

Original article

Influential Factors Shaping Client Perceptions of Tea Culture Ecotourism's Effectiveness in Promoting Sri Lankan Tea: A Case Study of the Uva Province, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Tea culture tourism combines the historical aspects of tea culture with the ecological environment and leisure activities. Traditional tourism is no longer sufficient to meet the evolving needs and desires of tourists, whose lifestyles and values have undergone significant changes. Consequently, many tourists have increasingly embraced tea culture tourism. However, there is a significant knowledge gap in understanding the efficacy of tea culture ecotourism as a marketing strategy. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing targeted strategies that appeal to tourists and for promoting Sri Lankan tea globally. This study aims to identify the factors affecting clients' perceptions of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism, investigate the relationship between tea promotion strategies and client perceptions of the efficacy of these experiences, and develop evidence-based recommendations for promoting tea culture ecotourism as an effective strategy for tea promotion. The study was conducted at Sky Cafe, located within the Halpewatte Tea Factory in Hela Halpe, Bandarawela District, Sri Lanka. A total of 130 visitors who experienced tea culture ecotourism at this location were selected using systematic random sampling and surveyed using pretested questionnaires and interviews to collect data. Descriptive and statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software. The research findings indicate that clients perceive ecotourism experiences centred on tea culture as more impactful when such experiences are characterised by cultural immersion and authenticity, alongside contributions to the local community's well-being. The study findings reveal a significant positive correlation between educational interpretation and environmental responsibility, as well as the perceived effectiveness of these ecotourism experiences. A robust correlation coefficient ($R = 0.746$) was identified among the independent variables—namely, cultural immersion, authenticity, local community well-being, educational interpretation, and environmental responsibility—and the dependent variable, which is clients' perceptions of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism. The correlation accounts for 55.6% of the variance in clients' perceptions, highlighting the substantial influence that these factors exert on their assessment of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism. The study findings prove that tea culture ecotourism can succeed by enhancing educational programs, enforcing environmental sustainability, empowering local communities, creating authentic experiences, and implementing continuous evaluation. These strategies collectively enrich visitor experiences while supporting local economies and preserving the ecosystems that sustain tea cultivation. By adopting these recommendations, policymakers can harness the potential of tea culture ecotourism as a sustainable tool for economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship.

Keywords: Clientele Perception, Effectiveness, Marketing Approach, Tea Culture Ecotourism

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INTRODUCTION

Tea is cultivated in around 36 countries globally; however, this widespread production can drive up costs. Thus, implementing non-crop diversification strategies, such as tea tourism, emerges as a beneficial alternative (Dissanayake, 2017). Developing tea-centered tourism can unlock new niche markets and strengthen the tea industry through better promotion and authentic cultural experiences. Niche tourism involves tailoring specific tourism products to meet the preferences of particular traveler segments (I. Fernando et al., 2017). Tea culture ecotourism, a recognized emerging niche, has the potential to significantly boost the industry's contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with appropriate investment and promotion (Jolliffe, 2007). Ultimately, tea tourism offers visitors authentic experiences and presents a viable path for enhancing profitability and sustainability in Sri Lanka's tea sector. Tea tourism is a tactical enabler to enhance the brand image of Ceylon tea by delivering experiential exposure to the entire tea culture of Sri Lanka (Dissanayake, 2017). Tea tourism can be developed into various niches, including rural tourism, exclusive tourism, community tourism, health tourism, heritage tourism, and ecotourism (Jolliffe, 2007). Ecotourism is a new form of tourism that concerns the conflict between economic development and environmental well-being. The priority is to minimize the ecological footprint of tourism through ecotourism, while still allowing people to enjoy nature and improving people's quality of life (Zhou et al., 2023).

Many tea-producing regions have begun to integrate the ecology of mountain-grown tea, traditional tea-making techniques, tea folklore, and tea culture to promote in-depth tourism development (Zhou et al., 2023). According to Zhang (2004), tea culture can be divided into three dimensions. The first dimension is the material aspect, which encompasses the production and consumption of tea. The second dimension is the behavioural aspect, which includes activities such as visiting tea houses, attending tea exhibitions, and participating in tea events. The third dimension is the spiritual aspect, which involves aesthetic, religious, and artistic elements. Culture and tourism share a mutually beneficial relationship that enhances the appeal and competitiveness of regions. Cultural tourism leverages artistic potential as a key attraction, recognizing culture as a significant asset for the tourism sector (Muhammad and Kuswarini, 2019). Culture is the essence of tourism. Tourism falls into the trap of superficiality and mediocrity due to the absence of cultural elements in tourism activities. Blending ecotourism with tea culture not only elevates the ecological value and overall quality of experiences given by tourism, but also it has been helpful to revitalize and strengthen the local tea industry (Zhou et al., 2023). In general, tea culture tourism combines the historical tea culture features with the ecological environment and leisure activities. When people travel more, their lifestyles shift, and gradual changes in values occur. As a result of that, the traditional type of tourism becomes less appealing as tourists are willing to have experiences that offer something unique. This trend has fueled the rise of tea culture ecotourism, which has high potential to cater to the desire of modern tourists for immersive and enriching experiences. Ultimately, it will promote tea worldwide.

