

## Exploring Event Satisfaction, Surfing Experiences and Destination Image at the World Championships of Surf Kayaking in Peru

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# **Exploring Event Satisfaction, Surfing Experiences and Destination Image at the World Championships of Surf Kayaking in Peru**

## **Introduction**

Hosting a small sporting event can be a way to bring attention, economic income and increased visitation to a tourism destination (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Milovanovi et al., 2019). For communities hosting events, leaving a good impression on tourists can ensure they come away with a positive destination image, a construct that has received much attention in the tourism literature (da Rosa, dos Anjos, de Lima Pereira, & Arnhold Junior, 2019; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Milovanovi et al., 2019). While past experience, destination image and event satisfaction have been found to be significant predictors of sporting event competitors' intentions to revisit a destination or participate in an event again, these are not the only factors that may affect participants' experience or future behavior (Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Koo, Byon, & Baker III, 2014).

Research on surf tourism has increased exponentially in the past two decades, but little research has been done on surf competitions, especially participants' experiences of these events (Martin & Assenov, 2012; Scarpi, Pizzi, Raggiotto, & Mason, 2018). The destinations capable of hosting surf competitions are limited because consistent, high-quality surfable waves are only generated when a variety of environmental conditions come together. Surf event planners must try to select destinations with high quality waves. Quality surf is a primary characteristic surfers seek when they travel (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; da Rosa et al., 2019), and surfers who compete at an international level expect world-class waves where they can perform their best. However, there are other aspects of a surfing event and the destination that can affect surfers' overall experience and future behavioral intentions. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore event satisfaction, surfing experiences, destination image and future behavioral intentions of competitors in the World Championships of Surf Kayaking.

## **Literature Review**

Destination image has been an important concept for tourism marketers, because it represents tourists' overall beliefs, feelings, impressions and knowledge about a destination (Hallman, Zehrer, & Müller, 2015). Researchers recognize three components of destination image: a) a cognitive component, representing knowledge about, and attitudes towards, attributes of the destination, b) an affective component, representing feelings and emotions towards the destination, and c) a conative component, representing tourists' behavioral intentions towards the destination (da Rosa et al., 2019; Hallman et al., 2015). Active sport tourists' image of a destination has been found to influence their future intentions to return to the destination or participate in the event again (Hallman et al., 2015; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Milovanovi et al., 2019). Many sport tourists rely on the natural environment, and one of their primary motivations in traveling is to seek high quality environmental conditions (wind, surf, snow, mountains, etc.) in which to do their activities (da Rosa et al., 2019; Hallman et al., 2015).

Surfers are one group of sport tourists who seek quality, consistent waves in their travels (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; da Rosa et al., 2019). As surf tourism research has increased in the last two decades, it has revealed more information about surfers' preferences when they travel (Barbieri & Sotomayor, 2013; Dolnicar & Fluker, 2003; Towner, 2016). Much of this research has demonstrated the importance of wave quality for surfers, and finding destinations where crowding

is not a problem. If surfers find a destination with consistent, high quality surf and low crowds, they may want to return in the future. Some surfers have even moved to destinations with high quality surf and established businesses in order to live a surf-focused lifestyle (Usher, 2017a). However, there has been very little research exploring surfers' experiences at surf competitions: studies have grouped surfers in with other extreme sports or simply examined the economic impact of competitions (Martin & Assenov, 2012; Scarpi et al., 2018). For coastal destinations hoping to attract surf competitions as a means of economic development, knowing the preferences of competitive surfers would be important for tourism developers. Surfers are not a homogenous group, though, there are many types of surf craft and hierarchies exist within surf culture (Nemani, 2013; Orams & Towner, 2013; Waitt & Frazer, 2012). When surfers travel, they may be treated differently depending on the level of tolerance local surfers have for various surf craft (Usher, 2017b). Surf kayakers are often considered lower on the surf hierarchy than surfers who stand up on boards (Anderson, 2016). Therefore, surf kayakers' travel experiences are likely different than board-riding surfers. By exploring the surf competition experiences of an under-studied user group, this study addresses several gaps in the literature and provides important insights for sporting event organizers and destinations.

