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Exploring the Motivations for Engagement in Sport Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Sports tourism has become a primary catalyst for tourism activity with a range of researchers noting the growing recognition of the inherent relationship between sport and tourism over the last decade or so. Importantly, sport tourism is a significant and growing global industry with notable economic implications for the specific sport and/or the event as well as there being a variety of flow-on tourism and travel benefits derived by the host destination by its staging. Despite this fact, sport tourism remains an area of economic and social endeavor that has not been well researched. The primary aim of this exploratory study therefore was to identify the underlying motivations for participant in the Australian University Games. Primary data was collected by way of a self-administered questionnaire with the study sample comprising students registered as participants at the Games. In all, over the scheduled two day period of registration, approximately 6,500 participants formally registered for the event. Of this number, just over 1,100 agreed to complete the survey with 1039 returning it to the researchers in a usable form. Study results revealed that the primary reason participants chose to attend the Australian University Games was to socialize and be with their friends. Other motivations for attendance included the desire to compete with other athletics and to have a holiday away from home. The implications of these findings with respect to event planning and event management practices are discussed, as are recommendations for future research.

Key Words: Sport tourism, motivation, tourist behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Sports tourism has become a primary catalyst for tourism activity with Gibson (2003, p. 205) noting that “The last decade of the Twentieth Century was marked by a growing recognition of the inherent relationship between sport and tourism”. In more recent times, sport tourism has become a truly global phenomenon which has crossed the traditional barriers of geography and culture. While new extreme sports activities have emerged as fads, many older, more traditional events have continued to be staged with great success. For instance, even though modernised somewhat, events such as the Olympics Games, the World Cup of Football, and the Tour de France cycle race continue to attract participants and spectators from almost every corner of the globe. Importantly, sport tourism is today a significant and growing global industry with notable economic implications for the specific sport and/or the event as well as there being a variety of flow-on benefits for tourism and travel derived by the host destination by its staging. With the advent of new technologies, and the development of an international society of sorts, more and more people globally now have access to a wider range of sporting events than at any other time in history (Getz & Cheyne, 1998).

Sports events are unique to other types of events in that they attract a wide range of participants with each seeking to satisfy their motivations for engagement in slightly different ways. For instance, any given sporting event may involve a variable mix of athletes, coaches, spectators,

tourists, non-resident media, technical personnel and other sports officials (Kurtzman & Zauhar, 2003). For some, tourist motivations result from deep, physiological needs which are often unrecognized by the individual themselves, whereas others equate motivation with the purpose of the trip, or the choice of holiday (Sharpley 1999). These drives cause and regulate behaviours that are directed towards achieving goals and they operate independently. Yet on occasion, both could be simultaneously or concurrently satisfied as in the case of a ski resort where skiing is combined with socialization (Kurtzman & Zauhar 2005). In this context therefore, individual motivation can vary with respect to the level of motivation (how much) as well as the orientation of the motivation (what type).

TOURIST MOTIVATIONS

Research into tourist motivations is today very much concerned with why people travel, the benefits that they seek and the experience that they pursue to satisfy their needs and desires (Gnoth, 1997). Motivation can be described as the driving force within individuals that impels them to action. As stated by Mannell and Kleiber (1997), motivation is an activation, drive and/or reason to engage in certain behaviours, and to maintain those behaviours. As such, one's motivation thus determines the direction and the strength or intensity of behaviour. As argued by Hudson (1999), central to most content theories of motivation is the concept of need. Needs are seen as the driving force that arouses motivated behaviour and it is assumed that to understand human motivation it is necessary to discover what needs people have and how they can be fulfilled. In the context of the study therefore, tourist motivations can be viewed as a function of the self perceived needs of the travellers, which drive the decision making process and purchase of tourism products (Collier 1999).

