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Sports Tourism in Cyprus: A Study of International Visitors

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Abstract

A decline in the number of tourists visiting Cyprus from 2000 to 2007 prompted the Cyprus Tourism Organization to examine sports tourism as a means of appealing to international visitors. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at airports in the cities of Larnaca and Pafos with 802 international tourists departing Cyprus. The respondents were surveyed about their experiences with three types of sports tourism in Cyprus: competitive (elite- and amateur-level athletic training or other preparation as well as competition), recreation (competition without trophy rewards), and leisure (sports-related play or pastimes). Statistical analysis showed most respondents had engaged in swimming, water sports, or other leisure-type sports tourism, with minimal numbers participating in the other two types.

Sports Tourism in Cyprus: A Study of International Visitors

In industrial nations, sports tourism contributes 1% to 2% of gross national product, while the contribution of tourism in general is 4% to 6% (Hudson, 2003). In the United States, the Travel Industry Association (TIA) reports that the crisis in tourism following the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and elsewhere did not extend to sports tourism; the number of sports tourists remained steady (Neirotti, 2005). Although sports tourism has been an emerging trend in the tourism industry only since the mid-1990s (Gibson, 1998; Hinch, Jackson, Hudson, & Walker, 2005), it seems to be one form of tourism not marked by decline during difficult times (Karlis, 2006).

The nation of Cyprus has traditionally relied on the sun and sea in marketing its tourism industry. But a recent steady decrease in tourism in Cyprus (during 2000–2007, visits fell from 2,434,285 to 2,416,086) has the Cyprus Tourism Organization (CTO) considering new approaches to selling its tourism product. A focus on sports tourism is one approach being weighed.

In 2003 the CTO adopted a tourism development plan, and accompanying strategy for implementation, with 2010 as the target date. The plan identified competitive and recreational sports as likely contributors to the achievement of its five objectives: (a) increasing per-tourist expenditure, (b) improving winter season tourism, (c) extending tourists' stays in Cyprus, (d) increasing repeat visits, and (e) increasing the number of tourist arrivals in Cyprus. The CTO's plan called specifically for the development of sports services and sports-related human resources and for the organization of sports events.

Research by Papanikos (2002) indicates that countries interested in expanding sports tourism must carefully consider how to go about that task. Building new facilities is not necessarily the right approach to establish a sports tourism market, and Papanikos advises officials like those in Cyprus to pursue extensive research before investing in the sports tourism industry (2002). Thus the CTO, prior to creating its 2010 plan, completed a SWOT analysis—an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats characterizing an enterprise—to evaluate sports tourism's appropriateness as a major pillar of the strategic plan for tourism in Cyprus (Kartakoullis & Karlis, 2002). The analysis by Kartakoullis and Karlis (2002) indicated that potential existed for developing sports tourism in Cyprus. Strengths and opportunities were plentiful, and the 2004 Olympics in Athens, Greece, would provide a means to educate the international community about Cyprus's sports tourism potential. The analysis also noted, however, that positioning Cyprus as a sports tourism destination would demand the collaboration of the nation's tourism and sports industries and experts, given certain internal weaknesses such as lack of existing expertise in sports tourism. Organizations assuming a role in developing sports tourism in Cyprus would be able to administer services effectively only if proper strategic management were provided.

Kartakoullis and Karlis's SWOT analysis (2002) was the initial study concerning sports tourism in Cyprus. It argued that Cyprus has all the necessary elements of a sports tourism destination, and it comprised a first guide for the CTO and the national government, as well as interested private tourism and sports groups. None of these players had a formal policy on sports tourism, and all were likely to be needed to administer future sports tourism services. A series of issues was identified that the three players would need to consider. The present study grew from those identified issues and represents expanded research on sports tourism's potential in Cyprus, as called for by Kartakoullis and Karlis.

