From Forbidden Fruit to the Goose That Lays Golden Eggs: Marijuana Tourism in Colorado

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Abstract
Often compared with the Gold Rush, the marijuana industry is already a multibillion-dollar phenomenon and is expected to generate $22 billion in sales in the United States by 2020. Two years have passed since the legalization of recreational marijuana began in Colorado. This unprecedented change has created numerous business opportunities as well as legal and operational challenges for the hospitality and tourism industry. This article explores the legalization of recreational marijuana in terms of the tourism industry in Colorado and identifies several challenges found in the current marijuana-related literature in the context of hospitality and tourism research. We also present several research areas that could help hospitality and tourism researchers explore and contribute to the body of knowledge of this emerging market by using Colorado as a focal point. Future research on marijuana tourism is of great importance in that the rapid rise of this niche market creates the pressing challenges and promising opportunities for destinations. Such knowledge will only increase in importance as marijuana tourism continues to evolve as a special interest tourism segment.

Keywords
marijuana tourism, cannatourism, Colorado, marijuana legalization, special interest tourism

Introduction
On November 6, 2012, Colorado residents approved Colorado Amendment 64 for the legalization of recreational (retail) marijuana with 55.3% of the vote, making Colorado the first state in the country to legalize recreational cannabis (Hudak, 2014). The sale of recreational marijuana went into effect on January 1, 2014. Colorado has legalized not only the drug’s retail sales and consumption, but also the whole production chain (Noel, 2016). This historical reform was achieved notwithstanding a federal prohibition of marijuana law and a strong opposition from many stakeholders, such as the governor, state attorney general, city officials, and the law enforcement community (Hudak, 2014).

As of May 2016, four states, Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska, and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana for recreational use (Governing, 2016). In 2016, 10 other states including Nevada, California, Minnesota, New York, and Vermont are expected to have ballot measures that give voters further opportunities to legalize possession (Stebbins, 2015).

This movement toward wider legalization can be ascribed to a relatively large number of marijuana users nationwide. According to a recent Gallup poll in 2016, approximately 11% of respondents indicated that they smoke marijuana in the previous year. Furthermore, nearly 10% of adults, 18 years old or older, indicated that they smoke marijuana once a year (Palermo, 2015), making marijuana the most popular recreational drug in America after alcohol and tobacco, according to the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (Cressey, 2015).

An Overview of Recreational Marijuana Legalization in Colorado
Due to its unprecedented nature, the legalization process in Colorado was groundbreaking but also challenging to ensure that legislation creates the necessary frameworks that would allow the industry to cultivate, process, and sell marijuana for recreational use. According to Amendment 64, Colorado residents 21 or older can buy up to an ounce of marijuana per visit, while out-of-state visitors can purchase a quarter ounce of marijuana per visit. Smoking is still prohibited in public spaces, most hotels and restaurants, and public indoor spaces under the Colorado’s Indoor Clean Air Act, and in national

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park areas. In 2013, the Indoor Clean Air Act was amended to include marijuana smoking.

The primary support behind the legalization of recreational marijuana was for marijuana taxes as a “bonanza” for state governments (Healy, 2014). As one of the most heavily taxed consumer products in Colorado, the marijuana purchase is subject to a 15% excise tax on the “average market rate” of wholesale marijuana, the 10% special marijuana sales tax, the 2.9% state sales tax, plus local marijuana sales taxes, such as a 3.5% tax in Denver. In the second year of legalization in 2014, recreational marijuana sales surpassed those of medical marijuana (Baca, 2016). In 2015, recreational marijuana sales reached $588 million, showing a sharp increase from $313 million in 2014. During the same year, marijuana specific tax revenue excluding fee revenues reached almost $70 million, which was almost double what the state earned from alcohol tax revenue (Baca, 2016). Of the total tax revenue collected, 15% of the total tax revenue was allocated to local jurisdiction and the remaining was retained by the state. As of September 2016, there were 450 retail cannabis outlets across the state, with nearly half of them (45%) located in the Denver metropolitan area (CDOR MED Licensed Facilities, 2016).

To oversee the implement and regulation of both medical and recreational marijuana, the state of Colorado legislature created the Marijuana Enforcement Division (MED) in May 2013 (CDOR Marijuana Enforcement, 2016; Hudak, 2014). Additionally, the state took legislative and regulatory actions to deal with cannabis edibles by launching an Edible Product Production Safety Working Group (Hudak, 2014), responsible for seeking better health and safety regulations related to the production of edibles.

Since Amendment 64 has affected diverse sectors in the state, including agriculture, public health, law enforcement, welfare, general businesses, and more, some groups in the state have undergone significant cultural and attitudinal changes. Accordingly, more governing bodies are expected to be formed to address and oversee the policies and practices in the respective interest area. As the industry evolves, new rules and regulations are likely to be introduced to accommodate the state’s broader interest in the industry. The state legislature already passed 81 bills enacting changes to drug laws in 2015 (Alsever, 2016).

