



# OBSERVATION ON THE SOCIOECONOMIC BENEFITS OF TRANSITIONING FROM ENTERTAINMENT TOURISM TO SPORTS TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

*Sports tourism is emerging as a powerful driver of socioeconomic growth in many regions, often outperforming traditional entertainment-focused tourism. This study examines India, Thailand, and Europe to compare the impacts of sports tourism including Olympic-related, recreational, and adventurous sports travel with those of entertainment tourism. Drawing on industry reports and case studies, we find that sports tourism contributes significantly to economic development through higher tourist expenditures, job creation, and infrastructure investments while also fostering social benefits like community pride and cultural exchange. In contrast, entertainment tourism, such as film- or nightlife-based travel, tends to yield more limited or*

*concentrated benefits. The analysis indicates that a strategic transition towards sports tourism can provide greater and more widespread socioeconomic advantages for destinations in India, Thailand, and Europe.*

**Keywords:** Sports tourism, entertainment tourism, economic impact, job creation, infrastructure, cultural exchange, India, Thailand, Europe.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a vital component of economic development for many countries, encompassing various niches from entertainment to sports. Entertainment tourism typically refers to travel motivated by leisure activities such as concerts, festivals, theme parks, film industry attractions, or nightlife events. Sports tourism, on the other hand, involves travelling to observe or participate in sporting activities, ranging from mega-events like the Olympics to recreational and adventure sports. Recently, sports tourism has grown into one of the fastest-expanding sectors of global travel, accounting for roughly 10% of worldwide tourism expenditures. This growth is evident in its projected 17.5% annual increase through 2030, demonstrating how sports-related travel “moves masses” across and within continents. Destinations are increasingly leveraging sporting events and activities to boost their appeal, as sports tourism can accelerate development and leave a lasting positive legacy in ways traditional entertainment tourism may not.

India, Thailand, and Europe offer useful case studies for examining a shift from entertainment tourism to sports tourism. India has long attracted visitors through Bollywood and cultural entertainment but is now witnessing surging interest in cricket, Olympics-related aspirations, and adventure travel in the Himalayas. Thailand is rebranding its tourism from nightlife and entertainment to sports events and adventure activities to improve its image and socioeconomic outcomes. Europe has also seen tremendous benefits from hosting sports mega-events and promoting adventure and recreational sports tourism, thanks to its rich cultural entertainment offerings (from theatres to theme parks). This paper explores how and why promoting sports tourism can provide greater socioeconomic benefits than entertainment

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tourism in these regions. The sections that follow outline the research approach, present key findings on different types of sports tourism, discuss their implications for community and economic development, and conclude with insights into the strategic advantages of this transition.



## 2. Methodology

This research employs a qualitative comparative case analysis, drawing on a range of secondary sources, including tourism industry reports, government policy statements, and academic studies. We focused on three regions—India, Thailand, and Europe—selected for their diverse tourism profiles and recent shifts towards sports tourism. Within each region, we examined multiple types of sports tourism: Olympic or mega-event tourism, recreational sports tourism, and adventure sports tourism. For comparison, we also considered prevalent forms of entertainment tourism in each region, such as film tourism, music festivals, and nightlife-orientated travel. Data on economic indicators (tourist arrivals, spending, employment) and reported social impacts were collected from published sources. Key examples—like the impact of hosting the Olympics in Europe or the rise of sports fan travel in India—were used to illustrate the differences in outcomes between sports and entertainment tourism. All information was analysed using an interpretive approach to identify patterns in socioeconomic benefits. Sources are cited in MLA style to support the findings. This methodology allows for

a holistic analysis of how transitioning to sports tourism might yield improved economic and social benefits across different contexts.

