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Coffee attraction experiences: A narrative study

Abstract

Reflecting a rich global coffee culture this paper explores the experience of visitors to coffee attractions as reflected through travel narratives published in the coffee trade literature. It first positions coffee related tourism within culinary tourism and then examines the types of attractions related to coffee. Using a typology of coffee attractions derived from the literature on both attractions and coffee travel narratives from five specialized coffee periodicals are reviewed. In doing so the paper makes a dual contribution to both furthering the study of attractions related to coffee tourism and to using narrative study methods in tourism research. In particular it is suggested that the narrative methodology may be applied to the study of other sectors of culinary tourism. A limitation of this study however is the use of secondary sources mainly derived from the coffee specialist literature. Nonetheless the narratives reveal the rich coffee culture and coffee experiences that can be associated with coffee related travel. In addition this exploratory study using published coffee narratives indicates the potential for future research investigating on a first hand basis the coffee experiences of tourists.

Keywords:

coffee attractions; narrative studies; coffee culture; culinary tourism

Introduction

Visitor attractions are an important component of both the supply and demand for tourism. In the case of food and drink a wide range of both natural and manmade attractions provide activities for visitors and stimulate the demand for tourism. Many beverages such as coffee have their own history and culture, often with rich geographic tradition and variations that lend themselves to differentiating destinations. Coffee as attraction includes processes, history, and traditions in the consumption of a beverage that is part of everyday life, yet has rich and varied cultural connections that are suitable for attracting visitors.

A growing number of coffee scholars and environmentalists (Gobbi, 2000; Munoz, 2002; Lepp, 2004; Daviron, & Ponte, 2005; Bacon, Mendez, & Fox, 2008; Mendez,

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2008; Sick, 2008) recognize opportunities for some coffee growing areas and coffee related sites to become tourist attractions as a means to create sustainable livelihoods in coffee farming communities. While coffee is grown in more than 60 countries worldwide (Illy, & Viani, 2005) to date few destinations have fully capitalized on the various opportunities that coffee production has provided for tourism demand. Hawai'i was perhaps the first destination which utilized coffee growing and processing areas as tourist resources, as since 1980s Kona coffee processing plants had transformed their operations to visitor attractions and coffee tours were offered to the island's tourists (Cox, & Cox, 1991).

Today, with the emergence of the importance of the gastronomic culture as part of an overall tourist experience, coffee related tourism projects have been established in numerous countries. Costa Rica is now a leader in the development and marketing of coffee tourism (White, 2008). Since attractions are the fundamental elements of a tourist experience and usually play a decisive role in travel's choice (Leiper, 1990), the study of coffee attractions can provide valuable insights into the concept of coffee tourism and provide a starting point for more systematic research in this field.

Academics focusing on new sub-segments of gastronomic tourism (Jolliffe, 2003, 2007; Plummer, Telfer, Hashimoto, & Summers, 2005; Sharples, 2008) have typically asked what attractions and events drive visitation of those with a special interest in specific food and beverage products. Website research, personal experiences and knowledge and specialized books are commonly sourced for these studies, as prior academic research in the field was limited or even non-existent. In the case of coffee related attractions this paper documents an exploratory study intended to go one step further by the analysis of narrative accounts from the specialized coffee literature to elicit an answer to the research question: "what are the attractions and/or potential attractions and events that can drive coffee interested tourists to destinations"? Taking this approach this paper is also intended to augment prior research on coffee and tourism.

Background

Travelling for food and drink experiences is acknowledged as an important and growing sector of tourism (Ignatov, & Smith, 2006). As part of this trend a number of authors have been exploring the intricacies of beverage related tourism, including studies of wine tourism, beer tourism, tea tourism and coffee tourism. This paper focuses on the attractions for coffee related tourism, of which there are a number of types. The following typology of coffee sites, based on Swarbrooke (1995), demonstrates the range and diversity of attractions based on coffee:

- Natural attractions – for instance, coffee growing areas and landscapes.
- Human made but not originally designed to attract tourists – such as historical coffee houses and traditional cafés.
- Human made and purpose built to attract tourists – for example coffee museums.
- Festivals and special events – as exemplified by coffee festivals.