## **Methods**

Researchers developed an online survey to evaluate competitors experiences at the event and in Peru. In addition, they also conducted semi-structured interviews with event organizers. Organizers emailed the survey link to competitors several days after the event and sent two reminders before researchers closed the survey a month later. The survey was available in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Competitors had to be 18 years of age or older to complete the survey. The survey inquired about competitors' satisfaction with various aspects of the event, the level of welcome competitors felt surfing in Peru, their willingness to return or recommend the destination for surf kayaking, components of the cognitive dimension of destination image of Peru, and overall satisfaction, willingness to return to, and recommend, Peru. In addition, there were demographic items and open-ended questions about the best and worst aspects of the event and most and least favorite aspects of competitors' surfing experiences in Peru. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS and the qualitative data were analyzed using Nvivo.

## **Results**

Out of 80 competitors, 41 provided responses to the survey, resulting in a 51.3% response rate overall. The number of responses for individual questions varied slightly (between 33-41 responses per question). The age range of respondents was 19 to 68, with a mean age of 39. However, one respondent was the parent of a junior competitor and answered the survey on the person's behalf. This person's response was included in the analysis as well. There were 79.5% male respondents and 20.5% female respondents. Respondents from a wide variety of nationalities filled out the survey: the highest number were from the United Kingdom and Ireland (36.4%). The next highest number of respondents came from Spain or the Basque Country (19.5%), followed by the United States (9.8%), Australia (7.3%) and smaller percentages of respondents from Argentina, Canada, Denmark, France, Peru and Sweden. Most respondents (80.6%) had been surf kayaking for more than six years. For 12.2% of respondents, this was their first World Championship. The majority (73.2%) had competed in 2-7 World Championships. Many respondents (89.7%) had not been to Peru before. A majority (64.1%) traveled to other parts of Peru before or after the event to see more of the country.

Means and standard deviations for the survey items are in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Respondents were most satisfied with the helpfulness of the event staff and least satisfied with ocean safety services. Organizers confirmed that the ocean rescue personnel they had originally contracted were inexperienced and unprofessional. Respondents expressed high satisfaction with the event overall. Overall, respondents appeared to have a positive surfing experience and felt welcomed in the surf. “Friendly local people” was also the highest rated aspect of destination image; however, a clean natural environment was the lowest rated aspect of the destination. While respondents were not as enthusiastic about returning to Peru, they did rate their overall satisfaction and willingness to recommend highly.

**Table 1.** Event Satisfaction

Items <sup>a</sup>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The registration process	41	3.54	.636
Opening ceremony	40	3.35	.700
Ocean safety services	41	1.98	.790
Event organization	41	3.34	.656
Communication of event information	41	2.85	.727
Timeliness of heat results	40	3.47	.716
Judging	40	3.53	.506
Helpfulness of event volunteers/staff	40	3.72	.452
Surf break selection	39	3.26	.785
Closing ceremony	40	3.05	.714
The event overall	39	3.28	.605

<sup>a</sup> – Respondents were asked to rate each of the statements on a 4-point Likert scale, 1 = Very dissatisfied; 4 = Very satisfied)

**Table 2.** Surfing Experiences

Items <sup>a</sup>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
When I wanted to practice or free-surf, I could surf anywhere I wanted.	39	3.26	.637
Local residents happily offered directions to different surf breaks.	37	3.38	.545
Local surfers were welcoming when I paddled out at a surf break.	38	3.37	.589
Surfing seems to be a major part of Peruvian culture.	37	2.92	.759
I plan to return to Peru to surf kayak in the future.	39	2.72	.916
I would recommend other surf kayakers visit Peru.	38	3.21	.843

<sup>a</sup> – Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each of the statements on a 4-point Likert scale, 1 = Strongly disagree; 4 = Strongly agree)

**Table 3.** Destination Image

Items <sup>a</sup>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Convenient transportation	38	3.00	.735
Well-maintained roads	38	2.26	.828
Quality accommodation	38	3.05	.517
Friendly local people	38	3.61	.495
Appealing restaurants	38	3.16	.638
Good safety and security	38	2.87	.623
Beautiful beaches	37	2.62	.828
Clean natural environment	38	1.82	.834
Good value for the money	38	3.26	.724

<sup>a</sup> – Respondents were asked to rate each of the statements about Peru on a 4-point Likert scale, 1 = Very dissatisfied; 4 = Very satisfied)

**Table 4.** Overall evaluations

Items <sup>a</sup>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I am extremely satisfied with my overall visit to Peru.	38	5.42	1.654
I plan to return to Peru for vacation	38	4.37	1.965
I would recommend Peru to others as a vacation destination.	38	5.24	1.837

<sup>a</sup> – Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with each of the statements on a 7-point Likert scale, 1 = Strongly disagree; 7 = Strongly agree)

The aspects respondents enjoyed most about the event were: the surf, the people (fellow competitors), and the management of the event. The primary aspect that respondents liked least was the ocean water quality, which many of them blamed for people getting sick, which was a major problem they noted. Organizers confirmed that many competitors had gotten sick, but they did not think it was the ocean water; they suspected it was from food. Respondents commented that the best aspects of surfing Peru were the waves, surfing Chicama (located north of the contest site and known as the longest left-breaking wave in the world), friendly locals and few, or in some cases, no people out in the line-up. The aspects respondents liked least were the ocean water quality and getting sick.

