

SPORTS TOURISM – THE NATURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF GROUP SPORTS TOURISTS – THE ALL BLACK EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Sport Tourism is a fast developing segment of a growing tourism industry [15]. This paper examines one category of sport tourism – event sport tourism – and those tourists who travel to watch a sporting event [5, p.45]. In particular, it focuses on an increasingly significant segment of sports tourism – group sport tours, and a specific subgroup of New Zealand All Black (AB) traveling supporters who are both spectators and fans. Survey research findings reveal that AB sport tourists' demographic characteristics differ significantly from the NZ population, exhibit very high levels of AB team identification, and a preparedness to invest in sports tourist activities.

INTRODUCTION

Watching sporting contests is a form of recreation for millions around the world. Sports fans and spectators regularly attend matches, games or events to observe and support 'their' chosen teams. The phenomenon of sports spectatorship is extensive as is evidenced worldwide by the abundance of existing and recently constructed purpose built event stadiums for live spectators [10] [18, p.108]. The increasing involvement of the media with developments in sport programming and reporting, and the creation of new and emerging media sports for the viewer, also supports the popularity of this leisure choice. Similar behavior is observed in NZ, where every year, thousands of sports enthusiasts observe sporting events from the sidelines, either literally (paddocks, fields, stadiums, courts, pools etc) or virtually through the use of sports reporting media (radio, internet, television, newspapers, etc). However it may be expressed, the consumption of sports in NZ society depicts a widespread behavior that is increasingly acknowledged as a significant and important leisure experience for many people. Growing numbers of sports observers take their passion for sports spectating to another level of involvement and travel extensively domestically or even internationally in order to champion and lend support to a multitude of sporting teams. The sport of Rugby Union has been particularly influential in the development of sports spectating in NZ. The almost universal acceptance of its role and place in NZ society and its domination over other sports were established early with European settlement [9]. Rugby is not just a sport in NZ, it is irrevocably connected to the roots of the nation's history and is seen as a defining symbol of NZ society and culture [2] [8] [11].

In 2002, more than 119,000 people played Rugby Union in NZ, and combined ticket sales for the international Super 12 and National Provincial Championship (NPC) matches topped 1.1 million [13]. Every major NZ fixture (including NPC, Tri-Nations, Super 12 and Test Rugby) has experienced increased ticket sales, especially since the advent of professionalism in 1996 [12]. Many more hundreds of thousands of people vicariously joined those at the stadiums and watched top level Rugby Union matches on the television or internet. Spectator figures for premier Rugby Union matches are complemented by similar high levels of support for other levels of Rugby Union. As such, it is easy to recognize the ubiquitous nature of rugby union spectatorship in NZ. It is more challenging to uncover information about extreme or ardent supporters, including those who travel far and wide to support their

teams. NZ's national representative Rugby Union side, the All Blacks (AB), attract a huge following throughout the country and thousands of supporters regularly travel (domestically and overseas) to show their faith and support their 'Men in Black'. Indeed, there is little documented information regarding the demographic profiles of traveling AB fans, and this paper seeks to address this matter.

METHODOLOGY

Results reported in this paper form part of a wider project investigating the socio-demographic and psychographic profiles of AB sports tourists, a topic which has not been examined previously. Specific objectives related to measurement of AB sport tourists' team identification levels, using Wann's Sport Spectators' Identification Scale (SSIS) [19]; and of the relationship between identification and level of financial investment by AB sport tourists.

Research Design

The research design for the wider project was structured to provide descriptive information about AB sport tourists' traveling experiences as well as to facilitate the generation of quantitative demographic data for profiling purposes. The broader research used a two-stage methodology. A first stage, self-administered postal questionnaire was sent out to 500 known AB sport tourists in order to build a profile of the sport tourists' main characteristics and behaviors before second-stage in-depth interviews provided the basis for gathering and recording the touring stories of several AB sport tourists. The first stage survey requested standard demographic information such as age, gender, nationality, income, education, occupation etc (able to be pre-coded), as well as AB team identification levels, travel/ tourism behavior and sporting behaviors – such as the sports tourists' support for other levels of NZ rugby, their playing history and their current involvement in club and community rugby. AB sports tourists team identification levels were measured using Wann's (1993) Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) [19]. A second stage for the broader project consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with purposively selected 'serial' AB sport tourists. This aspect of research is not reported here.

The sampling frame for the research was the Williment World Travel (WWT) database, which holds name, contact details and touring history details of 5,500 clients who traveled on WWT tours in the five years up to 2004. (No WWT logos or letterheads were used in any postal communications with the participants to emphasize the academic nature of the research.) A postal survey was determined to be the most practical and cost effective method to gain information from a large geographically wide-spread sample. It also made it possible to increase the sample size. Whilst it could be argued that using the WWT database may not provide full coverage of the potential research population, it was considered that the size and reach of the WWT database (as the largest touring supporter database in NZ), would provide an appropriate cross-section of AB sport tourists. A sample size of 500 was chosen so that a 95% confidence interval for sample proportions would be at most plus or minus 4.5%. With a population sampling frame of $N = 5,500$ and sample size $n = 500$, a systematic random sampling interval of $n/N = 500/5500 = 1/11$ was determined. From the sample of 500, 188 usable surveys were returned, making the response rate 37.6%. possibly reflecting the respondents' high interest in the survey topic. As Moser & Kalton have stated [1], a response rate of 30-40% from the general public can be regarded as successful, or reasonable [3]. The nature and size of the sample indicates that the achieved response level provides an appropriate cross section of AB sport tourists.

