

# **Active Sports Tourism:**

## **Active Sports Tourists Competing in the 2011 MBNA Chester Marathon**

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### **1. Introduction**

Sports tourism has received increasing attention in the academic literature of late, as well as from the industry by tourism suppliers, event organisers and destination managers. This niche market is growing in size and encompasses a wide range of tourism experiences, from taking part in sporting holidays through to spectating at sporting events. As noted by Higham and Hinch (1999), the twentieth century has seen the rapid development of both sport and tourism; both are among the largest and fastest-growing industries of our day. Moreover, the phenomena of mass participation in sport and tourism are closely related, with sport and tourism activity increasingly taking place simultaneously. From a tourism perspective, Standeven and deKnop (1999) have remarked on the sharing of resources and infrastructure that often occurs within the destination by both tourism and sport, while the “democratisation of sport and tourism has resulted in most sports offering the potential to generate tourist activity” (Higham and Hinch, 2002, p.176).

This case study seeks to add further depth to the consideration of this vibrant sector of the tourism industry by focusing upon the active sports tourist. To this end, it begins by presenting the 2011 MBNA Chester Marathon and data generated from an online survey of runners subsequent to the event. The data captured was from all runners but only the

data from those participants who stayed at least one night is presented, i.e. data from the active sports tourists. The case study is then placed within the broader context of sports tourism, active sports tourism and destination marathons.

## **2. The MBNA Chester Marathon**

Chester is an internationally recognised tourist destination in the North West of England, offering visitors a unique historical and cultural experience. The city is renowned in the UK for having the largest Roman amphitheatre and the most complete Roman town walls. It also has the distinctive and unique shopping arcades, known as the Rows and the Cathedral. According to Cheshire West and Chester (2009), the visitor economy is significant for West Cheshire. It is estimated that Chester alone attracts 8.4 million visitors a year, which in turn generates £500 million in income per year. With regard to employment, it is estimated that tourism-related employment accounts for 10.2% of all jobs in West Cheshire. More specifically, events are recognised by Visit Chester and Cheshire (2010) in their visitor economy framework for Cheshire as important to the branding of the destination and for the visitor experience. The '2020 Time to Meet the Challenge' document positions events in the context of the visitor economy of Chester and Cheshire.

Chester hosts a portfolio of events over the calendar year, ranging from one-off events to festivals (see Box 1). These events are run by a variety of organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors. There are also venues such as the international race course

which hosts international sporting fixtures (racing and polo) and cultural events, and outdoor spaces such as the Grosvenor Park and the Roman Amphitheatre.

### **Box 1: Examples of events taking place in Chester, 2012**

**Easter 2012: Chester Food, Drink & Lifestyle Festival 2012:** A three-day event of chef demonstrations, kids' workshops, CamperFest and over 120 exhibitors.

**May 2012: Embrace The Games:** A series of events to mark the Olympic torch visiting Chester.

**2nd June to 15th July 2012: MBNA Chestival:** A range of free arts events and ticketed events taking place around the city.

**July – August 2012: Grosvenor Park Open Air Theatre:** Outdoor theatre in the Chester Grosvenor Park.

**May to September 2012: Chester Races:** Horse racing taking place throughout the summer, starting with the May Festival and culminating with the Chester Finale in September.

**15th to 28th October: Essar Oil Chester Literature Festival:** An annual literature event comprising author events and a children's literature festival.

**2013: Chester Mystery Plays:** Chester's famous medieval plays, which are held every five years. 'Chester Mystery Plays in Miniature' occur as part of Chestival 2012.

## **2.1. Background to the MBNA Chester Marathon**

The MBNA Chester Marathon first took place in May 2010. The route for the Marathon was out of town and all registration and facilities for runners were based at the Chester Rugby Club. Following a successful inaugural event, some changes to the route were put into place to tie it more firmly to Chester the host city. As a result, in 2011 the Marathon moved to a city-centre start and finish from its out-of-town route in 2010. The timing of the event also moved from May to a new date in October. The event was set up by Active Leisure Events, a company founded by two friends, both dedicated runners and triathletes, who felt that Chester's failure to host a marathon needed to be rectified. The inaugural event attracted entries of 1,000 runners and this increased to 4,000 entries in 2011. The 2012 event is to be capped at 5,000 and will use the same course as in 2011, starting and finishing at the city centre location of the Chester Racecourse. The MBNA Chester Marathon is promoted as a 'destination marathon' and an ambition of the event organisers is for the marathon to become 'the UK's favourite regional marathon'.

## **2.2. The 2011 MBNA Chester Marathon**

On 7th October 2011, the second MBNA Chester Marathon took place. The runners gathered at the Chester Racecourse for the start of the race (see Figure 1). Spectators were able to join the runners and use the grandstand for a good view of the start of the race (see Figure 2). Runners then ran through the city centre, running through the Roman Walls four times and then passing by all the city's iconic landmarks: the Town Hall (see figure 3), the Cathedral (see Figure 4), the Eastgate Clock (see Figure 5), the 'Rows' shopping area and the Roman Amphitheatre. The route then went into the countryside outside Chester, passing through local villages (Eccleston, Pulford, Rossett, Holt, Farndon Churton, Aldford and Huntington) and coincidentally crossing and re-crossing the border of England and Wales. The route then returned to the city via the suburb of Boughton and on re-entering the city runners ran alongside the river at the Groves, for the runners to finish at the racecourse (see Figure 4). Food and water stations were provided at regular intervals and a range of volunteer marshals were positioned along the route to ensure safe passage of the runners and to support them by name (runners' first names were printed on the race numbers). Some volunteers came forward independently but others were from community groups (the Lady Taverners), youth groups (the 610 Squadron Air Training Corps, an Explorers Scout Group and the Cheshire Army Cadets), sports groups (Chester Tri Club and Juniors, Renegades West Cheshire Athletics Club, Buckley and Tattenhall running clubs, and Chester Nomads Football Club), sponsoring organisations (MBNA, Grosvenor Garden Centre, BAM Nuttall, Alan Morris Transport and HSBC) and local charities (Hospice of the Good Shepherd and Claire House).



