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A Study on the Impact of Large-Scale Sports Events on Urban Tourism Passenger Flow and Consumption Patterns from the Perspective of Sports-Tourism Integration

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Abstract: Driven by the Hainan Free Trade Port initiatives and the national strategy for sports-tourism integration, large-scale sporting events have become crucial for regulating tourist flows and optimizing tourism consumption. Leveraging its coastal advantages, Haikou hosts branded events like marathons and sailing opens, revitalizing its cultural and tourism landscape. Grounded in theories of sports-tourism integration and spatiotemporal flow reshaping, this study employs literature review, case study, and logical induction to analyze changes in tourist flow scale, origin composition, length of stay, and spatiotemporal distribution before and after these events in Haikou. It also examines shifts in consumption patterns, including dining, accommodation, experiential entertainment, and transportation. Findings indicate that while large-scale events rapidly increase short-term tourist numbers and alleviate off-peak traffic shortages, Haikou faces challenges such as short stay durations, a high proportion of basic consumption, insufficient high-end spending, and rapid post-event tourist declines. To address these issues, this paper proposes optimization strategies: developing event-based tourism product matrices, fostering high-end consumption formats, enhancing regional supporting services, and establishing sustainable visitor attraction mechanisms. These strategies aim to transition Haikou from relying on short-term event-driven traffic to fostering sustainable, high-quality tourism consumption growth. Ultimately, this study provides a practical reference for the high-quality development of the coastal sports and tourism industry within the Free Trade Port.

Keywords: sports tourism; sporting events; tourist flow; consumption patterns; urban tourism

1. Introduction

With the accelerated implementation of the national strategies to build a 'Sports Powerhouse' and a 'Tourism Powerhouse', the concept of 'traveling alongside major sporting events' has emerged as a distinctive trend in China's cultural and tourism consumption landscape. The integration of sports and tourism—recognized as an innovative productive force driving the transformation and upgrading of the service sector—has drawn substantial attention from local governments nationwide. Unlike traditional sightseeing tourism, large-scale sporting events generate strong crowd aggregation effects, enabling cities to attract substantial numbers of visitors from other regions within a short timeframe. This phenomenon modifies the seasonal distribution of urban tourist flows, stimulates the upgrading of local tourism product offerings, and contributes to the restructuring of urban tourism consumption patterns [1].

The development of the Hainan Free Trade Port has entered a critical stage of operational implementation. As the provincial capital, Haikou functions as Hainan's political, economic, and cultural center and serves as a key host city for coastal sports events. Historically, Haikou's tourism economy has displayed pronounced seasonality: visitor arrivals peak during winter months, while summer sees relatively low volumes; the majority of tourists are short-stay transit visitors, and the proportion of overnight stays

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remains modest; tourism expenditure is predominantly directed toward basic accommodation and dining services, whereas spending on premium vacation packages and sports-related experiences constitutes a comparatively small share—indicating that the sector's full economic potential remains underutilized. In recent years, Haikou has proactively positioned itself as a destination for branded sports events, regularly hosting international and national coastal sports competitions to harness the 'event economy' as a strategic response to persistent challenges in tourism development [2].

Empirical observations indicate that during event periods, Haikou experiences notable increases in hotel occupancy rates, visitor traffic at scenic attractions, and commercial district turnover [1]. However, following event conclusion, urban visitor numbers decline rapidly; the short-term influx fails to consolidate into a stable, long-term visitor base, and the influence on structural upgrades in consumption patterns remains constrained. Against this backdrop, conducting a rigorous analysis of the actual impact of large-scale sporting events on tourist flows and consumption behavior in Haikou, diagnosing current bottlenecks in the integrated development of sports and tourism, and identifying pathways toward sustainable optimization holds considerable practical significance.

