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Tea Tourism: Examining University Faculty Members' Expectations

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ABSTRACT

Tea tourism is emerging worldwide as a new type of sustainable cultural tourism; a market to which little academic attention has been paid. This study surveyed a total of 246 university faculty members in United States, China, and Taiwan with regard to their perceptions of tea tourism, including their levels of interest in various tea tourism activities and importance of tour components. The findings of this study revealed that demographic factors, cultural backgrounds, and self-reported expertise with regard to tea culture were significantly associated with respondents' expectations towards tea tourism. Practical recommendations in tea tourism marketing were provided.

Keywords: *tea tourism, tea culture, tourist expectation.*

INTRODUCTION

As tea drinking habits and tea cultures are transmitted worldwide, tea tourism is emerging as a new type of sustainable cultural tourism. In the United States, a tea garden was reopened in 2003 that provides tea factory tours and trolley rides through tea fields in South Carolina (Sanchez, 2008). Similarly, tea tourism in China has developed even more widely, including such attractions as the National Tea Museum in Hangzhou (Dewar & Li, 2007) and tea arts and ceremonies in the Fujian province (Xiao, 2007). Tea tourism encompasses a large potential market, as a result of its green and sustainable tourism characteristics, as well as the global transmission of tea culture. However, studies published on tea tourism are very limited, and little is known about the characteristics of the tea tourists. Thus, this study aims to add knowledge to the tea tourism literature by exploring university faculty members' tea tourism expectations, as these expectations relate to demographic factors, respondent cultural background, and experience with various types of tea cultures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tea tourism is defined by Jolliffe (2007, p.9) as "tourism that is motivated by an interest in the history, traditions and consumption of tea." Zhang (2004) indicates that tea tourism has developed to showcase tea planting areas with beautiful natural environment or special historical

heritage. Tea culture (local tea customs) is conveyed through a variety of activities promoting sightseeing, learning, shopping and other forms of entertainment and tourism experiences. Ji (2006) demonstrated that tea tourism in China was developed in the forms of tea museums, tea gardens, tea related activities, tea shops, tea events, tea folk performance, and tea related products. According to Jolliffe and Aslam's (2009) research in Sri Lanka, tea tourists had expectations concerning the relaxation, homely environments, and tea plantations when visiting a tea destination. In their survey of tourists in Xingyang, China, Cheng and colleagues (2001) find that tea tourists are mainly tea lovers between the ages of 31 and 40, and tea drinking habits had significant influences on people's attitude towards tea tourism.

METHODOLOGY

University faculty members were selected as the target population because of their relatively higher levels of education, more stable incomes, and higher degrees of social status, characteristics that are shared by people who are interested in beverage tourism (Charters & Ali-Knight, 2002). They tend to be more sensitive to cultural tourism. Data were collected from a convenience sample from three universities (one each from the United States, Taiwan, and China), with a total of 1,228 faculty members across the three universities being invited to participate in an online survey. A quantitative questionnaire was developed based on the literature in tea tourism and related research (e.g., Cheng et al., 2010; Kay, 2009; Shehata et al., 2004). Survey questions were reviewed by 5 faculty members with expertise in tourism to enhance the face validity. Respondents were asked questions regarding their experience with tea cultures (i.e., beginner, intermediate, or expert); their expectations about tea tourism, including their levels of interest in various tea tourism activities (e.g., tea garden tours, lodging near tea gardens, tea museums, tea factory tours, tea ceremonies, tea tasting, tea festivals, and buying tea products). Respondents were further queried about the importance of tour components (i.e., accessing the tea garden, communication with tea garden manager or farmer, getting information about tea growing and processing, learning about original tea preparation and drinking styles, and buying original tea products). Five-point Likert scales (1= not interesting at all, 5=very interesting; 1= not important at all, 5= very important) were used to measure expectations about tea tourism. ANOVA tests were used to detect significant differences in responses attributable to differences in age, cultural backgrounds, or tea culture experience levels. T-tests were conducted to see if there were significant differences in tea tourism expectations between female and male respondents.

FINDINGS

Two hundred forty-six faculty members participated in this study, yielding a 20% response rate. Total respondents were divided as follows: 62% were from United States, 32% from China, and 6% from Taiwan. With regard to gender, 57% of the respondents were female and 43% male. In terms of age, 60% participants were 45 or younger. The majority of participants had a doctorate degree (55%). In terms of cultural variables, 41% of respondents had Asian cultural backgrounds, 31% were from North American, and 21% from European.

Considering tea tourism activities, the three highest-interest activities reported by the respondents were *tea tasting* (\bar{x} =3.88, SD=1.21), *attending a tea ceremony* (\bar{x} =3.80, SD=1.23), and *attending a tea festival* (\bar{x} =3.47, SD=1.19). Of all the tea tour components, the three most

important components were *learning about original tea preparation and drinking style* (\bar{x} =3.58, SD=1.27), *buying original tea products* (\bar{x} =3.32, SD=1.25), and *getting information about tea growing and processing* (\bar{x} =3.26, SD=1.16).