Psychologists/social psychologists generally agree that a motive is an internal factor that arouses, directs and integrates a person's behaviour (Iso-Ahola 1982). This internal factor can be likened to an 'awareness of potential' in a future situation, meaning that motives can be considered as cognitive representations of future states (Iso-Ahola, 1982). According to Mill and Morrison (1985), motivation theories indicate that individuals constantly strive to achieve a state of stability, a homeostasis. Their homeostasis is disrupted when they are made aware of a need deficiency. This awareness creates wants. However, an objective/ goal or outcome must be present for the individual to be motivated to satisfy a need. For an individual to be motivated to buy they must be aware of a product or service and they must perceive the purchase of that product or service as having a positive effect on satisfying that realised need. According to Mill and Morrison (1985) it is a fundamental role of marketing to create awareness and to suggest objectives to satisfy needs. This is supported by Schiffman and Kanuk (1978) and Kandampully (2002), who contended that consumer needs are the basis of all marketing and that an understanding of human motives enables marketers to interpret and predict human behaviour in the marketplace.

In the tourism and leisure field, a widely accepted theory of motivation (Seeking and Escaping Model) was developed by Iso-Ahola (1982). Iso-Ahola's Model suggests that people are simultaneously motivated to seek rewards and to escape from their routine, both on personally and interpersonal dimension. For example, participation in a sporting event is today one of the most popular and engaging forms of activity engagement for a wide array of individuals. Such special events, from a visitor's point of view at least, provide opportunities for leisure, social or culture experiences outside the normal range of choices and far beyond every day experience (Getz 1991). In previous tourism research, Crompton (1979) identified seven socio-psychological motives associated with tourism. These are escape, self exploration, relaxation, prestige, regression, enhancement of Kinship, relations and social interaction. Dann (1981) profiled the traveller's motivations as a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. These factors have been described in terms of push (psychological) and pull (cultural) factors. The push factors are described to be intrinsic and unique to each tourist, as they are determined by the personality and attitude for the individual. Pull factors include price, destination image and marketing and promotion. Sport tourism, like other forms of

travel, entails primarily a set of motivational factors that are established in anticipation of the fulfilment of the desired needs.

Over and above all these motivational considerations, initial travel decisions are based on specific informational steps, with this being particularly so for the sports tourist. For repeat travel experiences, some of the following steps could be integrated, eliminated or taken in total: a) Awareness, b) Interest, c) Desire, d) Action. First, the sports tourist must hear through external sources or have previous knowledge of the potential destination and experience. In turn, this stimulates the individual to further investigate all the details pertinent to the destination activity offerings and costs. (AWARENESS) The person in question further develops an interest and preliminary commitment to the activity destination. (INTEREST) From this stage, the sport tourist analyses and compares, the flexibility of such a potential experience manifesting more profound needs. (DESIRE) From this reflection, the sports tourist makes a final decision to pursue or not to peruse the destination experience (ACTION) (Holloway & Christopher 1994).

It is worth noting at this point however, that not one of these factors remains constant as individual preference, as is human nature, is constantly changing. Given this reality, it is important therefore that marketers seek to understand how sports tourists make their travel and purchase decisions, what is likely to impact on their choices and what are the important criteria that guide their decision making. Consumer behaviour is, in this context, related to the actions directly involved in obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services, including the decision process that precede and follow these actions (Neal, Quester & Hawkins 2002). In successfully marketing the sport tourism product or service, the study of sport tourist motivations is thus critical to understanding why people do or do not travel to a given destination, and why they engage in some activities in preference to others. However there would appear to be a distinct lack of research which has identified what motivates individuals to become sport event tourists. Furthermore, even though previous research has suggested that the university student market constitutes a significant component of the international travel and tourism industry, there has to date been little research undertaken related specifically to this population with respect to their engagement in sporting events.

METHODOLOGY

As a sporting event, the Australia University Games has historically been organised by Australian University Sport (AUS), the peak governing body of university sport in Australia. Working closely with its members, and a range of state and national sporting organisations, the AUS stages the Australia University Games biannually. The event covers over twenty-five sports in various championship and games formats and involves over 6,500 participants and more than 1700 teams and support staff. The event, which is staged over a one week period, is the largest sporting event of its type held on a regular basis (every two years) in the Southern Hemisphere. In selecting the Games as a study site, the primary aim of this exploratory study was to identify the underlying motivations for participants to engage in the event. This study was based on a positivistic or quantitative approach to exploring a topic, and involved a purposive sampling technique.