2. Core Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Core Concept Definition

2.1.1. Tourism-Industry Integration

The integration of sports and tourism, as an industrial convergence model, fundamentally involves mutual interaction and resource sharing between the two sectors, thereby fostering innovation in business models. This model leverages sports resources as tourist attractions—utilizing distinctive assets such as sporting events, sports venues, and outdoor facilities to engage and attract visitors; simultaneously, the tourism market provides a broad and stable consumer base for the sports industry, enabling the commercial application of sports products and services within tourism contexts. Building on this foundation, the integration has given rise to emerging service sectors—including event tourism, outdoor leisure activities, and coastal sports and wellness tourism. These sectors not only extend the functional scope of traditional sports and tourism but also stimulate local economic development. Ultimately, through resource complementarity and market synergy, this integration achieves dual value creation for both industries, supporting a new paradigm of coordinated and mutually reinforcing development [2].

2.1.2. Tourist Passenger Flow

Tourist passenger flow, as a core concept in tourism geography and tourism economics, refers to the total number of tourists who, within a specified time frame, leave their place of habitual residence for a particular tourist destination—whether for sightseeing, leisure, vacationing, business, visiting relatives, or other non-residential purposes—and engage in a series of tourism activities (such as visiting attractions, participating in experiential activities, staying at accommodations, dining, etc.). This overall scale does not exist in isolation but is comprised of five interrelated, dynamically changing dimensions: First, the scale of tourist flow—namely, the absolute total number of tourists received and their relative density—reflects the overall attractiveness and carrying capacity of the destination; Second, the spatial structure of the tourist source markets—referring to the countries or regions from which tourists originate and the proportion of tourists from each source market—reveals the geographic reach of the tourism market and its development potential; Third, the temporal and seasonal distribution—i.e., the fluctuation patterns of tourist numbers across the four seasons, public holidays, or workdays—reflects the influence of climate, statutory holidays, and tourism preferences on travel behavior; Fourth, the length of stay—encompassing single-day visits, number of nights spent, or average touring hours per visit—directly impacts total tourism revenue and facility utilization rates; Fifth, the spatial movement patterns—namely, the trajectories, directions, and node selection of tourist movements within the

destination and between different tourist attractions—determine the degree of spatial congestion and inform transportation and infrastructure planning. Meanwhile, major sporting events—such as the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup, large-scale marathons, or comprehensive sports meets—are regarded as typical event-based tourism attractions. Their distinctive characteristic lies in their concentrated and time-bound nature: they can rapidly gather large numbers of spectators, athletes, coaches, media personnel, and related service providers from diverse regions within a short period, thereby significantly altering the originally stable visitor flow patterns at a destination—including an exponential surge in visitor numbers, a major restructuring of the visitor demographic composition, and sharp fluctuations in temporal distribution. This creates comprehensive challenges for traffic management, accommodation scheduling, security coordination, and the entire tourism service chain; however, such events can also serve as valuable opportunities for enhancing destination tourism brand promotion and upgrading local infrastructure.

2.1.3. Tourism Consumption Structure

The tourism consumption structure refers to the proportional composition and interrelationships among various types of consumption expenditures throughout a tourist's complete travel experience. This structure is generally categorized along three dimensions: first, basic subsistence consumption—covering accommodation, dining, and intra-city transportation to meet fundamental living needs; second, experiential and enjoyment-oriented consumption—including attraction admission fees, sports and interactive activities, and recreational leisure pursuits aimed at enhancing travel satisfaction; and third, derivative and value-added consumption—encompassing cultural and creative souvenirs, local specialty shopping, and wellness- or vacation-focused services. Optimization and upgrading of this structure are reflected in the growing share of experiential and derivative expenditures within total tourism spending, signaling a shift from fulfilling basic needs toward seeking higher-level spiritual fulfillment and personalized experiences.

2.2. *Theoretical Basis*

2.2.1. Event Tourism Theory

Large-scale sporting events function as major celebratory occasions that draw substantial numbers of non-local visitors within a brief timeframe, significantly elevating the destination's profile; following conclusion, they sustain tourism appeal through enduring brand recognition. Event-based tourism thus entails both immediate, short-term effects and prolonged brand-related spillovers [3].

