

Book review

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The book *Food Tourism in Asia* provides an insight into the geographies, cultures, policies and economies that are bound together by food in Asian countries. Through its different chapters, the book highlights that the homogeneity of what is defined as Asian is achieved through the heterogeneity of cultures and assembled food identities. The book is a timely contribution to the tourism literature for two reasons. First, the book adds to the discourse on Asian tourism which is a step towards decentring “Anglo-centric” perspectives in tourism (Winter, 2009). Second, the book expands understandings of food tourism by discussing “food for tourism” and “tourism for food” which identifies the role of food in generating as well as facilitating tourism marketing practices (Andersson and Mossberg, 2017; Boniface, 2017; Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie, 2016). The book is divided into 13 chapters where each chapter discusses different food tourism phenomena with reference to either culture, policy or experience.

The book starts with the first chapter by the editors, which provides a contextual background by defining meanings and interconnections between food, tourism and Asian “otherness”. Chapters two, three, five and ten discuss the intertwined inseparability between culture, identity and food that attracts tourists. Chapters four, six, seven, eight and nine discuss food policy in the context of regional and local development. Chapters 5, 11 and 12 delve into the embodied experiences and learnt competencies of food tourism as lived and conceived by engaged and prospective tourists. The conclusion chapter follows the

cognitive mapping approach to highlight six future areas of research to understand Asian food tourism.

Though each chapter is novel in terms of the issues it raises and insights it provides, several key chapters in the book stand out by pointing towards the economic realities of Asian countries which provide a non-western perspective of food tourism. Chapter four critiques the worldwide popularity of street food by pointing out its linkages with the urban poor and informal market exchange in Singapore and Ho Chi Minh City. Chapter seven discusses the case of Tatebayashi Grand Prix festival in Japan where local businesses demonstrate leadership using scarce resources to rejuvenate an economically disadvantaged region. Chapter eight highlights the historical growth of Ikeban (railway lunch) into the world-famous fast food Japanese cuisine. The chapter points towards the modest beginnings of Ikeban demonstrating the use of frugality by Japanese to achieve a fast paced modest life.

Though the book succeeds in presenting food tourism cultures in South-East Asian countries, it misses out on representing West Asian perspectives. Countries such as China, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and other Arabic countries that form part of Asia also need to be explored to get a holistic understanding of food tourism in Asia (Winter, 2009). Additionally, Asian food tourism narratives are also constructed by the affect of taste (Warde, 1997). Be it the palate of spices of India, the aromas of Persian Biryani or the staged view of Japanese Teppenyaki, the taste is deeply embedded in local cooking and eating practices and narratives of taste are often used in destination branding campaigns to ignite tourist interest (Boyne *et al.*, 2002). An affective exploration of tourism related to Asian food cooking, staging and eating practices would also enrich understanding of Asian food tourists.

The central message of the book is that there is a need to identify Asian food tourism as an

Food Tourism in Asia

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everyday, ongoing practice for Asian domestic and international tourists. The book enriches the understanding of food tourism as a symbol of conspicuousness that is sought, as well as an experience that is encountered and embodied in everyday life of a tourist in Asia. This multi-dimensional perspective of Asian food tourism as propagated by the book is useful for destination marketers and policymakers to be able to support and promote Asian destinations. Additionally, the book provides a practical understanding of issues, policies and marketing campaigns which is helpful for tourism academics, destination marketers as well as tourism businesses and stakeholders.

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