

# The Influence of Sports Events on Tourists' Destination Choice Behaviour

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## Abstract

This study conducted to examine the influence of sports events on tourists' destination choice behaviour in China. The questionnaire was distributed both online and offline in the area surrounding City-A. The author through personal networks, including family and friends, as well as via WeChat group emails primarily disseminated online questionnaires. The findings reveal that 57.8% of respondents expressed a greater likelihood of attending large sports events, while 59.9% indicated an increased intention to travel to City-A in the future. The occurrence of large-scale sports events has played a significant role in establishing City A's brand and has contributed to fostering a sports-oriented cultural environment, which is appealing to tourists. The study also highlights that the decision-making process regarding tourists' destination choices influenced by the presence of large-scale sports events, affecting tourists' behavioural patterns in selecting destinations.

**Keywords:** Sports Events, Tourist, Choice Behaviour, Destination.

## Introduction

Sports tourism destinations are locations where tourists are motivated by and fulfil their desire for sports culture and the spirit of sports (Choy & Yeung, 2023). These destinations offer a comprehensive range of services, including accommodation, transportation, food, travel, and shopping, aimed at providing a seamless experience for visitors (Mustafa, Lee, & Galloway, 2023). Essentially, sports event tourism destinations represent a new manifestation of the integration between tourism and sports events. They are regional tourism of spatial forms, which facilitate coordinated development. They have complex systems involving multiple factors, with the tourism destination serving as the primary carrier (PJ et al., 2023). Local governments often actively promote the sports industry and seek to host sports events to enhance overall benefits by integrating these events with tourism (Downward, Rasciute, & Muniz, 2020; Finlay, Tinnion, & Simpson, 2022). The ultimate goal of sustainable development in sports event tourism destinations is to achieve a balance between the development and utilisation of tourism resources and the needs of social and economic development (Liu, Yin, & Zhang, 2022).

A critical approach to achieving this goal is the effective management of stakeholders in sports event tourism destinations through coordination and cooperation (Rauf et al., 2021). Given the diverse interests and demands of various stakeholders, conflicts are inevitable, as outlined by the principle of universality of contradictions (Chang,

Choong, & Ng, 2020; Nikas & Poulaki, 2021). Despite these conflicts, stakeholders share common positive goals, albeit from different perspectives (Silva et al., 2021). The sustainable development of sports event tourism destinations relies on recognising these stakeholders as interdependent entities, presenting numerous challenges and puzzles in promoting such sustainable development (Bichler & Pikkemaat, 2021; Cooper & Alderman, 2021; Yang et al., 2021). Previous literature has emphasised the significance of sports tourism in enhancing the economy of modern countries (Perez-Aranda, González Robles, & Urbistondo, 2021). Boo, Wang and Kim (2021) discussed how sports tourism could reliably improve destination performance.

Similarly, Sato et al. (2021) noted that sports tourism benefits when visitors motivated by both sports and tourism. Manasbay et al. (2021) highlighted the role of sports tourism in influencing tourists' destination choices. Despite these contributions, gaps remain in the literature regarding the impact of sports events on tourism destination promotion (Xu, Yang, & Ren, 2020). Thus, further research needed to address these gaps and provide a clearer understanding of this phenomenon. This study aims to explore the impact of sports events on tourists' destination choice behaviour in China. Data collection involved distributing an online questionnaire, primarily through the author's personal network and WeChat group emails. The findings reveal that hosting large-scale sports events has contributed to establishing City A's brand and fostering a sports-oriented cultural atmosphere, which attracts tourists.

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Additionally, the study highlights that the decision-making process regarding destination choice influenced by the presence of large-scale sports events. The remainder of the paper structured into a review of literature, methodology, findings, conclusion, and implications. Future research directions discussed in the concluding section.