2.2.2. Tourism Consumption Upgrade Theory

With rising household incomes and evolving attitudes toward cultural and tourism consumption, travelers increasingly prioritize personalized, immersive, and experiential offerings over basic services such as dining, accommodation, and transportation. Sporting events exemplify high-quality experiential consumption and facilitate the shift in tourism expenditure from functional to experiential forms [3].

2.2.3. Spatiotemporal Reshaping Theory

Visitor flow at traditional natural scenic spots is strongly shaped by seasonal and climatic conditions; in contrast, large-scale sports events—when strategically organized—can generate artificial peak tourism periods, draw visitors during off-peak seasons, rebalance annual visitor distribution across destinations, and reconfigure the spatiotemporal structure of urban tourism flows [4].

3. Current Status of Large-Scale Sports Events and Tourism Consumption Development in Haikou City

3.1. *Overview of the Development of Large-Scale Sports Events in Haikou City*

Leveraging its tropical coastal climate and extensive coastline resources, Haikou has developed a year-round program of coastal sports events, establishing a comprehensive and multi-tiered event ecosystem. International-level competitions include the World Beach Volleyball Tour and various international sailing and windsurfing events; national-level public-facing brand events include the Haikou Marathon and the Haikou leg of the Hainan Island International Road Cycling Race. These events are strategically scheduled to coincide with the summer off-peak travel season, helping to enhance the appeal of Hainan's summer tourism market. The portfolio spans professional competitive events and mass-participation activities, attracting both elite athletes and amateur enthusiasts, thereby broadening the overall audience base [5].

3.2. Basic Characteristics of Tourist Flow and Consumption in Haikou City

Since the establishment of the Free Trade Port, Haikou's tourism market has continued to recover, yet structural challenges persist. The traditional peak tourism season spans November to March of the following year; however, visitor numbers decline markedly from April to October, revealing a pronounced seasonal imbalance [6]. A substantial proportion of visitors are transit travelers with brief stays, resulting in a relatively high share of day-trippers and an insufficient share of overnight visitors. In terms of spending, tourist consumption is heavily concentrated in basic services such as dining and short-term accommodation, whereas expenditures on high-value-added vacation experiences and coastal sports activities remain limited, constraining overall tourism economic returns.

3.3. Preliminary Practical Achievements of the Integration of Sports and Tourism in Haikou

In recent years, Haikou Municipal Culture and Tourism Bureau and Sports Bureau have jointly implemented supportive policies, including event-themed tourism itineraries, integrated hotel-and-ticket packages, and scenic spot discount campaigns during sporting events; meanwhile, commercial districts have introduced sports-themed promotional initiatives to facilitate seamless linkage across the 'spectating-touring-consuming' value chain [4]. The measurable uplift in tourism consumption attributable to these initiatives is increasingly evident, establishing a practical foundation for deeper integration between sports and tourism sectors.

4. The Multidimensional Impact of Major Sporting Events on Tourist Flow in Haikou

4.1. Short-Term Stimulative Effect on Passenger Volume

Major sporting events generate an immediate increase in Haikou's short-term tourist arrivals. Participants, support personnel, spectators, and sports enthusiasts converge on the city, resulting in a notable rise in passenger volume [7]. Notably, when such events are scheduled during the summer off-peak season, they produce temporary surges in visitor numbers during what is typically a low-demand period—helping to offset seasonal fluctuations and contributing to more balanced annual tourism distribution. During the Haikou Marathon, for example, interprovincial runners travel collectively to the city, leading to a marked uptick in urban hotel occupancy rates and delivering measurable growth in the off-peak tourism market.

4.2. Altering the Market Structure of the Source Market

Traditional tourist visitors to Haikou are predominantly from northern Chinese provinces, drawn by milder winter conditions, resulting in a relatively homogeneous demographic profile [8]. In contrast, sporting events attract substantial numbers of young and middle-aged sports enthusiasts from cities across the country. Notably, the proportion of such tourists has risen in economically developed regions—including the Pearl River Delta and the Yangtze River Delta—while the segment of high-quality consumers continues to expand, contributing to structural optimization of the overall tourist market. This event-attracted cohort exhibits stronger spending willingness and a greater openness to premium tourism offerings.