**Figure 1:** Chester Racecourse: the start and finish of the MBNA Chester Marathon. Photo credit: J. Beavan



**Figure 2:** The start of the 2011 MBNA Chester Marathon. Photo credit: R. Groome



**Figure 3:** Chester Town Hall. Photo credit: S. Gregory.

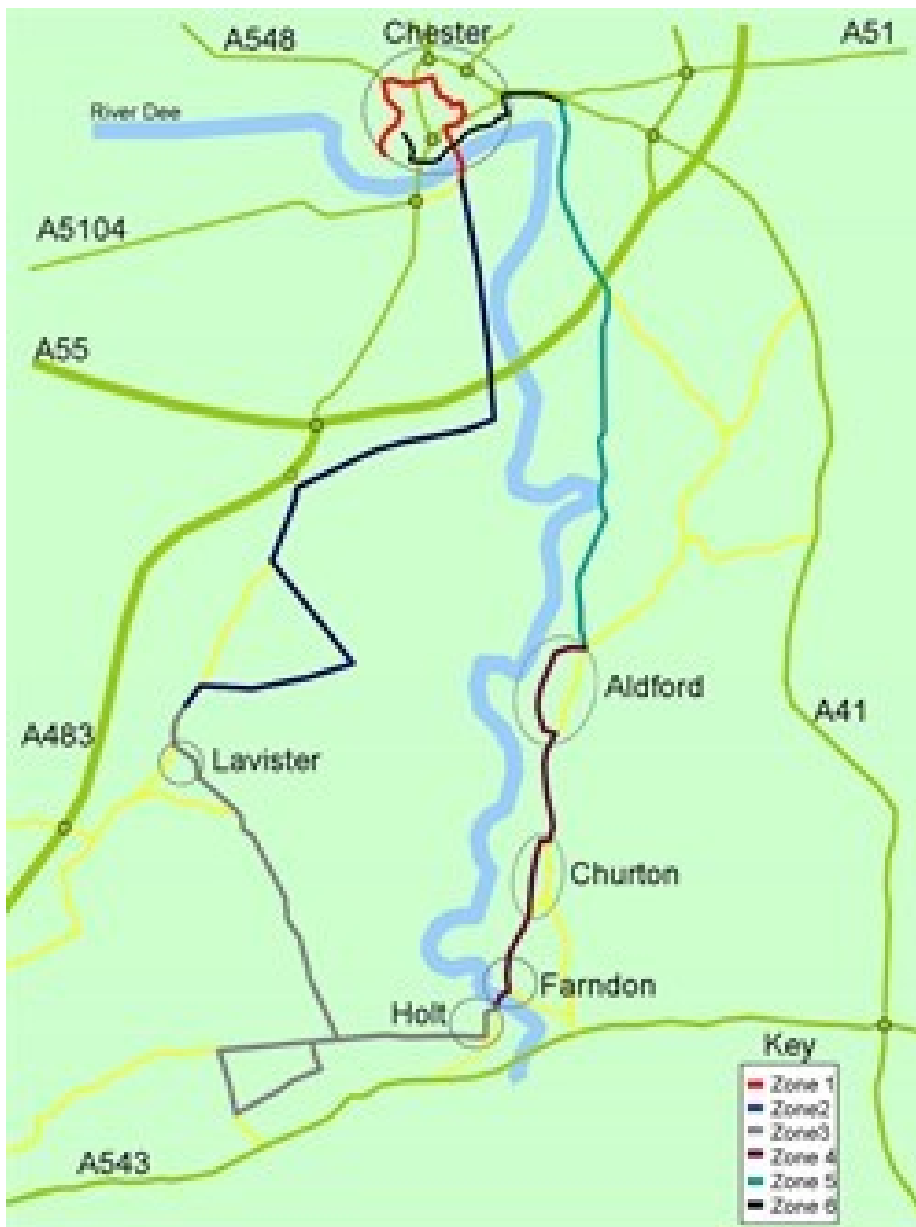


**Figure 4:** Runners alongside the Chester Cathedral. Photo credit: S. Gregory.



**Figure 5:** Runners passing under the iconic Eastgate Clock, Chester. Photo credit: J. Beavan





**Figure 6: The Chester Marathon route. Map credit: Active Leisure Events.**

On the day there were also other activities and support services, for both spectators and runners, including:

1. **A mini marathon** – this raised funds for and was organised by the Hospice of the Good Shepherd. The one-mile run started at 10.00am, after the Marathon had started, and was conducted wholly within the racecourse, finishing in front of the County Stand. Registration was available online prior to the event and on the day at

the Mini Marathon Registration point and in the Children's Zone. Places were limited but the event was open to all.

2. **Children's activities** – a children's activity centre was located at the Hospice of the Good Shepherd Children's Zone.
3. **Massage** – post-race massage, physiotherapy and podiatry advice was provided for a £5 donation. This was split between the main race charities.
4. **Meeting up with friends and family** – a special area to meet up with friends and family was designated.
5. **Race charity stall** – a number of the official race charities had awareness stands situated in the Athlete's Village.

