Introduction

Given that 100% of visitors must eat, it is surprising that academic interest in food and wine tourism is relatively recent (substantial research started to appear from the end of the 1990s) (Wolf 2015). One does not even need to travel exclusively in search of culinary experiences to be considered a food tourist; ‘opportunistic’ food tourists may look for food and drink experiences at a destination that they have selected primarily for other reasons, and ‘accidental’ food tourists may participate in a food or drink festival just because they happen to be in a certain location at a certain time (Yeoman et al. 2015). The tremendous growth of eco-gastronomic tourism in the last two decades, however, can be explained in terms of the potential that local food and drink have to help differentiate destinations by developing a ‘sense of place’, which offers a unique visitor experience, but at the same time, provides economic benefits to local communities (Haven-Tang and Jones 2005). One global manifestation of the shift in visitors’ interest from globalized and standardized products and services towards niche products and services is the surge in demand for craft-based products, which is a wider movement in which people demand goods and services that have a connection with the ‘local’ (Rogerson 2016). Place-based gastronomic tourism can focus on a diverse range of products including regional cuisine, wine, beer, cider, spirits such as gin and whiskey, and tea and coffee. While a substantial amount of research has been conducted on oenotourism, there appears to be scant research on the tourism generated by other alcoholic beverages (Cloutier et al. 2016), and particularly on craft or artisan alcoholic beverages. In order to address this gap in the literature, this chapter investigates the increasing popularity of craft drinks tourism (beer, cider, and gin) worldwide and, more specifically, in Northern Ireland, a destination where out-of-state visitors spend over a third of their money on food and drink (NITB 2009, cited by NITB 2012) and where pubs are the top visitor attraction (NITB 2012). The findings of the investigation revealed that tourists are thirsty for craft beer, cider, and gin in Northern Ireland, that craft drinks tourism provides local communities and entrepreneurs with economic as well as socio-cultural benefits, and that craft drinks contribute to provide that all important authentic experience that ‘the new tourist’ (Poon 1993) is after.
Craft drinks tourism worldwide & in N. Ireland

Within the past 20 years there has been a considerable increase in consumer demand for high quality, locally produced, authentic food and beverages. This increase in demand can be attributed to a post-modern consumer backlash against the industrially produced homogenous products that have dominated global markets (Jenkins 2016). The homogenization of consumption has been driven by multinational brands through mass advertising, whose effect has been to confuse consumer needs and wants and limit the range of offering in terms of product variety. However, a sea change is taking place and product differentiation and niche markets are becoming increasingly important to the contemporary consumer (Murray and O’Neill 2012, cited by Rogerson 2016). This post-productivist transition has generated a revalorization of rural spaces and craft products, such as gourmet coffee, artisan cheese, artisan bread products, humanely raised and slaughtered meat, and craft beverages. The promotion of these craft products complements the adoption of endogenous, bottom-up strategies for rural development, facilitating a sense of ownership by local people while creating niche markets for local enterprises in tourism, craft, and agricultural sectors (Ray 1998).

Another reason why the craft beverage industry has exploded in the market is that brewers and distillers are able to ‘hyperdifferentiate’ between corporate brands and craft beverages (Mathews and Patton 2016). Craft beer dominates the alcoholic craft beverage scene; however, craft cider and spirits are other manifestations of this burgeoning market. Examples of craft beverage tourism include tours of production facilities, visits to breweries, pubs, and brasseries, exploring self-driving trails or routes, themed weekends away, beverage tastings and beverage and food pairing sampling, visiting artisan food and beverage museums and collections, and the acquisition of themed visitor merchandise (Dunn and Wickham 2015).