Tea comprises both intangible and tangible cultural elements. The customs and traditions associated with tea consumption in various countries, such as daily tea drinking practices in China, the Japanese tea ceremony known as “Chanoyu”, the European afternoon tea symbolizing wealth and elegance, herbal tea traditions in Islamic countries, Malaysian milk tea, horse-milk tea in Tibet, apple tea in Turkey, and the pickled tea culture called “Miang” among the northern Thai people are some of the examples for intangible cultural aspects (Khaokhrueamuang and Chueamchaitrakun, 2019.). Tangible culture encompasses physical objects, such as tea ware, as well as the material culture symbolized by tea estates, historical buildings, and machinery used in tea processing and trading. Both intangible and tangible tea cultures are often converted into tourism products to fulfill visitor demand (Khaokhrueamuang and Chueamchaitrakun, 2019). While tea tourism has emerged as a popular avenue for promoting tea in producing regions globally, tea culture ecotourism, a niche segment of tea tourism, has not been thoroughly explored. The unique blend of Sri Lanka's rich tea culture with the principles of ecotourism creates a strong foundation for tea culture ecotourism. However, there is still a lack of information regarding the factors that influence clientele perceptions of tea culture ecotourism. Limited research has examined the effectiveness of marketing approaches oriented towards tea culture ecotourism for promoting Ceylon tea. Addressing this knowledge gap is crucial for developing targeted marketing campaigns that can attract suitable audiences and effectively promote Ceylon tea in both domestic and international markets. Ultimately, improved marketing strategies will not only revitalize Ceylon tea but also enhance the well-being of local communities and support sustainable tourism practices

Objectives

This study aims to identify the factors affecting clients' perceptions of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism, investigate the relationship between tea promotion strategies and client perceptions of the efficacy of these experiences, and develop evidence-based recommendations for promoting tea culture ecotourism as an effective strategy for tea promotion.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed for this study aims to illustrate the relationship between independent variables, including cultural immersion and authenticity, local well-being, educational interpretation, and environmental responsibility, and the dependent variable: clients' perception of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism. This framework was developed based on a synthesis of key factors identified through preliminary research and field observations (Figure 1).

Demographic Factors

Demographic factors like age, education level, gender identity, and residency were analyzed to understand the clientele in tea culture ecotourism. These variables influence consumer preferences in

tourism (Sugathapala and A.S.H., n.d.), helping to identify trends in perceptions of Ceylon tea promotion locally and globally.

Travel-related Factors

This study assessed travel-related factors, including previous experiences, travel purpose, travel style, and tour type, to understand tourists' motivations for engaging with tea culture ecotourism. The purpose of travel, whether for relaxation, cultural exploration, or adventure, influences tourists' activities and destinations (Sugathapala and A.S.H., n.d.). Travel style (solo vs. group) influences interaction levels, while the type of tour (plantation vs. factory) affects visitor perceptions and satisfaction. Previous experiences also shape expectations, with seasoned travelers more inclined towards novel experiences (Xinyue Li, 2022; Pinto da Silva et al., 2019).

Educational Interpretation

Learning plays a pivotal role in enhancing the tourist experience, allowing travelers to view their journeys as educational opportunities (Hewage et al., 2023). As tourists increasingly seek knowledge, tourism experiences can facilitate both formal and informal education (Sthapit et al., 2024). This study emphasizes educational interpretation as a key factor in visitor engagement through knowledge acquisition, particularly within the context of tea culture ecotourism. Participants reflected on their understanding of Sri Lankan tea cultivation history and various stages of tea manufacturing, while also engaging their senses through the aroma and freshness of tea leaves. This focus highlights how enhancing visitors' comprehension of tea culture can significantly enrich their overall experience.

Environmental Responsibility

The independent variable of environmental responsibility was assessed through tourists' perceptions of sustainable practices in tea culture. This included evaluations of eco-friendly methods, like using bamboo baskets for plucking leaves and the benefits of shade trees in creating a calm environment. Participants also reflected on conservation efforts, supporting measures that preserve nature's aesthetic beauty (Pinto da Silva et al., 2019). Research highlights that tourists value environmental preservation, with findings indicating significant willingness to pay for conserving tea resources (Feng et al., 2012).