4.3. Reshape the Time Distribution Characteristics of Passenger Flow

Natural landscape tourism is highly sensitive to climatic conditions, with peak demand typically occurring in winter; by contrast, sporting events can be scheduled flexibly. Haikou has strategically organized water- and coastal-related sporting events during summer months to stimulate tourism during traditionally low-demand periods, thereby mitigating the sharp dichotomy between peak and off-peak seasons, reducing annual fluctuations in visitor volume, and promoting a transition from seasonally concentrated tourism toward balanced, year-round development. However, visitor numbers decline markedly following the conclusion of such events, indicating a pronounced short-term surge effect and relatively limited capacity to sustain elevated tourist traffic over extended periods.

4.4. Restructuring the Spatial and Directional Flow of Urban Tourist Visitor Traffic

Traditional sightseeing tourists primarily visit well-known attractions such as the crater, the Arcade Old Street, and Holiday Beach [9]. During the event, visitor traffic is redirected to the race course and coastal sports facilities, enhancing the appeal of emerging areas including the West Coast and the Riverside Tourism Belt, revitalizing underutilized coastal cultural and tourism spaces across the city, facilitating the broadening of tourist flow from individual attractions to the wider urban area, and supporting the development of Haikou's comprehensive tourism ecosystem.

4.5. Impact on Tourists Length of Stay

The event features a comprehensive schedule; however, participants and attendees typically extend their visit to Haikou for two to three days rather than undertaking a one-day round-trip. Compared with general one-day stopover visitors, event-related tourists demonstrate a higher propensity for overnight stays, thereby increasing the share of overnight visitors. Nevertheless, Haikou currently offers limited post-event tourism offerings, leading many visitors to depart immediately after the event concludes—thus constraining the overall extension of their length of stay.

5. Analysis of Changes in the Tourism Consumption Structure in Haikou Driven by Large-Scale Sporting Events

5.1. Fundamental Rigid Consumption Experiences Short-Term Explosive Growth

The event attracted a large number of overnight visitors from other regions, leading to a short-term surge in fundamental consumption—including accommodation, dining, and short-distance transportation. Hotel and homestay bookings along the event route reached full capacity; urban restaurants and night market areas reported substantial increases in turnover; and demand for ride-hailing services and tourist shuttle buses rose markedly. This foundational layer of consumption constitutes the initial wave of additional spending triggered by the event and serves as the principal contributor to the current expansion of Haikou's event-driven economy.

5.2. Experiential Sports and Cultural Tourism Consumption Achieves Significant Growth Momentum

As spectator engagement evolves toward immersive participation in sporting events, demand for sports-related experiential activities has risen substantially. Emerging consumption formats—including sailing experiences, beach-based sports, bicycle rental services, sports-themed cultural and creative products, and event-related commemorative items—reflect strong market dynamism. Concurrently, integrated promotion initiatives linking tourist destinations with sporting events have enhanced ticket uptake, while nighttime tour packages and coastal leisure offerings gain increasing traction [6]. Consequently, the proportion of experiential consumption within total consumer expenditure has grown notably relative to traditional sightseeing tourism, indicating an early-stage structural shift in consumption patterns.

5.3. Insufficient Driving Effect of High-End Derivative Consumption

Available consumer data suggest that sporting events have generated only modest impetus for high-value-added derivative consumption, including premium vacation

products, wellness tourism, and luxury retail purchases. Tourist expenditure remains predominantly allocated to accommodation and dining; demand for immersive, extended vacation experiences remains underdeveloped; the linkage between event participation and premium consumption has yet to mature; and substantial opportunities persist for optimizing the overall consumption structure.