To suit the present study's purpose, the definition of sports tourism offered by Gibson, Attle, and Yiannakis (1997)—namely, that sports tourism is travel undertaken in order to participate in recreational or competitive sports—was expanded. A third type of sports tourism, leisure sports tourism, was added. Sports tourism here, then, refers to travel for reasons related to (a) elite or amateur athletic competition, training, or other related preparation; (b) recreation sports, defined as participation in competitive sports without trophy rewards; or (c) leisure sports, defined as play or pastimes involving a sports activity. The study examined the sports tourism experiences of all three types that international visitors to Cyprus self-reported during interviews. Specific objectives of the study were to assess the purposes of tourist visits to Cyprus; to identify sports activities in which tourists participate while in Cyprus; and to explore tourists' intentions concerning future sports tourism visits to Cyprus.

Procedures

To begin the study, we obtained from the Department of Civil Aviation in Cyprus a list of July and August 2005 departures from the country's two main international airports, which are in the cities of Larnaca and Pafos. The destinations of the departing flights included the United Kingdom, countries in western Europe, countries in eastern Europe, countries in the Middle East, and other destinations. The four regions and catchall category (other destinations) supplied categories used to ensure that a representative sample of departing tourists would be interviewed. Using the list of departures from the two airports, we prepared a timetable for data collection, covering all destination categories at various times of the day and night.

Keeping to this timetable, a team of trained interviewers conducted 489 face-to-face interviews in Larnaca and 313 in Pafos. An interview lasted approximately 5–10 minutes as the respondent prepared to take a departing flight. The interviewers asked participants a series of quantitative questions, including basic demographic questions as well as questions about the current trip to Cyprus. Respondents were asked about (a) the purpose of their travel to Cyprus, (b) any sports activities they participated in while in Cyprus, and (c) whether their intention was to visit Cyprus again for sports-related purposes. The questionnaire was designed to generate basic descriptive statistics in the form of frequency counts and percentages.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

Males comprised a slight majority of respondents, 51% (n = 407); females comprised 49% (n = 395). The occupational status of the majority of the respondents—65%—or 511 respondents—was white-collar professional or white-collar personnel (see Table 1). British

majority of the respondents (62.5%), or 501 respondents, had indicated professional or white-collar personnel (see Table 2). German tourists have long been a mainstay of Cyprus's hospitality industry. In this study, respondents from the United Kingdom, at 62.5% of the sample, characteristically outnumbered those from other nations. German tourists were next most numerous, comprising 8.6% (see Table 2).

Table 1

Respondents' Occupation Status, Most Represented to Least Represented

Occupation Status	Number of respondents indicating this status	Percentage of respondents indicating this status
White-collar personnel	374	47
White-collar professional	142	18
Blue-collar worker	139	17
Student	81	10
Retired	35	4
Homemaker	31	4

Table 2

Respondents' Country of Residence, Most Represented to Least Represented

Country	Number of respondents (N = 802)	Percentage of all respondents
United Kingdom	501	62.5
Germany	69	8.6
Sweden	48	6.0
Norway	42	5.2
Ireland	27	3.4
Greece	19	2.4
Netherlands	17	2.1
Switzerland	13	1.6
Israel	11	1.4
Denmark	10	1.2
Hungary	9	1.1
Russia	9	1.1
Belarus	3	0.4
Austria	2	0.2
Bahrain	2	0.2
Canada	2	0.2
Hong Kong	2	0.2
Iran	2	0.2
Japan	2	0.2
Jordan	2	0.2
Oman	2	0.2
United States	2	0.2
Other countries	6	0.7

Current Trip to Cyprus

The largest percentages of tourists interviewed for the study had secured accommodations (for the main part of their current stay in Cyprus) in the tourist destinations Pafos (sometimes spelled Paphos) (39%) and Ammohostos (38%) (see Table 3). The next most popular sites for accommodations were Limassol (sometimes called Lemesos) (11%) and Larnaca (9%). Three percent of those interviewed had stayed mainly in the capital city of Nicosia, which, while it is a business center, is not widely considered a place for tourists (see Table 3). Fully half of the respondents had stayed 6 to 10 days in Cyprus; another 29% had spent 11 to 15 days on the island (see Table 4).

