

Adventure Sports Tourism in Northern Cyprus: Extreme, Lifestyle and Alternative Sports

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Abstract

It is suggested in the literature that we have entered a postmodern era with a growth in new sports associated with spontaneity and playfulness as opposed to the rationalised and standardised characteristics of many traditional sports. Many of these new sports have been categorised as being alternative, lifestyle or extreme sports and are known to have fewer rules and regulations than conventional sports. Alternative sports have experienced a significant increase in popularity with many of them being adventure sports. For example; surfing, wakeboarding and mountain biking. The global sporting landscape is now comprised of participants who intentionally pursue experiences of risk and danger (e.g., snowboarding, bungee jumping, cave diving, parkour, mountaineering, free running, rock climbing). This study aims to contribute towards understanding the extent that international tourists have overlooked Northern Cyprus as a destination of choice for these new sport forms and their potential to revitalize its adventure sports tourism industry. A thriving sports tourism industry can create income, employment, civic pride, and cultural rejuvenation and education opportunities.

Key words: Northern Cyprus, sport tourism, new sports, alternative, lifestyle, extreme, income, employment

Introduction and Scope

Boosting sports tourism in Northern Cyprus has the potential to create new business and economic opportunities across several sectors (Alipour, et al., 2011). Increasing the number of people who travel to the island to pursue sport can raise its profile on a global scale. Increased sports participation in the region can have a direct impact on the health and fitness of communities in the area (Alipour, et al., 2011). The increase in variety and number of new sport forms around the world presents new commercial opportunities for Northern Cyprus. Many of these new activities are considered as being culturally lived experiences where emphasis is on taking part. Participants are often highly trained, highly organised and thrive on the adrenaline participation produces. Participants of parkour and free running often post videos of themselves jumping from high buildings, scaling walls and jumping between handrails on the self-broadcast website, YouTube. Willig (2008) in her research with eight extreme participants discovered that skydivers tended to focus on the social (camaraderie) aspects of the experience. Wheaton (2000) suggests that windsurfing participants value support and camaraderie above winning and competition which opposes the characteristics of professionalised dominant sports.

Parkour, free running, off road safari and bungee jumping are some of the newly emerged sports that present exciting opportunities to reinvigorate sport tourism and the economy within Northern Cyprus. For example, parkour weekends away could be made available through the internet on parkour forums. Lifestyle sport (e.g., windsurfing) packaged holidays could be advertised through travel agents. Mountain bike adventure holidays could be arranged that emphasise ideal environmental and weather conditions. Holidays that offer a range of extreme activities could be promoted that emphasise a sense of escape and personal discovery. Many of these activities are known to require extraordinary levels of personal achievement that when accomplished provide memorable lifetime experiences (Rinehart and Sydnor, 2003).

Hypothesis

H1 International tourists visiting Northern Cyprus do not know that lifestyle; extreme and alternative sports have significantly grown in number and variety across Europe and around the world.

H2 International tourists visiting Northern Cyprus have not recognised that new lifestyle; extreme and alternative sports have the potential to boost sport tourism and the economy.

H3 International tourists visiting Northern Cyprus have overlooked the naturally conducive environmental conditions that exist in the region for participation in lifestyle, alternative and extreme sports.

H4 International tourists visiting Northern Cyprus are not aware of the potential that media outlets provide in promoting packaged holidays for those who engage in lifestyle, extreme and alternative sports.

Literature Review: Sport Tourism

Ruskin (1987) suggests that sports tourism refers to patterns of behaviour whereby people during certain periods of the year actively engage in leisure pursuits. This can be in attractive outdoor natural settings or indoors using highly advanced sport facilities. Weed and Bull (2004) comment that sports tourism became embedded within society. This viewpoint is corroborated by Urry (2002), who explains that sports tourism is an important aspect of modern life. Weed and Bull (2004) argue that sport and travel are central aspects of people's lives. Globalization and commercialism have spurred the growth of sports tourism on a worldwide scale (Ottevanger, 2007). Schwark (2007) suggests that it was the middle of the nineteenth century when a relationship between tourism and the sporting industry was established. Redmond (1990), Weed and Bull (1997), Standeven and De Knop (1999) have noted the interdependent nature of tourism and sport. According to Weed and Bull (2004) a significant percentage of all vacations have sport as the main reason for the trip with almost fifty per cent of all domestic holidays including an element of participation in sport.