Limitations Arising from the Research Methodology

Several matters arising from the methodology may have impacted on the final results. The research related exclusively to AB supporters previously known to have traveled or toured to support the ABs,

and who are or have been clients of one of the authors' family sports tourism business, the latter factor perhaps reflecting a potential 'power relation' imbalance [20, p.162] possibly affecting responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of All Black Sport Tourists

The age profile of AB sport tourists is found to be different from that of the NZ population at large. For example, whereas nearly one third of respondents was aged over 60 (32%), NZ Census (2001) figures indicate that only about one in six (16%) of the NZ population is over 60. Similarly, one half of respondents (50%) were aged between 40 and 60 years, while the census shows only one quarter (25%). It is apparent that the age profile of AB sport tourists had disproportionately more respondents in higher age groups than is found in the general population. Such differences can be related to several factors. In particular, it is possible that older people who are retired have more time available for responding to surveys. Similarly, given that being an AB sport tourist requires significant resources in terms of both time and money, it is not surprising that the WWT database would consist of an asymmetric distribution of predominately older clientele. The findings have significance in a business context in as much as they imply only 1 in 5 people on the WWT database responding to this survey were younger than 40.

Age	All Black Sport Tourists Sample	NZ Population	Ratio
< 40	18%	59%	1:3
40 – 59	50%	25%	1.2:1
60 +	32%	16%	3:1
TOTAL	100% N = 188	100%	

TABLE 1 – Age Comparison of All Black Sport Tourists and NZ Population

Four out of every five respondents were male. This is much higher than expected given the 60/40 male/female composition of the WWT database, and the systematic sampling technique used. One reason which may account for the disproportionate sample representation of males is that whilst the WWT database has many male/female family couples registered, family responses were mainly male. Survey respondents differ markedly from the makeup of the general population with respect to tertiary or post-graduate qualifications. For example, over 40% of respondents indicated that their highest level of education was a tertiary or post graduate qualification, whereas approximately only 10% of the general population has achieved a bachelor or higher degree. Similarly, one quarter of AB sport tourists indicated an educational level of three years or less at secondary school, (Cf 40% in NZ population.) Respondents were predominantly urban based with less than 1 in 5 people surveyed living in rural areas compared to one in seven of the NZ resident population living in rural areas at the time of the 2001. Reflecting the age profile of the respondents, nearly one in three people replying to the survey were retired. Almost half of respondents indicated a 'white collar' type of employment such as manager, sales or other similar professional type of occupation. This finding must be tempered by querying whether or not 'professional white collar' types have a higher disposition towards survey completion, resulting in a higher proportion of returned surveys from this occupation group. Given that higher qualifications are generally required for 'white collar professional' jobs, it is probable that this high proportion of 'professional occupations' on the WWT database may relate to the above average education. By contrast, less than 15% of respondents listed occupations as trades related or rural sectors. AB sports tourists' incomes contrast notably with the distribution of NZ incomes. Over 25% of survey respondents indicated they had an annual gross income in excess of \$100k and over 75% of respondents had incomes of \$40k or above. In comparison, Statistics NZ report that the average NZ yearly income

Category	Characteristic	%	N
Gender	Male	82%	180
	Female	18%	
Education	Tertiary Qual.	40%	176
	≤ 3 years Sec Sch.	25%	
Gross Income	> \$40K	78%	170
	> \$100K	27%	
Age	60 +	31%	176
	40 – 60	50%	
Region	Urban	81%	174
	Rural	19%	

TABLE 2 - All Black Sport Tourists Main Characteristics

is about \$28k (NZ Income Survey June 2003 quarter, 2002). Given that the financial commitment required to undertake an AB tour is significant, this income distribution is not unexpected. In seeming contrast was the finding that just over 10% of the WWT database surveyed had gross annual incomes of \$20k or less. Such a result is perhaps surprising given that the sample consisted of people who had toured within the last five years. Plausible explanations for this finding include that people on lower incomes may have saved for many years. Others on lower incomes may have won their trip as a prize or others may have paid for their trip. Similarly, a redundancy package may have serviced the cost of the AB tour. Retirement onto a smaller income within the prior five years is also possible. In summary, we may state that the sample of AB sports tourists is disproportionately representative of older, wealthier, highly qualified, males living in urban areas. Given our travel industry experience and information received from experienced sports tour operators, we state the sample has face validity.