Well-being of Local Community

The well-being of local communities engaged in tea culture ecotourism is significantly influenced by various factors, including employment opportunities and economic contributions. Participants reported satisfaction with job creation resulting from tourist visits, indicating that these interactions enhance local livelihoods. Additionally, tourist spending contributes to local wages, fostering economic benefits that enhance the community's quality of life. Empowered local hosts expressed pride in their role within the tourism experience, reinforcing positive attitudes toward tourism. This research

highlights the socio-economic impacts of ecotourism, emphasizing the importance of community well-being in sustaining economic contributions (Pinto da Silva et al., 2019).

Cultural Immersion and Authenticity

The exploration of cultural immersion and authenticity within tea culture yields profound insights into participant engagement and appreciation. Understanding traditional practices, like the plucking technique of “one bud and two leaves” and orthodox manufacturing methods, deepens participants' connection to tea (Li, 2022). Enhanced tasting experiences were reported as participants engaged with diverse tea ware and expressed a keen interest in traditional ceremonies, underscoring their cultural importance (Banerjee & Tyagi, 2024). This potential for annual tea festivals to attract niche tourism is supported by the allure of such rituals in China and England (Yılmaz & Kumar Dixit, 2023). Moreover, interactions with tea pluckers and insights into local customs, such as wearing a “bindi,” enriched their experiences, reinforcing the cultural heritage and significance of scenic landscapes and historical factories (Muhammad & Kuswarini, 2019; Khaokhrueamuang & Chueamchaitrakun, 2019). Understanding these perceptions illuminates how sustainability influences attitudes toward the tea culture ecotourism.

Clientele Perception of the Effectiveness of Tea Culture Ecotourism

The study assessed clientele perceptions of tea culture ecotourism through various statements reflecting visitor experiences and satisfaction levels. This included enjoyment, perceived value, and appreciation of tea culture. Participants rated whether their experiences met or surpassed expectations for an enriching engagement and their overall satisfaction with the offerings. Key factors included willingness to recommend the program, revisit intentions, and interest in purchasing local tea products. Research indicates that enhancing customer involvement and co-creation in tourism can significantly boost satisfaction. Moreover, effective marketing that emphasizes unique offerings in tea tourism increases brand awareness and customer loyalty (Dissanayake, 2017). Hence, awareness of the brand was also evaluated. Understanding clientele perceptions is crucial for developing targeted marketing strategies that appeal to potential tourists.

These elements emphasize the importance of cultural experiences in shaping perceptions of tea culture ecotourism.