World Tourism Organisation statistics indicate that world tourism arrivals are forecasted to grow at about four per cent per annum with expected figures being one point six billion by 2020. They expect global tourist spending to reach two trillion United States dollars with a growth of six point seven percent per annum (WTO, 2001). Sports tourism is a large contributor to this growth and is one of the fastest growing sub sectors of world tourism (WTO, 2001). Boli and Li (2004) note that there are different classifications of sports tourism that each focus on distinct sports cultural experiences (e.g., competitive, holiday, and extreme sports tourism). Hinch and Higham (2011) divide sport tourist markets and participants into active or passive categories. They explain that tourists in the active group travel because they wish to engage in sports activities. They add that destinations are often selected according to the quality of the sports facilities and the regions resources. The passive groups are considered to be in the same category as tourists who visit destinations to watch a specific sporting event (Hinch and Higham, 2011). Hinch and Hill (2011) observe that specific global processes impact upon occurrences in sports tourism. For example; climate change, the increasing role of social media and ageing populations. They explain that the development of communication technology has changed the ways in which individuals consume sports. Hinch and Higham, (2011) suggest that social media can raise awareness on new sports activities and stimulate sport tourism.

Literature Review: Extreme Sports

Extreme sports are associated with risk, unconventional rules and techniques that differ from team sports (Puchan, 2005). Participation usually requires speed, height and a high level of physical exertion that if not effectively managed can result in physical injury and sometimes death (Rinehart and Sydnor, 2003).

Extreme athletes incorporate Olympic ideals of faster, higher and stronger on an individual basis and usually participate outdoors at their own pace. The sports are embedded with values of fierce individualism, defiance, alienation and inner focus (Frederick and Ryan, 1993). Tomlinson and Leigh (2004) explain that extreme sports involve dangerous actions that transcend the limits of human existence. Extreme sport participants often distance themselves from the standards of the dominant traditional sport culture. Their sense of individuality is reaffirmed by partaking in training sessions that are non-hierarchical in comparison to traditional sports (Wheaton and Beal, 2003). Wheaton and Beal (2003) state that UK windsurfing is a marginal extreme sport with participants acquiring a sense of exclusivity by being different. Wheaton (2000) suggests that windsurfing participants value support and camaraderie above winning and competition which opposes the characteristics of professionalised dominant sports. Wheaton (2004) suggests that sports like this are growing in number as a direct opponent to the professionalisation of sport. O'Grady (2012) discovered in her research with parkour participants that improved mental efficiency and strength were associated with conquering personal obstacles, self-assurance and confidence building. Her research emphasised the importance of personal development as well as improvements to physical ability. A few qualitative studies have been completed on the meaning and motivation for participation in extreme sports. For example, Larkin and Griffiths (2004) analysed the accounts of five bungee-jumpers on their involvement in the sport and Celsi *et al.* (1993) conducted an ethnographic study of skydiving. In both studies the participants benefited emotionally and socially by mastering the activity which lead to an increase in confidence and self-esteem. Willig (2008) conducted phenomenological research into the experience of participating in extreme sport with eight individuals.

She interviewed a male and female who were actively involved in variety of extreme sports, three male skydivers, two male mountaineers and a female mountaineer. In her study participants talked about how extreme activities grounded them and got rid of negative energy and that this lifted them to another level. Willig (2008) discovered that skydivers tended to focus on the social aspects of the experience whereas for the mountaineers it was flow (emotional benefit) that was more central. Willig (2008) suggests that participation in extreme sport is a way of extending the range of life experiences which ultimately enriches the quality of life for a participant. She suggests that the personality trait has only a modest influence on whether a person will participate in dangerous physical activities. Studies into personality focus on the relationship between the practice of extreme sport and certain personality traits. They suggest that extreme sport practitioners prefer novel and high risk activities (Diehm and Armatas, 2004; Franques *et al.*, 2003; Shoham *et al.*, 1998; Rowland, *et al.*, 1986). Most of these studies compare scores obtained from experimental and control groups using Zuckermans Sensation Seeking Scale (SSS) to validate their findings. Zuckerman (1979) defines the search for sensation as, "the need for varied, novel and complex sensations and experiences and the willingness to take physical and social risks for the sake of such an experience" (Zuckerman, 1979, p. 10).