Special provision was also made for the elite athletes, as the organisers wished to encourage and cater for the needs of elite athletes in order to make the MBNA Chester Marathon a competitive event and one that continued to attract runners of the highest possible calibre. To this end the organisers consulted widely and offered the following additional facilities to elite athletes: preferential start, elite athletes' drinks, massage facilities, a hospitality box.



**Figure 7:** The winner crossing the finish line at the Chester Racecourse. Photo credit: R. Groome.

### **3. Sports events tourists at the 2011 MBNA Chester Marathon**

Following the 2011 MBNA Chester Marathon, a survey was mailed out to the runners seeking to gain information on their demographic profile, their spending and their opinions on the event. Of the 2,414 runners, 1,054 completed and returned questionnaires, and of these 49.3% had on overnight stay. Overall, a high proportion of runners (91%) did not live in Chester and, significantly, participating in the MBNA Chester Marathon was the only reason why for 79.0% of runners were visiting Chester on that day. The importance of Chester as the event destination was confirmed by the majority of runners, in that 57.1% of runners stated that their reason for participating in the Marathon was that Chester was the host city – an increase of 4.4% from the previous year. Of respondents 99.1% (n=1003) reported they would visit Chester again. A high proportion of respondents intend to run in

the next MBNA Chester Marathon (67.2%) and almost all said that they would recommend the MBNA Chester Marathon to others (98.9%).

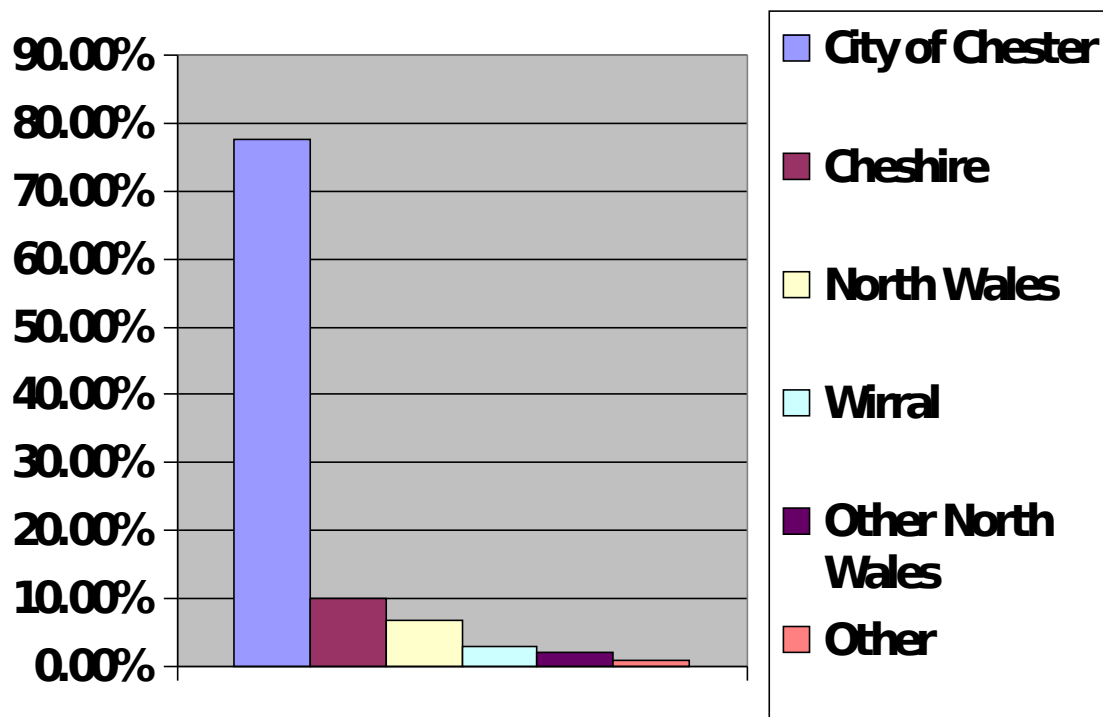
For 49.3% of runners their visit involved an overnight stay and the dominant category of accommodation (60.8%) was hotels. With regards to the type of accommodation, serviced accommodation (hotels and B&Bs/Guesthouses) was most popular, with non-serviced accommodation accounting for a small proportion (i.e. caravan/camping and self-catering) (see Table 1). Interestingly, a comparatively small proportion of runners did not pay for accommodation and stayed with friends and family (18.9%, N=92).

**Table 1:** Type of accommodation favoured by runners (n=487)

| <b>Accommodation type</b> | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Serviced/non-serviced</b> | <b>Response count</b> |
|---------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Hotel                     | 60.8%          | Serviced                     | 296                   |
| With friends/family       | 18.9%          | Non-serviced                 | 92                    |
| B&B/Guesthouse            | 15.4%          | Serviced                     | 75                    |
| Caravan/camping           | 2.3%           | Non-serviced                 | 11                    |
| Self-catering             | 2.7%           | Non-serviced                 | 13                    |

Of those who stayed overnight (n=487) the majority stayed either for one night (58.6%) or two nights (28.6%). Only exceptionally did people stay longer, with 11.1% of those questioned staying for three nights and 1.2% staying for seven. For those staying

overnight the majority stayed in the City of Chester (77.5%), with Cheshire in second place at 10% (see Figure 8). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the organisers noticed that the city centre accommodation was fully booked at the time of the 2011 event and they are currently 'promoting' this on their 2012 MBNA Chester Marathon website.