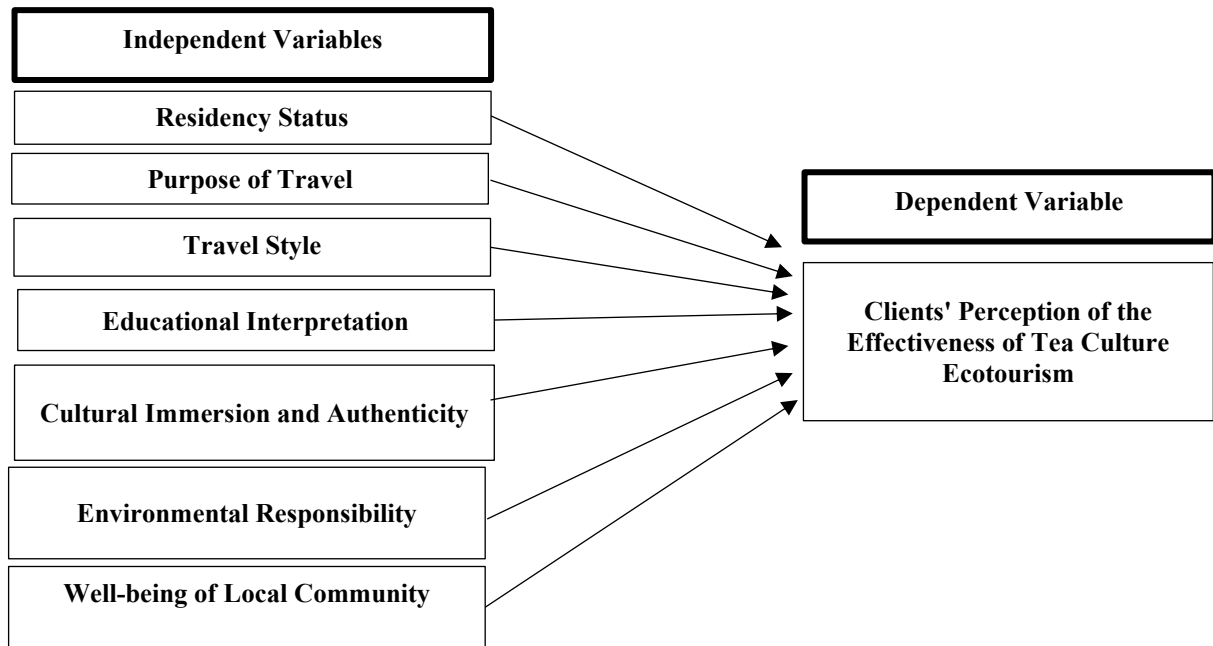


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

METHODOLOGY

Research Location

The primary study was conducted as a case study at the Sky Cafe, located within the Uva Halpewatte Tea Factory in Hela Halpe, Bandarawela District, Sri Lanka (Figure 2). This location was chosen due to its well-implemented tea culture ecotourism practices, which provided a rich context for examining the effectiveness of marketing approaches in promoting tea culture in the Uva Province of Sri Lanka.

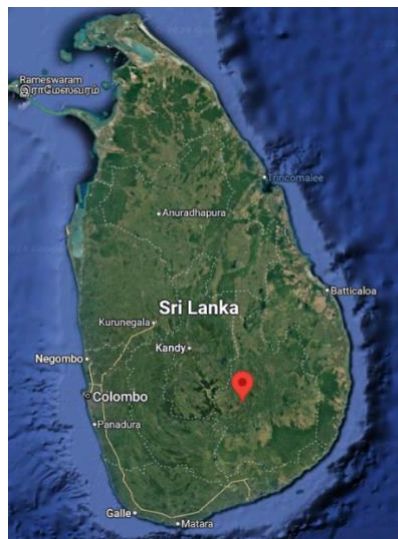


Figure 2. Research location (Source: Google Maps)

Sample and Sampling Technique

In this study, the systematic sampling technique, as explained by Thomas (2023), was employed to gather data from a sample of 130 participants who visited the Sky Cafe at the Uva Halpewatte Tea Factory between May and June, 2024. In this study, every third visitor to the café who had prior experience participating in tea culture ecotourism programs at the research site was systematically selected for inclusion. This approach ensured that only individuals with relevant experiences were included in the study, following the systematic sampling methodology outlined by Thomas (2023). This method emphasizes the selection of individuals at regular intervals, which is particularly valuable when an exact population size is unknown due to the unavailability of a comprehensive visitor list. By implementing this sampling technique, the study aimed to gather insights from a well-defined segment of the population, thereby enhancing the reliability and relevance of the findings.

Data on clients' perceptions of tea culture ecotourism were collected through a combination of self-administered structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, aligning with the study's objectives. The questionnaire, developed in Google Forms, was distributed among systematically selected visitors in a one-on-one, face-to-face manner at the site. Participants were asked to provide their responses on-site to ensure the reliability of the information. Designed in paper format, the questionnaires utilized a 5-point Likert scale to measure subjective attitudes, with responses categorized as follows: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4), and Strongly Agree (5). The structured questionnaires incorporated a mix of Likert scales, multiple-choice questions, and both closed-ended and open-ended formats to effectively capture both qualitative and quantitative data. To enhance the questionnaire data, in-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of participants, providing deeper insights into the complex relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Field observations also played a crucial role in enriching the primary data collected during this research.

Qualitative variables measured using the Likert scales were analyzed for index values in conjunction with the multiple linear regression model. This approach enabled a more precise and quantitative assessment of the independent variables and the dependent variable. Index values were computed to numerically represent the qualitative aspects of these variables, enhancing the accuracy and interpretability of the multiple linear regression analysis.

$$\text{Index} = \frac{\text{Marks achieved by the visitor}}{\text{Maximum potential marks that the visitor could achieve}} \times 100\%$$

Descriptive and statistical analyses were performed using SPSS software.

Reliability Analysis

Table 1. Reliability statistics of independent variables (Educational Interpretation, Environmental Responsibility, Well-being of Local Community, Cultural Immersion, and Authenticity) and dependent variable (Clientele Perception on the Effectiveness of Tea Culture Ecotourism).

