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# The Trends in Dining, Lodging, Entertainment, and Recreation among Virginia Youth Travel Soccer Participants, Their Family, and Friends When Traveling for Youth Travel Soccer Tournaments

by

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## Abstract

If the Convention and Visitors Bureau's (CVB's) and Sport Event Planners of smaller cities and towns were able to assess the trends of their youth soccer tourists, they might be in a better position to attract and retain these tourists as well as other tourists in other sports, large events or small. The purpose of this study was to examine where Virginia youth soccer participants, their family, and friends dine, lodge, entertain, recreate, and spend their free time when not playing soccer. This study takes a look at the growing business of youth soccer travel as it relates to the multi-billion dollar a year sport tourism industry. Relationships are shown in this study on where, when and how much money youth soccer tourists spend at a tournament destination compared to a 2008 study done by the National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC) on overall youth sporting event trends. Other relationships in this study include a listing of other popular activities that youth soccer tourists partake of during their free time in the host community also compared to the NASC study.

There has been a lack of research done in the field of youth sport tourism because it is a fairly new business to track, but it is rapidly growing. There are also not many sport tourism studies focused on the smaller communities. A questionnaire was created to collect the data for this study. These questions were selected to better find out just who, and what kind of visitors these cities in Virginia are getting with these tournaments in hopes that the information gathered will help in planning and being prepared for future youth soccer events in Virginia as well as help other smaller communities plan other sporting events in other states.

## Introduction

The world of sports is very diverse not only as an entertainment commodity, but as a global business. "There was once a day when 30,000 people filled a college football stadium on average, where as now days it is not surprising to see 100,000 plus at a big time college football game and millions more watching on television or the internet" (Biddiscombe, 2006). Sport is big business, and there are millions of people everywhere cashing in on it. Whether it is Miami, Florida hosting the Super Bowl or Lynchburg, Virginia hosting a youth travel soccer tournament, the reward for hosting a sporting event can be great for everyone involved if marketed, planned, and prepared the right way.

For years people have been traveling to see their professional sports teams play, whether it is within their home state or throughout the country. "Tourism is traveling for recreational or leisure purposes (The World Tourism Organization, 2009)." The World Tourism

Organization goes on to define tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited (The World Tourism Organization, 2009)." Though Sport Tourism may have been around for a while, only recently has it started to gain considerable attention as a potential gold mine for a community. Some municipalities have since noticed that there has been a need to develop a Convention and Visitor's Bureau (CVB) to help govern, market, promote, and keep statistics on tourism, particularly in the sport tourism industry. CVB's are common in larger cities, but recently have been developed in smaller towns. "A convention and visitor bureau is a destination marketing organization in the United States (CVB-online, 2009)." These CVB's gather information and statistics on what the tourist is interested in and what keeps them coming back or selecting certain destinations to travel to. (CVB-online, 2009)

Information is gathered on what hotels visitors for the sporting event stay in, what restaurants they dine at, where they go to shop, where they go to find a beer, and everything in between about the visitor's experience. This information is gathered to help these municipalities develop plans on how to keep these visitors coming back and for developing ideas for the future marketing of events. From the time the visitor for the sporting event steps foot in the city, or town, the CVB wants to know their every step until the time they leave. This requires the CVB's to do research on the people that are coming to the events related to the event itself. Before research can be done at the event itself, it is important for the researcher to know in general what kind of people are coming, by gender, nationality, age, socioeconomic status, etc. Once the researcher has a general idea of the people that they may have at the event they then can move into gathering information on how these people act inside the city or town, which in some cases is completely different then how they act in their hometown. (CVB-online, 2009).

While the larger CVB's do the research on the large sporting events of the world to find out what sport travelers want and need, what about small town USA? Sure there are cities like Indianapolis, Indiana and Miami, Florida, who year after year host some of the largest sporting events on the planet, but what about Lynchburg, Virginia or Rock Hill, South Carolina? These smaller cities may never host a Final Four or a Super Bowl, but that does not necessarily mean they do not host sporting events and receive a direct economic stimulus from sport tourists. These communities and thousands like them have CVB's just like the larger cities, but a lot of these smaller CVB's are often times focused on filling hotel rooms only and are not concerned with the local soccer tournament that may have brought in \$1 million dollars to a lot of other businesses in a weekend. Filling hotels is a goal, but preparing restaurants, movie theatres, and miniature golf courses for visitors is also important. It is important for these communities to maximize their potential and bring in events that have the best economic impact on the community, but sometimes creating a bunch of smaller goals is better in the long run then focusing on one big goal.