A primary attraction for coffee related tourism is thus the traditional coffee growing areas of the world, with their coffee landscapes. At these locations traditional coffee ceremonies often attract visitors. In Ethiopia (which is considered by most coffee scholars as the birthplace of coffee) the traditional coffee making ceremony is one very important aspect of the country's coffee heritage and culture (Petit, 2007) and constitutes a popular tourist attraction (Travel and Tourism Intelligence, 2007).

Coffee houses and contemporary cafés not developed specifically for tourism can also attract tourists. For instance, the old coffee houses of Vienna in Austria were introduced as attractions for the potential tourists in promotional tourism literature since 1920s' and 1930s' (Peniston-Bird, 2005). Examples of historic coffee houses include some of the oldest surviving coffee houses like the 'Café Florian' (1720) in Venice, Italy (Eccardi, & Sandalj, 2002) and the 'Queen's Lane' coffee house in Oxford, England which was established in 1654 (Potter, & Bennet, 1987). The first Starbucks store (1971) in Seattle's Pike Place market is also a well established visitor attraction in a place where "images of coffee cups in particular have become some of Seattle's unofficial mascots" (Aiello, & Gendelman, 2007, p. 167).

Coffee museums and coffee theme parks are cultural attractions constructed for touristic purposes. The creation of coffee museums in European cities such as the Burg Coffee Museum in Hamburg, Germany and the Chicco d'oro Coffee Museum in Balerna, Switzerland reflects both the collectors and coffee company interests in coffee. The existence of these museums could also be interpreted as a response to the demand for coffee experiences and activities from the European coffee lovers. In Colombia the national coffee park at Montenegro, built by a large coffee co-operative, is the world's largest coffee theme park with a coffee museum site and offering the visitors a look at the long history and culture of the coffee crop (Segal, 2007), the so-called national product of Colombia.

Special events and festivals are common reasons for coffee travel in both urban and rural destinations. Large international coffee festivals may be held in urban areas while regional or local festivals are held in rural places. Visitors to these festivals can taste hundreds of different coffees brewed with different methods (both traditional and new), learn how coffee is marketed, and attend coffee seminars about coffee's tasting, roasting, cultivation, health benefits and coffee shops' management. Coffee shows, exhibitions and barista competitions where baristi (professional coffee makers) compete on espresso and cappuccino creation and test their creative and coffee tasting skills are also popular events. One of the largest coffee exhibitions, the *Tea and Coffee World Cup Exhibition and Symposium* is organized by the international monthly periodical *Tea & Coffee Trade Journal*. It is a three-day show held every other year in Europe and alternate years in Asia or Northern America. The event includes coffee workshops, presentations about various aspects of coffee's production and consumption, traditional coffee ceremonies, and coffee tastings.

Benefits for the visitors to small-scale coffee festivals that are usually held in coffee growing regions include learning how coffee is used by domestic consumers, opportunities for direct discussions with coffee growers and, of course, the unique experience of tasting rare regional coffees in their own cultural environment through cupping. Coffee cupping is similar to wine tasting in that it involves smelling a coffee's aroma, slurping the coffee, tasting and evaluating it, then spitting the coffee into a nearby spittoon (Lingle, 1992). Some coffee festivals held in coffee regions with tourist infrastructure attract large numbers of non coffee driven tourists as is the case with the oldest food festival in Hawaii, the Kona coffee festival, (Johnston, 2006).

Methodology

Narrative research uses or analyzes narrative materials such as interviews, newspaper or magazine articles, essays, personal diaries, biographies, oral stories and so on (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). The narrative method is increasingly attracting the attention of tourism academics (Galani-Moutafi, 2000; Elsrud, 2001; Fullagar, 2002; Noy, 2002, 2004; Trapp-Fallon, 2003; Daniels, Rodgers, & Wiggins, 2005; Poria, 2006; Aiello, & Gendelman, 2007; Andriotis, 2009; Bosangit, McCabe, & Hibbert, 2009).