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items
Educational Interpretation	11	0.766	0.755
Environmental Responsibility	4	0.836	0.836
Well-being of the Local Community	4	0.716	0.747
Cultural Immersion and Authenticity	11	0.701	0.753
Clientele Perception on the Effectiveness of Tea Culture Ecotourism	5	0.864	0.875

Before conducting the main survey, a pilot survey was carried out to ensure the feasibility and reliability of the questionnaire. This pre-test involved a sample of 20 tourists from the population and aimed to identify any potential issues or challenges in the questionnaire design and administration. The reliability analysis of the study's variables, detailed in Table 1, used Cronbach's Alpha to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales for tea culture ecotourism. The alpha values for the questionnaire were above 0.700 at a 5% significance level. As noted by Banerjee and Tyagi (2024), these values indicate strong internal consistency reliability, ensuring stable and consistent results. Thus, the internal consistency of the constructs is acceptable, confirming that the research tool is reliable and yields credible results.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis of Tea Culture Ecotourism: Local and International Tourists

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of categorical variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender Identity	Male	52	40.0
	Female	78	60.0
Residency Status	Citizen of Sri Lanka	6	4.6
	International Tourist	124	95.4
Purpose of Travel	Relaxation	71	25
	Cultural Exploration	96	34
	Adventure	70	25
	Personal Growth and Development	37	13
	Other	10	3
Travel Style	Solo Traveler	45	34.6
	Group Traveler	85	65.4
Occupation Categories	Current Student	15	11.5
	Full-time Employed	70	53.8
	Operate Own Business	17	13.1
	Unemployed	16	12.3
	Other	12	9.2
Previous Experiences	Have not visited a tea field or a tea factory before	88	67.7
	Have you visited a tea field or a tea factory before	42	32.3
Tour Type	Tea Plantation Tour	63	48.5
	Tea Factory Tour	49	37.7
	Both	18	13.8

The sample comprised 130 respondents, with 52 males (40%) and 78 females (60%) (Table 2). This gender distribution is significant as it highlights a predominance of female respondents, which may influence the overall perception of tea culture ecotourism-oriented marketing strategies. Additionally, Yılmaz and Kumar Dixit (2023) indicate that women are more interested in attending tea tourism activities than men, further emphasizing the importance of targeting marketing efforts towards female audiences.

The study sample included 130 visitors to tea culture ecotourism sites, with 6 (4.6%) being Sri Lankan citizens and 124 (95.4%) being international tourists, as mentioned in Table 2. This distribution highlights a significant predominance of international visitors, indicating that tea culture ecotourism in Sri Lanka primarily appeals to foreign tourists rather than local ones. Many local tourists may not perceive any uniqueness in this segment of tourism, as they are already familiar with tea plantations, tea

factories, and activities such as plucking tea leaves employed in this tourism program. However, some tourists originally from Sri Lanka, who have migrated to countries like Australia and obtained citizenship there, return to Sri Lanka on vacation to visit their parents. For these individuals, the experience of tea culture ecotourism represents a unique opportunity to reconnect with their heritage.

In this study, a total of 71 respondents (25%) stated that relaxation was a primary motive for their travel. This aligns with findings from previous research, which showed that 56.4% of respondents expressed a desire to participate in Longjing tea tourism in the future, primarily for relaxation purposes (Xinyue Li, 2022). Hewage et al. (2023) define escapism as the perception of temporarily breaking free from everyday life, highlighting relaxation as a key travel motive that allows individuals to distance themselves from their daily routines and responsibilities. Additionally, the highest number of respondents, 96 (34%) individuals, claimed that cultural exploration was their travel purpose. This is consistent with the 43.6% of respondents in the Longjing tea tourism study who were motivated by tea cultural heritage (Xinyue Li, 2022). Furthermore, 70 (25%) participants selected adventure as one of their travel motivations. A total of 37 (13%) individuals chose personal growth and development as their purpose for the journey. Lastly, 10 (3%) participants reported additional motivations, including meditation, sightseeing, a desire to learn more about Sri Lanka, and photography, for their journey. The data showed that 96 respondents identified cultural exploration as a primary motive for their travel. This finding demonstrates a great enthusiasm among participants for seeing other cultures, which is especially important to activities aimed at promoting tea culture ecotourism. However, without particular data on how many respondents who selected one travel purpose also chose another, it is challenging to determine the degree of overlap in their motivations.