### Literature Review

The National Association of Sports Commissions (NASC), which is a national governing body in the United States to help areas market their destinations for sport events, conducted an amateur sporting event study in 2008 along with help from The Sports Research Partnership,

which is joint venture sport marketing company. The survey was sent to sport event professionals all over the United States. The survey conducted dealt with a variety of issues pertaining to trends in the amateur sporting event tourism industry. The issues included but were not limited to the following topics: trip frequency, event type, travel party, accommodations, expenditures, travel, additional activities, recommendation, decision making process, future events, profile of sport, and market size projections (NASC/Sports Research Partnership, 2008).

The results included statistical information encompassing a variety of different aspects of the trends in the sport event industry. The first topic dealt with trip frequency. The results from the survey showed that the average number of overnight trips taken in the last 12 months to watch an amateur sporting event is 2.9 trips. There were 1.6 trips taken in the last 12 months, on average, to participate in an amateur sporting event. Another interesting finding was that in the last 12 months, more trips with an overnight stay were taken for soccer events than the other top 4 sports, with an average of 4.1 trips taken to watch a soccer event and 2.0 to participate. These trends show that weekends are ideally the time for travel and the 1-2 days most likely refers to Friday-Sunday (NASC/Sports Research Partnership, 2008).

The second topic of the survey was the event type. The results for the overall top five sports events attended in the last 12 months were: football-33%, baseball-23%, basketball-19%, soccer-13%, and ice hockey-9%. This shows that the major American sports, plus soccer and ice hockey dominate the youth sport market. The top five attended sports in the last 12 months for participants and spectators were as follows, for participants; baseball-20%, golf-17%, basketball-17%, football-16%, and soccer at 14%. For spectators; football-41%, baseball-24%, basketball-24%, soccer-13%, and ice hockey at 9%. This data shows that these certain sports should be focused on by sport event planners, to bring in popular sporting events to their communities dealing with these popular sports (NASC/Sports Research Partnership, 2008).

The third topic of the survey was the information gathered on the travel party. It was found that for their most recent trip, 65% of the respondents had three or more people in their total travel party. Of those surveyed who made their own decision to go to the event, 50% had 1-2 people in their travel party. When it was a team/coach/league decision, 82% had three or more people in their

travel party. Not surprisingly, mothers and fathers were the most likely to make the trip from the household. Also shown was the point that an average of 2.7 days and 2.2 nights were spent overall on the trip. For trips to soccer events, the majority (54%) of total travel parties consisted of five or more people while only 22% of total parties traveling to football events consisted of five or more people. For every sport, the majority of household travel parties consisted of only 1-2 people. Once again it is evident that youth soccer is a big part of the business of youth sports tourism (NASC/Sports Research Partnership, 2008).

When dealing with the trend of accommodations when traveling to sporting event the surveyed group responded that they utilize different types of accommodations such as; budget hotel/motel- 37%, business hotel-34%, stayed with friends/family-13%, and luxury hotel-11% among other types. So it was found that 82% of the respondents stayed at a hotel on their trip. Travel parties with 5+ people were more likely to stay at a budget hotel/motel. Those attending a club/travel team event were more likely to stay at a business hotel. When it came to youth soccer; 45% chose a business hotel, 31% chose a budget/motel, 9% stayed with friends/family, 7% said luxury hotel, and 14 % stated another accommodation. It is important to inform other sources of accommodations that a sport event is coming town, such as campgrounds, bed and breakfast inns, and RV parks (NASC/Sports Research Partnership, 2008).

The most important part of the survey that the sport event planner is interested in is the total expenditures and what, when, where, and how the sport tourist spends their money. Accommodations were the number one expense with an average of \$171 per household per trip. Transportation was the second biggest expense at \$132 per household per trip. Dining was the third biggest expense at \$125 per household per trip. Those making their own decision for the trip spent an average of \$198 on accommodations versus \$154 when it's a group or team/coach/league decision. Soccer event attendees had a tendency to spend more on accommodations while spending less on entry/event fees than did attendees to other types of sporting events (NASC/Sports Research Partnership, 2008).