### Study Purpose

Legal marijuana is already a multibillion-dollar industry as smoking cannabis becomes more common as an everyday leisure practice in the United States. Given its role as the earliest adopter of legalization, Colorado is positioned to be at the center of marijuana tourism growth. Therefore, it is important to examine the effects of Amendment 64 and subsequent impacts on various issues linked to state residents and visitors.

Legalization in one state could influence consumption in other states via several mechanisms, although the magnitude of the effect depends on how marijuana is regulated in the legalizing state. For example, to manage public health risks, Texas is currently considering following Colorado’s example of allowing individuals to grow, sell, and consume marijuana in relatively small quantities, while restricting industrial-scale operations that cross state lines (Jensen, 2016).

Colorado’s legalization could also result in change in people’s attitude toward marijuana, making the drug less threatening and stigmatized (Caulkins, Hawken, Kilmer, & Kleiman, 2012a). This sentiment is already evident with more than half of Americans (58%) continuing to support legal marijuana use in the United States, the highest approval rating in the Gallup’s 46-year trend in 2015 (Jones, 2015).

While marijuana is a booming industry, few research studies are available to reference. In order to expand the knowledge boundary and serve as a benchmark for other states that want to follow the Colorado footsteps. Exploring the legalization of recreational marijuana highlights the paucity of academic research in both quantity and quality, especially in the hospitality and tourism industry. To sustain its long and positive benefits, research is needed to understand new tourism ventures and hospitality opportunities, including impacts, demand/supply patterns, consumption profiles, and policy management related to marijuana consumption.

Therefore, this article follows up on the legalization of recreational marijuana in terms of the tourism industry in Colorado and identifies several challenges found in the current marijuana-related literature in the context of hospitality and tourism research. We also present several research ideas that could help hospitality and tourism researchers explore and contribute to the body of knowledge of this emerging market by using Colorado as a focal point.
Literature Review

Marijuana reform has attracted a great deal of attention from academic disciplines. There are, however, about 100 times as many studies on tobacco or alcohol as there are about marijuana. While legalization provides an excellent opportunity to conduct informative research (Cressey, 2015), research activity has not been significantly improved since legalization; most post-legalization literature is mainly limited to non-academic reports from newspapers, magazines, and advocate/interest groups, making them subject to widely different estimates and biases as to render it virtually unsuitable for academic research. More objective and impartial research would provide a much stronger knowledge foundation by addressing the range of views presented so far.

Marijuana Research in Hospitality and Tourism

Marijuana reform not only creates a new industry, but also presents a significant research opportunity for virtually every major discipline, including agriculture, medicine, social work, psychology, general business, banking, government, sociology, tourism, and hospitality. In particular, the hospitality and tourism industry will encounter both business opportunities and operational challenges in dealing with a new niche market and, thus, deserve its own research agenda as one of the beneficiaries of legalization.

We identify four challenges in marijuana-related research from the tourism and hospitality literature. There is a range of conceptualizations and perceptions of cannabis use in society that is outlined in the current literature (Belhassen, Santos, & Uriely, 2007). But this view needs to be challenged and expanded to be understood under the recent business landscape. First, much cannabis research has been narrowly focused and constructed around concepts of either addiction (e.g., Fergusson & Horwood, 1997; Golub & Johnson, 1994; Thomas, 1996; Weisbeek et al., 1996) or deviance (e.g., Dembo et al., 1994; Young, 1971) due to its inherent negative social connotations (Becker, 1953; Goode, 1970). Deviance in tourism-related practices involves a departure from established behaviors and routines of everyday life (Ryan, 1993; Ryan & Kinder, 1996; Urry, 1990) and operates at the edge of social legitimacy or legality (Ryan, 1993; Ryan & Hall, 2001). Table 2 presents a summary of the past cannabis research in the tourism and leisure literature.

While hedonistic behavior during travel has been well documented in the literature, a great deal of current cannabis research related to consumption is focused on deviance addiction, making the current literature limited in the contribution to the Colorado situation. As cannabis users have become mainstreamed in conjunction with legalization, it is no longer sufficient to describe them as a deviant social group, espousing different social norms or eschewing social responsibility (Hammersley, Jenkins, & Reid, 2001).

Second, the current literature primarily used secondary data or took a qualitative approach using personal interview techniques when collecting the data. While these methods are useful due to marijuana’s illegal status and social stigma, the methodology needs to be improved with more advanced and empirical approaches. Still, some research findings on post-legalization provide unclear information. For example, the first statewide report about the impact of legalized
marijuana and tourism commissioned by the Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) showed that nearly half (49%) of potential summer visitors who were exposed to the state’s tourism ads in 2015 were influenced by the legalization of marijuana (Blevins, 2015). However, Grossman (2015) pointed out that this finding can be misleading in that the survey failed to ask whether potential visitors’ influence was positive or negative, making the finding of little use to researchers and tourism professionals.