Destination marketing organizations are increasingly using videos to tell the story of their place, and artisan food and beverage entrepreneurs are taking center stage (Kline and Bulla 2017). This form of marketing appeals to Millennials who are turning their back on ‘things’ in favor of immersive cultural experiences (Kelly 2017). Moreover, the rise of craft beverages signals the grassroots development of a space where multiple generations, social entrepreneurs, and community-focused innovators can forge their own path. The craft brewery or distillery serves as a medium to development within communities; it fosters a sense of local pride, the emergence of a place where ideas can be exchanged and voices heard, and an atmosphere that attracts creative professionals. Studies have documented the spiraling effect of changing communities where one small change leads to another until a critical mass of shifts have taken place in the built, cultural, human, and social landscapes of a town or region (Delconte, Kline and Scavo 2015; Stone and Nyaupane 2015; Zahra and McGehee 2013). Hence, new businesses that emerge within the craft beverage industry have the potential to create a ripple effect of impacts within their host region (Kline and Bulla 2017).

Craft beer tourism

According to Kelly (2017), beer tourism has become big business; breweries in the US have increased from just 78 in 1978 to 5,005 in 2016, which represents an annual average increase of 11.6% during the 38-year period. The number of craft breweries has also grown in the last
30 years in the US, from one craft brewery in 1966 to an estimated 2,000 breweries today (Herrera 2016; Reid, McLaughlin, and Moore 2014), although other estimates put the number of craft breweries at 4,000 (American Distilling Institute 2017b). The Brewers Association estimates that in 2014 more than 10 million people toured small and independent craft breweries in the U.S. and more than 7% of craft sales by volume were made at the brewery. Including a brewery visit within a tourism trip is very appealing and a survey conducted by Travelocity in 2016 found that more than 75% of respondents said they would choose a destination where there was the chance to visit a craft brewery and sample local beer (Kelly 2017). The craft beer movement in the United States is not an isolated phenomenon. Craft breweries are rapidly expanding also in the United Kingdom, across Europe, Australia, New Zealand, parts of Asia and most recently in South Africa (Rogerson 2016). Elzinga, Tremblay, and Tremblay (2015) argue that the increase in demand for craft brews has (re)invented beer as a serious consumption good to be paired with food, rather than simply as a liquid that quenched thirst on a hot day or offered an inexpensive buzz. Additionally, Withers (2017) points out that what was once considered a beverage for the ordinary person or working-class man has now transformed into a sophisticated and complex consumer product that spans across many demographic entities – from hipster to hippie – and with high-end restaurants offering a beer list that frequently matches the length and depth of wine lists. Sugar (2016) also maintains that the growth of craft beer allows women to ‘re-engage’ with beer and the social ritual of its consumption. According to Herrera (2016), there are several underpinnings of this cultural shift in beer consumption such as changes in preferences of certain consumer groups (e.g., hipsters) opting not to support beer conglomerates, the growth of word-of-mouth recommendations, increased disposable incomes, and higher education levels, which encouraged a preference for variety and quality over homogeneity and quantity. In this sense, craft beer exemplifies one of many ways through which communities reaffirm local identities in the wake of the impacts of globalization on homogenizing tastes and products (Flack 1997; Schnell and Reese 2014). Because of this reaction against industry consolidation and lack of variety, since the 1980s consumers have begun to show a renewed interest in ‘older’ European beer styles such as porter, pale ales, stout, and bitters (Dillivan 2012). Indeed, craft beer is conceptualized as a beer that (1) is brewed, bottled, and sold by a privately owned brewery; (2) is small in production (six million barrels or less); and (3) contains only ‘traditional’ ingredients (Brewers Association, 2017). Eberts (2014:176) points out that because brewers usually must draw their key raw ingredients, such as barley and especially hops, from a variety of non-local sources, they rely on evoking localness primarily through “the art of brewing itself and the narratives of place they employ in their marketing.”