Lastly, researchers performed bivariate correlation analysis between variables to determine possible relationships between satisfaction, surf experiences, destination image and future intentions. There were significant positive correlations between overall event satisfaction and overall visit satisfaction ( $r(37) = .537, p = .001$ ) and recommending Peru to others ( $r(37) = .463, p = .004$ ). Significant positive correlations were also found between being able to surf anywhere ( $r(39) = .352, p = .028$ ), feeling welcomed by local surfers ( $r(38) = .380, p = .019$ ), perceiving surfing to be a part of Peruvian culture ( $r(37) = .592, p < .0001$ ) and returning to surf kayak. Surfing anywhere ( $r(38) = .343, p = .035$ ), residents providing directions to breaks ( $r(36) = .340, p = .042$ ) and surf as a part of the culture ( $r(37) = .456, p = .005$ ) were also significantly positively correlated with recommending Peru to other surf kayakers. Regarding destination image, most

variables were significantly positively correlated ( $p < .001$ ) with overall visit satisfaction, except for friendly locals and the natural environment. Interestingly, friendly locals ( $r(38) = .348, p = .032$ ) and appealing restaurants ( $r(38) = .362, p = .025$ ) were both significantly positively correlated with returning to Peru. Convenient transportation ( $r(38) = .420, p = .009$ ), appealing restaurants ( $r(37) = .429, p = .007$ ) and a good value ( $r(37) = .420, p = .009$ ) were significantly positively correlated with recommending Peru.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Overall, respondents seemed to be highly satisfied with many aspects of the event, except for ocean safety services and communication. High-quality surfing waves can mean large waves, which raises the level of risk for competitors, even if they are highly experienced (Partington, Partington, & Olivier, 2009). Therefore, providing good safety services is incredibly important and when this aspect of the event fell through, respondents took note. Regarding surf experiences, despite being in surf craft that are often marginalized in surf culture (Anderson, 2016), respondents felt welcomed by surfers and residents in Peru. The welcoming atmosphere was positively related to their desire to return to the country to surf and recommend it to other surf kayakers. One important note is that competitors were there in the winter, when surf breaks were likely less crowded than usual, which is a desirable surf destination characteristic (da Rosa et al., 2019). Interestingly, while respondents did not express high agreement with surfing being a part of Peruvian culture, it appeared to be a significant factor in their desire to return to Peru to surf kayak and recommend it to other surf kayakers.

Given the fact that many participants became ill and blamed it on the water quality, it is not surprising that a clean natural environment was the lowest rated aspect of destination image. The varied scores on different aspects of destination image agrees with previous studies that have found that active sport tourists value some aspects of a destination more than others (da Rosa et al., 2019; Hallman et al., 2015). This study also highlights the ways in which visitors may compartmentalize their experience in a destination. Being sick did not overshadow their entire experience: they still rated aspects of the event (including restaurants), surfing and destination image highly and would recommend Peru for surf kayaking and vacation to others. The study also confirms previous findings that destination image is positively related to sport event participants' future intentions to return to a destination (Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007).

The study findings carry implications for high-risk adventure sport event organizers about the importance of securing high-quality safety/rescue services. Additionally, results highlight the need for clear and timely communication of competition times and results to ease anxiety and allow competitors to adequately prepare for competition. Organizers could also educate competitors before their arrival about food safety in developing countries, which was likely the cause of the illness, because the surf break was not located at a river mouth or sewage outflow. Testing the water quality and sharing the results publicly may be a way for organizers to allay fears of bad ocean water quality and contradict any negative information spread by competitors on social media. The findings also provide insight for tourism providers at sport event destinations: even if something goes wrong at the event, their hospitality can leave a positive impression on competitors, who then recommend the destination to others. Friendly local surfers and a lack of crowds would also be important aspects for surf destination marketers to showcase, in addition to high quality waves, in promotional campaigns.

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