Third, some tourism studies on drug tourism, including marijuana consumption, were mainly conducted in selected geographic locations, such as the Netherlands (Korf, 2002), the Amazon region (de Rios, 1994), Israel (Belhassen et al., 2007; Uriely & Belhassen, 2006), Mexican border cities (Valdez & Sifaneck, 1997), and South Asian countries, including India and Thailand (Westerhausen, 2002). All these locations shared common characteristics of having a lax regulatory environment against drug use and of accepting drug intake more liberally. In the same context, these tourism studies used mainly non-traditional forms of tourism, such as backpacking, drifting, and tramping with young people to explore drug use (Riley, 1988; Scheyvens, 2002; Westerhausen, 2002), making the interpretation of the results limited to a certain age group.

Table 2. Past Cannabis Research in the Tourism and Leisure Literature.

| Author (year) | Major objective | Sample/method | Location |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------|----------|
| Riley (1988)  | Investigate the subculture of the contemporary international budget travelers | Personal observations, interviews, and mail survey | Americans traveling overseas with a limited budget |
| de Rios (1994) | Examine drug tourism including motivation in the Amazon region | Personal observations with American and European tourists seeking the experience of hallucinogenic drugs | Amazon region |
| Moore, Cushman, and Simmons (1995) | Delineate behavioral conceptualizations of tourism and leisure | Conceptual research | NA |
| Valdez and Sifaneck (1997) | Describe the acquisition process of non-medical prescription drug, develop a typology of consumers, and explore the interaction between the actors in this process | Americans who purchase prescription drugs for recreational purposes using an ethnographic method | Mexican border cities |
| Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich, and Smeaton (1998) | Examine the sexual activity, alcohol and drug use of U.S. college students during “Spring Break” | Self-reported questionnaire with American spring breakers | Popular Florida beach destination |
| Sellars (1998) | Understand the motivation of drug use among youth traveling for dance and music | Conceptual research | The United Kingdom |
| Bellis, Hale, Bennett, Chaudry, and Kilfoyle (2000) | Measure changes in levels of substance use and sexual behavior of young travelers from the United Kingdom | Young U.K. visitors at a destination resort using self-administered survey | Ibiza, Spain |
| Korf (2002) | Describe and discuss long-term trends in cannabis use in the Netherlands | The general population including visitors and students at secondary schools | The Netherlands |
| Scheyvens (2002) | Consider both pros and cons of backpacker tourism in terms of whether it promotes local-level development | Conceptual research | NA |
| Westerhausen (2002) | Investigate the rise and fall of drug destinations in South East Asia | In-depth interview and observations with international visitors | India and Thailand |
| Peretti-Watel and Lorente (2004) | Study the relationship between cannabis use, sports practice, and other leisure activities during adolescence | Self-reported questionnaire with French adolescents | France |
| Uriely and Belhassen (2006)* | Investigate the nature of drug-related tourist experiences from a phenomenological perspective | In-depth interview with 30 drug tourists and additional ethnographic data | Israel |
| Belhassen, Santos, and Uriely (2007)* | Investigate the social forces that shape tourists’ motives in consuming cannabis while on vacation | In-depth interviews and observations of tourists | Israel |

*Two studies used the same data set.
Fourth, most current tourism literature considered marijuana consumption as an extension of leisure activity because cannabis use can be viewed as a leisure activity in Western society (Bellis, Hale, Bennett, Chaudry, & Kilfoyle, 2000; Josiam, Hobson, Dietrich, & Smeeaton, 1998; Moore, Cushman, & Simmons, 1995; Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004; Rojek, 2000; Sellars, 1998). Uriely and Belhassen (2006) connected a hedonic activity such as drug consumption in tourism with its consumption in daily life. This study's results demonstrated the relevancy of the normalization process of drug use at tourist destinations. Moore et al. (1995) also advocated that tourism should be studied in the context of individuals' everyday lives, rather than in fragmented domains.

Whether it is seen as drug tourism or an extension of leisure activity, cannabis use has been mostly considered to be a deviant leisure activity for both the individual and for society (Rojek, 2000). However, with recent legalization, this view can be challenged, as people are more likely to accept cannabis as a tourism attraction or amenity that they can experience during vacation, rather than a marginalized tourist interest or a mere extension of their daily habit. Alternatively, the perception will continuously persist as people witness more negative consequences from the legalization.