Rao (2008) notes that the rise in the number of craft breweries suggests that a new entry into a market is possible for entrepreneurs even when large-scale producers account for a vast majority of the sales in a market, and that a number of like businesses entering the same market does not always result in destructive competition. According to the author, this phenomenon is due to the craft beer industry’s success at framing itself as a social movement against big beer businesses. He states: “identity movements, informed by a ‘we’ feeling, arise to challenge dominant organizations or categories and seek to realize new collective identities by building new organizations that emphasize democracy, participation, and empowerment” (Rao 2008:43). This helps to explain why craft beer appeals to demographics such as hippies and hipsters, and why craft beer destinations that feature breweries, brewpubs, and craft-beer-focused bars have increasingly become appealing to residents and non-residents, who seek authentic and unique experiences as a means to explore host cultures (Plummer et al. 2005).
Craft drinks tourism worldwide & in N. Ireland

Craft cider tourism

In addition to craft beer, consumers are increasingly drinking craft ciders that allow for the personality of the product, producer, and place to come through. The amount of apple juice that must be legally contained in the final product varies from country to country (Kline and Cole 2017). For example, in the U.K. cider must contain 35% juice (Thring 2011), France requires it to be 100% apple juice derived (Blenkinson 2012), and in the USA, the standard is 50% (Badeker 2002). Similarly to craft beer, there are many different flavors and styles of ciders available to consumers nowadays depending on the ingredients (traditional versus unusual) that have been used and the methods that have employed in the production process (Kline and Cole 2017). The U.K. is the largest cider market both globally and across Europe (it represents 39% of the global market) and has more than 500 cider makers (NACM 2017). Overall penetration has slipped slightly in 2016, which is echoed by the 1% drop in volume sales. Despite this, there are areas of growth within this market, which suggests that consumers are drinking less cider, but are more discerning about quality and more experimental in their choices when they do. Craft cider and fruit-flavored cider have seen the biggest uptick in usage. Craft cider, although still a relatively niche area of the market, has gained a fairly strong following among young men. While only 14% of adults have drunk craft cider in the UK in the six months to October 2016, this jumps to 36% of male under-25s, and is also unusually high among people living in London (33%). It follows that craft cider offers growth potential if the craft craze in beer crosses over into the cider market (Mintel 2017).

The crossing of craft cider and tourism can be seen in both rural and urban settings. The location of the cidery affects the whole visitor experience. In the context of urban craft cideries where all raw ingredients are brought in at varying levels of processing, the experience is often similar to visiting new craft breweries. In general, the facilities will include many of the same elements tied to alcoholic beverage creation such as mash tuns (containers used to convert starches from crushed grains into sugars for fermentation), fermenters, barrels for aging, and packaging. Often a tasting room is built alongside the production space with varying degrees of access and view between the customers and cider makers. In the context of rural craft cideries, the experience is often similar to visiting wineries, where visitors get to consume the terroir of the cidery. Terroir is a French term that in the context of winemaking is defined as the unique mix of soil, climate, weather, and landscape in a particular place. In this setting, guests can often experience the process more comprehensively than would be expected of their urban counterparts, from the growing and the pressing of apples all the way to packaging and consumption of the cider (Kline and Cole 2017).

The visiting of craft cider operations, just as visiting wineries or breweries, can be defined as consumer experience tourism (CET), which is a powerful means for product branding (Mitchell and Mitchell 2001). Visitors to production facilities such as craft cideries, add value to the brand image through the experience of tours. Tours allow visitors the opportunity to identify with elements distinctive of craft products including quality, traditions, and craftsmanship that are critical to product marketing (Murray and Kline 2015). It follows that visiting craft cideries is not just a marketing opportunity for local cider production, it is a tourism opportunity that fosters a connection to place, culture, and heritage, all while encouraging the continuation of traditional and sustainable methods (Jenkins 2016).