**Figure 8:** Places where runners stayed overnight.

In the main, the active sports tourists travelled with other people: only 55 travelled on their own and 391 travelled with one or more adults. Participants typically travelled with one adult (n=206), while interestingly there were some larger groups travelling together of six adults and over (see Table 2). Of these 391 active sports tourists, 119 (30%) were travelling in family groups and had at least one child with them.

**Table 2:** People in the 'party'

| <b>Adults in party</b> | <b>Count</b> | <b>Travelling<br/>with children<br/>in party</b> | <b>Count</b> |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| On own                 | 55           | 1 child                                          | 44           |
| With 1 adult           | 206          | 2 children                                       | 58           |
| With 2 adults          | 84           | 3 children                                       | 11           |
| With 3 adults          | 51           | 4 children                                       | 4            |
| With 4 adults          | 26           | 5 children                                       | 0            |
| With 5 adults          | 5            | 6 children                                       | 2            |
| With 6 adults          | 19           |                                                  |              |

Table 3 indicates the various categories of expenditure by the runners. The greatest spending was on accommodation and on food and drink, with travel to Chester and shopping each also accounting for an important share of total spending. The total spending for the runners included in the survey was £129,891, which accounted for 84% of the total expenditure of all runners recorded in the overall questionnaire survey.

**Table 3:** Expenditure by category of the 2011 MBNA Chester Marathon runners

| <b>Expenditure item:</b> | <b>Spend (£)</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Accommodation            | 46,281           |
| Food and Drink           | 32,334           |
| Travel to Chester        | 22,314           |
| Shopping                 | 16,841           |
| Running gear             | 3,849            |

|                          |                |
|--------------------------|----------------|
|                          |                |
| Entertainment            | 2,008          |
| Car parking              | 1,480          |
| Souvenirs                | 1,364          |
| Visitor attractions      | 1,220          |
| Transport around Chester | 1,128          |
| Other purchases          | 1,072          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>             | <b>129,891</b> |

Charity fundraising was also determined from the questionnaire survey. A total of 109 respondents were raising money for charity. Of these, 106 declared sponsorship totalling £86,842. Of these, 105 named 68 charities of which the following were named more than twice: Cancer Research (n=10), Macmillan Cancer Support (n=6), Alzheimer’s Society (n=6), Breast Cancer Campaign (n=4), Parkinson’s (n=4), Click Sargent (n=3) and Guide Dogs for the Blind (n=3). This reflected the intent of the organisers, Active Leisure Events, to raise money for charities, both local and national, and to ensure that charities benefited from the event.

While the case study focuses upon the active sport tourists, the survey from which the contribution of the active sports tourists was extrapolated also captured information from tourists and locals. From this broader survey data, it is interesting to note the channels of communication for the event. The importance of a range of marketing activity is emphasised by the runners’ identification of how they knew about the MBNA Chester Marathon (see Table 4). Of these channels of communication, the most important were: race listing in *Runner’s World* (24.4%), recommendations (including race forums, 21.6%), the race website (19.9%) and

advertisements in Runner's World (11.7%). The importance of the Runner's World is significant and the magazine was cited by over one third of respondents as the source from which the Chester Marathon was discovered. Other minor categories identified were: race flyers (3.6%), men's and women's Running Magazine advertisements (2.6%), exhibition stands (2.5%), know the organisers (1.8%), local press feature (1.6%), other event listings (1.4%), bill board advertising (0.7%) and other press feature (0.6%).



**Table 4:** Ranking of how runners found about MBNA Chester Marathon (n=1036)

|                                        | <b>Response<br/>Percent</b> | <b>Response<br/>Count</b> |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Runner's World race listing            | 24.4%                       | 253                       |
| Recommendation (including race forums) | 21.6%                       | 224                       |
| Race web site                          | 19.9%                       | 206                       |
| Other                                  | 14.2%                       | 147                       |
| Runner's World advertisements          | 11.7%                       | 121                       |
| Through my running club                | 9.7%                        | 100                       |
| Other race listings                    | 8.3%                        | 86                        |
| Ran last year                          | 5.5%                        | 57                        |

From this broader survey data it was also noted that the MBNA Chester Marathon continues to contribute significantly to the City of Chester economy. The year-on-year increase in spending that has been noted in successive surveys could be attributable to the increasing number of runners, its ability to attract a strong regional field of runners, the increased number of runners staying overnight, and its route having moved to a city-centre start and finish. As a best estimate the economic spend of all the runners was £512,081.82, with accommodation and food and drink being dominant categories, but this does not necessarily include the expenditure of their supporters who accompanied them. Of the runners, 75.9% identified supporters who watched the event and this spend was not captured by the survey instrument. The economic value of the event can also take into account the money generated for charity, which totalled an estimated £453,518.18. The questionnaire captured the runners' contribution to the Chester economy, but it needs to be noted that it is not a full and comprehensive indication of economic benefit of the event as it excludes other interested stakeholders such as local businesses and Active Leisure Events themselves.

#### **4. Who are sports tourists?**

In understanding this case study it is necessary to appreciate the definitional debates, particularly with regard to the broader concept of sports tourism. Robinson and Gammon (2004) have commented upon the awkward marrying together of these two separate disciplines. Nevertheless, one of the first categorisations was provided by Gibson (1998, p.45), who divides the phenomenon into three domains: “active sport tourism, which refers to people who travel to take part in sport; event sport tourism, which refers to travel to watch a sports event; and nostalgia sport tourism, which includes visits to sports museums, famous sports venues, and sports themed cruises”. The separation of activity and non-activity is reinforced by Ritchie and Adair (2002), who summarise sports tourism as being travel to participate in passive or active sports holidays. Passive sports tourism refers to spectating and visiting sports museums, while active sports tourism refers to engaging in sports. Ritchie and Adair (2002) further qualify that either sport or tourism maybe the main motivator. To further corroborate this distinction, Sugden’s (2007) study on the Cuban Marathon presents three categories of sports tourism: ‘incidental sport tourism’, where the sport experience is a casual, unplanned part of the holiday; ‘residual sport tourism’, where tourism is a by-product of the sport experience itself; and ‘integral sport tourism’, where central to the tourism experience is sports participation.