Travel style was analyzed as an independent variable influencing clientele perception of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism. The analysis revealed that 45 tourists (34.6%) identified as solo travelers, while a significant majority, 85 tourists (65.4%), traveled in groups (Figure 5). This distribution indicates a strong preference for group travel among visitors participating in tea culture ecotourism. As noted by Huang (2024), more than 55% of tourists in his sample choose to travel with a group when engaging in tea tourism activities, reinforcing the trend observed in this study.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of continuous variables

Variable	N Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Variance Statistic
Age (Years)	130	21.00	65.00	31.13	8.99	80.80
Educational Interpretation	130	49.09	100.00	80.29	11.98	143.55
Well-being of Local Community	130	60.00	100.00	90.04	9.97	99.42
Environmental Responsibility	130	20.00	100.00	83.19	16.00	256.20
Cultural Immersion and Authenticity	130	61.82	100.00	86.01	8.34	69.49

Educational Interpretation scores average 80.29 (SD = 11.98), ranging from 49.09 to 100, reflecting generally high performance or satisfaction with moderate variability. The minimum index score of 49.09 suggests that certain respondents exhibited a comparatively low level of educational interpretation, whereas the maximum score of 100 indicates that others attained complete understanding or satisfaction with their educational experience. The mean index score of 80.29 indicates that, on average, respondents possess a strong understanding of tea culture ecotourism. This reflects a broad comprehension and recognition of the topic among those involved. A standard deviation of 11.98 reflects a moderate level of variability in the scores, indicating that while a majority of respondents clustered around the mean, there are also individuals with notably lower or higher scores. Therefore, targeted educational programmes could be designed to improve comprehension among participants who received lower scores on the index, fostering a deeper understanding of tea culture ecotourism for all visitors.

Environmental Responsibility scores average 83.19 (SD = 16.00), ranging from 20 to 100, indicating positive attitudes toward environmental stewardship, but with the highest variance (256.20) among the variables, suggesting diverse perspectives. This signifies that most participants perceive the practices implemented in tea culture ecotourism as effective and favorable for the sustainability of the surrounding tea environment. These findings align with I. Fernando et al. (2017) suggest that eco-friendly and sustainable tourism practices could be more marketable. Moreover, Hewage et al. (2023) advise stakeholders to adopt eco-friendly and sustainable tourism practices to position tea tourism as an environmentally conscious initiative. This indicates that enhancing the visibility and promotion of environmentally responsible practices in tea culture ecotourism may not only improve perceptions among tourists but also attract a broader audience interested in sustainable travel options.

According to the research findings of Galagoda et al. (2006), implementing an ecotourism project can be beneficial to an estate in various ways. The majority of the community believes that such a project would provide an additional income source for the estate and create new job opportunities for the locals. This indicates that the community is aware of the benefits the estate will gain from implementing an

ecotourism project. Furthermore, the results of their study indicate that many individuals are seeking to increase their income to enhance their living standards. Supporting this notion, Well-being of Local Community scores are notably high, averaging 90.04 (SD = 9.97), with a range of 60 to 100, indicating strong positive perceptions.

Similarly, Cultural Immersion and Authenticity scores average 86.01 (SD = 8.34), ranging from 61.82 to 100, suggesting robust engagement with cultural experiences. In a previous study, in response to an open-ended question, respondents defined tea tourism as traveling to regions where tea is grown to discover new flavors and learn about brewing rituals (Gonia and Topczyńska, 2021). This aligns with the high scores for cultural immersion observed in this study, as many participants emphasized experiencing local traditions related to tea preparation and consumption. Additionally, many highlighted the cognitive journey aspect of tea tourism; traveling along tea production trails and engaging with the cultural significance of tea in various countries (Gonia and Topczyńska, 2021). Such insights reflect the strong support for culturally enriching experiences through tea culture ecotourism.

Regression Analysis to Examine the Relationship Between Independent Variables and the Empirical Model

An empirical model was developed for the research to identify the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1(X_1) + \beta_2(X_2) + \beta_3(X_3) + \beta_4(X_4) + \beta_5(X_5) + \beta_6(X_6) + \beta_7(X_7) + \varepsilon$$

Table 4. Regression analysis variables

β_0	Coefficient of Constant	
Independent Variable	Definition	Abbreviation
X1	Residency Status	RES
X2	Purpose of Travel	POT
X3	Travel Style	TRS
X4	Educational Interpretation	EDI
X5	Environmental Responsibility	ENR
X6	Local Well-Being	LWB
X7	Cultural Immersion and Authenticity	CIA
ε	Error	
Dependent Variable	Definition	
Y	Clients' Perception of the Effectiveness of Tea Culture Ecotourism	

Table 5. Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.746 ^a	0.556	0.531	7.307
a. Predictors: (Constant), Residency Status, Purpose of Travel, Travel Style, Educational Interpretation, Environmental Responsibility, Local Well-Being, Cultural Immersion, and Authenticity				
b. Dependent Variable: Clients' Perception of the Effectiveness of Tea Culture Ecotourism				

