

Perspectives on Asian Tourism

Series Editors: Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore · Paolo Mura

Eerang Park
Sangkyun Kim
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Food Tourism in Asia

 Springer

Perspectives on Asian Tourism

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While a conspicuous body of knowledge about tourism in Asia is emerging, Western academic ontologies and epistemologies still represent the dominant voice within tourism circles. This series provides a platform to support Asian scholarly production and reveals the different aspects of Asian tourism and its intricate economic and socio-cultural trends.

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More specifically, the series will fill gaps in knowledge with regard to:

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- specific segments of the Asian tourist population, such as Asian women, Asian backpackers, Asian young tourists, Asian gay tourists, etc;
- specific types of tourism in Asia, such as film-induced tourism, adventure tourism, beauty tourism, religious tourism, etc;
- Asian tourists' experiences, patterns of behaviour, and constraints to travel;
- Asian values that underpin operational, management, and marketing decisions in and/or on Asia (travel);
- external factors that add to the complexities of Asian tourism studies.

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Food Tourism: Opportunities for Development

Driven by the growing trend to seek for authenticity, gastronomy has become a significant factor for tourists looking for a memorable experience in a destination. Gastronomy is a reflection of destination's culture, history, and people. When deciding to visit a destination and try its local food, tourists are searching for an experience that engages all their senses. By sharing this unique narrative, gastronomy tourism allows tourists to emerge themselves in the destination, co-creating an extraordinary experience.

Gastronomy tourism also has the potential to attract tourist to less-visited destinations, consequently generating spending in a way that is more equitable. It can empower all those who make up the value chain especially local communities in their capacity as ambassadors of the territory, providing jobs, reinforcing the identity and sense of belonging, and safeguarding the authenticity of each place. Gastronomy tourism not only builds the destination branding but also helps to promote sustainable tourism through preserving valuable cultural heritage, empowering and nurturing pride among communities, and enhancing intercultural understanding. In the era of multiculturalism, the heritage legacy must be managed as globalization can and must coexist with the defense of the cuisine and local produce.

Yet, to fulfil this potential, destinations must have a gastronomy tourism strategy, adapt by understanding and forecasting demand, create networks with all local stakeholders, and develop adequate products and marketing strategies. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) works with destinations around the world to develop innovative gastronomy tourism products. Furthermore, UNWTO engages in intense research and dissemination through its annual world gastronomy fora, facilitates the exchange of experiences, and provides a tool to enhance the visibility of the destinations that are a part of it. In 2018, for the first time, in collaboration with the Basque Culinary Center, UNWTO has launched a Gastronomy Tourism Startup Competition to promote innovation and digital transformation.

I am confident that this publication will serve as a hearty starter, encouraging destinations to place gastronomy tourism within their tourism planning and to create network of collaboration in order to harness the potential of this market on a local, national, and international level.

Chief, Tourism Market Intelligence and Competitiveness,
World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
Madrid, Spain

Sandra Carvão

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Part I
Introduction

Chapter 1

Eating in Asia: Understanding Food Tourism and Its Perspectives in Asia



Eerang Park, Sangkyun Kim, and Ian Yeoman

Abstract This introductory chapter provides the important contextual backgrounds of food tourism in Asia as well as key concepts and perspectives of understanding food tourism in Asia. Food as an experience of otherness, which has been predominantly discussed from a Western perspective, is understood within the Asian context through ethnic diversity and social changes in the region. Two distinctive approaches to food tourism in Asia are developed: food for tourism and tourism for food. The former corresponds to the conventional concept of food as a distinctive tourism resource, while the latter reflects on the contemporary social aspects of Asian countries where there is a strong and influential media presence.

Keywords Otherness · Culture · Social change · Heterogeneity

1.1 Food and Tourism: Eating Otherness

Food is now a trigger for tourist visits; in fact, it is the third most important motivation for choosing a destination (UNWTO 2017). It is said that now is the best time to be a food tourist, thanks to the proliferation of food-themed media such as TV programmes promoting food travel and celebrity chefs, travel guidebooks

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(e.g. Lonely Planet, Condé Nast) and social media (e.g. Trip Advisor) that provide local restaurant information and reviews as well as updated lists of the top restaurants and/or food-related activities in loco (Broadway 2017).