### **3. Findings**

#### **3.1 India: From Bollywood Glamour to Sporting Glory**

India's entertainment tourism has traditionally centred on its film and music industries. While this industry contributes to cultural exchange and niche economic activity, its scale remains modest compared to the nation's overall tourism sector. In contrast, India's sports tourism market is growing rapidly, valued at approximately \$9.47 billion in 2022 and projected to reach over \$37.6 billion by 2032. More than 50% of Indian sports travellers spend more than \$500 per trip, highlighting the economic potential of this segment. Major sporting events like the IPL and ICC World Cup serve as travel catalysts. Travelling fan groups like the "Bharat Army" support international cricket matches, creating demand for sports tour packages. Recreational events such as marathons and football leagues also boost domestic travel, while adventure sports like trekking, rafting, and diving are drawing visitors to rural areas. Government and private sector investments in sports infrastructure and international event hosting further bolster the sector.

#### **3.2 Thailand: Entertainment Havens to Sports and Adventure Hubs**

Historically reliant on nightlife and entertainment tourism, Thailand has faced criticism for associated social issues. Recent efforts aim to pivot toward sports tourism and quality leisure. Initiatives like the "Amazing Thailand Sports and Tourism Year 2025" campaign are designed to attract 39 million visitors and generate 3 trillion Baht in revenue.

Buriram province illustrates the economic transformation through sports tourism, showing a dramatic increase in visitor numbers and revenue after investing in sports infrastructure. The area now hosts over 100 sports events annually. In parallel, Thailand's natural assets support robust adventure sports tourism. Activities such as scuba diving, rock climbing, and mountain biking engage tourists with local communities and generate sustainable income for rural regions.

#### **3.3 Europe: Cultural Entertainment vs. Mega-Events and Outdoor Adventure**

Europe is renowned for entertainment attractions like theatres and theme parks. However, mega-events such as the Olympics and UEFA tournaments provide long-lasting

socioeconomic benefits. For example, the 2012 London Olympics generated £600 million in visitor spending, while Barcelona's 1992 Olympics transformed the city into a leisure destination, tripling holiday visits over a few years. Recreational sports tourism, including football travel and marathons, fosters repeat visitation and off-season travel. Adventure sports in the Alps and across rural Europe sustain local economies year-round, diversifying income sources and promoting environmental stewardship. These activities reach areas that entertainment tourism typically does not, distributing benefits more evenly.

#### 4. Discussion

The comparative findings suggest that sports tourism delivers greater socioeconomic benefits than entertainment tourism through several mechanisms:

- **Higher Tourist Expenditures:** Sports tourists generally spend more, boosting local economies through lodging, food, transport, and gear purchases.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Mega-events lead to significant investments in urban infrastructure that serve communities long after the event concludes.
- **Destination Branding:** Successful sports events enhance international reputation, while entertainment tourism often reinforces existing perceptions.
- **Geographic and Demographic Reach:** Sports tourism benefits remote areas and attracts a more diverse tourist demographic.
- **Social and Health Benefits:** Encouraging active lifestyles, sports tourism can foster community pride, youth engagement, and intercultural exchange.
- **Sustainability:** Adventure and sports tourism often support conservation efforts and environmentally responsible travel practices.
- **Challenges** such as overdevelopment or environmental degradation must be managed carefully. Strategic planning, inclusive policies, and sustainability measures can help ensure that the transition to sports tourism delivers long-term benefits.



## 5. Conclusion

Entertainment tourism remains valuable, but a strategic pivot towards sports tourism offers broader, more sustained socioeconomic benefits. India, Thailand, and Europe exemplify how sports tourism can drive higher spending, better infrastructure, and inclusive development. The shift is not about abandoning entertainment tourism but enhancing tourism portfolios to include more sports-focused offerings. By doing so, regions can better position themselves for long-term prosperity, wider geographic impact, and stronger community engagement.

### 5.1 Author Contributions

Mr Parthasarathi Chittibabu designed the study; Dr Hemachandran Ravikumar provided ideas on the final design and selection of assessment tools. Both authors were involved in data collection, summarising, statistical analysis, and finalising the report. Mr Parthasarathi Chittibabu has made the rough draft of the research paper; Dr Hemachandran Ravikumar provided the initial draft of the manuscript, and the final version is made available by considerations of all.

### 5.2 Declarations of Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no potential conflicts of interest regarding the study design, research analysis, or publication of this article.

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### 5.4 Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Review Committee of the UNS Research Council.

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