Research Population

The sample for this study was registered participants of the Australian University Games. For the purpose of this research, a suitable study respondent was defined as any individual having status as a university student and registered as a competitive participant of the Australian University Games.

Study Process

The point of registration for the event was agreed by Games organisers to be a desirable interception point at which to approach prospective respondents. A 5-page, multi-item questionnaire was distributed to event attendees as they arrived at the Games venue for event registration.

Prospective study respondents were approached as they entered the venue and asked to complete and then return the questionnaire to a member of the research team. Prior to the actual survey process commencing however, the purpose of the research project was outlined verbally to the prospective respondents by the researcher. Consistent with the ethics approval given for this study, it was explained to the prospective respondents that they were able to withdraw from the study process at any time and without penalty. All of the respondents participated voluntarily with precautions put in place to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. A total of 1039 usable questionnaires were collected from respondents at the venue over the two day participant registration period for the event.

Questionnaire Design

The design of the questionnaire plays an important role in determining the validity and reliability of the data that the researcher collects, and the response rate that the researcher aims to achieve (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2000). Questions used in this questionnaire were developed based on prior studies with this type of population (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2003). Closed-ended questions are employed in this questionnaire because uniform close-ended responses can be easily coded for data entry and analysis in a computer (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2002). They are also the easiest to administer and analyse since the range of potential answer is limited. It is important to note that the survey instrument used included a number of items that were included at the request of Games management. The intent being that they be used post the event as a form of evaluation for Games organisers. As such, while a 5 page survey instrument was administered to Games participants, only those items related to the primary study aim will be reported and discussed in this paper.

In terms of consideration of the items related to this research study, the questionnaire itself was divided into two sections each containing a number of items. The first section contained questions designed to collect a range of demographic details about the Games participants. The second section had a series of items designed to measure respondents' motivations for attending the Games and seeking, in particular, to identify the primary reason they had attended the event staged in Brisbane. Questions related to sources of information, transportation, accommodation, and expected total expenditure for attending the Games were also included. Each of these questions were phrased using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1= highly unlikely, 2= unlikely, 3= unsure/neutral, 4= likely, and 5= very likely. Items used in previous studies successfully utilising a 5-point Likert scale to explore the travel motivations and characteristics of university student travel (Field, 1999; Kim & Jogaratnam, 2002) were used as grounding for the items eventually incorporated in the survey instrument.

Data Analysis

A range of analyses including descriptive frequencies, cross tabs, and a test for scale reliability were completed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). SPSS is particularly well suited to positivistic survey research in that allows the researcher to complete the analysis of large sets of data whilst engaging minimal resource costs with respect to completion of the task.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study Sample

Of the 1039 respondents, 54.2% of the valid respondents were female and 45.8% male. The age of the respondents ranged from 17 to 25 years of age and older, with the majority aged between 18 and 22 years (79.1%). Survey results indicated that the majority (90.3%) of participants were Australian students with only a small minority of respondents reporting that they were international

students participating in the Games. The largest group of respondents to the 2005 Games came from New South Wales (30.7%), followed by Queensland (29.7%) and Victoria (23.9%). Tasmania was the least represented state with only 0.2% of the study respondents. The majority of respondents reported that they lived in an urban setting (78.4%). Only a small proportion of participants reported that they lived in either a regional or rural setting. Study results also revealed that 89.3% of respondents were undergraduate students with the remainder studying at the postgraduate level (10.7%). The participants of the Australia University Games came from a broad cross-section of universities with Monash University of Technology and The University of Queensland the primary providers of student participants.