Further attention and clarification has been suggested by the development of sport tourism frameworks. Jackson and Weed’s (2003) sports tourism demand continuum considers the type of participation, ranging from incidental to driven, and summarises the behavioural characteristics of these six types of participation. To understand the MBNA Chester Marathon runners in this context it could be naively assumed that they are erring towards one end of the spectrum due to the high level of commitment required in order to participate. It could be assumed that the nature of the activity requires them to be

categorised as regular or committed. Corresponding to Jackson and Weed (2003) assumptions, the Chester Marathon sport tourists were predominantly taking short holidays or weekend breaks, while the demographic profile was dominated by those age groups where bringing children along was uncommon practice. The survey results also confirm the importance of spectator tourism, in the form of people travelling to watch a family member or a friend compete in an event: only 12% of respondents travelled on their own to participate in the event.

Another framework for consideration is by Gammon and Robinson (2004), which focuses on whether sport or tourism is the primary motivation for the sport tourism experience. 'Sports tourism' is identified as involving those for whom sport is the prime motivation for travel, while 'tourism-sport' involves those for whom sport is a secondary activity. In this framework, the initial divide is by motivation rather than by level and type of engagement in sport, with both active and passive participation embedded in the respective categories. The MBNA Chester Marathon offers the opportunity for sports tourism and according to Gammon and Robinson's (2004) framework it would be of the hard rather than soft category. This is because the runners are actively participating in a competitive sporting event. The role of motivation is further identified by Kotze (2006), who contends that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations influence the decision to engage in sports tourism. Intrinsic reasons relate to one's emotions, a need to escape and a desire for involvement. Extrinsic motivations, meanwhile, relate to rewards, recognition and prestige. Specifically, the motivations aligned to sports tourism are said to be physical motivators, cultural motivators, interpersonal motivators, and status and prestige motivations (Kotze, 2006).

Definitions have also evolved from the type of product being engaged in, as well as the motivation for participating in sports tourism. There is a growing market and interest in sports and tourism, and this is reflected in the industry offering. Specialist sports tourism operators offer various packages to facilitate competitive sports participation (such as marathon and triathlon packages), sports participation (such as training camps, skiing and cycling tours) and event spectating. With regards to the product and demand for event participation and active sports tourism, Kurtzman (1995) identifies the reasons for the increasing interest by the industry and growth in the market as being:

- The increasing popularity of international and national sporting events.
- The wider understanding and acceptance of the health benefits of sports participation.
- The role and value of sport to the economy and international relations is acknowledged and appreciated by governments.
- A wide and sophisticated programme of sporting events has evolved internationally, across the year, thereby offering year-round opportunities for sports spectators and participants to engage.
- The increasing mobility of sport-minded people, aided by improvements in communications technology.

Kurtzman (2000) later refers to five main sport tourism product categories: sport tourism attractions, sport tourism resorts, sport tourism cruises, sport tourism tours, sports events tourism and sport adventure tourism. A product focus is further emphasised in Pitts' (1999) two categories of sports tourism: sports participation travel and sports 'spectatorial' travel. In the context of the MBNA Chester Marathon case study, the focus is on the sports tourist

and the sports tourist that participates in a particular sporting event. For this reason, the case study conforms to Pitts' (1999) category of sports participation travel, Kurtzman's (2000) sports events tourism, and Gibson's (1998) and Ritchie and Adair's (2002) active sports tourism/tourist.

## **5. Active sports events tourists**

To further consider the case study it is necessary also to place it in the context of the academic literature on active sports event tourists. According to Getz (2003), there is no conformity or agreement in defining sports event tourism. This variability is attributable to whether sports events tourism is considered from the differing perspectives of the destination, the organisers or the consumer. To illustrate this, Getz (2003, p.50) contends that for consumers "it is travel for the purpose of participating in, or viewing, a sport event", while for the event organisers "tourists might be one of several target markets to attract". With regard to sports events and active sports tourists as event participants, Kurtzmann and Zauhar (2005, p.44) state two requirements of sports events for them to be considered touristic in nature, those being either/or:

- "A. Tourists travelling distances to see present and past star athletes or winner teams;
- B. Tourists attending or participating in sports activities formally planned or informally organised".

The MBNA Chester Marathon runners, who are the focus of this case study, can be regarded as conforming to Getz's (2003) view, as they travel to participate in an event, and the second of Kurtzman and Zauhar's (2005) categories.

Getz and McConnell (2011) remark upon the increasing popularity of sports tourism and events. Studies further examining this context of sports event tourism have focused on the spectator (e.g. Gibson, Willming and Holdnak, 2003; Gibson, 2005) and more recently on participants (e.g. Shipway and Jones, 2007; Miller 2012). While there has been a greater attention given to spectators in academic studies, this imbalance is being addressed as Weed (2006) acknowledges the need to understand experiences rather than just describing them. Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010, p.164) also accept the increasing popularity of events for active sports tourists and suggest "the use of the term active event sport tourists to describe participatory sports-related travel associated with event participation". This definition would indeed seem to suit the runners in the MBNA Chester Marathon, who were staying overnight in order to take part in the event.

