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SPORTS TOURISM AS A DEVELOPMENT OPTION

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ABSTRACT

SE Asian countries are increasingly using sports events as a tourism development tool. Despite the region's current economic problems hosting and bidding for such events is still considered an appropriate strategy. Brunei Darussalam is given as an example of deliberate sports tourism development. The potential of golf in the region is stressed. Some of the necessary co-determinants of successful tourism development are considered.

Many European and North American first time visitors to Eastern Pacific Rim countries, ASEAN countries and China in particular are struck by the pervading and seemingly boundless interest in sports in the Eastern Pacific Rim. To some extent recent history has influenced this interest, as exemplified in the popularity of baseball in Japan and Korea, but essentially it seems global and all-embracing. European countries' football League results are as common a focus of interest as are tennis, rugby or golf tournaments. TV transmissions of major events feature widely in national programming of most of the region's services and daily newspapers carry large sports sections, reporting from all over the world.

Increasingly, the (tourism) benefits of international sporting events--and some of the less beneficial aspects--have been recognised, e.g. economic impacts (1, 2 p. 62, 3, p. 27), opportunities for national self-promotion in terms of technological, commercial and social accomplishments (4, p. 153, 5, p. 278ff), impacts on host region awareness (6, p. 9, 7 p. 232, 8) and international sporting events' use in a sustainable tourism development strategy (9, pp. 13-19). Competing for the staging of such events is arguably part of national policies, aiming at least in part at national cohesion, particularly in countries with disparate populations in terms of geography, religion, or race, or any combination of these. Due to sport's popular appeal it may also serve as a vehicle for internal unity and co-operation. An example of this is president Mahathir Mohammed's invocation of the "Spirit of Asia": when the Malaysian Commonwealth Games organisers hoped for 3000 volunteers to come for training in Cheras (Feb. 1998), 5000 turned up, some "all the way from Sabah and Sarawak" (10, p. 7). It is noticeable that the interest in hosting international sporting events is linked to rising confidence in a country's economy. If the number of events staged in the wake of the region's economic crisis should experience a substantial fall off from the beginning of the

year 2000 the question arises to what extent decision makers are convinced of the economic benefits of staging major events.

At present, however, the tourism potential of sports events is still judged to be substantial. SE Asian Countries' interest in putting on major games is manifest: the Traditional Games and Sports 2nd and 3rd World Conference in Thailand 1997 and Australia 1998, the Asian Winter Olympic Games in Korea 1999, following the Nagano Winter Olympics 1998, the Commonwealth Games in Malaysia 1998 and the Soccer World Cup in Japan and Korea in the year 2000 are clear indications of this. It is, however, not only mega-events which are considered to benefit tourism. A varied programme of events has long been thought to enhance the attractiveness of destinations. The Singapore Sports Council has its Annual Sports Diary, listing well over one hundred events every year, distributed by its Tourism Promotions Board (11). The New Zealand Hillary Commission, whose remit is to assist in bidding for and staging of events, advertises as many sports events as any other type of event: in the period between July and December 1998 alone it lists 7 regional and 6 international sports events, the same number as arts, crafts and cultural festivals designed to attract tourists. In the period of March 97 to April 98 it expected nearly 10,000 competitor visitors alone for its international sporting events (12). Malaysia is an even more clear cut case for the dominance of sports over cultural and other touristically attractive events: between June and December 1998 it staged 51 regional and 33 international sporting events (excluding the Commonwealth Games), compared to 45 other types of events (13).

In terms of using sports as a major tool in its tourism development strategy, Brunei Darussalam is a good example. The oil rich

mini-state on the island of Borneo now, after years of neglect, wishes to develop its tourism industry. The Brunei Darussalam Strategic Plan (14) suggests that its 1996 arrivals of 510,000 are to double by the year 2000, an increase of 26% p.a. over the next 2 years, compared to around 8% p.a. in the previous 5 years. This is to be achieved by a concentration on its strengths. Events engendering sports tourism are considered to be the greatest attractor, in addition to the "young families" segment for beach and theme park holidays, and eco-tourists. Polo, horse racing, speed boat racing, diving and yachting events, four wheeler motor racing, a Borneo marathon and a South-East Asian professional golf tournament are envisaged to help achieve the Sultanate's ambitious plans.

Any sport which has a broad base within a region's population will be a favorite for staging events, as the volunteer and spectator base and the number of tourists, i.e. players, friends, relatives, spectators is likely to be substantial. Therefore the development potential of golf is particularly prominent, especially once the region's economic downturn has been overcome. In view of the high prestige value of golf in many SE Asian societies' demand for club membership is buoyant, readiness to travel in pursuit of watching or playing the sport is high. The number of golf courses per population gives some indication of the potential this sport has in the region (See Table 1) (15).

Given that the annual value of the regional golf market is estimated at US\$ 6-8 billion--excluding spending on new course construction--even slow expansion means substantial expenditures (15). Golf tourists fall into two categories: firstly the well-heeled who want to play 'signature' or equivalent courses and secondly families, learners and young people who complement holidays by

linking in playing or learning to play golf. Japan, where golf is still unavailable to many, except for driving range play, is likely to be the main source country for golf tourism, but others, e.g. Korea, are also lucrative markets. The success of a strategy of sports and particularly sports events as a driving force of tourism development is, however, not only determined by the economic and organisational capability of Pacific Rim/ASEAN countries to successfully bid for and stage events or develop appropriate sports facilities. It is more a question of parallel developments. Resident attitudes must be positive, improvements of infra-

structure for visitors as well as locals need to take place, improvements in sports education and management need to be made in most of the countries. A greater stock of low cost accommodation needs to be made available and in some cases visa requirements need to be relaxed. As competition for staging major sports events is likely to grow these aspects play an increasingly important role in international bodies' award considerations. Last, but not least, greater success in international competitions for its sportsmen and women and teams would give the region its much needed boost.

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TABLE 1
Golf Course Provision Asia/Pacific Region

Country	Number Courses	of Population	1 course Per Population
Japan	2,500	124,000,000	49,600
Australia	1,600	18,000,000	11,250
New Zealand	425	3,500,000	8,235
India	170	800,000,000	4,705,882
Thailand	160	58,000,000	362,500
Malaysia	160	19,000,000	118,750
Indonesia	135	191,000,000	1,414,815
South Korea	82	44,000,000	536,500
Taiwan	80	21,000,000	262,500
Philippines	60	64,000,000	1,066,667
China	38	1,185,000,000	31,184,211
Singapore	32	3,000,000	93,750
Hong Kong	15	4,000,000	266,667
Brunei	5	300,000	60,000
Vietnam	1	66,000,000	66,000,000
UK	2,450	60,000	24,490

Source: T. Merrifield, 1998.