When it comes to statistics on traveling the respondents once again provided valued information. The average number of miles traveled one-way for an overnight trip was 287 miles. Of the people surveyed 32%

stated that they traveled an average of 300 miles or more. Three out of every four people used their own/family vehicle to reach their destination. The average mileage traveled for a youth soccer event was 253 miles one-way (NASC/Sports Research Partnership, 2008).

Another key trend that sport event planners need to be aware of is the additional activities that the tourists take part in when visiting a destination for a sporting event. The statistics found out can lead sport event planners to be better prepared for the next time the event is held again. Eating out at a restaurant was the #1 activity participated in at the event city/location. Of those people traveling 300+ miles one-way for their event, 52% of them went shopping. Only 18% visited local landmarks on their trip, and 10% of the people didn't do any additional activities at their destination. When it came to the sport of soccer; 84% said they ate out at a restaurant, 38% said they shopped/went to the mall, 16% said they visited local landmarks, and 15% said they went to the beach/ocean/lake (NASC/Sports Research Partnership, 2008).

### Methodology

The population of this study was defined as all Virginia youth travel soccer spectators that attended the sampled Virginia youth travel soccer matches during the sampling time frame, or all of the Virginia youth travel soccer parents in attendance at the sampling site during the sampling period, or all Virginia youth travel soccer coaches in attendance at the sampling site during the sampling period. The sample for this study was selected by youth travel soccer tournament location first. Over 900 questionnaires were distributed overall at both cities. Out of the over 900 questionnaires, only 522 were usable to measure. Two tournament locations (Cities) in Virginia were selected to sample from; Chesapeake, on the east coast, and Richmond, centrally located in Virginia. As stated, the instrument used for this study was a questionnaire made up of 23 specific, but short questions, requiring a circle or a short response. All questions are important to try and piece together the trends of the person answering them.

The first few questions asked are about the general distance the respondent travels for a soccer tournament, how many years their child/children have been playing, what season is more popular for their participant to play soccer, how many people are usually in their travel party, and how often they plan a vacation around a tournament. These first few questions are

important for gaining insight on the general length of stay, number of people, and time of year the town can expect to have youth soccer tourists. The middle part of the questionnaire is the most important part, because the questions deal with the direct expenses on accommodations, food, entertainment and other activities that the respondent/tourist partakes in when attending a travel tournament. When trying to figure out the economic impact of this study, this middle section of questions asks about the total expenditure of the youth soccer travel party on everything from accommodations and food to entertainment and other activities. These questions encompass everything about the tourists stay, such as if they went shopping, to if they went to a museum or water park. The last few questions of the survey are the simplest, and is general demographic information on the respondent, such as income level, gender for both the respondent and the participant, hometown, the age of the respondent and the participant, and if the respondent is married. These last few demographic questions give the last pieces of information needed to piece together exactly who the questionnaire respondents are and relate them as individuals to other respondents. All of these questions are intended to piece together exactly what youth soccer travelers in Virginia do from the time they step foot in the tournament town to the time they leave.

Questionnaires were methodically distributed only before games, at halftime, or at the end of games to not interfere with the sampled participant's enjoyment of the game. Distribution started with the first wave of games that started at 8:00 AM. Questionnaires were distributed to people before the game on two fields, at halftime on two more fields, then after the game on another field. This process continued throughout the day at each game time slot, which was every hour. A schedule of all the games on each field on each time slot was followed so the sample was not duplicated. The distribution of as many questionnaires as possible occurred from 8:00 AM until 12:00 PM at one location and then moved on to another location for the afternoon games and consistently continued at this location for four more hours, or until the games ended for that day.

### Findings

Table 1 and Table 2 compares the top expenditures on Virginia youth soccer trips to the youth sport industry as a whole. Most of the expenditures were similar across the board between Virginia youth soccer respondents and general youth sports in the NASC study. Meals/Beverages and Event/Entry fees were the only two categories that were distinctively different.