Primary Motivation for Attending the Games

Study findings revealed the primary reason for respondents attending the Australian University Games was to “go with friends” (29% of respondents). The second frequent reason offered was to “compete with other athletes” (14.5%). Other important motivators identified included “holiday away from home” (13.9%); “participate in organized events” (11.3%), and “prestige in representing their university” (6.3%). Such results support those arguments presented for two of the most popular reasons put forward for tourism motivation and engagement. These being pull and push factors (Dann 1981), and the seeking and escape model (Iso-Ahola, 1982). These theories argued that a primary motivation of travel was individuals seeking to get away from their regular place of resident. This they achieved by taking a holiday away from home and, more particularly, by seeking out opportunities to travel to a particular destination with the intent of participating in an event in order to socialise with friends. Importantly, study results reveal that there are a number of motivating factors for participation in sports tourism with no one motivation significantly factored higher than another. Study findings were consistent with the findings of Dos Reis Vong (2004) who, in a study of the travel characteristics of university students, found that socialising and being with friends were critical factors for decision making when it came to travel. Thus, these findings lend further support for the notion that a cohesive and purposeful social program, as a component part of the wider sporting based activities, are a critical factor for the successful staging of the Games.

Previous Attendance at the Games

More than 41% of respondents indicated that they have attended a previous University Games with the remainder being first time attendees in 2005 (58.6%). Among those respondents who indicated that they had attended a previous Australian University Games, there was an increase in the percentage who reported attending from year 2001 to year 2004, with figures of 5.6% and 33.2% respectively. The results indicate a high degree of satisfaction amongst respondents with their involvement in previously staged Games. As sport tourism is very much service industry based, where characteristically intangibility and inseparability of production and consumption exist, high levels of perceived satisfaction are critical for the long term success of an operation (Pegg & Suh, 2005). As event participants gauge the overall quality of the service when they effectively purchase and consume the experience, a high rate of customer return is a strong indicator of the consumers’ perception of service quality and customer satisfaction (Kandampully, 2002). As such, study results would indicate game participants at the Australian University Games are of the view that event is valued and a worthwhile endeavour in which they seek to be involved.

Likely Attendance in the Future

The majority of the respondents (67.2%) reported that they would likely or highly likely attend another staged Games event in the future. Only just over 16% of respondents indicated that they were highly unlikely or unlikely to participate again, while a further 16% of respondents were unsure. The finding indicates that at the time of completing of the survey, most participants were satisfied with their involvement in the Games and would seek to engage in the 2006 event if at all possible.

Recommendation to Others

Those surveyed held the Games in high regard with 85% of respondents indicating that they would encourage others to attend the event in the future. Specifically, 60% reported that they were highly likely to undertake such action with a further 25% stating that they would likely recommend the event to their friend, fellow student or co workers. As noted previously, in a service dominated industry, word of mouth is a critical indicator of the event quality and is a sound measure of overall consumer satisfaction (Pegg & Suh, 2005).

Event Attendance in Lieu of a Holiday

From the survey, more than half of the respondents indicated that their participation in the Games would not affect the decision to take a separate holiday, either interstate or internationally. However, 23% of study respondents reported that their participation in the event might curtail the opportunity to take a holiday. Such a finding is consistent with that found by Dos Reis Vong (2004) who found that a large segment of the student travel market had limited discretionary income and that a decision to travel to one location or activity usually resulted in the loss of opportunity to engage in alternative options. This would suggest that event organisers need to carefully consider the location chosen to stage the Games as a sizable number of event participants make decisions about travel based on their ability to value add to the experience beyond that of simply participating in the Games.

Likely Attendance at Multiple Events

Significantly, study results revealed that 36% of the respondent's indicated that they were highly likely to attend both the regional university games and the Australian University Games regardless of whether or not they were staged in different geographic locations in any given year. A further 15% of respondents indicated that they would most likely not attend both games with a 26% of respondents unsure at the time of completing the survey. As noted by Sharpley (1999), understanding such issues is critical for understanding the motivations of tourists and the needs they seek to satisfy through engagement in particular activities or events. In better understanding tourist motivations and the barriers and constraints to their engagement, key stakeholders, for example Games organisers, can better plan the provision of services such that the Games become a more critical item in the decision making process of the prospective consumer.