In this paper, published narratives about individual coffee travel experiences from five specialist coffee periodicals were identified and analyzed. The periodicals used in this study were 1) *Barista Magazine*, 2) *Tea & Coffee Trade Journal*, 3) *Fresh Cup*, 4) *The Specialty Coffee Chronicle* and 5) *Café Europa*. The *Specialty Coffee Chronicle* and *Café Europa* are the official periodicals of the Specialty Coffee Association of America and the Specialty Coffee Association of Europe respectively. The *Barista Magazine* and *Fresh Cup* are two of the most significant print magazines of the specialty coffee industry (Weissman, 2008) and the *Tea & Coffee Trade Journal* claims to be the oldest international periodical dedicated to tea and coffee since 1901 (www.teaandcoffee.net).

All issues of these periodicals from January 2006 to April 2009 were examined and 155 narratives about travels to urban and rural coffee destinations were found, varying in length from a half page to eight pages. These free-flowing texts can be seen as lived experiences which provide the reader with honest detailed descriptions of visits to coffee destinations and thus can be considered as useful research data. The research had a qualitative character and the focus of the researchers was initially in the content of the text and specifically on the actual places visited by the narrators and their undertaking activities.

The sites visited extracted from the text were categorized as attractions according to their own intrinsic nature using the typology discussed earlier in the paper which was based on Swarbrooke's (1995) classification of visitor attractions as in Jolliffe (2003) and Plummer et al. (2005). The second narrative analysis aimed to classify the attractions based on the importance underlined by the expressions and evaluations cited in the reviewed materials. The texts were read repeatedly for total immersion and

the significance of the coffee related attractions in the tourists' experiences was revealed through the interest expressed, comments about and time spent for particular types of attractions. In the final analysis and reporting of the findings both web and academic sources were used to augment some of the descriptions of coffee experiences, such as the tours of coffee plantations.

Narrative authors were in the most cases people within the coffee business and with a good knowledge of the coffee industry (with a few exceptions where articles were written by volunteer or scientific tourists) and all had coffee as the primary motivator for travel. Therefore for the scope of this paper any reference to the term coffee attraction means all the physical or man-built entities that can drive visitation of those who have coffee as the primary motivating factor for travel.

Findings

First, from the coffee narratives the researchers added rich examples to the identification of various types of coffee attractions (Table 1). The information gleaned from the narratives is discussed here in the four categories of natural attractions, human made but not originally designed to attract tourists, human made and purpose built to attract tourists and festivals and special events.

Table 1

A TYPOLOGY OF COFFEE ATTRACTIONS FROM COFFEE TRAVEL NARRATIVES

Natural attractions	Human made - not originally designed to attract tourists	Human made - purpose built to attract tourists	Festivals and special events
Tropical mountain	Coffee houses	Coffee museums	Coffee festivals
Shade grown coffee plantations	Coffee roasting facilities	Coffee theme parks	Coffee exhibitions and competitions
Full sun coffee plantations	Coffee machine factories		Coffee cupping
	Coffee farms		Coffee harvesting
	Coffee mills		Traditional coffee
	Heritage coffee		
	Coffee shops		

Source: Based in part on Swarbrooke (1995)

NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

Coffee professionals and coffee lovers increasingly travel to coffee growing regions visiting the beginnings of the chain of coffee production (Sanchez, 2008). The opportunity to meet and form relationships with the producers and the tasting of rare local coffees are appealing activities for these travelers (Giuliano, 2007). The natural coffee attractions are the places where the coffee trees grow. There are three basic types: the tropical mountain coffee forests, the shade coffee agro-forestry systems and the full sun coffee plantations. The tropical mountain forests in Central America are not easy accessible and coffee grown there is rarely utilized for commercialization. The shade

coffee plantations are areas where coffee trees grow naturally along with many other native tree species like bananas, sugar, papayas, avocados and many other fruit species. Traditional shade grown plantations found in most coffee producing countries, are also parts of larger fragile eco-systems that act as refuges for many species of migratory birds, insects and terrestrial mammals.

