

What do Participants Like and Dislike About a Small-Scale Active Sport Tourism Event? Bike Florida 2005

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Small scale recreational/active sport tourism events such as 5K runs, triathlons and soccer tournaments are becoming more pervasive. Awareness about the variety of community and participant benefits that might accrue from organizing such events (Higham, 1998) is also growing. This study focuses on one such event from the participant's perspective. Research on participant benefits has focused on such concepts as subcultural identity (Green & Chalip, 1998), the benefits sought and satisfied by participation (Papadimitriou et al., 2005), involvement level in the sport and their experiences at the event (McGehee, et al., 2003; Ryan & Lockyer, 2002). Bike Florida Inc. is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote safe cycling in the State of Florida. Each spring, Bike Florida sponsors a week-long, fully supported bicycle tour of about 1000 participants. Our previous analysis suggests that these participants want a physically active experience that encourages socializing and exposes them to new experiences. However, from an event management perspective it is increasingly necessary to find out more about participants so that events can be managed to maximize participant satisfaction. Moreover, with an event that draws many participants in mid and later life there is a need to better understand the participation patterns and experiences associated with such activity choices among middle aged and older individuals. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine and compare the benefits cyclists sought from participating in Bike Florida 2005 with the reported outcome of their experiences in the form of their favorite and least favorite aspects of the ride. Moreover, did their experiences differ by life stage and gender? Accordingly the following research questions were answered: 1 a&b What aspects of the ride did participants like the most or the least? 2 a&b. Is there a relationship between benefits sought and the favorite and least favorite aspects? 3 a&b. Do the favorite and least favorite aspects of the ride differ by life stage or by gender?

Method: Data collection began a week after the Bike Florida 2005 tour ended. The data were collected using a voluntary online survey consisting of fixed choice and partially open-ended questions (102 participants without internet access received the questionnaire via mail). The questionnaire consisted of six sections, for this study benefits sought, demographics, and two open-ended questions (favorite and least favorite parts) were used. The final sample size was 499, with a total response rate of 47%. The mean age was 57.5 years and frequencies showed that 95.9% (N= 417) of the participants were aged 40 and above. Previous research has suggested that life stage is an important factor in examining participation in sport and active sport tourism (McPherson, 1984), thus a decision was made to focus the analysis on the 417 participants who were aged 40 and above. Thus, the study examined two macro seasons of life (Levinson, 1978), middle adulthood ages 40-59 (n=221; 53%) and late adulthood 60-88 years (n= 196; 47%). Of the 417 participants included in the analysis, 58.7% were males and 41.3% were females. The open-ended questions were coded into categories and each response was assigned a number and entered into the database. The data were analyzed using frequencies, cross tabulations, and factor analysis.

Results: Responses to the "most favorite part" question yielded 8 categories: Everything (2.3%); Activity (34.2%); Weather (7.4%); Places, nature and scenery (28.5%); Socializing (10.4%); Route (12.1%); food (3.2%) and the Staff, organization and facilities (1.5%). Their least favorite aspects yielded 9 categories: None (7.6%); Waiting in line (7.1%); Services (10.0%); Weather (23.1%); the route and causeway bridge (21.8%); Facilities (7.9%); Food (6.6%); Activities (4.7%); and Others (11.3%). A factor analysis of the benefit sought scale yielded 6 factors: Socializing (.90); Physical fitness (.81); Seeking knowledge and new experiences (.79); Excitement (.73); Skill improvement (.76); and Relaxation (.69). Crosstabs between benefits sought and the 8 favorite categories revealed: Those who were seeking a social experience reported a specific activity (31.1%) as their favorite aspect of the ride followed by scenery (29%), socializing (12.6%) and the route (12.6%). For those seeking physical fitness, activity was their most favorite (38.9%), followed by scenery (24.6%) and route (12.8%). Those Seeking Knowledge and New Experience favored activity (35.4%), scenery (26.3%), and route (12.9%). Those seeking Excitement, activity (34.3%), scenery (25.4%), socializing (13%), and the route (11.2%) were their favorites. Those seeking Skill Improvement reported activity (36.8%), scenery (24.5%), route (12.9%) and socializing (11%) as favorites. For those seeking Relaxation activity (36.5%), scenery (27.8%), route (12%) were favored. When analyzed by life stage, those in middle adulthood identified an activity as their favorite part (33.5%), followed by scenery (28.2%), socializing (12.3%) and route (10.1%). Those in later life also noted that activities were their favorite part of the ride (35%), followed by scenery (28.8%) and route (14.7%). When analyzed by gender, men and women equally identified activities as their favorite aspects of the ride, followed by scenery route, socializing, and weather. Crosstabs between benefits sought and the 9 least favorite categories revealed: those seeking a social experience, the weather (24.5%) and the route (22.4%) and other (13.5%) were their least favorite parts. Among those seeking physical fitness,

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the weather (21%), route (21%) and others (11.3%) were least favored. For those seeking new experiences and knowledge, the weather (20.1%), route (18.6%), and others (13.9%) were their least favorite parts. Among those seeking excitement, the route (21.5%), weather (16%), services and facilities (11%) and others (11.7%) were least favored. Those who wanted skill improvement, the route (20.4%), weather (17.6%), other (13.4%), and facilities (10.6%) were least favored. For those wanting a relaxing experience the weather (23.7%), the route (23.2%), services (12.5%) and others (11.2%) were their least favorite. In terms of life stage, those in later life (LA) were slightly more likely to cite weather as their least favorite aspect (MA 20.9%; LA 25.9%) followed by the route (MA 20.9%; LA 22.9%). More in MA cited services (MA 13%; LA 6%) and others (MA 13%; LA 9%) as their least favorite parts. More LA individuals tended to complain about the length of a ride. Men and women equally noted that the weather was their least favorite aspect and slightly more men disliked the route.

Discussion: Activity and scenery were the aspects of the ride identified as their most favorite parts. The route and socializing were the next favorite categories. Conversely, the weather and the route in particular were identified as the least favorite aspects. Irrespective of benefits sought, gender and life stage there is little difference in their favorite (activity, route and socializing) and least favorite parts (weather and route) of the ride. Thus, it appears that direct experience rather than benefits sought or motivation may be more influential in determining experience and satisfaction levels with an event. Additionally, situational factors like weather or unexpected events on the route seem to be critical factors in influencing participant's experiences and satisfactions with an event as is demonstrated by the weather in particular being singled out as a least favorite part, but being cited by some as their favorite part. Having the chance to be physically active and to cycle is the primary focus of the Bike Florida experience and was reported consistently as one of the main reasons for taking part and rated consistently as their most favorite part. It is suggested that in the future event managers should protect the integrity of the core activity (cycling) by working to alleviate the parts of the experience the participants identified as their least favorite including choosing routes that shield the riders from the wind and traffic and having a backup plan if adverse weather conditions occur.