

Study: What College Sports Fans Do When Attending a Game?

In recent years, sport related travel or sport tourism has increasingly gained attention both among academics and practitioners. Sport tourism is described as travel for the purpose of participating in, watching, or venerating sport.



Small and Big Sport Events

Much of the existing literature has focused on event sport tourism, that is, travel associated with watching sports events, particularly mega or hallmark events. The term hallmark event refers to major fairs, expositions, cultural, and sporting events of international status which are held on either a regular or one time basis.

Hallmark events are generally thought to help position a host city as an international tourist destination and facilitate touristic activity in the years following the event. However, while some researchers have discussed the positive impacts of hallmark events, scholars have increasingly recognized the downsides associated with these events.

Thus, given the challenges associated with hallmark events, some scholars (J. Higham) suggested that small-scale sports events might be more likely to have positive effects for host communities. He defined small-scale sports events as "regular season sporting competitions (ice hockey, basketball, soccer, rugby leagues), international sporting fixtures, domestic competitions, or disabled sports, and the like".

Furthermore, Higham explained small-scale sports events usually operate within existing

infrastructures, require minimal investments of public funds, are more manageable in terms of crowding and congestion compared to hallmark events, and seem to minimize the effects of seasonality.

College Sport as a Tourist Attraction

To date, the literature on small-scale sport events is sparse. This is particularly noticeable when it comes to the use of college sport as a community tourist attraction. In the US, college-sports events have the potential to increase city revenue and community spirit, while increasing traveler's awareness of the local community.

Researchers Irwin and Sandier were among the first to recognize the tourism-related potential of fans traveling to watch college-sports events. They concentrated their investigation on people who attended ten US collegiate championships. They found that fans spent the most on lodging and retail shopping and that fans with a particular team affiliation spent more time and money at the destination.

In conclusion, the authors suggested that future research on college sport and tourism should segment the analysis of fan behaviors by team affiliation. They further recommended that tourism agencies in cities hosting such events should work more closely with each other and with the universities involved to actively market the event and provide more information about the destination to potential sport tourists.



Gibson found that the fans contributed economically to the community primarily through lodging and food expenditures. Some fans mentioned retail shopping as part of their game day routines, but on the whole their primary motivation was to tailgate and watch the game. Some would even pick up

gear such as goalie hockey equipment to play a few games of pickup. Sports fans tend to be unmotivational when it comes to their sport-related travel and it may be hard to persuade them to take part in other tourism activities. Fans of all ages spoke of treating the away games as mini-vacations and arriving a day or so before the game so that they could "see some of the sights".

Study of College Sports Fans Behavior

The purpose of our study was to investigate the participation patterns of both Gator (American football fans at University of Florida) and away fans in a range of tourism activities and to assess the images that these two groups of fans hold of Gainesville, Florida - the home of the University of Florida Gators and Alachua County.

What activities do fans participate in? The most popular activities for both home fans and away fans were attending a University of Florida sporting event (other than the football game), dining out, shopping/antiquing, taking in the nightlife, and attending a non-university sporting event such as the "Gone Riding Florida State Championship Mountain Bike Series".

Do away fans participate in a greater number of activities than home fans? The data indicated that home fans participated in more activities than away fans. Home fans participated in an average of 2.2 activities, whereas, away fans participated in an average of 2.0 activities.

Is there a difference in the types of activities that home and away fans participate in? In general, both home and away fans participate in similar activities. However, statistically, home fans were more likely to dine out or attend a non-university related sporting event; whereas, away fans were more likely to go tubing in the springs.



Do home fans hold different images of the county than away fans? Visitors seemed pleased with what Gainesville and Alachua County had to offer. Images of Alachua County were measured on a 5-point scale, where 1 was excellent and 5 was poor. All items scored 2.04 or lower indicating that all

items were considered good or excellent. People were most satisfied with the quality of sporting events in the county. Other aspects of the county that rated highly were the friendliness of the people, attractiveness of the scenery, good opportunity to increase knowledge, quality of natural areas and good place to come for the day. Home fans rated all seven differences more positively than away fans.

Sport Events Are Beneficial for Communities

The findings of this study suggest that college sports events attract a significant proportion of fans from outside of the local community and, as such support the proposition that small-scale sport tourism events may be beneficial for communities. Some scholars stated that traveling fans tend to be "sport junkies," interested in little else besides "the game". This study tends to support this thesis somewhat as the most popular activities were dining out, attending other sports events, night life, and shopping, all common activities among sports fans.

However, the findings also suggest that both the home and the away fans might hold some untapped potential for tourism development within the community. Some fans may be persuaded to engage in other activities such as tubing in the springs. Perhaps the lack of participation in a range of activities by the away fans stems from a lack of awareness of what the region has to offer.

When fans travel to well-known destinations such as New Orleans, knowledge about the destination may precede the fan's visit. However, when fans come to watch University of Florida, they may be unaware of what the county has to offer.

Thus, we suggest that the Visitor and Convention Bureau (VCB) and the university need to actively leverage the "away fan" market in particular, by raising their awareness of what the county has to offer and organizing special events to coincide with their visit. The positive images that both sets of fans hold of the county seems to suggest that both home and away fans might be persuaded to explore more of the county's attractions.

(extract from: "Sports Junkies" or Tourists? What College Sports Fans "Do" When Attending a Game)

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