Furthermore, the focus of much of the media coverage of food has been Asia. For example, the Telegraph newspaper published an article of the ten best destinations in Asia known for their distinctive symbolic national foods and drinks (e.g. kimchi with Korea, pad thai with Thailand, sling with Singapore, sushi with Japan) and identified Asia as a great continent for food and its exploration (Everett 2017). As such, countries in this region including China, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia have recently begun to proactively plan and promote food tourism nationally and internationally.

What is food? What is food tourism? Why the interest in Asia in particular? This introductory chapter aims to provide important contextual backgrounds to answer these three fundamental questions. More importantly, a theoretical framework will be provided which will inform how this volume approaches, understands and discusses the phenomenon of food tourism in Asia.

Food is seen to represent the culture associated with a place (Long 2004). Culture, the socially constructed and standardised activities and practices of a particular group of people, defines the (in)appropriate or (un)acceptable food and foodways associated with a place. According to Timothy and Ron (2013, p. 99), foodways constitute '...the culinary smells, sights, sounds, and eating practices of a people or region, as well as culinary routes, sights and landscapes'. They include not only cooking methods, recipes, ingredients, dining customs and social connotations but also aliment-related rituals and festivals, farming traditions and methods and even family ties (Timothy and Ron 2013). Cook and Crang (1996, p. 131) describe food and foodways as 'powerful emblems of identity' due to their role in (re)constructing and (re)shaping the self with regard to ethnicity and cultural identity (Gabaccia 1998). They further function as a metaphor for cultural artefacts and thus provide a means for the expression of local culture and identity (Ottenbacher and Harrington 2013).

Eating and tourism are inseparable (Molz 2004) as food is an essential element of survival. However, when it falls within the domain of tourism, food is no longer simply a matter of sustenance. Instead, food consumption on holiday is situated between its obligatory and symbolic facets, described as the 'tourist's paradox' (Mak et al. 2012). The obligatory facet of eating reflects its essential role in human existence, whereas the symbolic goes beyond the essentiality of food consumption and embraces the complexity and dynamism of experiencing other cultures.

Otherness is defined by perceptions of the unknown; in this sense, food tourism is 'an exploration of the foodways of other' (Long 1998, p. 181), which is unfamiliar from a culturally dissimilar group perspective. Food is essential to every aspect of our lives (Long 2004), and the exploration of food as a representative of otherness implies the experience of the everyday life of otherness. Food, experienced through eating and engaging in related activities in foreign destinations, therefore

signifies a series of activities of understanding, tasting and learning of the other's life and history embedded in their culture.

Food has been examined in various social and cultural contexts, and the study of food and eating has a long story in the field of anthropology (Brown 1995; Feeley-Harnik 1994; Mintz and Du Bois 2002), including in the Asian context. The common denominator concerns the extent to which, and how, individuals connect food and eating to rituals, symbols and belief systems. In this regard, food is a symbolic and ritual value creator. It transforms and (re)affirms one's relationships with visible others. In support of this notion, Ellis et al. (2018) claim that food tourism should be approached and examined through the lens of cultural anthropology.

Within the aforementioned theoretical framework, food tourism as a social and cultural phenomenon is:

visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of specialist food production region are the primary motivating factor for travel. (Hall and Sharples 2003, p. 10)

Although this is the most widely used definition of food tourism in the relevant literature, Hall and Sharples' (2003) definition is somewhat narrow and only considers the tourist perspective, thus failing to address how food places are defined through the concept of destination. In comparison, Walter's (2017) explanation of food tourism suggests a clearer idea of the places in which food experiences unfold, referred to in his definition of food tourism destinations as:

motivated to visit particular food destinations based on perceived authenticity of cuisine, atmosphere, décor and architecture, evidence of traditional cultural practices in food preparation, cooking and consumption, opportunities for cross-cultural interaction, and the ethnicity and perceived *localness* of hosts. (p. 366)

In this volume, the adoption of combined definitions of food tourism is more appropriate and is aligned with this book's theoretical framework, as discussed earlier.