## Review of Literature

Sports event tourism is an emerging industry that combines sports events with tourism enterprises (González-García et al., 2022). It plays a crucial role in stimulating local economic growth and enhancing a city's popularity. As the administrative authority for sports event tourism destinations, local governments must fulfil their roles effectively (Pedauga et al., 2022). Policymakers should employ economic, legal, and other measures to develop sports event tourism through planning, policy formulation, and investment attraction (Liang et al., 2022). It is essential for them to introduce policies that encourage event tourism enterprises and actively promote the sustainable development of sports event tourism destinations (Houge Mackenzie, Hodge, & Filep, 2023). Incentive measures can yield certain performance improvements and benefits while boosting public credibility (Moradi et al., 2023). However, such subsidies also pose a financial burden on government expenditures. For event tourism enterprises, maximising profits is crucial for achieving long-term stability (Cheng, Zhang, & Zhang, 2023). Consequently, the interplay between government incentives and the economic benefits generated by event tourism enterprises becomes a focal point of interest (Morfoulaki et al., 2023).

Tourists attending sports events represent the largest stakeholder group in the development of sports event tourism destinations (Heebkhoksung, Rattanawong, & Vongmanee, 2023). They are integral to the activities at these destinations, drive the market economy, and are the focus of services provided by other stakeholder groups (Martins et al., 2022). As consumers, sports event tourists evaluate destinations based on their quality of experience (Tian, Deng, & Yuan, 2023). They seek high-quality sports projects and services. The government, as a key player in development, must address the needs and demands of event tourists within reasonable limits (Sürme, Temizel, & Aslan, 2022). Effective policy implementation requires coordination with various departments and through policy incentives and publicity, the government should encourage event tourism enterprises to offer favourable conditions for event tourists and stimulate consumption (Vrondou, 2023).

Sports event tourism enterprises are organisations or collectives that provide services to event tourists with the aim

of profitability. This includes sports event organisers, stadium operators, and tourism service providers (Dixon, Henry, & Martinez, 2023). As core stakeholders in the sustainable development of sports event tourism destinations, their decision-making is influenced by value orientation (Tuchel et al., 2024), as well as by government policies and the needs of event tourists (Hu, Xu, & Wang, 2022). Tourists, as a key consumer group, increasingly value the additional services provided at sports event destinations, beyond just the sports event itself (Peixoto, Santos, & Sousa, 2023). Consequently, sports event tourism enterprises should enhance their service offerings and quality to meet the diverse material, spiritual, and cultural needs of tourists, stimulate secondary consumption, create chain value, and drive the development of related industries (Papaioannou et al., 2024).

Therefore, the focus of the interaction between stakeholders is on the investment strategies of event tourism enterprises and the consumption levels of event tourists (Van Rheenen & Roberson, 2023). Motseke and Engelbrecht (2022) highlight that sports tourism can boost economic value by attracting visitors from various destinations, enhancing their engagement with sports. Additionally, sports tourism provides opportunities for the public to explore local culture and traditions (Mascarenhas et al., 2021). Herbold, Thees and Philipp (2020) emphasise that sports tourism can invigorate the tourism industry by drawing visitors to different locations. Çetin and Coşkuner (2021) argue that promoting sports tourism significantly affects overall sports performance. Conversely, Yang et al. (2020) suggest that sports tourism fosters mutual understanding between tourists and residents, thereby strengthening community unity. Ito and Higham (2020) advocate for the promotion of sports tourism with logical support to improve tourism performance. Cooper and Alderman (2021) assert that sports tourism contributes significantly to economic value and knowledge sharing. Therefore, a focused approach to sports tourism is essential for enhancing economic value and fostering mutual understanding among sports teams.

## Methodology

The target population for this study comprises potential tourists aged 18 and older, residing outside urban area A, who possess independent decision-making abilities. The survey aims to gather data on the demographic characteristics of these potential tourists and to assess the influence of various factors related to large-scale sports events on their destination selection behaviour. The data collection conducted through a structured questionnaire, which divided into three main sections, encompassing 20 questions. The first section focused on the demographic characteristics of the respondents,

including gender, age, occupation, monthly income, and place of permanent residence. The second section evaluated tourists' perceptions of the sports events they have witnessed in City A. The third section investigated tourists' destination selection behaviour in relation to large-scale sports events.