## **6. Active sports event tourists and destinations**

While considering the sports tourism and sports events tourism product, the destination itself is of importance. Indeed, "sport tourism is about an experience of physical activity tied to an experience of place" (Standeven and De Knop, 1999, p.58). Hinch and Higham (2001) contend that sport tourism has three dimensions – activity, space and time – of which Weed and Bull (2004) further suggest that the interaction of people, activity and place is related to motives of sports tourists. The consensus appears to be that the integral components of the active sport tourism experience indicate the importance of place, i.e.

the destination. In relation to the destination, the value of smaller-scale events is particularly noted. According to Higham (1999), not only can these small events use existing infrastructure but they require smaller investment of funds, can potentially minimise tourism seasonality and can be more manageable than larger events. In the context of Chester and the destination marketing organisation framework for the visitor economy, events *per se* are seen as having this importance and potential.

In understanding the value of sports events to destinations and the tourism economy, it is accepted that sports events can be an important contributor to the economic development of cities and regions. According to Hall (1992), there is a range of techniques for calculating the expenditure effects of events. These include surveying participants, sponsors and visitors; gaining information from recipients of expenditure such as shops, accommodation providers and petrol stations; and collecting statistics on attendance and participation. The present case study focuses solely on the expenditure of participants. Gratton, Shibli and Coleman (2006) note the need to look beyond economic benefits and present a 'balanced scoreboard' approach to evaluating events, acknowledging the need to consider the event's aims, economic impacts, sports development, place marketing effects, media and sponsor evaluation. Further attention is given to place marketing by Chalip and McGuirly (2004), who emphasise the need to maximise opportunities for bundling together destination attractions and to use the sports event as leverage for marketing. While academic literature has tended to focus upon large spectator events, such as 'hallmark' or 'mega events', and event sport tourism, Kotze (2006) shows how this has been at the expense of small-scale sport events. The accrued economic benefits from the active sports tourists at MBNA Chester Marathon further confirms the value of such

small-scale sports events both to the visitor economy and to destination marketers, and emphasises the importance of not overlooking them.

Studies have shown the effect of event participation on return visits to the event and/or just the destination (Kaplanidou and Vogt, 2007; Miller, 2012). Kaplanidou and Vogt (2010) identify how a good event experience can lead to a greater likelihood of future return visits to the event destination. Miller (2012), meanwhile, identified how the return to the destination could be connected to competing again in the event or using the area as a training destination. For the purpose of MBNA Chester Marathon, as 2011 was only in its second year of running, it is too early to see evidence of this loyalty and destination relationship developing. The active sports tourists in the survey did nevertheless express a strong intent to revisit the destination (99.1%) and to run in the next MBNA Chester Marathon (67.2%). Kaplanidou and Gibson (2010) further identify the importance of event satisfaction and the linkages to return participation in the event or similar events organised by that community. The need for the basic requirements of a successful event is magnified by the effort and expectation of these travelling participants as they look for exceptional facilities and outstanding event management. "Signage, competent officiating, punctuality in starting events on time, and an overall sense of efficiency are what participants expect, particularly those who are active event sport tourists" (Kaplanidou and Gibson, 2010, p.175). Kaplanidou and Gibson's (2010) study further reinforces the importance of destination image to both event organisers and tourism agencies, and so the need for working together to fulfil the sport tourists needs and for the host community to maximise the benefits. Images and iconic landmarks of a city (as shown in Figure 5) and engagement with the destination are indicative of how an event can be used to create and enhance destination image.



## 7. Destination Marathons

Running is considered to be one of the top ten participation sports and is one of the fastest-growing activities alongside cycling, canoeing and tennis (Mintel, 2009). Parallel to the popularity of taking part in running is the increasing number of people participating in marathons and even combining this interest with tourism. Sugden (2007, p.235) notes the preponderance of marathon running: “with more than 130 officially sanctioned events [marathon running] has developed to become a key feature of the international sport tourism calendar”. Attention has been given to marathons within the active sports tourism academic literature and from perspectives focusing on the destination marketing potential of marathons (Getz and McConnell, 2011; Chalip and McGuirly 2004), marathon runners’ behaviour and motivations (Hallmann and Wicker, 2012; Funk and Brunn, 2007; Shipway and Jones, 2007; Sugden, 2007), and the economic value of marathons (Agrusa, Lema, Kim and Botto, 2009; Lapeyronie, 2009; Agrusa, Tanner and Lema, 2006).

The co-branding potential of marathons and bundling of activities is examined by Chalip and McGuirly (2004), wherein events are considered as opportunities to combine running with a holiday at the host destination. In the context of MBNA Chester Marathon, this is starting to develop, as evidenced by the range of activities taking place at the main site of the Chester Racecourse for both runners and spectators. The potential items for bundling can be linked to event elements and destination elements (Chalip and McGuirly, 2004). An example of an event that has extended activities over its lifetime is Baltimore Running Festival (see Box 2), where extra events have been developed on the back of a successful running event. Studies such as McGehee, Yoon and Cardenas (2003) focus on

recreational runners' involvement in travel to road races and travel behaviour characteristics, and a focus upon travel behaviour in their study led Hallman and Wicker (2012) to propose three different profiles of marathon runners: holidayers, socialisers and marathoners. The profiles proposed by Hallmann and Wicker (2012) evolved from an extensive survey of marathon runners at three German marathons, and focused upon their behaviour and consumption patterns (travel means, length of stay and spending behaviour).

