

Tea Tourism and the Importance of Tea Tourists' Guidance in India

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The importance of tea tourism in India is immense as it has a dual impact by creating a regional tea market and securing jobs for tea labor. Therefore, proper guidance for the tea tourists is essential regarding the tea tourism destinations by addressing the issues, challenges, and opportunities in promoting local culture. Through the public-private partnership, tea tourism should be included in the mainstream tour packages, and local tea customs can be conveyed through a variety of activities promoting sightseeing and other forms of entertainment and tourism experiences. A proper planning is required for making tea tourism more attractive and developed in India. Development of tea tourism sustaining the environment and preserving the heritage and culture will benefit the Indian regions by creating employment opportunities and boosting the rural economy and thereby alleviate the insurgency and other socio-economic problems. It is expected to contribute to the literature on tourist guiding and the promotion of tea tourism and the tourist guides within tea garden boundaries in India.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has changed from a small-scale industry into one of the world's largest and fastest-growing industries of the world economy since 1960 onwards (Amin, 2010; Amin, Kabir, Khan & Rahman, 2019). The tourism and travel industry has been ranked as the 4th largest industry in the world after fuels,

chemicals, and automotive products. Tourism's total contribution of the global economy in 2017 was 8.7 trillion USD, which equates to 10.4% of total global GDP. The tourism sector supported 313,221,000 jobs in 2017, which is equal to 9.9% of the total employment. This sector also generates 1.5 trillion USD in the export sector in 2017, which is 6.5% of the total exports. International tourist arrivals reached a new record figure of 1.3 billion in 2017, which was only 25 million in 1950. It is forecasted that international tourist arrivals are to reach 2.09 billion by 2028 (Amin, Kabir, Khan & Rahman, 2019).

Tea tourism, a form of nature tourism, is a significant tourism concept associated with tea gardens, and also a kind of unique tour experience connected to nature¹. The concept of tea tourism gains the momentum since the beginning of the 21st century and one of the most researched topics nowadays (Koththagoda & Thushara, 2016; Sanjiv & Suvamay, 2016). At present, tea plantations, tea culture and tea production have also been interacted by the tea tourism industry in the world (Fernando, 2015). Hence, the tea gardens, the process of tea plucking, tea producing, undertaking a tea-testing session, trying one's hand at plucking tea leaves, trekking in the natural beauty of a lush tea garden, visiting a modern tea factory, cultural festivals of the tea tribes and staying at the tea bungalows are part of tea tourism, and within the idea of tea tourist as well. Tea culture is conveyed through a variety of activities promoting sightseeing, learning, shopping and other forms of entertainment and tourism experiences (Zhang, 2004).

Tea is farmed in over 30 countries of the world including, China, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Kenya, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, Turkey, etc. India is the second-largest producer after China also increased to reach 1.2 million tonnes in 2013, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (FAO, 2015). Because of this reason, India is known for the best place for tea production, which has also seen a great jump of 304%, while the cultivated tea area increased by 160% in the last five decades (Shah & Patel, 2016). Tea production in India is growing in 16 states, of which North-East India accounts for about three-fourths of total tea production because of suitable climatic conditions as well as socioeconomic conditions suitable for tea production. Moreover, climatic and geographic conditions of India have formed an appropriate possibility for tea cultivation as tea tree has a long history dated back to the late 18th century (Shah, 2013). Therefore, India holds the immense potential for developing a tea tourism industry for future export diversification.

India has lots of tourist potentialities because of its natural beauty, hilly regions, and historical destinations. The economy of many Indian districts is also based on tea, agriculture, and tourism. Their significant tourism economic activity has also been cantered on the tea industry. Therefore, tea tourism has a tremendous scope for expansion in India, which can encourage as niche tourism segment as the number of tea plantations. Among the teas cultivated in India, the most popular tea comes from Darjeeling Himalaya, where the tea has been cultivated for the last 150 years. Darjeeling tea is well known as one of the finest tea in the world (Khawas, 2006). The bulk (75 to 80%) of tea production comes from Northern India, Assam and West Bengal being the major contributors (Kumar, Badal, Singh, & Singh, 2008). However, it is not only growing in north-eastern states, but the commercial cultivation of tea in India is spreading in 16 states. More than 50% of the Indian tea is produced in Assam. The remaining tea growing states are West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, which are producing around 25.8%, 14.5%, and 5.3% of the total tea production in India, respectively (Shah & Patel, 2016).

The famous tea producing areas like Darjeeling, Upper Assam, Cachar, Nilgiri, etc., could also be promoted for tea tourism. For example, Assam tea is renowned for its strong liquor; Nilgiri tea is well known for its delicate flavor, and the Darjeeling tea is famous for its unique color and aroma. Recently, the rising number of tourists have been rushing to the lush green tea estates of Darjeeling, the Nilgiris, and Assam. Moreover, Assam is also one of the best destinations in tourism, where tourists can also

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