Craft spirits tourism

The explosion in craft spirit distilleries in the USA is a less-known, but even faster growing market than craft beer. While the number of craft distilleries is much smaller than the number
of craft breweries (there were roughly 1,000 craft distilleries at the end of 2016 compared to
over 4,000 craft breweries), the growth of craft distilleries is even more dramatic, with the
number of new entrants to the craft distilling market doubling approximately every 3–5 years
(American Distilling Institute 2017b). According to the American Distilling Institute (2017a),
“craft spirits are the products of an independently owned distillery with maximum annual sales
of 52,000 cases where the product is physically distilled and bottled on-site.” Most estimates
put the craft spirit market at around 2% of the total US distilled spirits market (Geller 2015);
however, craft spirits likely own a larger value portion relative to sales volume, as the products
generally maintain higher pricing per unit relative to mass producers. As noted by Kinstlick
(2011), the most popular spirit type produced by craft distillers in America is whiskey (52%),
followed by vodka (50%), gin (30%), and rum (25%).

A possible reason behind the proliferation of craft distilleries is the regional specialization
seen throughout the market landscape. Craft distillers link their products explicitly to local or
regional history through branding and the use of local ingredients as a point of market differ-
entiation. This is likely one reason for the popularity of gin among craft distillers as it is one of
the spirits most amenable to using non-traditional ingredients in its production, specifically the
botanicals that are used in the creation process. This use of non-traditional ingredients allows
distillers to include local products in developing their flavor profiles and allows further linkage
of craft spirits to local heritage, agriculture, or landscape (Cole 2017).

It is the connection of place and product that provides the link between craft spirits
and tourism. Akin to the farm-to-table movement as part of the larger trend of local food
production-consumption, the grain-to-glass trend has become important for craft distillers
(Helmer 2015). Similar to visiting a creamery to experience the process of how cheese
is produced from milk cows, craft distillers can share with tourists how they take locally
grown ingredients and produce spirits with significance to the agriculture of the area. Cole
(2017:32) argues that “seeking authenticity is fitting within craft spirit tourism as a way
tourists connect with something real, like the culture of a place, or essential, like the herit-
age of a landscape.” As in the case of wine tourism, which has led to the establishment of
wine destinations throughout the world (e.g., Napa Valley, California; Bordeaux, France;
Tuscany, Italy), a rise in the establishment of craft beverage destinations based on beer,
cider, and spirits is beginning to be seen. For example, craft spirit trails are being developed
at different geographic scales; while some are specific to craft distilleries and even particu-
lar spirit types such as the Kentucky Bourbon Trail Craft Tour, others offer a mix of craft
beverage producers such as the Central Pennsylvania Tasting Trail (Cole 2017). In the U.K.,
Scotland is now at the heart of the British gin industry, being home to two of the world’s
largest brands (Gordon’s and Tanqueray), but also to more than 25 craft gin distilleries. To
reflect this rise in Scottish craft gin, the Wine and Spirit Trade Association (WSTA) has
launched the Scotland Gin Trail. The route’s 17 stop-offs include craft distilleries and gin
bars across Scotland, from the bright lights of Glasgow Distillery (a young producer that
launched its first spirit, Makar Glasgow Gin, in 2014) to the dark skies of Shetland Reel
Gin (the U.K.’s most northerly distillery) (Reaney 2016). In addition to craft spirit trails,
craft distilleries also host special events and festivals, e.g., the Craft Spirits Fest in Miami,
Florida and the Craft Spirits Carnival in San Francisco, California, and deliver facility tours
to create a deeper connection between the brand and the tourists (Cole 2017).
Case study 46.1: Tourism in Northern Ireland

Statistics published by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) point towards an upward trend in external tourism activity in Northern Ireland between 2011 and 2016. According to the source, in 2016, there were an estimated 4.6 million overnight trips in Northern Ireland (including external trips of visitors to the Province and domestic trips taken by local residents), which represents a 1% increase on 2015. Expenditure associated with these trips was £851 million, which represents an 11% increase on 2015 (NISRA 2017a). The growth in visitor numbers is likely to continue in the next few years, due to the fact that Northern Ireland is not yet a mature tourism market and, as a consequence, it has the potential to grow faster than its closest neighbors (the U.K. and R.O.I.), as it is still playing catch-up to 30 years of limited investment due to the Troubles. Moreover, it can safely be anticipated that visitor numbers to the destination will increase further in the next couple of years due to the fact that Lonely Planet, the world’s largest travel guide book, has named Belfast and the Causeway Coast as 2018’s number one region to visit (Belfast Telegraph 2017).