Literature Review: Adventure and Recreation Sports Tourism

The word recreation has Latin origins and means "restoration and recovery" (Bammel and Burrus, 1996). Participation in recreation can reduce the pressure and fatigue that excessive workplace demands often cause (Goodale and Witt, 1980). The word recreation conjures up an image of playing sports and having fun whilst temporarily forgetting responsibilities and duties. Recreation is an activity or experience that a participant freely chooses for the purpose of deriving pleasure (Kraus, 1990). Chang (2001) suggests that recreational sports are conducted during free time to satisfy mental and physical needs by individuals or groups and are not job related. Kelly (1996) explains that recreation has the characteristics of enthusiasm, freedom and intrinsic satisfaction. Chen (1995) notes that participation in well planned and organised physical activity can develop mental and physical health. Lai (2000) comments that the purpose of recreation is to maintain and improve physical fitness through leisure activities. Adventure and recreation sports tourism provides excitement, exploration and the development of new personal skills for participants who overcome an element of risk (e.g., mountaineering, mountain biking, sailing, surfing). Adventure as a recreational choice often provides participants with an opportunity to explore the world in pursuit of their ambitions (Weed and Bull, 1997). They will experience new cultures, values, beliefs and benefit a country's economy when they spend money during their visit. Adventure tourism is the development of these activities into structured lucrative business opportunities (e.g., adventure packaged holidays). Alternative sport forms are those sports that differ significantly from conventional sports. The concept of lifestyle sport refers to the personal meaning an individual associates with the activity (Wheaton, 2004).

New sport activities are often informal whilst at the same time participants are fully absorbed in the activity. For example participants maintain a childlike and playful approach when in their environments whilst practicing parkour (Ameel and Tani, 2011). The participants frequently use the words playground to describe how they perceive the built environment. They emphasise the playful and lucid nature of parkour in that participation reveals their inner child. Through playful and emotional interaction with the environment parkour participants claim their sense of space within the city and creatively use the obstacles, streets and buildings that surround them (Atkinson, 2009). Participation recreates urban space into a place of free movement and play amongst the architectural obstacles and its inhabitants. Rawlinson and Guralda (2011) suggest that parkour is concerned with creative potential and testing the spirit of mankind. Atkinson (2009); Stevens (2007) and Geyh (2006) emphasise the lucid nature of parkour. Geyh (2006) comments that parkour transforms an environment into a place of free play. It is clear in the literature that participation increases physical fitness and that participants work out regularly in the gym to keep physically fit. Participants also become more aware of their diet and a need to eat healthy foods (O'Grady, 2012). Theories of health behaviour within the health psychology domain suggest that good health is a globally shared desire and that people are motivated by the pursuit of health and longevity.

Sport Tourism in Northern Cyprus

Northern Cyprus has a Mediterranean climate with crystal clear sea, hot dry summers and mild winters which makes it an ideal location for sports tourists (Katircioglu et. al., 2007). It boasts an average of three hundred and twenty sunny days each year and is environmentally one of the healthiest regions in the world. Sport tourists can expect beautiful sunrises, sunsets and a climate that can accommodate most extreme, lifestyle or alternative sports. For example; snorkeling, bungee jumping, gliding, hand gliding, caving, mountain biking, speed sailing, outdoor climbing, skateboarding, scuba diving, barefoot water skiing, cliff-diving, surfing, free-diving, jet-skiing, open water swimming, powerboat racing, yacht racing, kayaking, windsurfing and kite-surfing. People who live in Northern Cyprus are proud of its history and beautiful setting with its many historical and cultural monuments. For example; Bellapais Abbey, Buffavento Castle, St Hilarion Castle, Kyrenia Castle, Sourp Magar Monastery and the Folk Art museum, (Katircioglu et.al., 2007). Visitors to the island can witness sporting events that are often held in one of its major towns. Kyrenia is a popular town that is located at the centre of the northern coast with visitors being drawn to its pretty horseshoe shaped harbor (Katircioglu et.al., 2007). It is set in a breathtaking heavily mountainous region that has spectacular sea views, hotels and beaches (Katircioglu et.al., 2007). Visitors can visit the city of Famagusta that is situated on the south east coast of Northern Cyprus. It is rich in architecture from the Venetian period when it was fortified against the invading Turks and is now the second largest city in Northern Cyprus.