Once dubbed as “drug tourism” and “drug tourists,” marijuana tourists are seen as a new niche market for Colorado. As noted earlier, the current literature on drug tourism including marijuana is overly skewed to a negatively perceived or marginalized subculture and fails to provide a comprehensive picture of a tourism segment, something that has been witnessed in Colorado over the last 2 years. Overall, cannabis consumption has generally received little attention in the tourism literature because of its illegal status (Belhassen et al., 2007). Peterson (2015) echoed the statement that one of the problems when it comes to official support for marijuana legalization is the lack of “hard numbers.” Thus, research studies are needed to provide more objective evidence for barometers to disentangle correlation and causation on various issues, especially with negative impacts (Cressey, 2015).

**Future Research Suggestions for Hospitality and Tourism**

In this section, based on the literature review, we identify five areas that tourism and leisure research can capitalize on to provide theoretical and practical implications for academic audiences as well as industry practitioners. This can serve as a research resource and reference for any parties that are interested in creating a more objective profile of current Colorado marijuana tourism and in offering benchmark strategies for other states that are considering following Colorado’s example.

Given the scarcity of the existing literature, the direction of marijuana research could be compared with what gambling research experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. As a new area for research, a grounded theory approach is likely to be the most useful method as its findings can be viewed as an initial framework for further investigation (Belhassen et al., 2007). A comprehensive picture comparing cannabis consumption as leisure and tourism activities using a longitudinal study approach should shed some light in this burgeoning area (R. J. Williams, Rehm, & Stevens, 2011). Table 3 shows a summary of the research recommendations made in the following section.

**Economic and Social Impact**

In early gambling research, the best methodological and theoretical approach to analyzing the economic and social impacts of gambling was the subject of considerable debate among scholars. In particular, how to align the social impacts with economic impacts was one of the key issues (R. J. Williams et al., 2011). By the same token, marijuana research will face the same question. Even though it may be too early to fully assess comprehensive economic and social impacts in the wake of legalization, there is notable evidence on how the past 2 years have evolved in terms of economic contribution, mainly in the form of tax revenue to the state. Based on these reports, a recurring conclusion is that the industry is expected to grow bigger as more states are considering legalization. It is predicted that the legal cannabis market would grow by 25% in 2016 to reach $6.7 billion in total U.S. sales, and that the total could approach $22 billion in sales by 2020 (Huddleston, 2016). Colorado’s legal marijuana industry was reported to be worth $1 billion in 2015 and could easily become a top tourist draw, rivaling Colorado’s $4.8 billion skiing industry (Economic Study, 2015) or $1.2 billion craft brewing industry (Huddleston, 2016).

The most obvious interest area would be continual and long-term economic impacts from legalization. Sales taxes on gasoline, hotel rooms, and restaurant meals purchased by marijuana tourists in the state could be significant along with tax revenues from marijuana sales generated themselves (Caulkins et al., 2012a). For example, during the first year of legalization in 2014, Denver accommodated 15.4 million overnight visitors, who spent a record of $4.6 billion: $1.3 billion for lodging, $913 million at restaurants, and $579 million in retail. The gains from the prior period were double to triple compared with the national average (Marijuana Policy Project, 2015).

In that sense, like tourism impact studies, the economic impacts of marijuana tourism can be evaluated at three levels: direct, indirect, and induced. Direct effects are defined as expenditure incurred by tourism products in the state: marijuana and marijuana-related sales (e.g., edibles) in this case. These effects are straightforward and relatively easy to calculate. Second, indirect effects refer to intermediate consumption for the production of goods and services that tourism companies purchase from their suppliers, forming the tourism supply chain. In the Colorado case, all expenditures from supporting infrastructure catering to marijuana
tourists can be the example, including hotels, restaurants, transportation, retail, convention/event venues, and entertainment. Lastly, induced effects account for expenditure by employees from wages paid by companies in direct contact with tourists. Induced effects also include the consumption of companies that have benefited directly or indirectly from initial expenditures in the tourism sector. An input–output model representing the flows of economic activity within a region or in a state can be employed to capture these economic impacts of visitor spending.

Furthermore, some experts forecasted that revenue is likely to be highest in early years with revenue flattening or declining in subsequent years. Therefore, it is imperative to follow up with the revenue and tax trends using a longitudinal method. This approach will show whether legalization would bring changes in people’s perception and attitude and render marijuana tourism as one of the special interest tourism (SIT) sectors, such as wine, food, or sport tourism. In this way, the legalization can be evaluated as a sustainable reform for the state, overcoming the “novel effect” from ensuing competition.

While fiscal impacts using total sales, revenues, and taxes can portray a clear picture of how the legalization positively affects the state economy in general, it is also important to examine intangible impacts, such as employment rate, job creation, resident migration, and housing and real estate markets, to assess whether the reform has influenced residents’ daily life positively or negatively. For instance, Colorado experienced its lowest unemployment rate in more than 6 years and over 22,000 occupation licenses have been issued for jobs created directly by Colorado’s marijuana industry (Jennings, 2015), showing a strong indication of a healthy economy driven by legalization. On the other hand, there is a negative ramification, such as having difficulty of finding sober employees in certain areas of the state (Alsever, 2016).