Table 3

Site of Respondents' Main Accommodations in Cyprus, Most to Least Popular

City	Number of respondents (N = 802) with accommodations in city	Percentage of respondents with accommodations in city
Pafos (Paphos)	312	39.0
Ammohostos	306	38.0
Limassol (Lemesos)	92	11.0
Larnaca	71	9.0
Nicosia	21	3.0

Table 4

Duration of Respondents' Visits to Cyprus, in Days

Days	Number of respondents (N = 802)	Percentage of respondents
1-5	126	16.0
6-10	398	50.0
11-15	232	29.0
More than 15	46	6.0

The respondents were asked the reason for their current travel to Cyprus and were allowed to offer more than one reason. Including the multiple responses, 864 reasons for visiting Cyprus were recorded for the 802 respondents (see Table 5). The most common reason was tourism/recreation; 87.8%, or 704 respondents, said they traveled to Cyprus for that purpose (see Table 5). A reason involving sports tourism specifically was given by 16 respondents, or 2.0%. (The breakdown by type of sports tourism was as follows: recreation sports tourism, 1.2%, and competition sports tourism, 0.8%, with 0.4% of the latter representing preparation for competition and 0.4% representing actual participation in competition.)

Of the 16 respondents who traveled to Cyprus for sports tourism purposes, 13 were male and 3 were female (see Table 6). The largest percentage of people visiting Cyprus in order to pursue sports-related activities were aged 20-29 years; the next largest group of sports tourists were aged 60 or more. All respondents indicating they had visited Cyprus for sports tourism purposes were from western Europe (see Table 8). Those who came because of sports competitions stayed in Cyprus 11-15 days, whilst those who came to prepare for competition spent 6-10 days (see Table 8).

Table 5

Purpose of Respondents' Current Travel to Cyprus, Most to Least Common (Sports-Related Purposes Shaded)

	Number of respondents stating this purpose	Percentage of all respondents
Tourism/recreation	704	87.8
Business	72	9.0
Visiting relatives	32	4.0
Attending a wedding	20	2.5
Visiting friends	18	2.2
Recreation sports tourism	10	1.2%
Competition sports tourism—actual competition	3	0.4%
Competition sports tourism—preparation	3	0.4%
Attending a funeral	1	0.1%
Honeymooning	1	0.1%

Note. Because respondents were not limited to a single purpose for travel, 864 responses were recorded for the interview item on purpose of travel. To obtain the percentages in the column headed "Percentage of all respondents," the number of respondents stating a particular purpose (middle column) was divided by 802 (the sample size). The right-hand column entries total 107.7% (= 864/802). For the same reason, entries in the middle column of Tables 6-13 do not equal 802 and entries in the tables' right-hand columns do not equal 100%.

Table 6

Purpose of Respondents' Current Travel to Cyprus, by Gender

	Male		Female	
	Number of male respondents stating this purpose (n = 407)	Percentage of male respondents stating this purpose	Number of female respondents stating this purpose	Percentage of female respondents stating this purpose
Tourism/recreation	354	87.0	350	88.6
Business	52	12.8	20	5.1
Visiting relatives	14	3.4	18	4.6
Attending a wedding	10	2.5	10	2.5
Visiting friends	5	1.2	13	3.3
Recreation sports tourism	8	2.0	2	0.5
Competition sports tourism—actual competition	2	0.5	1	0.3
Competition sports tourism—preparation	3	0.7	0	0.0
Attending a funeral	0	0.0	1	0.3
Honeymooning	1	0.2	0	0.0

Note. See note for Table 5.