5.4. Consumer Demand Is Expanding from Traditional Tourist Attractions to the Entire Urban Area.

Event-driven consumption is no longer confined solely to traditional tourist attractions; instead, its consumption scenarios have continuously broadened to encompass a wide range of areas, including commercial districts along event routes, coastal leisure hubs, urban commercial complexes, and distinctive night market districts. This systematic extension of the consumption scope has effectively boosted overall urban commercial vitality, thereby facilitating the profound transformation and deepening of the tourism consumption model. It shifts from a previously limited focus on attraction-based spending to a comprehensive cultural and tourism commercial consumption framework that spans the entire metropolitan city landscape and its broader surroundings.

6. Practical Challenges in Managing Passenger Flow and Consumer Conversion Processes at Haikou Sporting Events

6.1. The Customer Flow Exhibits Distinct Pulse Characteristics, Yet Lacks Strong Long-Term Retention Capability.

Sports events and cultural festivals held in Haikou commonly display a pronounced pulse-like pattern in visitor flow: attendance surges dramatically during the event period, then declines rapidly once activities conclude. The intense concentration of visitors generates short-term vibrancy and economic activity, yet this influx seldom translates into sustained tourism engagement. Post-event, visitor numbers fall sharply, and the city struggles to retain attendees as repeat or long-term visitors. Systematic branding, post-event marketing, and relationship-nurturing initiatives remain underdeveloped, limiting the depth and durability of audience connection. Consequently, brand recognition and emotional resonance among participants are modest, and the events exert only marginal influence on regional tourism growth beyond their immediate duration. A substantial majority of attendees participate on a one-off basis, while the share of those expressing genuine intent to revisit—particularly for non-event-related purposes—or to engage with Haikou's broader tourism offerings remains low. As a result, both overall repeat visitation rates and longitudinal visitor loyalty require targeted enhancement.

6.2. The Increase in Tourist Stay Duration Is Limited; Overnight Spending Potential Remains Underutilized.

Although the event attracts some overnight tourists, the absence of post-event extended travel packages and multi-day sports-tourism vacation offerings results in most visitors departing immediately after the competition, leading to relatively short stays and constraining opportunities for secondary spending and consecutive consumption [10].

6.3. Low Consumer Spending Levels and a Shortage of High-End Experiential Business Offerings

The current sports and tourism offerings in Haikou remain relatively limited, with most focused on basic spectator experiences; immersive coastal sports vacation packages, sports-themed team-building programs, and high-end wellness-sports integrated products are notably scarce [11]. This insufficient supply of high-value-added experiential services has constrained consumer behavior upgrading and impeded the full realization of tourist consumption potential.

6.4. Inadequate Linkage Mechanism between Sporting Events and Tourism Products

Collaboration between sports event organizers and cultural tourism enterprises remains insufficient; the development of intellectual property-driven tourism centered on sporting events is still limited; integrated vacation packages combining events,

accommodation, scenic attractions, and sports experiences lack seamless design; ticket-based promotional linkages remain rudimentary; product innovation is underdeveloped; and pathways to convert visitor traffic into premium consumer expenditure are inadequately optimized.

6.5. Urban Infrastructure Capacity Faces Limitations

During peak periods of major sporting events, challenges—including inadequate traffic management and parking services, insufficient supporting infrastructure for coastal sports activities, and a shortage of qualified sports service personnel—have adversely affected visitor experience, thereby constraining spending behavior and weakening the efficacy of organic promotion.

7. Pathways for Optimizing Passenger Flow Quality and Upgrading Consumption Structures from the Perspective of Tourism-Industry Integration

7.1. Build a Differentiated Brand Event Portfolio to Smooth Out Annual Visitor Flow Fluctuations.

Continuously develop distinctive coastal sports events during off-peak seasons to establish a sustainable event ecosystem featuring monthly activities and year-round competitions, thereby steadily attracting and retaining visitors. Additionally, concentrate resources on cultivating one or two nationally recognized exclusive event intellectual property brands to enhance the overall reputation of events in Haikou, mitigate short-term visitor surge effects, foster a long-term and stable visitor base, and ultimately increase tourist willingness to return.