Along with economic impacts, social impacts should also receive attention. R. J. Williams et al. (2011) cautioned not to apply arbitrary monetary values to impacts that are clearly non-monetary in nature when researching gambling. The same suggestion can be applied here since no social impacts from legalized marijuana have been objectively assessed in

| Economic areas | Key issues |
|----------------|-----------|
| Economic and social impact | Examine comprehensive economic impacts and social impacts |
| | Focus on long-term economic impacts using direct, indirect, and induced perspectives |
| | Investigate negative social impacts |
| | Compare economic gains and social costs to see whether the legalization is sustainable |
| | Examine intangible impacts to assess whether the legalization influence residents’ quality of life positively or negatively |
| | Investigate social assessment impacts such as crime, employment, socioeconomic inequality, leisure activity, attitudes, and QOL |
| | Follow up with the revenue and tax trends using a longitudinal model |
| Demand: Visitors | Profile the composition of visitors including demographic and socioeconomic characteristics |
| | Investigate visitor’s attitude, perceptions, behaviors, and image perception toward Colorado |
| | Examine cannabis as visitor’s primary or secondary motivation and apply motivation typologies from the tourism literature |
| | Investigate visitor’s views on marijuana: deviant vs. recreational activity |
| | Examine the “corridor” effect |
| | Compare visitor’s behavior and perception changes during pre-, during-, and post-visit |
| Supply: Products, tour packages, attractions | Investigate new products and services in the hospitality business setting |
| | Examine new festivals, tours, and attractions in the tourism business setting |
| | Examine corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies and practices from the marijuana tourism and its related businesses |
| Host: Residents | Investigate and compare residents’ support for before and after legalization |
| | Examine residents’ consumption patterns of cannabis |
| | Investigate resident’s perception on image, perceived impacts, benefit, and support using theoretical frameworks |
| | Examine amenity migration issues and its implications |
| Government: Policy and regulations | Seek possible marketing collaboration ideas between the state and the marijuana industry |
| | Examine the control on marijuana prices and its impacts on demand and supply |
| | Investigate employment-related laws, regulations, and its legal ramifications |
| | Investigate liability issues with hospitality and tourism businesses |
| | Concern about public health and safety issues |
| | Educate hospitality employees and visitors about marijuana and edible consumption |
| | Seek balancing between personal prerogatives and public health and safety |

Note. QOL = quality of life.

Table 3. Key Research Areas in Hospitality and Tourism.
the tourism context. There are already a slew of negative consequences reported by law enforcement and residents, including an increase in marijuana-related emergency room visits among youth, more newborns with marijuana in their system, an increase of homeless people, a rise in drug-related school suspensions, more drug-related crimes, deterioration of poor communities used as marijuana growing fields, lawsuits from neighboring states, and so on (Alsever, 2016). It would be interesting to examine the correlations between economic impacts brought by the legalization and residents’ quality-of-life (QOL) issues as social impacts. A qualitative assessment of the profile of both positive and negative social impacts (e.g., crime, employment, socioeconomic inequality, leisure activity, attitudes, and QOL) would be beneficial before applying quantitative techniques to examine social impacts. Then, following up with a quantitative and empirical approach would enhance a broader understanding of social impacts from marijuana legalization.

**Demand: Visitors**

The next area is obvious and straightforward: who are the visitors? As the extant marijuana literature profiled tourists in a distinctive way (i.e., marginal, deviant young travelers), it is important to understand how the legalization changes the composition of the visitor profile. As Preston (2002) pointed out, cannabis can be one of the predominant themes in a tourist’s journey. This billion-dollar enterprise of labs and dispensaries need strong tourist infrastructure to make the tourism sustainable and successful. While young generations were more likely to support legalization, Colorado’s cannabis tourists are reported to be older (Peterson, 2015). Visitor profiling uncovering demographic and socioeconomic characteristics would be a good place to begin identifying who marijuana tourists are to the state. Legalization also makes the data collection process easier with visitors. Respondents are more likely to provide honest responses on their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, making the data more reliable and credible.

In conjunction with the visitor profile, one area that deserves attention is about state image perceived by visitors. Some residents are concerned that marijuana legalization would tarnish Colorado’s brand as a tourist destination, attracting fewer conventions and leisure travelers. This image could be different from or opposite of the healthy, family-friendly, and outdoor activity image that the state has promoted (Ingold, 2013). The examination of the state image among visitors, therefore, would be interesting to ascertain whether there has been an image shift. This issue could be examined with Colorado residents as well.