The survey administered from January 10 to February 15, 2024. Questionnaires were distributed randomly both online and offline in the areas surrounding City A. Online distribution was carried out primarily through mass emails sent by the author to family and friends, and via WeChat groups. The questionnaire designed based on existing research from both domestic and international scholars, integrating their findings and aligning with the study's specific needs. Prior to the survey, the author sought validation for the questionnaire's structure, content, and overall design by consulting eight experts. The feedback was as follows: for the structure of the questionnaire, four experts considered it reasonable, three deemed reasonable, and one regarded it as average. Regarding the content design, three experts found it accurate, four considered accurate, and one judged it as average. In terms of the overall design validity, three experts deemed it effective, four found it effective, and one viewed it as average.

### Data Analysis and Results

Tourist motivation plays a crucial role in influencing destination choice behaviour. Research in the tourism sector highlights that tourists' motivations encompass a range of factors, including the pursuit of stimulation and social interaction, physical and mental relaxation, relief from work pressure, personal development, and a sense of

achievement. Preferences for sports events vary among tourists and large-scale sports events can have diverse impacts on destination choice behaviour. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, human needs progress from basic to higher levels. Once basic needs are satisfied, individuals seek to fulfil higher-level needs. Thus, internal needs drive motivation, which, in turn, propels behaviour. Tourists with varying motivations will select different types of tourism resources and destinations. In the survey, respondents were asked about their travel motivations to City A, specifically regarding five key factors associated with large-scale sports events: the excitement of the sports events in City A, the sports venue architecture, the sports cultural atmosphere, the sports brand image, and the novel experience of attending the games. The results detailed in Table 1. The findings reveal that 60.9% of respondents felt that "a wonderful sports event" aligns with their travel motivation. A significant 81.9% indicated that "the sports venues and buildings in City A" matched their tourism motivation. Additionally, 67.6% of respondents found that "the sports cultural atmosphere in City A" was in line with their travel motivation, and 66.4% believed that "the sports brand image of City A" met their travel needs. Notably, 53.2% of respondents considered "the new life experience of watching the games" as a motivating factor for their travel, even though this factor had a lower proportion compared to others. Overall, the survey suggests that the appealing sports events, impressive sports venues, vibrant sports culture, established sports brand image, and unique experiences associated with attending the games in City A are all significant motivators for tourists. These factors play a positive role in encouraging travel to City A.

Table 1

Statistical Table of the Degree of Conformity between the factors such as wonderful Sports Competitions and Tourists' Motivation to Travel in City A

Impact Actors / Degree of Conformity	Very Consistent	More in Line	Same	Not Consistent	Very non-
	with	with	As	with	compliant
A Wonderful Sports Competition in a City A	27.5%	33.4%	29.5 %	7.7%	2%
Sports Stadium Building in a City A	36.5%	35.4%	23%	3.7%	1.4 %
Sports Culture Atmosphere of a City A	29.1 6%	38.5%	26.7 %	3.9 %	1.8 %
Sports Brand Image of a City A	29.3 %	37.1%	27.9 %	4.7%	1%
Watch the Games and Experience New Life Experiences	20.8 %	32.4 %	35.4 %	7.2%	4.1%

The author also investigated how various inherent factors of City A align with tourists' motivations for travel. The survey results, presented in Table 2, reveal that 57.6% of respondents felt the catering service level in City A was consistent with their travel motivations. Additionally, 73.5% of respondents considered the level of public security in the city to align with their tourism goals. The

overall service level in City A was deemed consistent with travel motivations by 59.9% of respondents, while 65.4% found that the city's tourism resources matched their travel needs. However, the survey also highlighted certain factors where there was a perceived misalignment. Specifically, 34.2% of respondents felt that the tourism price in City A did not align with their motivations for travel. Similarly,

26.7% found that the distance between their permanent residence and City A was inconsistent with their travel objectives. The hospitality of local people seen as misaligned by 25.6% of respondents, and local customs and weather considered inconsistent with their motivations by 15.5% and 11.2% of respondents, respectively. These findings suggest that tourism-related

costs, distance from tourists' residences, local hospitality, customs, and weather may negatively impact tourists' decisions to visit City A. The dissatisfaction with these aspects was notably higher compared to the satisfaction with catering service quality, public security, overall service level, and tourism resources, indicating that these factors could be significant barriers to attracting tourists.