Table 7

	Percentage of those < 20 years old (n = 43) stating this purpose	Percentage of those 20–29 years old (n = 210) stating this purpose	Percentage of those 30–39 years old (n = 233) stating this purpose	Percentage of those 40–49 years old (n = 168) stating this purpose	Percentage of those 50–59 years old (n = 96) stating this purpose	Percentage of those > 60 years old (n = 52) stating this purpose
Tourism/recreation	90.7	88.1	88.4	83.9	89.6	90.4
Business	2.3	12.4	8.2	11.3	5.2	3.8
Visiting relatives	7.0	1.9	2.6	6.5	5.2	5.8
Attending wedding ^a	0.0	1.9	5.6	0.6	2.1	0.0
Visiting friends	0.0	1.9	2.1	3.6	1.0	3.8
Recreation sports	0.0	2.4	1.3	0.0	1.0	1.9
Competition sports tourism—actual competition	0.0	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Competition sports tourism—preparation	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0
Attending a funeral	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Honeymooning	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table 8

Purpose of Respondents' Travel, by Country of Residence, as Percentage of n

	Percent of those from the United Kingdom (n = 501) stating this purpose	Percent of those from Western Europe (n = 249) stating this purpose	Percent of those from Eastern Europe (n = 23) stating this purpose	Percent of those from the Middle East (n = 19) stating this purpose	Percent of those from other countries (n = 10) stating this purpose
Tourism/recreation	86.45	92.0	95.7	68.4	70
Business	8.6	7.6	8.7	21.1	40
Visiting relatives	4.4	2.8	4.3	5.3	10
Attending a wedding	3.4	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Visiting friends	3.4	0.0	0.0	5.3	0.0
Recreation sports	1.4	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
Competition sports tourism—actual competition	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Competition sports tourism—preparation	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Attending a funeral	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Honeymooning	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Note. See note for Table 5.

Respondents' Sports Activities While Visiting Cyprus

Most respondents (85.8%, or 688 individuals) indicated they had participated in some type of sports experience during their visit to Cyprus (see Table 9); 114 respondents said they did not participate in any type of sports in Cyprus (14.2%). Swimming was most widely participated in (by 82.9%, or 665 respondents), followed by water sports (24.7%, or 198 respondents), and soccer (7.2%, or 58 respondents). For males and females alike, swimming and water sports were the top two sports pursued. In the subsample of females, however, it was beach volleyball rather than soccer that was the third most popular sports activity.

Visitors from the United Kingdom and western Europe tended to participate more in sports activities while in Cyprus than did visitors from eastern Europe or the Middle East (see Table 11). Visitors who stayed mainly in Ammohostos and Pafos were most likely to have participated in sports during their time in Cyprus; those staying in Nicosia were least likely to have (see Table 12). Finally, those respondents staying in Cyprus for more than six days showed the highest rate of sports participation during a visit (see Table 13).

Table 9

Sports the Respondents Participated in While in Cyprus, Most to Least Commonly

	Number of respondents stating this sport	Percentage of respondents stating this sport
Swimming	665	82.9
Water sports	198	24.7
No sports activity	114	14.2

Soccer	58	7.2
Cycling	56	7.0
Beach volleyball	52	6.5
Tennis	51	6.4
Orienteering	34	4.2
Golf	12	1.5
Jogging	10	1.2
Gymnastics	6	0.7
Aerobic exercise	4	0.5
Fishing	3	0.4
Bungee jumping	2	0.2
Equestrian sports	2	0.2
Miniature golf	2	0.2
Parachuting	2	0.2
Bowling	1	0.1
Go-Karting	1	0.1
Diving	1	0.1
Judo	1	0.1
Karate	1	0.1
Table Tennis	1	0.1

Note. See note for Table 5.