In examining the marijuana tourist profile and perception, previous thinking would be challenged as most currently available cannabis research in tourism has been strongly tied to the theory of deviant opportunities (Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004). With legalization, marijuana consumers could be viewed as a “connoisseur consumer” and no longer as a marginal deviant seeking visitor. Legalization has brought the perception of marijuana consumption to the crossroad between deviant and recreational activity, similar to what had been seen in gambling research. As people’s view is moving more toward recreational activity, this phenomenon will generate more visitors traveling specifically for marijuana as a recreational amenity.

Travelers’ motivation is one of the most widely studied areas in tourism literature. Motivations of drug tourists were examined in de Rios’s (1994) study of American and European tourists who arrived in Amazonian cities to experience a drug. The findings of the study reported that while some tourists traveled to search for a uniquely profound experience, other drug tourists could be classified mainly as fun and recreation seekers (e.g., Bellis et al., 2000; Josiam et al., 1998; Sellars, 1998). Later, Belhassen et al. (2007) identified four motivations of international visitors who used marijuana at their vacation destinations: experimental, pleasure orientation, quest for authenticity, and purchasing. As this study used qualitative interviews, the finding of the study did not attempt to quantify the importance of motivation factors. The current literature mainly concludes that drug consumption might not necessarily function as the major travel motivation for these tourists but is more likely to be by-product of their tourist experience. Future research needs to investigate whether this holds true for Colorado visitors after legalization. Its new legal status could create marijuana consumption as a major motivation, as opposed to a secondary benefit sought by tourists as identified in the earlier studies. Further, it would be beneficial to know whether the traditional tourism motivation typologies can be applicable in the context of marijuana tourism.

Another interesting area to look at among visitors is how the cannabis experience in Colorado will engender a similar pattern of use in one’s daily life subsequent to the trip (Uriely & Belhassen, 2006). The “corridor” approach, a term used by Belhassen et al. (2007), refers to the consumption of cannabis in tourism that will lead to similar consumption in a visitor’s everyday life in the country of origin. The legalization can create normal behavior in which individuals can satisfy their cravings to try the “forbidden fruit” without taking the risks of being labeled as deviant (Uriely & Belhassen, 2006). Belhassen et al. (2007) echoed the same suggestion that future studies should examine the relationship between the nature of the tourist experience with cannabis and its impacts on the individuals’ daily life and QOL. Other research opportunities with visitors are tourists’ behaviors and perceptions during the course of pre-, during-, and post-visit, including risk perception, benefit sought, attitude, well-being, satisfaction, willingness to return, and recommendation after the trip.

**Supply: Products, Tour Packages, Attractions**

Marijuana legalization has led to the creation of related businesses. A handful of cannabis-themed tour operators have
emerged in Denver as the Mile High City. For example, to celebrate April 20 as a national holiday for cannabis culture, MY 420 tours provides transportation to and from purchase and consumption sites, a hotel stay where guests can use a vaporizer, and daily marijuana happy hours, as well as grow classes, marijuana-themed cooking classes, hash making labs, grow site and dispensary tours at vineyard-esque marijuana farms, and marijuana-themed concerts. This type of package has gained popularity quickly for out-of-state visitors and even foreign travelers. Not only do tourism packages abound but also some venues have converted themselves into marijuana-themed attractions. For instance, the 170-acre CannaCamp opened July in Durango in southwest Colorado and proclaimed itself the nation’s first cannabis-friendly ranch resort. The resort allows guests to bring and smoke their own marijuana at the resort (Marijuana Policy Project, 2015).

As more diverse visitors come to Colorado either primarily or secondarily for marijuana, there will be different packages to cater to each market. Marijuana tourism products have already been diversified like other segments to capitalize on each niche market, ranging from major several day packages to smaller weekend getaways for groups and couples and from high-end boutique style to mom-and-pop retail shops. Other unusual types of marijuana-related businesses have emerged: vending machines (Chappell, 2014), food trucks (Runyon, 2014), “bud and breakfast” (Bennett, 2014), and wedding planners who “toke” their client’s big day to a new “high” (Brady, 2014). Colorado has already hosted the Cannabis Cup event twice, a marijuana trade show with competitive events (i.e., best edible or best sativa flower contests) in 2015 and 2016 (Stebbins, 2015). As the industry has gained more momentum, there is a movement pushing a bill in the state that would allow producers and sellers to open tasting rooms, as wineries, breweries, and restaurants have done. On the other hand, numerous Colorado hotels may not promote themselves publicly as marijuana-friendly establishments. Each hotel will come up with its own rules on how to accommodate marijuana smokers. Some hotels have designated areas for smoking while others do not. The same observation has been seen in other hospitality operations.