The official tourism organization, Tourism NI, is promoting a number of niche forms of tourism in order to attract international visitors, increase visitor spend, and compete with other destinations. Among these is gastronomy tourism. According to Tourism NI (2017), “food is a major reason why people come to Northern Ireland and tourists spend over £350 million per year on food and drink alone. Food and drink related experiences have become increasingly important to tourism as they offer destinations an opportunity to differentiate and celebrate local foods and educate visitors about heritage, landscape and culture”. In order to take advantage of the opportunities associated with food and drink in the Province, Tourism NI identified 2016 as the Year of Food and Drink. Different foodie experiences and events took place during the year across Northern Ireland and each month had a different theme ranging from ‘Breakfast month’, to ‘Brewing and distilling’, to ‘Bread and baking’, to mention but a few (Visit Belfast 2016). The Causeway Coast and Glens Restaurant Week, a nine-day culinary celebration that showcases the vibrant restaurant scene across the entire Borough and which has taken place in November for the last two years, is part of the legacy of the Year of Food and Drink 2016 (Visit Causeway Coast and Glens 2017).

Craft drinks tourism in Northern Ireland

Pubs are the top visitor attraction in Northern Ireland (NITB 2012). Moreover, the second most popular activity undertaken by domestic tourists in Northern Ireland in 2016 was “to go to a pub, restaurant or nightclub” which accounted for 33% of all activities undertaken (NISRA, 2017b: 6). Hence, in accordance with global trends, it is not surprising that alcoholic craft beverages have grown in popularity and are sought after by increasing numbers of domestic and international visitors. In order to quench the thirst for alcoholic craft beverages, a number of breweries, distilleries, cideries, and pubs that specialize in craft drinks have emerged; out of these, some have been in existence since the 1980s, but the majority has emerged within the last five years. The most prominent examples include Hilden Brewery, Whitewater Brewery, Boundary Brewery, and Lacada (craft beers); MacIvors, Long Meadow, Tempted, and Toby’s (craft ciders); Shortcross Gin, Jawbox Gin, Boatyard Distillery, and Copeland Gin (craft gins); The Quiet Man, and Echlinville Distillery (craft whiskeys); and as regards bars that specialize in alcoholic craft drinks, Kiwi’s Brew Bar in Portrush; Sunflower in Belfast; the Woodworkers in Belfast; and the John Hewitt also in Belfast (see Figure 46.1).
There are currently no statistics available on craft beverages and craft beverages tourism in Northern Ireland. Hence, for the purpose of this chapter, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with five craft beverages businesses including Jawbox Gin, Lacada Brewery, MacIvors Cider, Kiwi’s Brew Bar and Prohibition Ltd (a wholesaler that curates and distributes craft drinks in the region) between September and December 2017. From the interviews, it emerged that all the businesses have been in operation between seven years (Kiwi’s Brew Bar) and almost a year (Jawbox Gin) and were launched because the founders either had a personal interest in a specific craft drink or realized that the drinks market was flooded with standardized commercial products. For example, the Director of Kiwi’s Brew Bar argued the following:

I was sick of going to different pubs to drink the same beer. There was just nothing, only mainstream tasteless beer.

(Kristofer Charteris, Portrush, 2017, pers. comm.)

This finding supports the literature on the emergence of craft beverages as a response to the industrially produced homogenous products offered by global brands (Flack 1997; Schnell and Reese 2014; Herrera 2016; Jenkins 2016). The interviewees were asked if the demand for craft drinks has increased in the last year. They all agreed that it has apart from the Director of Kiwi’s Brew Bar, who maintained that demand has slowed down in the last year after peaking two/three years ago. For example, the Managing Director of Prohibition Ltd stated:

Yes, however now as it is becoming slightly more mainstream, people are demanding ‘cheaper’ products within the craft industry.