A particular focus within academic literature, as well as popular publications such as magazines and newspapers, is that of economic benefits. Academic studies have highlighted the substantial potential of international marathons in this respect. Kotze (2006) highlights the value of the Comrades Marathon in South Africa, which was estimated as generating R20million from tourists. Agrusa *et al.*'s (2009) detailed study of the 2007 Honolulu Marathon, the third largest marathon in the USA and sixth largest in the world, identified how over 72% of participants were from outside the state of Hawaii. The study concludes that the marathon generated an economic impact of US\$108,890,000 and, in turn, US\$3.7million in state taxes. The direct linking of a marathon event to tourism activity is encapsulated by Damien O'Looney, the Edinburgh Marathon Marketing Director who said how "the marathon draws thousands of people to Edinburgh who would not otherwise come to the capital. Many of these runners come with friends and family and stay in the city for several days. This year there are over 1,500 runners coming from outside the UK from over 40 different countries across the world including the US and Germany and from as far afield as South Africa, Mexico, Ukraine to China and New Zealand. Last year's event benefited the economy by over £5million and over 200

Scotland and UK charities benefited by an overwhelming £3million (taking the total amount of money raised since the start in 2003 to over £10million)” (Anon, 2010).

Of note is the significant impact of the top five major marathons: London, New York City, Boston, Berlin and Chicago. The ING New York City Marathon was first established in 1970, when it saw 127 runners paying the \$1 entry fee to participate in a 26.2-mile race that looped several times within Central Park. The race now brings in an estimated US\$220 million in economic impact to the city and is regarded as the highest-grossing single-day sporting event in New York. In 2008, the marathon's estimated impact was US\$205 million and it had more than 37,000 runners, 2.5 million spectators and a worldwide television audience of more than 300 million in 2006 (Anon, 2007). Significantly in terms of sports tourism, 88% of the runners were from outside New York City and nearly 50% came from outside the United States. Of the runners who come from overseas, their stay in the city is for an average of six days. Overall in 2008, the marathon participants and spectators spent US\$71 million on hotels, US\$45 million on food and beverages, US\$42 million on retail merchandise, over US\$16 million on entertainment, US\$14 million on transportation, and US\$11 million on running and fitness gear at the ING New York City Marathon Health and Fitness Expo (Anon, 2007). A recent study undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University highlights the tremendous economic impact of the London Marathon. The London Marathon was estimated to generate over £100 million of UK economic activity each year. London accommodation and catering sectors were among the main beneficiaries, having received £13.2 million in 2011. The runners and spectators were responsible for 83% of economic impact on London and other beneficiaries were noted as charities (£50 million was raised in 2010). Other benefits attributable to the marathon related to the spending of overseas visitors and television rights-holders (£3.85 million).

The economic benefits of such events are not generated solely by major marathons and are also experienced by smaller scale events (see Box 2). The benefits of a small-scale event can equally be highlighted with the MBNA Chester Marathon as presented in Table 3.

### **Box 2: Smaller scale marathons in the USA: Facts and figures**

#### **1. Baltimore Running Festival (Dance, 2009):**

**Started:** 2001; **Runners (2009):** 20,364; **Visitors (2009):** 57,000.

**National and international participants:** 40% of the runners came from outside Maryland, from all 49 other states and 44 countries.

**Estimated US\$25 million in economic impact for the city of which:**

- US\$5.4 million was spent on both restaurants and hotels.
- US\$3.8 million was spent on retail.
- US\$4.4 million was spent on transportation.
- US\$6.3 million was spent on entertainment.
- US\$830,000 charity donations.

#### **2. Rock 'n' Roll Seattle Marathon and Half Marathon (Lamppa, 2009):**

**Started:** 2001: **Runners (2009):** 25,000 registered; **Visitors:** 16,353.

**National and international participants:** 12,076 participants from out of town, representing 50 states and 27 countries.

**Estimated economic impact of US\$30.8 million for the city of which:**

- 12,223 hotel room nights.
- More than US\$1.8 million in new tax revenue and other tourism-related fees collected.
- Visiting runners brought over US\$18.9 million in direct spending from outside the region, including expenditures on food, travel, lodging and entertainment.
- Average length of stay was 3.4 hotel room nights.

The Port of Seattle collected US\$47,068 in Passenger Facility Charge fees.

## **8. Conclusion**

In keeping with academic studies, the significance of the MBNA Chester Marathon must be considered broader than simply the economic expenditure generated. While acknowledging the economic benefits of the active sports tourists participating in the event (detailed in Table 3), there are also wider issues that need to be considered. The importance of Chester as the event destination was clearly supported by the survey respondents. The strength of intention to compete in the following year's marathon and to return to Chester shows both event and destination loyalty beginning to form. As Getz and

McConnell (2011, p.335) contend that active sports tourists can be see as “primary targets for destinations seeking competitive advantages through event tourism”. The MBNA Chester Marathon clearly provides such an opportunity.

In some cases, the lucrative nature of events for tourism is evident through the setting up of destination organisations, as is the case of Durban Events Corporation, which was specifically set up sport events opportunities in Durban (Turco, Swart, Bob and Moodley, 2003), and this might be an opportunity for Chester and the area. Equally, the opportunity to bundle events with the marathon to extend the offering is possible as part of a consideration of the overall annual event portfolio for the city of Chester. The role of the marathon in generating a fitting and appropriate image for the city is also worthy of further consideration.