Identification Levels of All Black Sport Tourists

Wann's Sport Spectator Identification Scale [11] (See Table 3 below) was used to assess the identification levels of AB sports tourists' with their team. Respondents' were asked to score on an eight point scale the degree of agreement with seven statements. Wann [19] [20, p.5] has suggested that the resulting aggregate score would indicate fan identification: ≥ 35 being high, with ≤ 18 being low. Several authors have suggested that the most highly identified fans are those supporting college teams [6] [16] [21]. However, here, four out of five AB sports tourists display highest levels of identification. Over 80% of respondents' recorded high levels of AB team identification (ie; scores > 35) whilst nearly 20% recorded medium levels of identification (ie; scores: 18 - 35). No responses indicated low identification. Whilst Wann's SSIS [20, p.5] has proven useful in many settings, the uniformly high identification levels of AB fans means that Wann's categories are less useful as an analytical tool in discriminating between AB sports tourists and segmenting AB tourist markets. Consequently, given the high team identification and homogeneity exhibited here, an intermediate level of 'moderately high' identification was devised to assist in differentiating between high SSIS respondents. Accordingly, the SSIS categories were adapted, so that scores $35 \leq 46$ would be interpreted as being 'moderately high'. Over 40% of the sample had 'moderately high' team identification. A further 40% have the highest identification levels, indicating that AB sport tourists have strong allegiance, a deep personal commitment and emotional involvement with the AB team [16]. For many fans, such strong emotional ties to the ABs may form a central component of their self-concept [19]. The level of monetary investment prepared to be made by the AB sport tourist in order to travel to support the ABs within NZ, was considered. Overall, more than four in five respondents (80%) indicated that they that they would consider spending up to \$2k to support the AB within NZ; a further one in six (16%) spending \$2 - 5k. Our data illustrates that nearly one third of AB tourists (31%) would be prepared to spend \$5-10k in

relation to overseas tours, with a further quarter (27%) between \$10-15k. However, there is no observed statistical pattern linking spending to identification, meaningful in a tourism management context.

Q # SSIS Statements

1)	How important to YOU is it that the All Blacks win? (1=Not Important ... 8=Very Important)
2)	How strongly do YOU see YOURSELF as a fan of the All Blacks? (1=Not At All A Fan ... 8=Very Much A Fan)
3)	How strongly do your FRIENDS see YOU as a fan of the All Blacks? (1=Not At All A Fan ... 8=Very Much A Fan)
4)	During the season how closely do you follow the All Blacks via ANY of the following; a) in person or on TV sports programs, b) on the radio or c) TV news or a newspaper? (1=Never ... 8=Almost Every Day)
5)	How important is being a fan of the All Blacks to YOU? 1=Not Important ... 8=Very Important)
6)	How much do YOU dislike the All Blacks greatest rivals? (1=Do Not Dislike ... 8=Dislike Very Much)
7)	How often do YOU display the All Black brand or team name at work, home or on your clothing? (1=Never ... 8=Always)

TABLE 3 Sport Spectator Identification Scale (Wann & Branscombe, 1993:5).

Note: The anchors for the response scales appear in parentheses following each statement.

Score*	Level of Team Identification	All Black Sport Tourists %
< 18	Low	-
18 ≤ 35	Medium	18%
36 ≤ 45	Moderately High	43%
> 46	High	39%
Overall % N		100% 172

TABLE 4 - All Black Team Identification Results * Adapted from Wann *et al.*, 2001:5).

Expenditure commitment for NZ Tour	Medium Team Identification %	Moderately High Team Identification %	High Team Identification %	Expenditure commitment for NZ Tour % N	Expenditure for Overseas % N
\$0 - \$1,999	80	71	89	83% 138	24% 41
\$2k - \$2,999	-	15	4	8% 14	
\$3k - \$4,999	16	7	4	7% 12	
\$5k - \$9,999	4	1	3	2% 3	31% 51
\$10k - \$ 14,999				-	27% 45
\$15k +				-	18% 30
Total	100% 26	100% 73	100% 68	100% 167	100% 167

TABLE 5 – Expenditure Levels of All Black Sport Tourists.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The recent growth in event tourism has seen an increasing amount of research conducted on event goers [4] [7]]. However, there has been limited investigation of sport tourists generally, and no specific examination of AB sport tourists’ social-demographic characteristics or touring experiences. Here, we

reported on such characteristics and on team identification levels measured using Wann and Branscombe's SSIS [19]. Our analysis has revealed that the AB sport tourist market is largely homogeneous, with distinctive characteristics in that it is disproportionately representative of older, wealthier, highly qualified and educated, urbanized males. Its distinctiveness also relates to its highly identified, deeply committed and emotionally involved fans. Indeed, we note that AB sport tourists tend to have highly elevated levels of team identification, in comparison with the level of identification reported in other sports. Indeed, there appears a requirement for the existing SSIS to be more finely grained at the upper levels to reveal differences between highly identified fans. Future research regarding sport spectatorship could seek to effect comparisons across sports and national boundaries.

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