Furthermore, female respondents were more interested in *attending a tea ceremony* [Female \bar{x} = 4.03, Male \bar{x} = 3.48, $t(208) = -3.27$, $p < .01$], *tea tasting* [Female \bar{x} =4.06, Male \bar{x} = 3.6, $t(201) = -2.704$, $p < .01$], and *buying tea products* [Female \bar{x} =3.50, Male \bar{x} = 3.10, $t(202) = -2.850$, $p < .01$] than were male respondents. In terms of tea tour components, there were no significant differences between female and male respondents. The mean importance of all tea tour component ranged between 2.96 and 3.68 (on a 5-point Likert scale), indicating that both genders considered all components relatively important.

Significant differences were found across age groups with regard to expectations of tea tourism activities and tea tour components. Respondents whose ages were 36 to 45 were more interested in *tea garden viewing tours* [$F(4,200) = 5.067$, $p < .01$] and *tea festivals* [$F(4,202) = 4.270$, $p < .01$] than were respondents in other age groups. Respondents aged 35 or younger were more interested in *lodging near tea gardens* [$F(4,200) = 5.067$, $p < .01$], *listening to tea production information* [$F(4,201) = 3.755$, $p < .01$], *visiting tea factories* [$F(4,201) = 4.375$, $p < .01$], *tea ceremonies* [$F(4,202) = 2.945$, $p < .01$], and *tea tasting* [$F(4,202) = 4.270$, $p < .01$] than were subjects in other age groups. Regarding tea tour components, the 35 or younger group considered *accessing the tea garden* [$F(4,203) = 3.601$, $p < .01$], *communication with tea garden manager or farmer* [$F(4,203) = 4.585$, $p < .01$], *learning about original tea preparation and drinking style* [$F(4,204) = 9.418$, $p < .01$], and *buying original tea products* [$F(4,203) = 3.691$, $p < .01$] more important than did the other age groups.

There were also significant differences in expectations among the three cultural groups. The Asian group ranked all activities and tea tour components more highly than did European and North American groups. All three groups reported moderately high interest in *attending a tea ceremony* (Asian \bar{x} = 4.13, European \bar{x} =3.26, North American \bar{x} =3.69, $p < .01$), *tea tasting* (Asian \bar{x} =4.29, European \bar{x} =3.37, North American \bar{x} =3.61, $p < .01$), *tea festivals* (Asian \bar{x} =3.76, European \bar{x} =3.05, North American \bar{x} =3.29, $p < .01$) and *buying tea products* (Asian \bar{x} = 3.74, European \bar{x} =3.0, North American \bar{x} =3.18, $p < .01$).

There was a significant difference among self-reported tea culture experts, intermediates, and beginners in terms of the importance of activities and tea tour components. The more experienced respondents were with tea culture, the more they were interested in activities such as *tea tasting* [$F(2,202) = 6.927$, $p < .01$], *tea ceremonies* [$F(2,204) = 4.509$, $p < .01$], and *tea festivals* [$F(2,204) = 6.780$, $p < .01$]. With regard to tea tour components, the more experienced the respondents were with tea culture, the more important they considered *learning about original tea preparation and drinking style* [$F(2,206) = 6.662$, $p < .01$], *being able to buy original tea products* [$F(2,205) = 11.105$, $p < .01$], and *getting information about tea growing and processing* [$F(2,205) = 9.895$, $p < .01$].

CONCLUSION

This study found that demographic factors were associated with university faculty members' tea tourism expectations. Thus, in designing market segmentation and making marketing strategies, tea tourism marketing should take into account tourist age, gender, and cultural background. For example, a tea gift shop would do well to cater to female customers and market a tea festival mainly to a 36- to 45- year old group. Respondents with Asian cultural

backgrounds (mainly Chinese) were more interested in the cultural components of tea tourism. The reason may be related to the role of tea in Chinese culture and tradition. Chinese tea culture has a very long history and has been transmitted to many other countries (Wang, 2001). Respondents' relatively strong interests in certain activities, i.e., tea tasting, attending tea ceremonies or festivals, learning about original tea preparation and drinking style, getting information about tea growing and processing, and buying original tea products, indicate the importance of providing and delivering more information on authentic tea culture to customers and potential customers when managing a tea tourism destination.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDY

This study was limited to faculty members at three universities in three destinations. This sample has relatively higher levels of education, more stable incomes, and higher degrees of social status—factors which make this group potentially more sensitive to cultural tourism. Thus, respondents may express specific expectations toward tea tourism which differ from those of people in other demographic segments. Future studies can expand the population to the general public in order to build a more complete profile of potential tea tourists.

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