**Table 2**

*Statistical Table of the Degree of Conformity between Factors such as Catering Service Level and Tourists' Motivation to Travel in City A*

<b>Impact Actors / Degree of Conformity</b>	<b>Very Consistent with</b>	<b>More in Line with</b>	<b>Same as</b>	<b>Not Consistent with</b>	<b>Very non-compliant</b>
Food and Beverage Service Level in a City	19.3 %	38.3 %	33.4%	6.9%	2.2%
Public Security Level of a City A	32.4 %	41.1%	24 %	2.2%	0.4%
Service Level of the City A	22.8%	37.16%	34.2%	4.7%	1.2%
Tourism Resources of a City A	31.2%	34.2%	30.5%	2.8%	1.4 %
The Distance between You and the City A	14.5%	16.5%	42.2%	14.7%	12 %
Weather in City A	12%	35%	41.8%	7.3 %	3.9%
Travel Prices in a City A	5.7%	20.2%	39.9%	21.4 %	12.8%
The Customs and habits of A City	8.4 %	24.8%	51.3%	11.8%	3.7%
Local Hospitality of a city A	8.4 %	21 %	45%	17.7 %	7.9%

In [Table 3](#), the survey results concerning how respondents have learned about large-scale sports events in City A reveal that a majority of participants have accessed this information through various media channels. Specifically, respondents reported learning about these events through television, newspapers, the Internet, personal experiences shared by friends, travel agencies, and other sources. The data highlights that television and the Internet are the

predominant sources through which respondents have obtained information about the large-scale sports events in City A. Notably, 69.7% of respondents indicated that television was a key medium for acquiring this information, while 60.7% reported using the Internet to learn about the events. This suggests that these two channels play a crucial role in disseminating information about major sports events to potential tourists.

**Table 3**

*Investigation and Statistics of Tourists' Understanding of the (Large) Sports Events in City A*

<b>Medium</b>	<b>TV</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Internet</b>	<b>Personal Experience of my Friends around me</b>	<b>Travel Agency</b>
Frequency	355	185	309	101	25
Rate	69.7%	36.3%	60.7%	19.8%	4.9%

The results presented in [Table 4](#) indicate that a significant majority of respondents have become aware of the sports events in City A through television (69.7%), the Internet (60.7%), and newspapers (36.3%). This suggests that the hosting of large-scale sports events in City A substantially increases the city's media exposure. As one of China's most economically advanced cities, City A frequently hosts high-profile sports events with considerable international influence, attracting extensive media attention. For example, a dedicated study on the 2002 City-A Tennis Masters revealed that this event garnered substantial coverage from both domestic and international media, resulting in high media exposure metrics. Such extensive

media coverage effectively functions as free advertising for City A, enhancing its visibility. This media presence positively affects both potential tourists who are enthusiastic about sports events and those who are not, as it improves their perception of the large-scale sports events hosted in the city. Regarding the impact of large-scale sports events on the decision-making stage of tourist destination selection, the paper explores how various decision-making methods influence this process. The analysis focuses on different preferences for sports events and sports event tourism, as well as the tourists' awareness of large-scale sports events in City A. For instance, it examines whether tourists who are keen on traveling and

watching games have different decision-making behaviours compared to those who do not share this interest. The survey results and their analysis, as detailed in

Table 4, provide insights into these varied decision-making methods and their implications for tourist destination selection in the context of large-scale sports events.