In the long term, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is one of the intriguing areas to be explored as the industry grows. The importance of CSR has been examined in gambling research as its negative effects evoke the need to have open discussion regarding problems associated with gambling and apply the CSR principles to the gambling industry (Tetrevova & Svedik, 2012). One form of CSR in the marijuana industry is the self-policing that occurs in relation to the safety of the stores where the products are sold and the integrity of the products themselves. For instance, while an Edible Product Production Safety Working Group has over-seen health and safety issues regarding the production of edibles and their distribution, educating tourists about edibles has been one of the biggest challenges for businesses since legalization (Noel, 2016). Recently, several marijuana advocate groups have adopted a slogan of “start low and go slow” with regard to edibles and shared the sentiment on Denver billboards with the advice, “Don’t let a candy bar ruin your vacation.” One study reported that there was a dramatic increase of out-of-state visitors to Colorado emergency rooms for marijuana-related symptoms. According to the report, there was a 109% increase among out-of-state visitors who exhibited marijuana-related symptoms between 2012 and 2014. On the other hand, Colorado residents showed a 44% emergency room increase since the state’s recreational marijuana sales began (Kim et al., 2016). Future studies need to investigate how marijuana providers and suppliers adapt themselves to sustain a healthy relationship with visitors as well as other stakeholders, including the state government, law enforcement, and residents.

**Host: Residents**

This is one of the areas that have received the least attention from both practitioners and researchers. Aside from the report that residents’ support for legalization has increased based on a national survey (Jones, 2015), a scarcity of research has been developed in this area. As gambling research has placed a significant weight on understanding residents’ support for gambling approval in their jurisdiction before and after legalization, marijuana tourism can follow a similar path in documenting how residents perceive and react to the recent reform.

Along with out-of-state visitors, residents will be also significantly influenced by the legalization in various ways. For example, in Telluride where 80% of voters approved recreational marijuana in 2012, the new tourism tagline is “The Most Colorado Place on Earth.” It is one of the few Colorado towns that does promote marijuana not only to guests but also to residents. Also, the Colorado Department of Revenue (CDOR) conducted the marijuana market demand study in 2014, which was touted as the world’s first post-legalization market study for both legal medical and recreational marijuana. This study examined the combined annual marijuana consumption for Colorado residents and tourists and estimated the demand at 130.3 metric tons. Of the total demand, Colorado residents consumed 121 metric tons, which is more than 90%, while the remainder, 9 metric tons, was purchased by tourists. When divided by location, tourists accounted for 44% of recreational sales in Denver and 90% of retail dispensary traffic in the mountains and other vacation areas (Bluntschli, 2014).

Therefore, the investigation of resident consumption is important to identify how the new law affects residents to profile negative effects of “internal” consumption. The only current literature that addressed residents’ perspective is Valdez and Sifaneck’s (1997) study on differences between drug tourists among American citizens at the Mexican border cities to obtain prescription drugs. By using sociodemographic characteristics, this study examined the issue of tourist–host contact...
by describing the interaction between tourists and locals during the drug acquisition process. Following gambling models, future research can examine residents’ perception, image, perceived impacts, benefit, and support with theoretical frameworks, such as social exchange theory.

Another topic that may intrigue researchers with residents is amenity migration. Amenity migration is defined as the increase in human migration to areas of high-quality recreational and tourism resources and includes both permanent and second home residents (Hall & Williams, 2002; Moss, 2006). The rapid influx of amenity migrants can create impacts and raise concerns among local and regional governments (Hall & Müller, 2004; Hall & Williams, 2002; Moss, 2006). There are two forms of tourism-related migration: consumption-led and production-led (A. M. Williams & Hall, 2002). The consumption-led migration refers to the influx of several groups of migrants to places of high amenity, including second home owners (Hall & Müller, 2004), retirees (A. M. Williams, King, Warners, & Patterson, 2000), and other lifestyle migrants whose occupations are not place-based. The latter, consumption-led resident influx, is influenced by an attempt to seek certain values at the destination, such as tradition, heritage, subjective well-being, environmental protection, and other QOL concerns (Jenkins, 2000). This residential mobility has contributed to local labor pools and entrepreneurial personnel in tourism regions. These two types of tourism-related migration movements can create the issue of affordable housing for employees and residents (Gill, 2008) and a rapid increase in the number of homeless people (Alsever, 2016). Thus, future studies can investigate this issue in conjunction with social impacts of legalization as discussed earlier.