The narratives reflect the fact that the shade coffee plantations were clearly the most visited natural attractions by the coffee travelers who were always willing to support sustainable agriculture methods. Large full sun plantations, where the coffee trees are cultivated alone and offer little habitat for birds, like those found in Brazil and Vietnam are of less interest for the tourists due to the lack of biodiversity as well as because, in general, coffee grown there is regarded as poor-to-average quality (Banks, Mc Fadden, & Atkinson, 1999).

HUMAN MADE BUT NOT ORIGINALLY DESIGNED TO ATTRACT TOURISTS

Europe is a region where coffee production cannot occur due to the geographic and climate conditions and the attractions for coffee tourists there are, therefore, limited. However, there are countries in Europe where coffee tourism development appears to have excellent prospects. Espresso was originated in Italy (Illy, & Viani, 2005) and today the Italian espresso coffee bar is a particular attraction to visit and which has a whole culture and history to itself. A young coffee entrepreneur describes his experience from his own coffee trail in the country of espresso and cappuccino:

"It was really great to see 50- and 60-year-old baristas working and being proud of what they are doing. I was able to experience the long coffee tradition in Italy, to visit some of the world's most known roasteries, see the incredible system they have in the café bars, taste hundreds of different coffees, and meet some of the pioneers of our industry. Just being there in the land of espresso was unforgettable." (Allen, 2007, p. 52).

Some narratives are descriptive, providing details of coffee traditions in different cultures, for example as with this description of traditional coffee ceremonies:

"The traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony begins with the roasting of beans over charcoal fire. The blackened beans are then ground into a fine paste and mixed with water in a clay pot known as a "jebena". The resulting rich brew, served in tiny ceramic cups, is a highlight of any visit to Ethiopia." (Tolina, 2008, p. 18).

Coffee undergoes a number of processing steps before it reaches the cup as beverage and many of these processing methods and areas are important attractions. Coffee mills are buildings near coffee plantations and coffee farms owned generally by large cooperatives or coffee exporters where the coffee cherries are processed, sorted, fermented and packaged in coffee bags. These coffee mills are the places where coffee formulates its final quality characteristics and therefore are sites of high-level interest for tourists seeking coffee education. Matters like sustainability and recycling during the processing methods were always mentioned in the coffee narratives when there were references to coffee mills visits.

In any non coffee producing country the most visited coffee attractions are the local coffee houses. The modern, popular coffee houses, while constituting social institutions and increasingly reflecting the changing lifestyle of modern urban societies (Scott, 2006), are not places of high importance for what we might call the 'dedicated' coffee tourists. Analysis of the narratives reveals that for them, three types of coffee houses form coffee tourism attractions: historic coffee houses, traditional coffee houses and specialty coffee houses with a reputation for very high quality of beverages offered.

Historic coffee houses have associated their name and place with the heritage of the coffee industry or their city or country. Coffee houses favoured by famous figures also gained a special reputation and became tourist attractions of their cities like 'the Gran Café de Gijón' (1888) in Madrid with the great Spanish poet Federico García Lorca and the painter Salvador Dalí being amongst the famous intellectuals who had many cups of coffee within its walls (Castano, 2007). Traditional coffee houses are thus magnet for special interest tourists as they have been seen as original marks of a place's social culture and heritage. Local coffee houses are often preferred to modern ones. The narratives reflect the fact that regardless of the coffee quality offered, a cup of coffee in a traditional coffee house made and served in the traditional manner is a valuable experience for coffee travelers.