Table 10

Sports the Respondents Participated in While in Cyprus, by Gender, as a Percentage

	Percentage of males stating this sport	Percentage of females stating this sport
Swimming	80.8	85.1
Water sports	27.5	21.8
No sports activity	14.7	13.7
Soccer	13.8	0.5
Cycling	8.4	5.6
Beach volleyball	4.2	8.9
Tennis	7.9	4.8
Orienteering	3.9	4.6
Golf	2.5	0.5
Jogging	1.5	1.0
Gymnastics	0.7	0.8
Aerobic exercise	0.0	1.0
Fishing	0.5	0.3
Bungee jumping	0.2	0.3
Equestrian sports	0.0	0.5
Miniature golf	0.2	0.3
Parachuting	0.0	0.5
Bowling	0.0	0.3
Go-Karting	0.2	0.0
Diving	0.2	0.0
Judo	0.2	0.0
Karate	0.2	0.0
Table Tennis	0.2	0.0

Note. See note for Table 5.

Table 11

Sports the Respondents Participated in While in Cyprus, by Country of Residence, as a Percentage

	Percentage of visitors from United Kingdom	Percentage of visitors from Western	Percentage of visitors from Eastern	Percentage of visitors from Middle East stating	Percentage of visitors from other countries
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	Kingdom stating this sport	Western Europe stating this sport	Eastern Europe stating this sport	East stating this sport	Countries stating this sport
Swimming	82.2	84.3	82.6	73.7	100.0
Water sports	26.7	22.1	21.7	21.1	0.0
No sports activity	15.0	12.4	17.4	21.1	0.0
Soccer	9.6	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cycling	8.6	4.8	4.3	0.0	0.0
Beach volleyball	8.4	3.6	4.3	0.0	0.0
Tennis	5.6	8.4	0.0	10.5	0.0
Orienteering	5.2	2.4	0.0	5.3	10.0
Golf	1.6	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Jogging	0.8	2.0	0.0	5.3	0.0
Gymnastics	0.8	0.4	0.0	5.3	0.0
Aerobic exercise	0.2	0.8	4.3	0.0	0.0
Fishing	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bungee jumping	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Equestrian sports	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Miniature golf	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Parachuting	0.2	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bowling	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Go-Karting	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Diving	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Judo	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Karate	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Table Tennis	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0

Note. See note for Table 5.

Table 12

Sports Participated in While in Cyprus, by Site of Main Accommodations, as a Percentage

	Percentage of visitors to Pafos stating this sport	Percentage of visitors to Ammohostos stating this sport	Percentage of visitors to Limassol stating this sport	Percentage of visitors to Larnaca stating this sport	Percentage of visitors to Nicosia stating this sport
Swimming	81.1	90.5	76.1	77.5	47.6
Water sports	21.2	30.1	25.0	21.1	9.5
No sports activity	14.1	8.8	21.7	19.7	42.9
Soccer	12.5	3.6	4.3	4.2	4.8
Cycling	13.5	1.3	5.4	7.0	0.0
Beach volleyball	11.5	2.6	8.7	0.0	0.0
Tennis	9.9	3.6	5.4	4.2	4.8
Orienteering	5.8	3.6	1.1	5.6	0.0
Golf	2.6	0.3	1.1	1.4	4.8
Jogging	1.0	2.0	1.1	0.0	0.0
Gymnastics	0.3	0.7	1.1	1.4	4.8
Aerobic exercise	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.4	0.0
Fishing	0.0	0.7	0.0	1.4	0.0
Bungee jumping	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Equestrian sports	0.0	0.3	1.1	0.0	0.0
Miniature golf	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0

Parachuting	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bowling	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.4	0.0
Go-Karting	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0
Diving	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Judo	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Karate	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.0
Table Tennis	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0

Note. See note for Table 5.