7.2. Develop Integrated Multi-Day Sports and Tourism Vacation Packages to Extend Guests Stay Duration.

Comprehensive 1–3-day travel packages are designed to integrate sports viewing, coastal sports participation, scenic area visits, and urban night tours into cohesive offerings. These bundled products support distinct thematic itineraries—including runner-focused vacations, sailing-themed educational experiences, and beach-based team-building programs—intended to extend visitor stay duration and enhance overnight accommodation utilization and sustained local expenditure.

7.3. Enrich the Diverse and Multi-Tiered Tourism Service Offerings to Drive the Upgrading of Tourism Consumption Patterns.

On one hand, expand mass-market sports and leisure offerings; on the other hand, cultivate high-value-added business formats—including premium coastal wellness and fitness activities, personalized marine coaching services, event-integrated cultural and creative products, and themed homestay resorts. Encourage tourists to shift spending from basic accommodation and dining toward immersive sports experiences, wellness retreats, and distinctive shopping, thereby optimizing the tourism consumption structure and enhancing per-capita tourism expenditure value [2].

7.4. Establish a Multi-Stakeholder Collaborative Operation Mechanism for Sports, Cultural and Tourism Sectors, and Commerce.

Foster deep collaboration among government departments, event organizers, hotel groups, tourist attractions, and commercial districts; implement coordinated, city-wide promotional initiatives during major events; develop limited-edition cultural and creative products, themed dining experiences, and co-branded consumer vouchers; establish an integrated traffic monetization framework; and enhance the consumption-driving effect of such events [12].

7.5. Enhance Comprehensive Urban Supporting Services Across the Entire City to Elevate the Overall Visitor Experience.

Optimize urban traffic management, parking facility planning, and volunteer service systems during the event; upgrade coastal sports infrastructure along the West Coast; develop professional talent in event operations, sports coaching, and high-end cultural

and tourism hospitality; comprehensively enhance the city's capacity to accommodate visitors; build a strong reputation through consistently high-quality services; and drive sustainable growth in visitor numbers through service excellence [13].

8. Conclusion and Future Directions

Large-scale sporting events exert a significant positive influence on both tourist flow and consumption patterns in Haikou. Regarding tourist flow, these events temporarily increase visitor numbers, optimize the source market structure, mitigate seasonal disparities between off-peak and peak periods, encourage dispersal of tourist traffic to emerging coastal areas, and thereby raise the proportion of overnight visitors. With respect to consumption structure, such events directly stimulate growth in core sectors—including accommodation and dining—drive incremental demand for sports-related experiential offerings, and broaden the scope of consumer activities from individual attractions to the broader urban landscape.

However, Haikou's integrated sports and tourism development faces several persistent challenges: event attendance exhibits sharp short-term surges, yet the city lacks robust mechanisms for sustainable visitor acquisition and retention; average tourist length of stay has improved only marginally; supply of high-end experiential tourism products remains insufficient; upgrading of consumer spending patterns is incomplete; and synergy between sporting events and the tourism sector remains underdeveloped. To advance, Haikou should prioritize cultivating enduring event intellectual properties, designing integrated vacation packages, diversifying premium sports and tourism offerings, and establishing a multi-stakeholder collaborative operational model—shifting emphasis from short-term event-driven visitation gains toward long-term, high-quality tourism economic growth.

As the Hainan Free Trade Port continues to deepen its openness, the international visibility of large-scale sporting events hosted in Haikou is expected to rise steadily. Future efforts may focus on developing premium international coastal sporting events, creating cross-border sports tourism products, and expanding event-based tourism targeting international visitor markets. Subsequent research could employ quantitative empirical methods—including structured surveys administered to event participants and analysis of granular tourist consumption data—to more precisely estimate the contribution of such events to local tourism revenue, thereby supporting evidence-informed policy design for the high-quality integration of sports and tourism in Haikou.

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