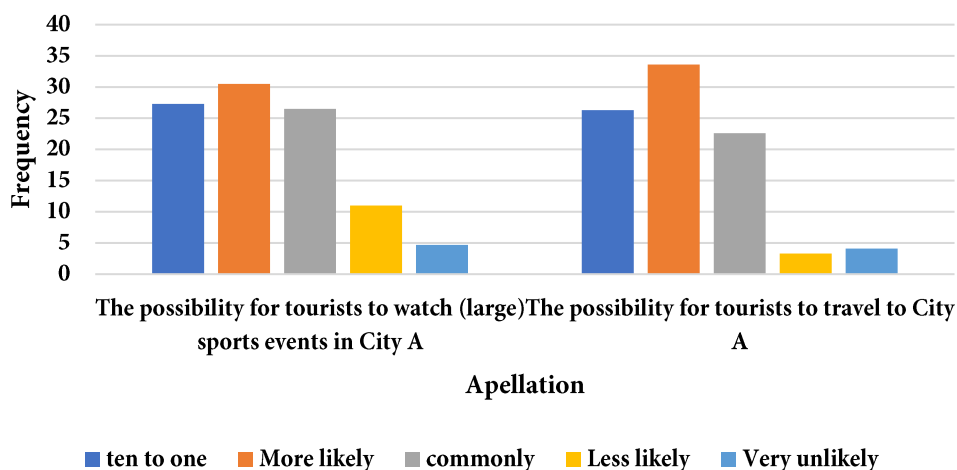
**Table 4**

*Statistical Table of the Decision-Making Mode of Tourist Destination Choice Behaviour*

Appellation	Classify	Frequency Rate	
The Destination Decision Method	Make your own Decision	366	71.9%
	With the help of others (Relatives, Friends, Colleagues, etc.)	143	28.1%
Whether I like to Travel and watch the Games	Hobby	277	54.4%
	Don't like	232	45.6%
Whether you have Friends around you who like to travel and watch Games	have	396	77.8%
	not have	113	22.2%

The decision-making process for selecting tourist destinations primarily influenced by the mode of decision-making employed by the tourists. This mode classified into two categories: "self-decision" and "decision with the assistance of others," such as relatives, friends, or colleagues. According to the survey results, 71.9% of respondents reported that they typically decide on their travel destination independently. In contrast, 28.1% of respondents indicated that they rely on the advice of relatives, friends, or colleagues to make their destination choices. This data highlights a significant distinction in decision-making approaches among tourists, with a predominant reliance on personal judgement in determining travel destinations. The decision-making mode has implications for how tourists respond to the influence of large-scale sports events in City A. Assuming other variables remain constant, the analysis considers three key factors: the mode of decision-making, the tourists' interest in traveling and watching sports, and

the influence of friends who share similar interests. For tourists who make decisions independently, their preferences for travel and sports events are the primary determinants of their destination choice. Conversely, tourists who rely on external advice influenced not only by their own interests but also by the preferences of their friends. This indicates that such tourists are more likely to sway by social recommendations in addition to their personal preferences. Thus, the mode of decision-making significantly affects how large sports events in City-A, influence tourists' destination choices. Tourists, who decided independently primarily influenced by their personal interests in travel and sports, while those who seek advice from others also consider the opinions of their friends, thereby making the decision-making process more collaborative. This distinction underscores the varying impacts of sports events on tourist destination choices depending on the tourists' decision-making strategies.



**Figure 1:** Statistics on the possibility of Tourists coming to A to watch Sports Events (Tourism) in the Future.

The survey results related to the impact of large-scale sports events in City-A, on future tourist intentions are detailed in Figure 1. Respondents were asked two key

questions: "Under the influence of large-scale sports events held in City A, how likely are you to watch (large-scale) sports events in City A in the future?" and "Under the

influence of large-scale sports events held in City A, how likely are you to travel to City A in the future?" The results revealed that 57.8% of respondents expressed a higher likelihood of attending large-scale sports events in City-A in the future, while 59.9% indicated an increased likelihood of travelling to City-A because of these events. These findings illustrate that the presence of significant sports events in City A has a substantial effect on the intentions of potential tourists. The data demonstrates that more than half of the respondents are inclined to both visit City A for sports events and travel there in general, indicating a positive influence of such events on destination choice and tourism intentions.