1.2 Heterogeneous Culture and History of Asia

The unique history, background, architecture, clothing styles and cultural outlooks of Asian countries have tended to create a notion of 'Asianness' in the minds of tourists from other continents. Food now adds another important layer to Asianness in the eyes of others, especially non-Asians. However, otherness still exists and, indeed, is more distinctive among those Asians who are collectively associated with 'Asianness'. According to Jo (2004), there is no single representation of Asian, and 'the notion of Asian-ness is not a stable and unifying concept' (p. 23). Instead, Cayla and Eckhardt (2007) argue that there are two opposing trends in Asia – regional cohesiveness versus heterogeneity in ethnicity. While this complexity of Asianness was once seen as a challenge among Asian tourism service providers as it prevented

the creation of a unified identity, it is now taken advantage of as service providers differentiate themselves in terms of food, at least in the sphere of food tourism.

The focus of tourism development in Asia, especially in many developing countries, has been on attaining aspects of modernity such as standardised brand hotels and amenities; as a result, there has been a diminished appreciation of cultural heritage and uniqueness. However, the heterogeneity and authenticity of food in Asia has brought new opportunities to destinations in the region and has become a strong justification for the preservation of the locality, which is now viewed as more attractive when it remains truly Eastern and is not westernised. This explains the recent growing recognition of the close relationships between traditional regional or local food products and intangible heritage in terms of the development of food tourism destinations that is linked to particular geographic areas and their specific gastronomic and culinary heritage (Avieli 2012; Bessiere 1998; Cheung 2013; Everett and Aitchison 2008; Kim 2016).

Ethnic heterogeneity in Asia, in particular, explains the multilayered nature of otherness within the region. As discussed earlier, the culinary diversity in the region is a direct result of the continent's different ethnic philosophies and practices. Novelty is one of main motivations for food tourism as it represents unfamiliarity (Ji et al. 2016). A higher degree of unfamiliarity/unusualness is regarded as 'exotic', which is shorthand for authenticity (Lévi-Strauss 2008). This use of the word 'exotic' – and its connotations – is commonplace in the developed world. Thus, food tourism that seeks the authentic, exotic experience has typically been discussed from a non-Asian perspective, that is, the consumption of 'exotic otherness' in the non-West by Western tourists.

Yet otherness within Asia is also prominent. This raises an important question – to what extent, and how, is exoticism or a uniquely exotic taste of Asianness consumed and appreciated among Asian tourists in Asia? Without answering this question, a holistic picture on food tourism in Asia would be incomplete.

When the role of food in tourism and food tourism in Asia is discussed, the non-Asian viewpoint has tended to dominate despite the substantial volume of existing literature on Asian case studies. According to Ellis' (2014) critical review of the food tourism literature from 1994 to 2014, Asian case studies accounted for 39% of food tourism research with 58% of case studies focusing on Europe, America and Oceania. Among the Asian case studies, the great majority of research papers were focused on China and Hong Kong, long known as gastronomy destinations. However, they were predominantly from the perspective of the international tourist, more precisely, Western tourists' exploration of 'Asianness', which often neglects the complex composition of Asian tourists in this sphere of food tourism.

Furthermore, although many developing countries in Asia still receive significant numbers of Western international tourists, it is noteworthy that the unprecedented rise of the middle classes in several countries in Southeast Asia is leading to the creation of a new pool of potential food tourists. The presence of the more developed economic powers in Asia, such as Japan, South Korea and Singapore, as well as the ethnic diversities and cultural and historical differences in the region will further encourage inter- and intra-regional food tourism, something that has been

overlooked. It is also noteworthy that the food and tourism industries in Asia have been undergoing unprecedented rapid and radical change on a global scale. The increasing popularity of Asian destinations requires a breadth of understanding of the social, cultural, historical and environmental aspects of Asia, with food being one of the key agents informing us of these complexities in Asia. This leads to the adding of another layer to the dynamics of food tourism in the Asian context, making it more difficult to holistically understand the phenomenon of food tourism in Asia in a simple way.