(Felicia Matheson, Newcastle, 2017, pers. comm.)
This finding is in line with global trends relative to the growth of craft beverages as noted by Reid, McLaughlin, and Moore (2014), Herrera (2016), the American Distilling Institute (2017b), and Mintel (2017). The interviews also revealed a shared belief among participants that craft drinks help destinations differentiate themselves by developing a sense of place, which has the effect of enhancing the visitor experience. For instance, the Head Brewer and Chair of Directors of Lacada argued:

Yes, visitors … wish to hear the stories of local produce and local firms; they like to take this back with them; it provides them with identification with the places they visit and the people they meet.

(Laurie Davies, Portrush, 2017, pers. comm.)

This belief supports the view of authors such as Plummer at al. (2005), Jenkins (2016), and Cole (2017) according to whom the connection of ‘product’ and ‘place’ is at the heart of the successful marriage between craft beverages and tourism. In addition, all interviewees unanimously agreed that craft beverages provide local communities with socio-cultural benefits such as a sense of pride, identity, and unity, which also supports the current literature on the topic (Delconte, Kline, and Scavo 2015; Stone and Nyaupane 2015; Zahra and McGehee 2013). Finally, when asked about the future of alcoholic craft beverages, four out of five interviewees affirmed the belief that the popularity of craft drinks will increase in the future with the Founder of Jawbox Gin stating:

The signs at the moment are that demand will increase, as long as the quality of the product remains high there should be no reason for this to change (see Figure 46.2).

(Gerry White, Belfast, 2017, pers. comm.)

![Jawbox Gin](image-url)
The Owner of MacIvors Cider Co. added that:

People want to consume less drinks but of a higher quality. Low alcohol, gluten-free, low-cal are all trends that are increasing exponentially.

(Greg MacNeice, Portadown, 2017, pers, comm.)

This finding is in line with current statistics that point towards an increase in the consumption of craft beverages (Reid, McLaughlin, and Moore 2014; Elzinga, Tremblay and Tremblay 2015; Herrera 2016; Jenkins 2016; Rogerson 2016; American Distilling Institute 2017b) and a decrease in the consumption of mainstream alcohol (Mintel 2017) as people become more health conscious.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has investigated the growth of alcoholic craft beverages and craft beverages tourism both internationally and in Northern Ireland. The evaluation of the current literature on the topic and the analysis of data obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted with five enterprises that operate in the craft drinks industry in Northern Ireland have revealed some significant trends and characteristics. While the overall number of craft breweries, cideries, and distilleries still trails behind that of commercial ones, the former have been growing at a much faster rate. This increase can be explained in terms of the contemporary consumers’ interest in products that are authentic, local, and produced with traditional methods, which, in turn, allows them to identify with the culture, heritage, and terroir of the destination visited. This is evident in the case of visits to craft cideries in Normandy, craft gin distilleries in Scotland, and craft breweries in the USA.

Craft beverages and craft beverages tourism provide communities with socio-cultural benefits such as a renewed sense of pride, identity, and unity and allow local entrepreneurs to be creative, forge their own path, and earn a living through their passion, while at the same time benefiting the region their craft business is located in through the creation of employment. Third, the development of the alcoholic craft drinks industry appeals to a wide demographic not only because of its democratic connotations, but also because of its use of sustainable methods of production based on small batch brewing, use of local botanicals or grains, and employment of cooperative business models that adopt bottom up strategies, which lead to a more sustainable type of tourism.

All these facets help to explain the increasing popularity of craft beverages and craft beverages tourism, a success story that is likely to continue as it fosters an environment where all players win including producers, consumers, destinations and the tourism industry.

**References**


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