Table 13

Respondents' Participation in Sport Activities by Duration of Stay (in Days), as a Percentage

	Percentage of visitors staying 1–5 days stating this sport	Percentage of visitors staying 6–10 days stating this sport	Percentage of visitors staying 11–15 days stating this sport	Percentage of visitors staying more than 15 days stating this sport
Swimming	69.8	86.4	84.1	82.6
Water sports	17.5	23.6	30.6	23.9
No sports activity	28.6	11.3	11.6	13.0
Soccer	11.1	7.5	4.7	6.5
Cycling	4.8	8.8	4.7	8.7
Beach volleyball	10.3	7.8	3.4	0.0
Tennis	4.8	6.8	7.3	2.2
Orienteering	4.8	4.0	3.0	10.9
Golf	2.4	1.8	0.9	0.0
Jogging	0.8	1.5	1.3	0.0
Gymnastics	1.6	0.8	0.4	0.0
Aerobic exercise	0.8	0.5	0.4	0.0
Fishing	0.0	0.3	0.4	2.2
Bungee jumping	0.0	0.3	0.4	0.0
Equestrian sports	0.0	0.3	0.4	0.0
Miniature golf	0.0	0.3	0.4	0.0
Parachuting	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0
Bowling	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Go-Karting	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0
Diving	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.0
Judo	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0
Karate	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0
Table Tennis	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0

Note. See note for Table 5.

Intention to Visit Cyprus Again to Participate in Sports Tourism

The respondents were asked during their interviews whether it was their intent to visit Cyprus again in order to participate in sports tourism; 87% said they did intend to do so, and 13% indicated they had no intention of returning to Cyprus to participate in sports activity at any future time.

Discussion

A major limitation of the study was that data were collected only during the summer months. Data collected in the winter season might generate different results, because Cyprus also features mountainous regions, like Troodos, where winter sports like cross-country and alpine skiing, snowboarding, and snowshoeing are available. Conducting a similar airport-interview study during the winter months would be interesting.

In any case, the summer study results indicate that few sports tourists come to Cyprus to pursue either the competition (whether actual competition or training or preparation for competition) or recreation types of sports. And it certainly is no surprise that most sports tourists in Cyprus are leisure sports tourists. The climate and the beaches of Cyprus provide ample opportunities to pursue leisure swimming and water sports, and these were indeed the sports activities most widely pursued by the respondents in our study.

The study generated information that may be useful for the further development of sports tourism in Cyprus. For example, the data show that sports tourists tend to come to Cyprus from the United Kingdom and western Europe. As Weed and Bull have suggested (2004), the proximity of Europe to Cyprus should support growth in sports tourism by Europeans in Cyprus. The CTO's sports tourism marketing strategies in Europe, then, might promote Cyprus as a sports tourism destination. (The marketing strategies for eastern Europe and the

Particular CTO campaigns targeting Europe and other regions should address the fact (supported by our data) that many who visit Cyprus engage in leisure sports activities rather than competitive or recreation ones. More competitive and recreation sports tourists might be drawn to the country if its resources for competitive and recreation sports tourism were actively marketed. The experience of the United Kingdom's Olympic team, which trained in Cyprus prior to the Athens Games, offers a starting place. After the Games had concluded, the British Olympic performance manager, Richard Simmons, commented that "We made the right decision to choose Cyprus as not just our training base for the Athens Olympic Games but also our warm weather training centre of operations for at least the next ten years. Cyprus now offers great training facilities for a huge range of sports, and is blessed with wonderful weather and a superb environment. Athletes and coaches from whatever the sport and whatever level could not choose a better place" (Simmons, 2005).

The benefits of a plan to build sports tourism in Cyprus would extend to the nation's citizens as well as tourists (Hall, 2000). Whether or not new sports facilities are part of it, such a plan can be expected to point the way to development of local economies as well as to citizens' increased use of improved sports services and available facilities. Our data show that most respondents say they would return to Cyprus specifically for sports tourism experiences. There is, then, potential for Cyprus to become a sports tourism destination, enjoying the financial impact such tourism can bring. The Cyprus Tourism Organization might consider moving in a direction that develops and broadens Cyprus's sports tourism role.

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