1.3 Getting Closer to Food Tourism in Asia

1.3.1 *An Avenue on the Journey of Eating in Asia*

This book, as an attempt to get closer to food tourism in Asia, is comprised of four sections including the current introductory chapter. The second section delves into the sociocultural aspects of food tourism in Asia, and the different cases studied in each chapter elaborate upon the connection between food and tourism through social and historical lenses. Berno, Dentice and Wisansing in Chap. 2 guide readers through the social context of Asia, the meaning of rice and how to understand rice culture, which signifies eating traditions and practices in Asia.

Similarly, Avieli (2012) described the basic structure of the Vietnamese meal, with specific reference to the Hoianese meal, which consists of steamed rice served with an array of side dishes. This structure is common in Asia, but distinctions are usually made through the array of side dishes, the different ingredients produced in different climates and soils and the use of different sauces or condiments. In addition, an examination of this staple food, rice, can distinguish between the eating styles of different regions in Asia (e.g. short-grain sticky rice in Northeast Asia and long-grain or (different types of) short-grain sticky rice in Southeast Asia). The dyad of rice and side dishes gives us an idea of the importance of rice.

Lee in Chap. 3 brings a historical perspective to our understanding of the noble class' food consumption in preindustrial Korea. From a new food tourism product perspective in contemporary Asia, Henderson in Chap. 4 investigates the distinctive qualities of street food and its contribution to tourism with specific reference to the regions of Vietnam and Singapore, whereas Jolliffe views cookery classes as the vehicle to emphasise the connections and interactions with locals in Japan and Thailand, in Chap. 5.

The third section examines the depth of food tourism destination development along with issues of food tourism policy and destination management. Asia is diverse in terms of the types of consumer terrains, the origins of products and services and the breadth and depth of cultural variety contained within it (Blair et al.

2003; Cayla and Eckhardt 2007; Jo 2004). In addition, Asian culture embraces colonial influences in most countries that have a long history; hence, social and cultural features are not only dynamic but are also characterised by fusions of various facets of multi-cultures. These features can explain the genuine flexibility and fluidity of ideas in Asian culture and business (Blair et al. 2003). The ability to adopt different environmental and cultural influences and apply or integrate them into their own contexts can be seen as a strength of Asian culture, when contemplating the subject of innovative (food tourism) branding.

Ooi and Tarulevicz in Chap. 6 review the regulation of food safety as an essential part of the modernisation of Singapore that explains the social and political background of the shaping of the current form of hawker centres and the new concept of the Michelin star hawker in Asia. In Chap. 7, Kang, Park and Kim examine and discuss the importance and significance of collaboration and cooperation among relevant stakeholders, including the local community, for the success of regional food festivals rooted in udon noodle heritage in Japan. In Chap. 8, Hashimoto and Telfer also explore, from a food tourism perspective, an interesting Japanese food tourism phenomenon associated with the Japanese railway lunch-box as a regional identity that is creating new types of attractions, such as railway routes and train stations. Muangasame and Park in Chap. 9 review various food initiatives driven by food tourism policy and promotion in Thailand, while Dixit and Mawroh in Chap. 10 advance the literature on the use of local food in destination marketing and branding and present the implications of using indigenous Khasi cuisine in India.

The fourth section sheds light on tourists themselves and their behaviour from a domestic food tourism perspective. Due to the emphasis on the international tourism perspective of food tourism, it is rare to find a diligent attempt to understand domestic food tourists in the Asian context. It is obvious that otherness within the same country exists, although to a great extent there is homogeneity within nations. People are bound by their locality, which creates clear differences in food and foodways. Thus, it is worth investigating domestic food tourists, as such an exploration is likely to illustrate the diversity of locality and relevance to food in tourism, which is linked to the sustainability of food tourism, by looking closely at the intrinsic and experiential value of food heritage shared by the nation, and the circuit of production and consumption of local food in the tourism sphere.

Kim and Park in Chap. 11 examine Japanese udon noodle tourists' embodied multisensory experiences in situ that transform the heritage of the region associated with udon noodle production into a food consumption place. Xu and Kim in Chap. 12 uniquely contribute to enhancing our knowledge on the most visible impact of media on domestic food tourism through an examination of the impact of the national food and culture documentary programme 'A Bite of China' on potential Chinese food tourists.

The final section identifies the contribution of this book through six emergent themes of food tourism research in Asia, all derived from the preceding chapters using the process of cognitive mapping. Food tourism in Asia is a representation