Table 1: VA Youth Soccer Expenditure Results

	Under \$50	\$51-\$150	\$151-\$200	\$200 +
Accommodations	7%	26%	37%	30%
Transportation	13%	39%	36%	12%
Meals/Beverages	5%	30%	41%	24%
Entry/Event Fees	68%	23%	7%	2%
Gifts/Souvenirs	58%	31%	8%	3%
Shopping	32%	38%	22%	8%
Entertain/ Attractions	43%	31%	18%	8%

Table 2: 2008 NASC Expenditure Results

	Under \$50	\$51-\$150	\$151-\$200	\$200 +
Accommodations	4%	21%	41%	34%
Transportation	16%	37%	32%	15%
Meals/Beverages	4%	42%	29%	25%
Entry/Event Fees	31%	38%	28%	3%
Gifts/Souvenirs	63%	28%	6%	3%
Shopping	36%	32%	16%	16%
Entertain/ Attractions	49%	25%	19%	7%

Table 3 shows a lot of similarities between the two studies. The largest difference in the results is that the tourists who attend the beach/ocean/lake on trips among Virginia youth soccer travelers were 29% higher than the other study on youth sports in general. This large difference is assumed to be from the fact that one of the locations sampled in the Virginia youth soccer study was Chesapeake, Virginia, which is only a few miles from the coast. It is assumed that many of these people at this tournament also utilized the local beaches as well in the same weekend as the tournament.

Table 3: A comparison of studies

	VA Youth Soccer	2008 NASC Study
Ate out at Restaurant	83%	79%
Shopped/went to Mall	46%	38%
Visited relatives/friends	21%	25%
Attended pro/college sporting event	4%	19%
Visited local landmarks	13%	18%
Visited museum/historic site/gallery	11%	16%
Visited state/national parks	7%	8%
Went to beach/ocean/lake	39%	10%
Visited theme park	16%	7%
Played other sports	3%	6%
None of these	2%	10%

## Conclusions

The questionnaire was highly effective with collecting appropriate demographic information that shows relationships between demographics and the actual trends of the youth soccer tourist. Also selecting two different geographic locations to collect the data turned out well in getting a very diverse sample of convenience made up of people from all over the state of Virginia. When distributing the questionnaire it was observed that most of the people that took the time to fill out the information were women, and men did not want to be bothered, or were skeptical to give any information.

Out of the 522 useable questionnaires for this study most of them stated that they were female, between the ages of 36-55, and had a combined household income of more than \$66,000 per year. Also most of the respondents stated that they traveled for other youth sports as well, with most picking sports that were in other seasons not conflicting with soccer. Most of the respondents were also married. The results showed also that most tournaments took place over two days and nights. The results also showed that most youth soccer participants had at least one person in attendance with them, and in some cases more than two people traveled for the tournament. This shows that sport events planners should plan on at least one person per athlete per event no matter how far the athlete is coming from for the event. Most respondents also stated that they play in at least three tournaments per year, which shows that most clubs play a full slate of travel tournaments both in the fall and the spring, so event planners should be aware of both the fall and the spring as the primary seasons for travel soccer. Spring seems to be the most popular season, but it all depends on which season high school soccer is played in the area. Out of the first results from the questionnaire the most important note to point out for future events is that 72% of the respondents said that they sometimes plan vacations around a youth soccer travel tournament, which means that they are partaking in other activities when attending tournaments. This percentage shows that sport event planners need to pay attention to the trends of where these tourists to spend their free time so they can better prepare these businesses when these tournaments are in town.

When conducting this study the most important trends to find out were where the youth soccer tourist lodges, dines, and goes to relax. The results collected were very helpful and showed detailed trends. First, the lodging results

showed that 79 % of the tourists stated they usually stay in hotels and usually budget or cheaper hotels like a Hampton Inn, or Comfort Inn, but event directors should also be aware that tourists also stay in business hotels, as well as luxury hotels. Some respondents also stated that they camp and stay in an RV for tournaments. Most of the respondents prefer to lodge within a few miles of tournament site, though there were some who did not mind to travel 11 or more miles to their hotel and back. The most important note for sport event planners is that most of the respondents stay at least two nights for at least \$76 per night per room, and they often times travel with two or more people. The number of rooms and rates add up to huge economic impact for area hotels when tournaments come to town.