HUMAN MADE AND PURPOSE BUILT TO ATTRACT TOURISTS

For the coffee travelers, with in-depth knowledge around coffee and espresso in particular, there are a few coffee houses located in urban settings which have become destinations points. These modern coffee houses have similarities with the Michelin starred restaurants in that they offer rare coffees and have developed espresso blends highly appreciated by coffee experts. Most of these coffee houses belong to the so-called 'Third Wave', a self described movement of coffee professionals that perceives and promotes coffee with a blend of artistry and science (Baccellieri, 2006). In these coffee houses, coffee is approached in the same way that fine wine is embraced by sommeliers. Coffees' organoleptic characteristics are meticulously analyzed and its origins, species, varieties, processing methods and other quality determinants are mentioned to the customers.

Travelers to these coffee houses usually call themselves 'espresso tourists', as their main interest of visit is to taste and learn about the espresso offered from the skilled and knowledgeable staff of these premises. Many of these 'third wave cafés' do in-house coffee roasting providing another attraction for the visitors. Weissman (2008) contends that the city of Portland in Oregon, U.S.A has become an important specialty coffee destination because it hosts many 'third wave cafés' resulting in a unique coffee culture embraced enthusiastically by local residents.

FESTIVALS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Most traditional coffee festivals visited by the authors of coffee narratives drew few tourists in general as coffee festivals are trade-oriented and were not primarily developed for tourism purposes but for coffee marketing and commercial purposes. There is

evidence in the published coffee travel narratives that festival organizers (local authorities and coffee cooperatives) and event managers wish to capture special interest and mass tourists. This can compliment regional efforts to attract tourists through promotion via tour operators and tourist offices in urban centres. For instance, at the Indian International Coffee Festival in 2007 visitors could register during the conference for a 'coffee safari' which included tours to specialty coffee plantations and visits to heritage sites associated with the coffee culture of the country allowing the participants to gain an in-depth knowledge of India's coffee industry and culture (see also www.iicf.in). These intentions are also apparent in recent academic papers dealing with coffee festivals (Jolliffe, Bui, & Nguyen, 2009; Hsiao, Jaw, & Huan, 2009). Thus, whilst the main scope of the coffee festivals is the promotion, information about and commercialization of a region's coffees, coffee tourism activities are an emerging component of these events.

Coffee related activities and attractions are sometimes amalgamated to form 'coffee tours' which in some ways could be considered to be special events (Table 2). These tours can last from one hour (usually those taken in small coffee farms) to a number of days in the form of a packaged holiday. Itineraries aim to educate tourists about the coffee's history, cultivation, processing and culture of the producing areas. The narratives reveal some case examples which are profiled below.

Table 2

EXAMPLES OF COFFEE TOURS

Location	Tour	Duration
Panama	Finca Lerida Coffee Tour	A few hours
Costa Rica	Heredia Café Britt Coffee Tour	1.5 hours or 4 hours
Costa Rica and Nicaragua	Costa Rica and Nicaragua Coffee Tour	16 days

Source: Based on Weissmann (2008:138); Smith (2009); Brenes et al. (1997); Pendergast (2001); White (2008); Responsibletravel.com (2010).

The owner of Finca Lerida coffee farm in Panama, Johnny Collins, developed an inn on the grounds of the farm offering accommodation and running coffee tours and bird watching expeditions. The coffee tour involves walking through the coffee garden (planted with 240.000 coffee trees) where the types of coffees grown are analyzed along with information about their cultivation. Then, follows a visit to the original processing plant and observation of the coffee roasting process. The tour ends in a coffee tasting room where the participants learn how to taste the farm's speciality coffee with professionals coffee tasting techniques.

The Café Britt coffee tour was first operated in 1991 and by the late 1990s was the third biggest tourist attraction in Costa Rica. The tour under the slogan "Come discover the origins of the world's finest coffee" lasts one hour and half and includes visit to the coffee gardens, birds observation, and education about sustainable growing practices and the role of the coffee crop in Costa Rica's culture and economy. The tour guides are actors dressed in traditional Costa Rican coffee farming garments that also

perform a coffee related theatrical show. The tour concludes with a visit to the Café Britt's coffee gifts shop the participants have an opportunity to taste and buy packaged Café Britt coffee and other coffee souvenirs.