Source: Sample survey 2024

The overall fit and explanatory power of the regression model are explained by the model summary table (Table 5). According to the model summary table, the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.746. It suggests a strong positive relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. The high correlation value indicates that as the predictors increase, there is a corresponding increase in clientele perception, demonstrating that the model effectively captures the relationship between these variables. The R square value is 0.556. It means that approximately 55.6% of the variance in clientele perception can be explained by the independent variables included in the model. This level of explanatory power indicates that the model has a meaningful ability to predict clientele perceptions based on residency status, purpose of travel, travel style, educational interpretation, environmental responsibility, local well-being, cultural immersion, and authenticity. The Adjusted R-squared value of 0.531 accounts for the number of predictors in the model and provides a more accurate measure of goodness-of-fit when several independent variables are included in the model. A significant portion of the variance in client perception remains explained by the model even after the R-squared value is adjusted for the number of predictors. The average distance that observed values fall from the regression line is represented by the Standard Error of the Estimate. The calculated Standard Error of the Estimate is 7.307. A lower standard error indicates better predictive accuracy. Thus, while this value implies some variability in predictions, it is important to consider it in conjunction with R-squared values to assess overall model performance. This should be taken into account when applying these findings to real-world scenarios.

The statistics in the model summary indicate that the multiple linear regression model provides a strong framework for understanding how various factors impact clients' perception of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism in promoting tea. Stakeholders can leverage the insights regarding a strong correlation and substantial explanatory power to enhance marketing strategies and improve visitor engagement in the tea culture ecotourism program.

Table 6. ANOVA table

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8173.866	7	1167.695	21.854	0.000 ^b
	Residual	6518.632	122	53.431		
	Total	14692.498	129			
a. Dependent Variable: Clients' Perception of the Effectiveness of Tea Culture Ecotourism						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Residency Status, Purpose of Travel, Travel Style, Educational Interpretation, Environmental Responsibility, Local Well-Being, Cultural Immersion, and Authenticity						

Source: Sample survey 2024

The Regression Sum of Squares in the ANOVA table (Table 6) indicates the amount of variability in clientele perception that can be explained by the independent variables included in the model. A significant portion of the variability in perceptions regarding the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism is accounted for by the predictors, with a Regression Sum of Squares value of 8173.866. The degrees of freedom for regression are seven, corresponding to the number of predictors in the model, including a constant term. The Mean Square for Regression is 1167.695. It represents the average amount of variability explained by each predictor, adjusted for their respective degrees of freedom. The F-statistic is calculated as 21.854. It is a critical indicator for assessing whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the dependent variable and at least one independent variable in the model. The associated significance level (p-value) is 0.000, indicating strong evidence against the null hypothesis, which assumes that there are no effects from any predictors on clients' perceptions of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism. This level of significance suggests that at least one predictor has a significant impact on clientele perception related to the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism in promoting tea, reinforcing the importance of considering these independent variables in future analyses. The Residual Sum of Squares is 6518.632. The portion of variability in clientele perception that remains unexplained by the model is represented by the Residual Sum of Squares. The degrees of freedom for residuals is calculated as 122. This indicates that, although a significant amount of variance is explained, there are still factors influencing perception that are not captured by the predictors. The Mean Square for Residuals is 53.431. This value indicates the amount of variability that remains unexplained after accounting for all predictors in the model. The Total Sum of Squares amounts to 14692.498. This represents the overall variability within the dataset regarding client perception. This total can be categorized into explained variability (Regression Sum of Squares) and unexplained variability (Residual Sum of Squares), confirming that the model explains a substantial portion of the total variability observed in clientele perceptions regarding the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism.

The regression analysis (Table 7) examines the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable, Clientele Perception of the Effectiveness of Tea Culture Ecotourism. The results indicate that Cultural Immersion and Authenticity ($\beta = 0.622$, $t = 5.885$, $p < 0.001$) has the strongest

positive influence on clientele perception, followed by Local Well-Being ($\beta = 0.194$, $t = 2.158$, $p = 0.033$) and Traveling Style ($\beta = 0.123$, $t = 1.989$, $p = 0.049$). Environmental Responsibility showed a significant but negative effect ($\beta = -0.155$, $t = -2.102$, $p = 0.038$), suggesting that higher expectations for environmental practices may lead to critical evaluations when these expectations are not met. Education and Interpretation ($\beta = 0.091$, $t = 1.233$, $p = 0.220$), Number of Purposes of Travel ($\beta = 0.040$, $t = 0.635$, $p = 0.526$), and Residency Status ($\beta = 0.075$, $t = 1.225$, $p = 0.223$) were not statistically significant predictors.

