

Tea, as the second most consumed beverage in the world after water, is attracting a large number of tourists who are searching for travel experiences related to the history, traditions and consumption of the beverage. Literature discusses how this practice of “tea tourism” has already been implemented in a number of countries around the world and as the phenomenon continues to grow, researchers have begun to shed some light on the larger role that tea tourism could play as a tool for sustainable development. Amidst these studies on tea-related tourism, an evident research gap lies in an assessment of the potential development of this special-interest tourism in the context of Nepal. The development of the tea sector in Nepal has picked up tremendously in recent years and government-initiated reports have specifically highlighted the industry’s potential for continued growth. As our world is shifting to a new paradigm of sustainability, much literature is also simultaneously criticizing the notion of sustainable tourism and development. In this context, this study examines the current state and future potential of tea tourism development in Nepal, and analyzes how it might be addressing the three pillars of sustainability: healthy environment, social justice, and economic growth. Using a qualitative analysis of social science fieldwork conducted in the Ilam region and capital city of Nepal, I argue that there are many theoretical ways in which tea tourism integrates the three main pillars of sustainability, but that the execution of the practice is much farther removed from this vision of sustainable tourism and development.