Another important trend that was measured in this study were dining results and the types of restaurants and expenditures on restaurants from the youth soccer tourists. Eating out was unanimously the most popular activity other than playing soccer among youth travel soccer tourists. Most of the respondents stated that they preferred to sit down and enjoy a decent restaurant rather than eat at fast food restaurants. So sport event planners need to prepare restaurants like Applebee's, Chili's and Outback Steakhouse in their areas when these events come to town as well as fast food restaurants. Most of the tourists stated in the results that they preferred to eat at a restaurant relatively close to the tournament site and their hotel, but some stated that if they really wanted something nice to eat they would go out of their way to get it. An important note for sport event planners is that 81% of the tourists stated that they often look for food that they cannot find in their hometown, so specialty restaurants should keep an eye out on larger crowds of out of town visitors when these tournaments come to town. The most important finding from the dining results show that most of the respondents spend more than \$150 on food for their travel party when attending youth soccer travel tournaments. So overall eating out is the most popular and highest expenditure of youth soccer tourists.

The third important trend that was discussed for this study was the shopping and entertainment results, and whether youth soccer tourists spend money at places like malls and movie theatres to waste time at tournaments. The results show that most youth soccer tourists spend at least \$51 on shopping per youth soccer tournament trip. Also shown in the results is that most of the tourists spend at least \$51 on entertainment and attractions, which shows that tourists may be going to the movies or a theme park.

Another important finding in this study was the other activities that were found popular among Virginia youth soccer tourists and where they spend their free time on these trips, which includes visiting a beach/ocean/lake, visiting a theme park, visiting relatives/friends, visiting museums/local landmarks, and playing other sports. So, it is important for the sport event planner to make these types of businesses aware of these tourists coming in town, and that they might be interested in recreating with them.

Comparisons are shown in figures 11 and 12 showing the important expenditures, and other activities relationships of this study compared to the 2008 youth sports travel study done by the National Association of Sports Commissions. These relationships show that these Virginia results can be used in other cities, towns, in gauging trends among youth sports tourism abroad. These findings support previous theories that smaller communities need to pay attention to these smaller tournaments and tourists, because these tourists spend money when in these small towns. The theory that economic impact from sporting events can take place in smaller markets is also supported with these results.

The results turned out this way because it is assumed that all youth sports tourists spend money on certain activities and businesses when traveling to youth tournaments. This theory proved to be right on in this study. The trends related to dining, lodging, and other activities in this study proved to be related to previous studies done in this field. The one unique part of this study that has a lack of research support is that this study focused on the youth sporting events in smaller communities rather than the larger events in bigger communities. Finally, it is believed that these results turned out the way they did because it is believed just like everything else tourists from this generation copy the same sort of trends as people previous to them in other generations. So parents who make the purchase decisions on these trips do so because of the way their parents taught them and because of what is popular, and maybe also because of what the majority of their teammate's parents and families are doing.

If this study was to be done again it is recommended that it be done in more depth, meaning take a larger sample, and expand the questions. If this study is done again, a sample of convenience should be taken over many different locations over a larger time frame. It is also suggested that this study be done during a non-recession year, because it is believed that the results may have been skewed because of the economic state of the

U.S. at the time. Finally, to other researchers, it is important to realize that this study needs to be something that is refined and done yearly or twice a year, because the youth sport tourism industry is ever changing and the trends are ever changing. It is important that the sport event planner and CVB keep up with the trends of the tourist who visit their towns, so their economies can benefit from the impact that these sport events bring to an area in such a short time.

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### Author's Biography

Billy Russo earned his Bachelor's Degree in Sport Management from High Point University (High Point, NC) in 2007 with a minor in recreation management and a concentration in facility management. Billy completed his Master's Degree in sport studies in 2009 also from High Point where he served as a facility manager for the University's brand new recreation center. As a facility manager Billy managed student staff and supervised a larger amount of recreation programming and activities. Billy has been with the Southern Virginia Recreation Facilities Authority for over 2 years where he currently serves as the Director of Operations for a 93 acre outdoor sports complex located in Martinsville, Virginia.