## Conclusion

The exceptional sports events hosted in City-A, the impressive stadiums constructed for these events, the vibrant sports culture fostered, the established sports brand image of City-A, and the unique experiences gained from attending these events all align with tourists' motivations for travel. These elements collectively contribute to promoting tourism by enhancing the appeal of City-A. The advancement of media networks plays a crucial role in disseminating information about these large-scale sports events. Most people learn about such events through television, the Internet, travel agencies, and other media channels. The cognitive levels of potential tourists outside City-A vary regarding these events, with television and the Internet emerging as the most significant and accessible sources of information. The effective dissemination of information by media and relevant authorities not only boosts the visibility of the events but also enhances City-A's overall profile. This increased media exposure helps to shape a positive perception of both the events and the city, further encouraging potential tourists to consider City-A as a desirable destination.

## Implications

This study underscores that hosting large-scale sport events can significantly enhance a city's media visibility and establish a robust city brand image, while also advancing various aspects such as urban development, tourism resources, and service quality. Large-scale sports events serve as a prominent promotional tool for the city, and to maximize their impact, it is essential to amplify media coverage. Besides traditional media channels such as television and the Internet, there is a need to expand the reach of publicity efforts, increase media exposure, create engaging highlights, and explore innovative promotional strategies. City A, as the largest economic

hub in China with a population of 8 million residents and a substantial transient population, faces considerable challenges related to traffic congestion, especially during major events. Despite its developed transportation infrastructure, including public transit and subways, the influx of participants and spectators for large-scale sports events inevitably strains the city's transportation system. Respondents have expressed concerns about potential traffic issues if they visit City A during such events. Therefore, it is crucial for City A's relevant departments to implement measures that mitigate the negative impact of these events on traffic flow. The high cost of living in City A, coupled with the generally lower income levels of the respondents, highlights disconnect between the city's pricing and the tourism motivations of potential visitors. Given China's socio-economic context, where a significant portion of the population resides in rural areas with relatively low income, the high consumption levels in City A can be a deterrent for many tourists. The influx of athletes, tourists, media personnel, and others during large-scale sports events may exacerbate the demand for accommodation and other services, potentially leading to price increases and resource shortages. Consequently, it is important for relevant authorities to monitor and regulate pricing practices to prevent exploitation. Moreover, large-scale sports events can also pose challenges to the environment and public security. It is essential for City A to address these issues proactively. When selecting sports events to host, the authorities should consider choosing events that resonate with the public, offer widespread appeal, and have affordable ticket prices to attract a diverse range of tourists, including those with moderate and lower consumption levels. Finally, in the context of developing sports events and tourism, both event organisers and tourism service providers must prioritize high-quality service. Tourists seek new experiences, relaxation, and enjoyment. Providing thoughtful and excellent service is crucial to enhancing their overall experience and ensuring that their visit to City A is memorable and enjoyable.

## Future Directions

This study makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge on sports tourism, yet it opens several avenues for future research. First, future studies should consider collecting data from populations outside of China and exploring various international tourism destinations. This broader scope would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how sports tourism affects tourist satisfaction across different cultural and geographical contexts. Second, it recommended that future research

investigate the role of resident stereotypes in the promotion of sports tourism within China. This novel approach could provide fresh insights into how local perceptions and stereotypes influence the effectiveness of sports tourism marketing. Examining this aspect would not only enrich

the existing literature but also offer a new and holistic perspective on promoting sports tourism. Such studies could significantly enhance our understanding of the diverse factors that affect sports tourism and contribute to more effective and inclusive promotional strategies.

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