Sport tourists who visit Famagusta will experience its historical buildings, Venetian city walls, Othello's tower, ruined buildings, mosques and museums. Lefkosa is the largest city with the largest port which trades internationally in the export of Turkish Cypriot produce (Katircioglu et. al., 2007). The city's modern road network makes it easily accessible from other major towns and cities on the island (Katircioglu et. al., 2007).

Sport tourists who choose Northern Cyprus as their destination for sports participation will have easy access to Lefkosa (Katircioglu et. al., 2007). This city is known by several names including; Lefkosa, Nicosia or Lefkosia. Lefkosa has been the capital of Cyprus since the 7th century with buildings, monasteries and churches that were built during the city's long history (Katircioglu et.al. 2007). There are ancient sights in Lefkosa and a large art and cultural center. Visitors to Northern Cyprus can experience Guzelyurt along the North West Coast that is said to have been inhabited since the Bronze Age. The Archaeology and Nature museum and St. Mama's monastery can provide hours of fun and entertainment (Katircioglu et. al., 2007). Guzelyurt is considered to be the citrus growing centre of Northern Cyprus.

Methodology

A quantitative research methodology was adhered to for this study with respondents being randomly selected from international tourists visiting Northern Cyprus. The researchers wanted to gain insight into whether they were aware of the growth of new sports around the world and the potential impact this could have on sports tourism in Northern Cyprus (Katircioglu et. al., 2007).

After careful consideration it was agreed that questionnaires would be an appropriate way to obtain information from high numbers of people (Creswell, 1994). It was realised that the success of any designed questionnaire was dependent upon its construction. This meant that any questions asked had to be appropriate and in the right order.

Having established the aims and objectives of this study meant that it was possible to build the questionnaire around them. This enabled the researchers to identify any unnecessary questions and to focus on those questions that significantly contributed towards achieving the aims and objectives of the study (Gratton and Jones, 2004). All options were considered in relation to open, closed, yes/no and multiple choice questions with the ultimate aim being to construct a questionnaire that captured accurate beliefs, feelings and opinions (Creswell, 1994). The researchers recognised that standardised answers to questions would aid in the compilation of data. To check questionnaire design ten were administered to respondents as part of a pilot study. This provided the main study with a knowledge base from which the researchers could work. One hundred and sixty face to face questionnaires were conducted for the main study. Each questionnaire was presented to the respondent orally. This enabled the researchers to use detailed questions and it provided an opportunity to build rapport with the respondent that would increase response rates (Gratton and Jones, 2004). The only requirement being that the respondent was able to read and understand the question and be able to answer them. The aim was to design the questions in a logical manner with one leading on to the next. For example, beginning with the factual and less sensitive questions and progressing to questions on behaviour and attitudes (Creswell, 1994).

It was important when constructing the questionnaire that any statements used were understandable to people from different backgrounds and cultures (Gratton and Jones, 2004). This required that any words used were easily understandable to all educational levels and spelling and grammar was accurate. The researchers aimed to keep words simple with minimal technical language to ensure that the meaning of each question was clear and to avoid misunderstanding (Creswell, 1994). The researchers realised that the phrasing of words would influence a respondents answers. The intention was to conduct the questionnaire in a conversational manner and to not make assumptions about the respondents (Gratton and Jones, 2004). The researchers considered the questionnaire as being an inexpensive, quick and easily analysed method of obtaining the required data. Each questionnaire had nineteen questions with seven of the questions being demographic in nature. Some of the questions included:

Do you participate in an extreme, lifestyle or alternative sport on a regular basis?

Yes

No

Are you aware of an organised group that practice extreme, lifestyle or alternative sports in the mountains in Northern Cyprus?

Yes

No

Have you ever seen a television program on extreme, lifestyle or alternative sports in Northern Cyprus?

Yes

No

Have you ever seen an extreme, lifestyle or alternative sports packaged holiday advertisement on the internet for participation in Northern Cyprus?

Yes

No

It was agreed that the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) was an appropriate data management tool for the one hundred and sixty respondents in this study. The researchers considered data analysis as being a critical aspect of the research design along with initial data entry (Gratton and Jones, 2004). Emphasis was on ensuring that data was entered correctly so that effective analysis could be conducted. The spreadsheet format of SPSS maximised the consistency of the results.