Primary data was collected by way of a self-administered questionnaire with the study sample comprising students registered as participants at the 2005 Australian University Games. The questionnaire itself was divided into two sections with the first containing questions designed to collect a range of demographic details about the Games participants. The second section had a series of items designed to measure respondents' motivations for attending the Games and seeking, in particular, to identify the primary reason they had attended the event. The data collection process took place over a two day period and entailed completion of a self-administered survey. Prospective study respondents were approached as they entered the registration area for the event and asked to complete and then return the questionnaire to a member of the research team. Prior to the actual survey process commencing however, the purpose of the research project was outlined verbally to the prospective respondent. In all, over the scheduled two day period of registration, approximately 6,500 participants formally registered for the event. Of this number, just over 1,100 agreed to complete the survey with 1039 returning it to a member of the research team in a usable form.

CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this exploratory study was to identify the underlying motivations for participants engaging in the Australian University Games. Study results revealed that the primary reason participants chose to attend the Australia University Games was to socialise and be with their friends. Other motivations for attendance included the desire to compete with other athletics and to

have a holiday away from home. Godbey (2006) argued that in today's business environment, leisure and tourism service providers must become increasingly agile in terms of working with, and for, its customers. That is, they need to better focus on the needs and wants of their consumer and design products and services that will satisfy their needs and wants. A notion supported by Sontag and Dugger (1998) who stressed that marketers and consumer researchers, in the age of globalisation and cultural diversity, must be able to understand, predict and satisfy the needs and wants of consumers - whatever they are like, whatever they want and wherever they live. As such, event managers need be cognisant of the need to plan their events around a suite of social activities that are, in turn, either complementary or supportive of the core sport activities. Study results make clear therefore, that when marketing the University Games event in the future, the information disseminated about it must include specific information about the social program and the means by which participants can freely engage in such activities.

Getz and Cheyne (1998, p. 152) contended that "if one is to fully appreciate the value of sports tourism to a community, one must start by gaining an understanding of issues from the tourism context. That is, one must not only understand the needs, motives and benefits of consumers, but also the destination and event attractiveness". Marketing, barriers and personal contingency factors need also be appreciated as each shape, in some manner or other, decisions related to travel. Thus, and in order to be best positioned to satisfy the tourist's expectations, it is vital for tourism researchers and practitioners alike to gain an understanding of the tourist's general behaviour patterns before, during and after the tourism product has been consumed. Importantly, the information and knowledge garnished from such endeavour can inform collaborative marketing activities – that is, marketers will know who to target at a particular time with a specifically designed product that better meets the tourist's particular needs and wants. As argued by Godbey (2006), an understanding of tourist behaviour is crucial to optimizing the effectiveness and efficiency of marketing activities. However, in order to understand tourist behaviour, it is first important to understand tourist motivation.

While this research study has sought to probe some of these issues, it is clear that much data related to sports tourism, and the Australia University Games in particular, has yet to be mined. As such, and given the lack of research undertaken to date in this area, further attention by academics and practitioners alike with respect to sport tourism in the Australian setting appears well justified. As such, there are a number of recommendations that might be made with respect further research related to the topic matter, and the Australia University Games in particular. To this end, a more detailed study on motivations for engagement of Games participants is warranted. The fact that 11.9% respondents indicated their primary participation reason as "others", would suggest that a large segment of attendees are not motivated by the primary motivators previously identified in the literature. It is clear that this issue need be explored in much greater detail than that attempted to date. Also, a study which looks at specific motivations for engagement of athletes, as against team support staff and administrators, is also needed. Current research has focussed only on the athletes yet the support staff and administrators make up approximately 15 % of the total number of Games attendees. Finally, greater attention needs be also paid to the diversionary activities that are staged parallel to the actual sports competition. The completed research has indicated that these activities are a key consideration for Games participants yet little attention has been given to their importance or the value of different types of activities. A more detailed research study should be undertaken to find out participants preference on different types of social programs. Key issues that might be explored relate to whether or not the social program is just about partying, drinking and entertaining at night time or does it reflect to date that the behaviour reflects the choices available to them at the event? Other questions to be explored include: can a purposefully designed social program help to achieve greater involvement of Games attendees in the full suite of activities on offer and hence, expend a greater degree of their discretionary spending at Games sanctioned events? The intent of such research being to ultimately assist event organisers to developing a social program that better matches the participants' wide variety of expectations when attending such events.

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