



Sports travel thrives both on participation and experiencing events

Sports travel is being described as a new interdisciplinary segment between the tourism industry and the sports industry.

Sports travel is all about indulgence, a theme that has the power to excite one and all.

Still travel companies can't assume sports travel is just another trip. Rather it demands detailed introspection about why one plans such trips and what do they expect.

The term "sports travel" refers to the combination of various activities of recreation (both physical and psychological), fitness, competition, adventure, rehabilitation, healthcare, sports watching and sports and cultural exchange, and the interactions between travelers and destinations, travel service providers, sports enterprises and local communities," says *Zhao Wenzhi, Executive VP of GZL International Travel Service.*

Wenzhi added, "In short, it covers all kinds of tourist activities carried out by tourists along with sports organizations and travel service providers in order to meet a wide range of sports-related needs. As a new interdisciplinary segment between the tourism industry and the sports industry, it is a new form of tourism that is based on sports resources and attracts people to participate in and experience sports activities and nature. It is a special leisure lifestyle combining sports with tourism."

According to Wenzhi, it is also an important component of the sports industry.

"The cross-section of these two major industries reflects the social nature of sports and tourism. Sports travel is a kind of special travel. This emerging segment is different from mass travel activities and is not an ordinary branch of tourism, which has its specialization and particularity. It always depends on sports-related participation, organization and guidance," said Wenzhi.

Just not about "watching"

In terms of way of participation, Wenzhi explained that sports travel is generally divided into two categories, namely watching and doing/playing.

Both of them involve food, accommodation, transport, sightseeing, shopping and entertainment in the tourism domain as well as sports events and participation. Therefore, they essentially belong to the same category of travel service. The ratio between watching and doing/ playing is around 3:7.

The watching products include GZL's 10-day La Liga in Spain (Real Madrid vs. Barcelona), including VIP exclusive seat, featured state-run castle hotel, downtown super luxury hotel and AVE high-speed rail, which brings tourists to Spain's Bernabeu Stadium to witness the star-studded national derby between Real Madrid and Barcelona. The doing/ playing products include GZL's 3-day trip of hot spring, skiing and five-star hotel to Mangshan in Hunan, during which tourists take high-speed rail to Wugaishan Ski Resort for the joys of alpine skiing, cliff hot spring and lobster seafood dinner buffet. The watching category heavily relies on the schedules and popularity of sports events. When there are high-profile sports events such as the World Cup, the share of watching segment will increase.

"The sports travel products focusing on watching rely heavily on the popularity and awareness of the specific events and may gain different market responses. They have to be tested by the market," said Wenzhi.

Compared with extreme sports enthusiasts, light sports activities have a larger audience, lower thresholds, easier involvement and greater affordability. Therefore, the absolute quantity of light sports travelers must be higher than

the number of extreme sports tourists. Currently, popular participatory sports travel products include skiing, cycling, diving, mountaineering and hiking.

Popular events

At present, Chinese tourists still concentrate on popular and well-known events such as the Olympic Games, Grand Slam tennis, World Cup soccer, EPL and Formula 1 Racing, completed by other regional events, including Derby in La Liga, Premier League and Asian Cup. With the further development of the sports travel market and the increasing maturity of consumer awareness, sports travel will inevitably diversify and deepen. Chinese tourists will participate in or hope to try more different sports activities and watch more professional events. During travel, tourists will be eager to gain more in-depth experience in sports and watch different events they love," said Wenzhi.

Among the current popular events, Wenzhi referred to the success of the derby in La Liga in late February. "It has received a lot of attention from football fans, and related products are also selling well."

Area where sports travel is akin to other trips is a comprehensive list of items in an itinerary. "The itinerary has to meet these needs of tourists (food, accommodation, transport, sightseeing etc.). However, unlike other tourism products, sports tourists will more specifically target at a certain sports event. Therefore, when designing our products, GZL will develop itineraries based on their needs and painpoints. For example, for a specific itinerary, the arrangement of other attractions, arriving city and departing city will be adjusted in accordance to the time and place of the sports events, so that tourists can make the most of the trip in addition to the joy of the events," said Wenzhi.

Wenzhi also pointed out that China's tourism market is currently on a journey of vertical segmentation. Therefore, in the field of sports travel, there will be more vertical segments, which will be developed in depth, such as hiking, climbing, diving and skiing. These segments often have their own specific audiences, who are also the most loyal and frequent consumers in a specific segment. They are willing to participate in the custom-made tours under a certain category, because these customized products are tailored for their pain points. According to GZL's statistics, the tourists from Tier 1 cities tend to choose these more specialized, vertical and customized products.""

Areas of improvement

Wenzhi felt that given the needs of tourists, sports travel products should be further segmented, instead of simply classified as watching and doing/ playing. For example, some travellers may want to watch snow events while they also enjoy local skiing experience. It covers the needs of both watching and doing/ playing. For this kind of enthusiasts, there are not many products available on the market, added Wenzhi.

Wenzhi also projected that the sports travel packages will evolve into a-la-carte menus with a variety of options, so that tourist can flexibly pick up the options that meet their needs. For those who have more experience in travel, the packages with sports ticketing and accommodation will satisfy their needs for international transportation, local transportation, local excursions, local food experience and other local scenarios.

The significance of personalization and service shouldn't be overlooked.

"For tourists, no matter what kind of itinerary, travel products that can provide personalized and high-quality services will always be favored. Therefore, regardless of the sales approaches, travel agencies should focus on premium services and meet the demands of travellers. The awareness of Chinese tourists is increasing day by day, and they will surely take a broader step and participate in the market. The concept of AR (augmented reality) can be used as part of the process to improve the travel experience, providing travellers with hi-tech perceptions," said Wenzhi.

Company profile:

Founded on December 5th, 1980, Guangzhou GZL International Travel Service Ltd. is a subsidiary of Guangzhou Lingnan Group Holdings Company Limited, a company listed at Shenzhen Stock Exchange and a tourism giant in South China.

It is the only diversified travel agency in China that has won "China User Satisfaction Tripod", the highest honor of quality management in China's tourism industry and has been recognized by former AQSIQ and former National Tourism Administration as the "national tourism service quality benchmark". It is also the first service provider that has received "Guangdong Government Quality Award", the highest quality award granted by Guangdong Provincial Government. In the first industry ranking published by China Travel Service Association in 2018, GZL won six awards, including "Top 20 Travel Service Brands in China in 2018", "Excellent Outbound Travel Agency in 2018" and "Excellent Domestic Travel Agency in 2018".