The Findings

It was discovered that fifty nine percent of those questioned were under the age of fifty one and that fifty three percent of those questioned were female (Gratton and Jones, 2004). Sixty five percent of those questioned were European with only thirty three percent being Turkish.

Sixty five percent of those questioned were in full time employment. It was discovered that eighty four percent travelled abroad once a year with six percent traveling less than once a year. One hundred percent of those questioned stated that they were aware of a growth in extreme, lifestyle and alternative recreational activities across Europe and around the world (Wheaton, 2004).

Ninety six percent of those questioned did not participate in any of the activities on a regular basis with four percent participating in some of the activities on a regular basis. Ninety nine percent of the respondents were aware of organized groups that practiced extreme, lifestyle and alternative sports in the mountainous regions of Northern Cyprus. All of those questioned believed that Northern Cyprus would be a destination of choice for those who participate in extreme, lifestyle and alternative sports (Katircioglu et. al., 2007). Ninety nine percent of those questioned had seen a television program based on one or more of the activities in Northern Cyprus. All of those questioned had heard a program on the radio in Northern Cyprus dedicated to extreme, lifestyle, and alternative sports. Ninety five percent of respondents had been involved in arranging a holiday advertisement for the activities on the internet. Ninety six percent had seen extreme, lifestyle or alternative sports packaged holiday advertisements on the internet for participation in Northern Cyprus. All of the respondents were aware of the current political climate in Northern Cyprus and felt that the potential of these newly emerged physical activities to revitalise a region had been somewhat overlooked (Katircioglu et. al., 2007). Ninety four percent of those questioned believed that advertisement campaigns aimed at both potential and current participants would significantly increase sport tourism in Northern Cyprus. Ninety nine percent of respondents stated that these new sport forms were highly creative and that participants would respond most favourably to innovative and exciting advertising campaigns. Ultimately the respondents believed that not enough was currently being done to maximise the potential of extreme, lifestyle and alternative sports to reinvigorate sport tourism within the leisure sector of Northern Cyprus (Katircioglu et. al., 2007).

Conclusion and Future Development

It was hypothesized that most tourists visiting Northern Cyprus were not aware that lifestyle, extreme and alternative sports have significantly grown in number and variety across Europe and around the world (Wheaton, 2004). Yet all of the one hundred and sixty respondents were fully aware of the growth in these new sports. This discovery suggests that international tourists visiting Northern Cyprus are aware of the changes taking place in the global sporting marketplace (Katircioglu et. al., 2007). It was hypothesized that international tourists visiting Northern Cyprus have not recognised that new lifestyle; extreme and alternative sports have the potential to boost sport tourism and the economy. Yet all of those questioned expressed the viewpoint that inadequate steps had been taken to maximise the potential that these new sports have in increasing sports tourism within the leisure sector of Northern Cyprus (Katircioglu et. al., 2007). It was hypothesised that international tourists visiting Northern Cyprus are not aware of the potential for media outlets to promote packaged holidays for those who engage in lifestyle, extreme and alternative sports. (Wheaton, 2004).

Yet most of those questioned had seen advertisements for these sports on all forms of media outlets. Most respondents had been involved in arranging a holiday advertisement for the activities on the internet and had seen extreme, lifestyle or alternative sports packaged holiday advertisements online for participation in Northern Cyprus. This discovery highlights the point that many are aware of the growth of these activities and the potential they offer as part of sports tourism in Northern Cyprus. It was hypothesised that international tourists visiting Northern Cyprus have not fully recognised the naturally conducive environmental conditions that exist in the region for participation in lifestyle, alternative and extreme sports (Katircioglu et. al., 2007). Yet all of the respondents believed that Northern Cyprus is a destination of choice for those seeking special interest forms of tourism (e.g., lifestyle, extreme and alternative sports). The respondents expressed the desire for the leisure sector of Northern Cyprus to seize the opportunity to fully develop special interest forms of tourism in the region. All of those questioned were of the opinion that an updated sporting infrastructure needs to be implemented to attract and accommodate those seeking adventure and new forms of physical activity (Alipour, et al., 2011). This needs to be combined with strategically planned advertising campaigns within all media outlets to attract potential special interest tourists and spectators to increase income from investors and visitor spending, as part of building adventure sport tourism in Northern Cyprus.

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