Table 7. Relationship among the independent factors on the dependent factor

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-5.067	8.393		-0.604	0.547
	Traveling Style	2.758	1.387	0.123	1.989	0.049
	Environmental Responsibility	-0.103	0.049	-0.155	-2.102	0.038
	Local Well-Being	0.208	0.096	0.194	2.158	0.033
	Cultural Immersion and Authenticity	0.797	0.135	0.622	5.885	0.000
	Education and Interpretation	0.081	0.066	0.091	1.233	0.220
	Number of purposes of travel (Sum)	0.343	0.539	0.040	0.635	0.526
	Residency status	3.822	3.119	0.075	1.225	0.223
a. Dependent Variable: Clients' Perception of the Effectiveness of Tea Culture Ecotourism						

These findings align with prior research emphasizing the importance of cultural and community-focused elements in ecotourism. As noted by Huang (2024), more than 55% of the tourists in his sample choose to travel with a group when engaging in tea tourism activities, reinforcing the trend observed in this study. Previous research indicates that tourists' environmental mindfulness and knowledge significantly influence their attitudes towards ecotourism, which in turn affects their behaviour (Hadi & Johan, 2023). Tourists with strong environmental values are likely to scrutinise practices that do not align with their expectations, which can lead to negative perceptions (Chiu et al., 2014). Thus, involving local communities in sustainable practices can bridge the gap between tourist expectations and actual practices, fostering a more positive perception (Wang et al., 2023). According to the research findings of Galagoda et al. (2006), implementing an ecotourism project can be beneficial to an estate in various ways. The majority of the community believes that such a project would provide an additional income source for the estate and create new job opportunities for the locals. This indicates that the community is aware of the benefits the estate will gain from implementing an ecotourism project. Furthermore, the

results of their study indicate that many individuals are seeking to increase their income to enhance their living standards. In a previous study, in response to an open-ended question, respondents defined tea tourism as travelling to regions where tea is grown to discover new flavours and learn about brewing rituals (Gonia & Topczyńska, 2021). This aligns with the high scores for cultural immersion observed in this study, as many participants emphasized experiencing local traditions related to tea preparation and consumption. Additionally, many highlighted the cognitive journey aspect of tea tourism; travelling along tea production trails and engaging with the cultural significance of tea in various countries (Gonia and Topczyńska, 2021). Such insights reflect the strong support for culturally enriching experiences through tea culture ecotourism.

According to the coefficient values (Table 7) obtained from the analysis, the empirical equation can be written as,

$$\text{Clients' Perception of the Effectiveness of Tea Culture Ecotourism} = - 5.067 + 2.758 (TRS) - 0.103 (ENR) + 0.208 (LWB) + 0.797 (CIA)$$

Conclusions

The research establishes a significant relationship between educational interpretation and environmental responsibility within the context of tea culture ecotourism. The strong positive correlation ($R = 0.746$) among the identified independent variables—cultural immersion, authenticity, local community well-being, educational interpretation, and environmental responsibility—illustrates their collective impact on clients' perceptions of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism.

The correlation accounts for 55.6% of the variance in clients' perceptions, highlighting the substantial influence that these factors exert on their assessment of the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism. The study findings prove that tea culture ecotourism can succeed by enhancing educational programs, enforcing environmental sustainability, empowering local communities, creating authentic experiences, and implementing continuous evaluation.

In conclusion, this research provides valuable insights into clientele perceptions regarding the effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism-oriented marketing approaches for tea promotion. By understanding demographic influences and preferences, stakeholders can develop targeted marketing strategies that resonate with both local and international audiences. This holistic approach is essential for the successful advancement of tea culture ecotourism, ensuring that it meets both ecological and cultural objectives while enhancing visitor experiences.

Recommendations

The findings of this study propose that policymakers should prioritize the development and enhancement of educational programs within tea culture ecotourism initiatives. This approach not only

fosters environmental responsibility but also enriches visitor experiences through cultural immersion and authenticity. It is essential to empower local communities by involving them in decision-making processes and ensuring that they benefit from tourism activities. Additionally, a commitment to environmental sustainability and continuous program evaluation should be integral to the policy framework. By adopting these recommendations, policymakers can effectively leverage tea culture ecotourism as a means to promote economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship, ultimately leading to a more sustainable and impactful tourism sector. Furthermore, understanding demographic influences and preferences will allow stakeholders to create targeted marketing strategies that resonate with both local and international audiences, enhancing the overall effectiveness of tea culture ecotourism marketing initiatives.

Additional Declarations

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