

Factors that Influence International Fans' Intention to Travel to the United States for Sport Tourism

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A study, Tourism 2020 Vision, conducted by the World Tourism Organization (2001a) forecasted that the number of international tourist arrivals to the Americas is expected to reach 282.3 million in 2020. Among the development of international tourist arrivals, sport tourism is one of the major developments in the past decades that has continued growing (World Tourism Organization, 2001b). The combination of sport and tourism has become a popular choice among sports fans and tourists as they can participate in sporting events and enjoy other tourist activities. Not only do sports tourists take advantage of sport tourism, but governments and cities also benefit from sport tourism in terms of generating revenue for and awareness of the community. For example, the 2007 London Grand Départ of the Tour de France brought £88 million (approximately US\$129.77 million) into London's economy-money spent by spectators, teams, and race organizers in London during the race weekend (Sport Business, 2008).

International sports fans' interest in visiting sports destinations might be attributed to various reasons: watching sporting events, supporting players from their native countries, viewing stadiums and facilities, or participating in related or leisure activities. Although international fans have shown interest in sport tourism, some factors might restrain their intention in outbound travel for sport tourism. Fans' concerns might include long travel distances (especially traveling across continents), language barriers (Chen & Hsu, 2000), safety of destinations (Kim, Guo, & Agrusa, 2005; McKercher & Hui, 2003; Tsai, 2006), unfamiliarity with the destinations (Wu, 2004), and travel cost (Chen & Hsu, 2000; Kim et al., 2005). Furthermore, the cost of travel and economic reasons are critical factors for international sports fans to travel outbound.

As the sports industry has become a global business, sport management professionals have opportunities to work with international sports fans. As a result, the major purpose of this study was to investigate factors that might influence international sports fans' intention to travel to the United States for sport tourism. Sport tourism includes broad concepts, this study focuses on sporting event tourism where fans travel outbound for sporting events as spectators. A survey with 49 questions was distributed to 500 college students in various majors and years of study who were enrolled during the 2008 academic year at five colleges and universities in Taiwan.

This study showed that the factor of respondents' interest in sports played a critical role in the students' intention to travel overseas for sport tourism. The results of exploratory factor analysis show that six major factors (cost and ease of arranging travel plans, interest in professional sports, different atmosphere and cultural experience, interest in travel, experience of watching live sporting events and viewing facilities, and the chance to see Asian players or famous U.S. players and coaches in the games) are the major factors that influence international fans' intention to travel to the United States for sport tourism. In regard to trip arrangement, the participants in this study indicated that they preferred to spend a shorter period of time (e.g., 1–3 days) on sport tourism for a 14-day trip. The results of this study will be helpful for sport management professionals to understand international fans' motivations and expectations for sport tourism. This information will also help destination marketers to forecast sport tourism according to international sports fans' preferences and make decisions on marketing strategies and planning.