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## Ancillary Student Material

### Further reading

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### **Related websites and audio-visual materials**

MBNA Chester Marathon: <http://www.activeleisureevents.co.uk/>

Welcome to Chester and Cheshire: <http://www.visitchester.com/>

MBNA Chester Marathon 2011 short clip: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_PFafDQZlgc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PFafDQZlgc)

Tony Audenshaw completes the MBNA Chester Marathon 2011:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz9Hs3vItXw>

Visit Chester: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jX50GBj6UtA&feature=related>

### **Self test questions**

Try to answer the following questions in order to test your knowledge and understanding of the case. If you are not sure of the answer, then please refer to the suggested references and further reading sources.

1. What is sports tourism?
2. What are active sports tourists?
3. Identify the importance and value of the sports tourism market to destinations.
4. How did MBNA Chester Marathon benefit the city of Chester?

# Ancillary Instructors Material

## Teaching Notes

Key themes for discussion in relation to Active Sports Tourism and the Chester Marathon case study might include:

### Sports tourism

- Understanding the definitions of sports tourism
- The market for sports tourism
- The demand for sports tourism holidays
- Case studies of specialist sports tourism operators

### Sports tourism and destinations

- The usefulness of sports tourism to destinations.
- The benefits of sports tourism to destinations
- Case studies of destinations which are branded as sports tourism destinations

### Sports events and destinations

- The use of sports events to attract tourists to destinations



- The range of sports events available at destinations
- The benefits of small scale sports events to a destination's visitor economy
- Case studies of small scale sporting events as tourism attractions.

### **Further reading**

Bull C.J. 2006. Racing cyclists as sports tourists: The experiences and behaviours of a case study group of cyclists in East Kent, England. *Journal of Sport and Tourism* **11** (3): 259-274.

Getz D. 2008. Event tourism: Definition evolution and research. *Tourism Management* **29** (3): 403-428.

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Tony Audenshaw completes the MBNA Chester Marathon 2011:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iz9Hs3vItXw>

Visit Chester: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jX50GBj6UtA&feature=related>

### **Sample Essay Questions**

Evaluate the role and usefulness of small scale events to the marketing of destinations.

Illustrate your answer with examples.

Consider the economic importance of event sports tourists. Use examples of a wide range of events to illustrate your answer.

As a consultant to Active Leisure Events you have been asked to advise them on lobbying for more support from companies, local authorities and Visit Chester and Cheshire.

Present a convincing case to the private and public sector for involvement in the MBNA Chester Marathon and the benefits that will accrue.

### **Sample Exam Questions with Answers**

1. “Event related travel is typical and widespread [presenting] primary targets for destinations seeking competitive advantages through event tourism” (Getz and McConnell, 2011, p.335).

Discuss the statement in the context of small scale sports events and illustrate your answer using the example of the MBNA Chester Marathon.

Students will need to show a good consideration of the academic literature defining event tourism, market awareness of the rise of sports events and then give specific details from the case study on the MBNA Chester Marathon. In order to discuss the statement it will be expected that:

- Students are able to define event tourism, acknowledging events as an important motivator for tourism (Getz 2008) and consider the framework for planned events that Getz (2008) proposes. This will place into context what is meant by event-related travel.
- Students show an awareness of sport event tourism as a market segment and give an indication of its growing popularity and size. Students should refer to the market for both spectating and participating in sports events and should illustrate their answer with discussions of mega sports events such as the Olympics, London Marathon and small scale sports events. There is a wide range of events which can be referred to and

provide examples from destination marathons, to branded international events such as athletic meets.

- Students understand the use of sports events by destinations and give specific examples of destinations that have benefited from hosting small scale events. Use of destination marathons to illustrate the benefits and more specifically MBNA Chester Marathon and the use of events by the destination marketing organisation in the branding of the destination and for Chester in their visitor economy framework.

2. Define sports tourism and discuss the benefits sports events tourism can bring to destinations. Illustrate your answer using the example of the MBNA Chester Marathon.

Students will be expected to give a definitional account and also an awareness of benefits for the various stakeholders within the destination that will benefit. The answer would have the following elements to it:

- Students will need to show an understanding of the various definitions proposed in the academic literature and the frameworks that are available for considering sports tourism. Academics have separated active from passive sports tourists, and the hobbyist from the activity participant. In the main studies include those for whom sports participation is the primary purpose of travel whilst for others it is spectating. Frameworks have also been suggested by Robinson and Gammon's (2004) as their sport tourism framework clarifies soft and hard tourism, and sport tourism and tourist sport, and Jackson and Weed's (2003) sports tourism demand continuum (1992). The sports-tourism demand continuum allows for an understanding of the

range of sports tourists from the incidental to the driven and considers the defining characteristics of these types: decision-making factors; participation factors; non-participation factors; typical group profile; lifestyle and sports expenditure.

- Students will need to discuss the benefits of sports events tourism, as it is seen as:
  - Enhancing the tourism product at the attraction
  - Extending the tourism season at destinations
  - Attracting a different market segment to the destination
  - Increasing economic spend
  - Increasing new tourist stays
  - Offering opportunities for destination marketing and branding
  - Providing the potential for product bundling
  
- In considering the benefits, students should also draw attention to Gratton, Shibli and Coleman (2006) 'balanced scoreboard' approach to evaluate events and looking beyond economic benefits to evaluate events, acknowledging the need to:
  - consider the event's aims
  - economic impacts
  - sports development
  - place marketing effects
  - media and sponsor evaluation.

- The Chester Marathon benefits can be used to illustrate the range of advantages accrued from destination marathons and small scale events:
  - Additional economic spend generated
  - Additional tourist spends generated
  - Money raised for charity
  - Heightened profile for a city hosting a high profile regional event
  - Resident pride and opportunities for volunteering for community groups
  - Repeat event participation and event loyalty