**Government: Policy and Regulations**

There are several areas that present research opportunities from the state government and regulatory perspectives. Although we can see the success of the initial rollout and implementation of legal retail marijuana, there are a number of issues to be addressed in the long term: (a) regulatory needs, (b) the structure of distribution and pricing, (c) prevention of illegal diversion, and (d) other vital aspects of this new market (Hudak, 2014). In line with these proposals, a compounding challenge is lack of support from the state tourism agencies. Due to marijuana’s illegal status with the federal government, state tourism agencies are reluctant to make any reference to the booming cannabis industry in their promotion materials. For example, the CTO, an official tourism entity in the state, has not made any reference to cannabis-related promotion in their marketing materials because most of the fund would be spent outside of Colorado, which can be constructed as a federal offense (Feuer, 2016). The Visit Denver also did not list any cannabis-related retailers in their lists of attractions on their official websites. Unlike the skiing industry, marijuana tourism marketing efforts, therefore, have been mostly promoted by private companies and advocacy groups through word-of-mouth (WOM) or informal communication channels, rather than a concerted effort between state/city governments and the marijuana industry. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate how the state tourism agencies and the marijuana tourism industry could collaborate to achieve mutual benefits for both parties.

As the industry has evolved, it is expected that the prices of marijuana will decline. The price declines and associated effects on consumption would not be limited to the state or states that legalized for two reasons: drug tourism and interstate smuggling (Caulkins et al., 2012a). There are some winners and losers from decreasing marijuana prices. Because state taxes are based on a percentage of the sales price, declining prices mean each sale puts less money in the public purse. On the other hand, the price drop would challenge the black market, thus reducing law enforcement and social costs in terms of tax dollars spent on jail and the damage done to individuals who are arrested. Young people, who are more likely to be price-sensitive, may increase their intake of inexpensive marijuana over time, as may chronic marijuana users (Hudak, 2014). Further, price declines and associated effects on consumption could encourage more drug tourism (Caulkins, Kasunic, & Lee, 2012b). Future studies that investigate the price changes in marijuana and marijuana demand will be productive for state governments and industry practitioners.

Another research interest would be employee-related issues in the workplace (Ferguson, webinar, April 20, 2016). Current provisions related to employment post-legalization are still vague and require clarification from Colorado courts and/or the state legislature. Employment laws and regulations need to be revisited to reflect the current legal environment pertinent to marijuana legalization, including lawful off-duty conduct, unemployment compensation, workers’ compensation, and the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act (CADA). Educating hospitality employers about proper procedures to follow in managing their workforce is important and fruitful. Trade organizations and advocacy groups need to work with the industry on various issues, such as training, safety, hiring procedures, policy application, and so on, to assess how the legalization will affect daily operations and the long-term success of a company. Hotels could encounter liability issues and negative publicity if they do not have marijuana-related policy in place for both employees and guests (Noel, 2016). For example, if a guest left a chocolate edible on the counter in a checked out room, there is a potential for someone (i.e., housekeepers) to come across it, consume or give it to someone else, not knowing really what it is. This will pose a significant legal and liability challenges for hotels by not providing a safe work environment and training.

When it comes to public health and safety, there are already several reports about negative incidents with marijuana consumption, especially with edibles. Because public
smoking is prohibited, marijuana edibles have become more popular among some visitors. Unfortunately, most people have little knowledge on how to properly dose themselves and, therefore, fail to realize the unique marijuana potency of this form of the drug (Hudak, 2014). As was mentioned earlier, educating tourists about edibles has been one of the biggest challenges since the marijuana legalization. The challenge involves inculcating the perception that marijuana is not completely harmless and may cause unwanted health effects with careless usage (Noel, 2016). Although it is crucial to strike a balance between personal prerogatives and public health and safety, future studies will need to investigate a joint effort between the marijuana industry and government to address this important issue for both Coloradado residents and visitors to Colorado.

Conclusion

Since the legalization of recreational marijuana, cannabis has been considered to be a top tourist draw in Colorado. It is indisputable that the marijuana market has changed the landscape of the tourism and hospitality industry in Colorado and will be a significant consumption commodity. Legalization has changed and expanded how marijuana consumption is viewed in the tourism discipline, which may create the paradigm shift from viewing marijuana as a forbidden fruit to the goose that lays golden eggs. This study examined the current status of marijuana tourism in Colorado, identified several research challenges based on the existing literature, and suggested key areas for future research surrounding marijuana tourism. This overview and set of recommendations is necessary to gain and enrich a deeper understanding of marijuana tourism and to aid other states that attempt to benchmark Colorado in their own legalization process.

Two years have passed since the legalization of recreational marijuana began in Colorado. This transition period has revealed various benefits and problems stemming from legalization (Alexander, 2016). While the reports from commissioned studies and advocacy groups need to be scrutinized, these studies also raise worthwhile research questions that deserve further attention. Future research on marijuana tourism is of great importance in that the rapid rise of this unprecedented niche market creates pressing challenges and promising opportunities for destinations. The various questions and issues surrounding marijuana tourism are relevant and beneficial to all major tourism stakeholders, including tourists, residents, tourism bureaus, hospitality sectors, and governments. As a result, more information and knowledge on marijuana tourism will render significant practical value, and such knowledge will only increase in importance as marijuana tourism continues to evolve as a special interest tourism segment.

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