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Thakur, Jatin, "Sports Tourism: An Exploration of Motivations, Experiences and Personal Reflections at the FIFA World Cup 2018 In Russia" (2020). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 58.

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Sports Tourism: An Exploration of Motivations, Experiences and Personal Reflections at the FIFA World Cup 2018 In Russia

Introduction

People now travel to other countries and even continents to see their favorite team/sport. Sports tourism is a growing sector within the tourism as well as the sports industry. Being a football (soccer) fan in a country that has limited football fandom (or fan culture) compared to other games such as hockey or baseball, it is challenging to experience the cultural atmosphere that you would expect in a country that has a significant dominant football fan culture. Experiencing this fandom can be an important part of being a devout follower of a particular game. I was born in a country that is currently ranked 96th in the FIFA national team rankings (FIFA.com, 2018) and has a strong fandom of cricket fans, which meant most of my childhood was spent playing and experiencing the game of cricket. I now reside in Canada, which currently ranks 79th in the FIFA national team rankings (FIFA.com, 2018), and has a very limited football fandom. As a football fan, I have missed the opportunity to experience the football fan-culture and the experience associated with the sport. To gain insight into this experience, I undertook a study involving a visit to Russia to experience the game's (and arguably the world's) biggest event – the FIFA World Cup.

Literature Review

Sports tourism is a sector that is rapidly catching up in the tourism literature. While there is a fair amount of research done on this concept, the literature fails to identify a single definition of sports tourism. For the purposes of this research, the author will use various definitions of sports tourism depending on the paper's varied sections. A significant limitation of the literature in the field of sports tourism is that it has not progressed consistently within the past few years. Most of the research is a few decades old. With this study, the author attempts to contribute to the field of sports tourism. Travel motivations and factors influencing fan attendance are more than one and these will be accordingly referred to in this paper to further the understanding of this study. Definitions of sports tourism, motivating factors and the classifications of the concept provided a background for the focus of the theoretical perspective of this study. Since this paper aims to explore the motivations for sports tourism and reflect on the personal experiences of the researcher, several concepts and definitions discussed above will be used throughout this paper as deemed appropriate.

Methodology

The theoretical framework is of fundamental importance to any research design. This chapter discusses the approach to the methodology that will be undertaken for this study. It discusses particular research methods used and it will formatively assess the methodology that will examine the research design, validity and reliability, including triangulation, research population and sampling, data collection instrument and type of analysis. Limitations and ethical considerations are also discussed within this chapter. It first explores the mixed methods research paradigm and provides a definition and discussion on the approach followed by the rationale for using this paradigm in this study. It then discusses the design of the approach and the techniques of collection of data. Finally, it discusses the potential limitations and challenges of the mixed methods research approach.

There are various approaches to researching in the field of social sciences. However, the most commonly used frameworks are qualitative method, quantitative method and mixed method. Qualitative method involves analysis of narrative (non-numerical) data through approaches such as ethnography and phenomenological study. Quantitative method involves statistical analysis of the collected data relying on numerical evidence. Mixed method involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods concerning with both types of data.

This paper uses mixed methodology as a tool to study. Mixed methodology concerns with working with other paradigms (qualitative and quantitative) and both types of data (Creswell, 2003). Mixed methods approach is less known compared to other methods because it has emerged as a separate orientation only during the past two decades (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 7). There has been a debate between quantitative and qualitative methods, but it is now widely accepted that both the paradigms can complement one another (Macionis, 2007). Mixed methods approach can be helpful to validate the hypothesis by triangulating the data collected through various methods. Creswell (2003) and Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) argue that while mixed methods are possible, they should be separated so that the strengths of each paradigm can be realized. Even though many scholars have questioned the compatibility of mixed methods approach, it has provided successful outcomes for research. Mixed methods approach is evolving as a distinct methodology in the field of social sciences. This study will use the mixed methods approach.

Results

The analysis of the auto ethnographic data indicates that there are multiple motives for sports tourism. The motivation for traveling for sports related tourism purposes is multidimensional, and not does not appear to be a single attribute (or uni-dimensional). The motivations explored in this study do not need to be prioritized in terms of the order. Each motivation can be equally important and be experienced at a similar time as other/s. Perhaps, the importance (or relevance) of each of the motives can be studied separately.

A total of 74 people were asked to participate in the survey during the data collection period of 6 days. Of these, 7 were not eligible because of incompletely filling out the survey, and 47 declined to participate and the remaining 20 people agreed to complete the survey. This was a response rate of 27.02%. The results of the quantitative study are presented firstly with an overview of the demographic information, secondly the behavioral patterns of tourists, thirdly the motivations, and lastly, the experiences and expectations of sports tourists in the destination.

Conclusion and Discussion

The primary objective of this research was to explore the experience of being a sports tourist at the FIFA World Cup 2018, and understand the motivations and expectations of sports tourists. This research identified and categorized the motivations and experiences of sports tourists, described and discussed the tourism experiences and the behaviors of sports tourists in the destination. This chapter reviews the results of this research, presented in the previous chapters, and attempts to present them in an articulately synthesized manner so as to elevate the convenience of understanding the findings. This research also attempted to position the concept of sports tourism through a mixed methods technique of study. The reflective approach to the study provided an opportunity to understand the motivations and experiences of sports tourism through a

constructivist approach, while the quantitative part of study allowed for comparison and triangulation of the data from the qualitative study.

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