BOOK REVIEWS

VFR travel research: international perspectives, edited by Elisa Backer and Brian King, Bristol, Channel View Publications, 2015, 226 pp., £29.95 (paperback), ISBN 9781845415174

Through their publication of VFR Travel Research: International Perspectives, the two editors, Elisa Backer and Brian King, fulfill the long felt need of having a substantive literature on Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR). It is a subtle subject which is difficult to measure statistically and hard to bring into touristic bounds.

Said to be the oldest form of travel, it has remained an under-researched field of study. Barring a few articles in tourism journals, not much has been published. This is brave of Elisa and Brian to take this theme with the academic support of Morrison, Nadkarni, Tony Seaton and other scholars. The first paper on VFR was published in 1990 (Jackson, 1990). The apathy of scholars towards VFR was due to many reasons, most common was that VFR did not benefit the accommodation sub-sector, particularly commercial accommodation as 80% of VFRs are likely to stay with their hosts. Similarly, VFR tourists are generally budget tourists which will affect high class hotels and motels negatively. Many scholars did not consider a VFR as a tourist for obvious reasons, primarily ‘he is in the region for reasons other than a holiday’ – to meet his friends and relatives. It was found difficult to precisely define a VFR.

According to UNWTO, one-quarter of all international tourists are motivated by the desire to visit friends and relatives and Australia alone hosts 48% of total visitors in the country. The size of VFR comprises half of the US pleasure market. Sadly, such a large captive market has not attracted the attention of serious scholars. As low spenders they do not contribute much to the host community, besides their indifference to participate in touristic activities that project a wrong perception.

The book provides in-depth research and covers diverse aspects of the VFR phenomenon. Efforts have been made to define it but definitional problems are not easily solved. The book has 14 chapter covering some important themes, such as the contribution of VFR to destination and marketing (chapter 2); VFR and the migration nexus (chapter 4); and implementing travel strategies (chapter 7). The editors have examined the theme globally and have discussed a few VFR travel profiles of countries such as Iran, the United States, South Africa, Italy and UAE. The final chapter is devoted to the future of VFR travel. This chapter is unlike a customary conclusion and provides some new ideas and useful information about the progress of VFRs, particularly their shift in attitudes due to the impact of globalization, capitalism and the tremendous increase in the human population, particularly in China and India with 2.6 billion people (combined), all of which are fertile areas for VFR researchers. Both countries have a long tradition of VFR travel, particularly Diaspora. Elisa and Brian deserve congratulations for publishing the first book on the dubious phenomenon. Citations on VFR travel publications at the end would be of immense help to VFR researchers. Overall, it is well-documented literature that should inspire scholars for further research.

Reference

Jackson, R. T. (1990). VFR tourism: Is it underestimated? Journal of Tourism Studies, 1(2), 10–17.

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The future of food tourism: foodies, experiences, exclusivity, vision and political capital, edited by Ian Yeoman, Una McManon-Beattie, Kevin Fields, Julia Albrecht and Kevin Meethan, Bristol, Channel View Publications, 2015, 286 pp., £34.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-84541-537-2

Travelling in search of food is an old activity because food is of paramount importance for living organisms. According to life science experts, humans can live for more than three weeks without food but cannot survive more than three days without water, which is an important ingredient of almost every food. So thinking about a future without food and water is not possible. Besides its biological necessity, food is a vital constituent of the tourism sector as tourists need to eat wherever they travel. Food also helps tourists to explore other cultures and provides insights into different ways of life. To some extent, the future of the tourism industry will depend on the ways in which food is produced and consumed in the future.

The substantial increase in academic publications on food tourism shows that it has become a significant subject of tourism studies. The earlier literature on food tourism has already covered themes such as, the role of
local food and its economic benefits to the region (Hjalager & Richards, 2002); the significance of tourist expenditure on food; food as a promotional tool in destination marketing (Hall, 2004), food festivals, food-related tourist experiences (Hall & Sharples, 2003), food related tourism motivations and food as a marker of a culture and identity. The Future of Food Tourism: Foodies, Experiences, Exclusivity, Vision and Political Capital is a timely collection of literature on food tourism as it covers some previously discussed as well as new themes with an eye on the future. The book is a collection of 17 chapters in four parts by 21 authors, including five editors, who mostly come from New Zealand, Australia, the UK, the USA and Canada.

According to the editors, the aim of this book is to portray the ‘big picture’ (p. 4) on the importance of food tourism in the future. They foresee that ‘food tourism can open up previously non-existent streams of revenue for emerging destinations in agriculture regions’ (p. 5) and call upon urban destinations to add food tourism to their portfolio of tourism products. Besides the future of food tourism/tourists, the topics that have been covered in the book include, gastronomical public policies of countries; the significance of architecture in food and wine tourism; envisioning agri-tourism after 100 years; changing demographics of male foodies with a focus on British men; single dining and its impacts; the experience economy and its relationship with regional food tourism; the relevance of intellectual property rights in food tourism; the affective power of food in redesigning a tourist imaginary for the future and the importance of food festivals in tourism promotion.

To meet the needs of future tourists for innovation and novelty in food, the book presents future scenarios expressing the possibility of a change in food production processes in the future from traditional to laboratory based processes, such as growing hamburgers in a lab using vitro meat, replicating food, such as a pizza using a 3D food printer (p. 29) etc. It has been predicted that food prices will rise rapidly due to scarcity of essential resources, such as water, oil and bio-fuel; people will become more health conscious and will take the help of technological applications such as mobile Apps for monitoring their health; fresh and authentic food will become an exclusive entity of the wealthy class while poor people will have to rely on artificial and manufactured food; food will become social capital as it supports cultural identification and social status and the world economy will shift from Western to South and East economy while the Western consumer will remain dominant.

Although the book successfully presents a literature review of the existing academic research on food in tourism and other social science disciplines and provides a future direction on food in scholarship and future implications on food tourism in the developed world, the book completely ignores developing societies, particularly Asia, where China, India and Thailand are famous for their food and food as emerging tourism destinations. According to UNWTO, the strongest growth by region will be seen in Asia and the Pacific, where arrivals are expected to reach 535 million by 2030 (UNWTO, 2015). The book also does not present any discussion about the importance of vegetarian food which is now becoming part of people’s everyday meals due to many side effects of non-veg food on health. It also lacks a discussion on the impacts of changing 24/7 working and dining patterns on health and what will be its sociological and economic impacts on society.

Despite some above-mentioned shortcomings, the book definitely provides a platform for further research on the future of food and tourism and the editors must be appreciated for their efforts. Anyone, be it a graduate or postgraduate student, a research scholar, a practitioner, a restaurant manager, a futurologist, an academic or a foodie, who is interested in food and its future implications in tourism should read this book which is a collection of articles reflecting the significance of food in tourism. The conceptual framework of the core concepts of all preceding chapters through cognitive mapping approach at the end is very useful, which will surely help scholars in summarizing their research projects.

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