









How cannabis tourism regulation and self-regulation shape resident support for ethical cannabis tourism

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ABSTRACT

Cannabis tourism is expanding amid legalization and commercialization, yet it stirs controversies over potential risks. This study explored how regulation and self-regulation affect residents' support for ethical cannabis tourism through social cognitive theory. A survey of 560 Thai residents revealed that well-designed regulatory frameworks elevated moral obligation while mitigating moral disengagement and lowering risk perception. Conversely, moral disengagement heightened risk perceptions. Moreover, moral obligation diminished concerns about cannabis tourism's harms. Risk perception was the most critical predictor of residents' support. These findings highlight the need for transparent, culturally sensitive regulations to sustain social well-being while harnessing the industry's economic benefits.

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Introduction

The commercialization of cannabis has emerged as an ongoing global economic phenomenon, which is commonly referred to as the *green rush*, since the legalization of cannabis in the state of Washington in 2012. This phenomenon centers around leveraging the medicinal and health-related benefits of cannabis in order to drive growth in the agricultural and wellness industries (Charoenwisedsil et al., 2023). This major policy change has paved the way for the development of various tourism-related business ventures, such as *bed and breakfast* establishments, cannabis tours, consumption lounges, and cannabis festivals (Dupej & Nepal, 2021). O'Regan (2022) also suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic has further stimulated the expansion of cannabis tourism, because it has been recognized as an activity that can alleviate stress.

The economic potential of the cannabis industry is promising, and Data Bridge Market Research (2020) indicates that legal cannabis business revenues could reach approximately US\$100 billion by 2027. The first state to legalize recreational cannabis use is Colorado, and 15%

of the total number of tourists were found to participate in cannabis-related activities (Colorado Tourism Office, 2017). Not all cannabis tourists are enthusiasts (Wen et al., 2019), but their curiosity has led them to repeatedly engage in cannabis tourism (S. K. Kang & Lee, 2021; Wen et al., 2023). S. Kang et al. (2019) describe cannabis tourism as one of the fastest-growing segments of special interest tourism by referring to “the act of traveling or vacationing to a place because of the ability to purchase marijuana legally” (Picken, 2017).

The existing tourism literature typically examines the development of cannabis tourism from an uncritical perspective, which primarily focuses on the hedonic or isolated consumption behaviors of tourists (S. K. Kang & Lee, 2018), despite the marketing portrayal of cannabis use as a cultural and lifestyle activity. However, cannabis tourism, which has historically been considered a vital component of drug tourism (Wen et al., 2019), has been suggested to potentially expose society to three distinct types of risks that include social, performance, and financial (Liang et al., 2023). Some destinations, such as Thailand have generally implemented a set of