Targetted to British coffee lovers and responsible tourists interested in fair trade the Costa Rica and Nicaragua coffee tour is a two week packaged holiday offered by the UK specialist tour operator responsibletravel.com and costs £1175 excluding flights for a February 2010 tour (Responsibletravel.com, 2010). The tour encompasses visiting coffee landscapes and coffee farms, a butterfly farm, a boat trip on the lake of Nicaragua, bird watching, wildlife reserves, and many chances to meet fair trade coffee producers who are willing to exchange knowledge and opinions about their products and fair trade initiatives. This is just one example of how coffee experiences are being packaged for tourism.

Discussion and conclusion

The travel narratives examined in this study are reflective of the diversity of coffee related attractions. As it is likely that coffee consumers are seeking more opportunities to learn about their daily beverage, the tourism exploitation of these attractions can lead to a growth of coffee tourism, which can be important for a number of reasons. First, such tourism offers a chance to build pro-poor partnerships and linkages. Second, this form of tourism can contribute to the development of the peripheral and remote areas of developing countries where coffee is grown. Third, coffee tourism can promote business investment in these less developed countries. And fourth, coffee tourism activities may influence tourists near coffee attractions to extend their length of stay or spend more money. The relationship between coffee sites and tourism at the coffee growing regions of the world therefore holds potential for the diversification of the tourism product of coffee producing regions by the creation of coffee attractions, promoting a distinct regional image with a gastronomic identity and adding value to the coffee agriculture and economy.

Some indications of trends in coffee related tourism can be extracted from the narratives, in particular since some of those writing are close to the business of coffee. For example, visiting sites sacred for their coffee history as well as visiting places where coffee is bundled into a tour is reflected in the narratives. The narratives reflect the existence of different types of coffee tourists with references to both "authentic" and "espresso" coffee tourists.

The narrative approach used here reveals rich data that augments previous study on coffee attractions. This technique provides a more in-depth look at the types of coffee attractions that travelers were attracted to visit and to write about than did previous research based on other types of secondary sources. In the words of the coffee tourists themselves, authenticity and variety are sought out in their coffee experiences. The environment where the coffee is grown, processed, tasted (cupped), and consumed is clearly as important as the quality of the coffee itself. In many cases the authors of the

narratives, are seeking a deeper knowledge of the coffee growing and production process with emphasis on sustainability issues.

The attractions identification and evaluation documented here was based on published travel narratives in coffee periodicals, which limits the validity of the findings by not having sourced other published oral narratives or written narratives (e.g. travel blogs). Furthermore, tourists' personal coffee education, culture and drinking preferences probably influence their desired coffee tourism experience, their itineraries and which coffee attraction to visit as gastronomic tourists have been found to form distinct categories and can not be treated as a single segment (Charters, & Ali-Knight, 2002; Ignatov, & Smith, 2006). The authors of the narratives analyzed were people within the coffee industry and coffee was clearly their primary motivator for travel. As probably for the most part visiting coffee sites is driven by secondary motivations, similar studies with tourists not motivated by an interest in coffee could provide a useful comparison to the results reported in this paper.

However, the potential significance of this paper is in extending the use of the narrative approach in tourism research to the emerging study of culinary tourism. Information gleaned from the qualitative coffee narratives revealed here could also be used to frame further research of a more structured nature, for example delving into and further deconstructing the nature of the "authentic coffee experience" that motivates those who travel for coffee.

Another limitation of the research discussed above is the fact that it is based on secondary sources in the form of published coffee narratives. Future studies could therefore use an interview technique to elicit and collect coffee narratives from visitors on site. In addition the narrative research method used here could be useful for the study of other sub-sets of culinary tourism and culinary attractions.

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