

SPORTS TOURISM: DEVELOP THE POTENTIAL OF YOUR COMMUNITY



Sports are a major tourism generator bringing huge benefits to the destination. How to develop a sports tourism program that is right for the given community?

There is little doubt that Sports and Athletics play a major role in tourism. In much of the world newspapers devote more space to sports news than to foreign news and major sporting events such as World Cup Soccer, the Olympic Games, the World Series and the Super Bowl have become more than national pastimes but also real or quasi real national holiday. Both young and old alike idolize sports figures as role models, so much so that when a sports figure ends up on the wrong side of the law or in a moral crisis that too becomes major news.

From a tourism perspective, sports really are two different commodities, the passive commodity called "spectator sports" and the active commodity called "participatory sports." Spectator sports are really part of the entertainment industry, in fact, some call the US's university sports system "edutainment" as college athletes are as many entertainers as they are students.

These athletic games exist as emotion releases and permit people to discuss "safe" and "non-controversial" subjects. Participatory sports, such as skiing, swimming, or jogging, may or may not have a competitive side to them, but in call, cases force the participant to increase his/her skill and physical stamina. In this latter category success is not dependent on the other but rather on the skill and luck of the actor. **Both spectator and participator sports can play a major role in a community's tourism industry and in its quality of life.**

Sports then are a major tourism generator. Thousands of people attend major sporting events such as Super Bowls or Olympics Games and their attendance generates a great deal of revenue, not only for the teams but also for the tourism industries that serve these athletic spectacles. Hotels, restaurants, nightspots, transportation facilities are only a few of the tourism industries that benefit from these sporting events. Not unlike the major professional sports, sports connected to education such as in the United States university athletics bring thousands of loyal fans to the host community and in pre-game and after-game activities produce a great deal of economic revenue.

Midway between professional and academic sports and participatory sports is what may be called armature league sports. These tournaments can be especially helpful to the tourism industry during the off-season and the players often bring their entire families to these localized series. To help you develop a sports tourism program that is right for your community considers some of the following ideas:

Determine what facilities your community has and build your sports tourism program around the best that you can offer:

Offer your visitors the best facilities and equipment possible. If you are building your sports program around participatory activities then make sporting equipment easily available. For example, a golf course that does not provide clubs may be well suited for the local population but may fail to become a tourist attraction if visitors cannot rent clubs easily.

Visitors, especially who come for sporting or athletic reasons, tend to respond to their environment:

Surround your athletic facilities with pleasant surroundings, not only to develop a sense of *esprit de corps* but also to encourage people to stay in town after the athletic event has ended.

Know the conditions under which tournament teams are going to have to compete:

There is perhaps nothing as destructive for a community's sports tourism reputation than taking its guests by surprise. Athletes want to know what to expect, what the playing conditions are going to be, and what challenges they are going to face.

Sports tourism, just like other forms of tourism, requires that you maintain good community lists and emergency numbers:

All sporting events have an element of risk. Make sure that visiting athletes know where to go for medical attention, what restaurants serve before and post-games foods, and if hotel check-outs can be coordinated with sporting event timetables. Know the risks that go with the types of sporting events that you are promoting.

Be age-sensitive:

Especially if you are promoting participatory athletic activities for people with special needs with which you may be challenged. Business catering to older athletes may have to deal with different risks than those businesses that deal with visitors or younger sports enthusiasts. Every sports-oriented tourism community should know how to find 24-hour pharmacies, hospital emergency rooms, and doctors and dentists who are willing to take on emergency out-of-town patients.

Use sports as a means to teach people new skills:

Many people love to combine travel with skill enhancement. Consider developing lists of athletes, former professional athletes or educational centres that may be willing to accept tourists for the purpose of teaching them or helping them to improve a particular athletic skill. Learning a new athletic skill may not only be beneficial for a person's stress levels but also can teach teamwork and offer a new outlook on life.

There are numerous "sports schools" around the world that will accept both groups and individuals. For example, Portugal's Pierre de Coubertin Soccer Academy, located in Santa Maria da Feira, just outside of Oporto will teach individual how to incorporate the art of soccer into a person's business life, or provide the person with a chance to de-stress on the soccer field during the day and over a glass of Portuguese wine at night. These skill enhancement centres are a great way to increase a community's tourism potential.

Know the legal consequences of any event and practice good risk management:

In today's society where litigation has become a way of life, check with your community's law offices about the need for waivers when conducting public tournaments, when hosting major sporting events or when encouraging out-of-towners to visit your community for recreational reasons.

Use sports tourism to give your community a new image:

Athletics provides a community with a sense of sizzle and a dynamic image. Use your sports tourism as a way to develop a halo effect that spills over into every aspect of your community's self-image.

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