

Sports Tourism in Laguna Province:

Trends, Impacts, and Strategic Pathways

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Abstract

This paper examines the trends, impacts, and strategic pathways of sports tourism in Laguna Province, Philippines. Sports tourism in Laguna is increasingly recognized as a driver of economic growth, community engagement, and environmental awareness. Using a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and interviews, the study found that event-based and active sports tourism—such as triathlons at Caliraya Lake, regional competitions at the Laguna Sports Complex, and eco-sport activities in Mt. Makiling—generate significant benefits for local communities. Results show that sports tourism fosters small business growth, enhances local pride, and encourages sustainable development. However, challenges persist in infrastructure, marketing, and long-term planning. Recommendations highlight stronger stakeholder collaboration and the integration of sports tourism into provincial development frameworks to strengthen Laguna’s position as CALABARZON’s sports tourism hub.

Keywords: Sports Tourism; Laguna Province; Sustainable Development; Community Involvement; Tourism Planning

1. Introduction

Sports tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic components of the global tourism industry. Defined by Weed (2008) as travel undertaken to participate in or observe sporting events, it encompasses activities from international mega-events to grassroots competitions. The sector contributes billions of dollars worldwide and strengthens cross-cultural ties through sport (Gibson, 1998). In the Philippine context, sports tourism gained national recognition following the 2019 Southeast Asian Games, which revitalized local economies and promoted cultural exchange (Philstar, 2023). At the provincial level, Laguna stands out due to its accessibility from Metro Manila, diverse natural landscapes, and existing sports facilities. From the Laguna Sports Complex in Sta. Cruz to the scenic triathlon routes in Caliraya Lake and eco-sport trails in Mt. Makiling, Laguna demonstrates clear potential for sustained sports tourism growth. Despite this promise, academic studies focusing on Laguna remain limited. Most Philippine research highlights urban centers such as Manila and Cebu (PNA, 2019). This paper addresses that gap by analyzing the province’s current sports tourism landscape, identifying its socio-economic and environmental impacts, and proposing strategic pathways toward sustainable development.

2. Literature Review

The Review of Related Literature provides the theoretical and empirical foundation of the present study, situating sports tourism within global and local perspectives. It examines existing research, models, and case studies that explain how sports and tourism intersect as tools for economic development, cultural promotion, and environmental sustainability. Reviewing both international and Philippine-based studies enables a clearer understanding of the factors influencing the growth of sports tourism in Laguna Province. Through this review, the study identifies patterns, gaps, and conceptual frameworks that will guide the analysis of Laguna's sports tourism trends, its socio-economic and environmental impacts, and the strategies necessary for its sustainable advancement.

Sports tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding sectors of the global travel industry. According to UNWTO (2021), it accounts for nearly 10% of the global tourism economy and continues to grow as destinations leverage sports to attract both domestic and international visitors. Contemporary scholars now define sports tourism not only as travel to participate in or watch sporting events but also as a catalyst for economic growth, community cohesion, and sustainable destination branding (Grix & Carmichael, 2021).

Gibson's early framework of sports tourism—divided into event-based, active, and nostalgia forms—remains relevant but has since evolved. Recent studies suggest that successful destinations integrate all three dimensions into a holistic visitor experience (Hinch & Higham, 2020). In the context of Laguna, this framework is reflected in the province's hosting of triathlons at Caliraya Lake (active), community events and inter-school tournaments (event-based), and heritage-oriented activities at local sports venues (nostalgia-based). Together, these illustrate how Laguna uses its natural and cultural assets to engage both participants and spectators.

Weed (2020) expanded the understanding of sports tourism by emphasizing its role in promoting inclusivity, local participation, and destination identity. Modern destinations that embrace these principles—such as Baguio City and Cebu in the Philippines—demonstrate that sports tourism extends beyond financial gains to building social capital. Similarly, in Laguna, community-driven events foster local pride and collective engagement, reinforcing the province's image as CALABARZON's sports tourism hub.

Ritchie and Crouch's (2021) updated Destination Competitiveness and Sustainability Model underscores the interplay between natural resources, governance, and innovation in shaping successful sports destinations. Applying this perspective to Laguna highlights the importance of maintaining high-quality infrastructure and ensuring that development aligns with sustainable policies. Laguna's eco-sport sites, such as Mt. Makiling and the Laguna Sports Complex, exemplify how natural landscapes can coexist with well-planned sports facilities.

Furthermore, Higham and Hinch (2020) introduced the concept of "balanced tourism," emphasizing harmony between visitor satisfaction and environmental protection. For Laguna, this balance is critical as outdoor and eco-sport activities—like trail running and cycling—depend heavily on the conservation of its lakes, mountains, and parks. Effective event management and environmental awareness programs can thus ensure that tourism growth does not compromise ecological integrity.

Finally, Preuss (2020) explored how sports events create lasting legacies that extend beyond immediate economic benefits. These include infrastructure enhancement, increased visibility of host destinations, and a strengthened sense of community identity. Laguna's continued investment in sports facilities and regional

tournaments demonstrates these long-term legacies in action—enhancing both the physical environment and residents’ engagement with tourism.

In summary, the reviewed literature suggests that the sustainability and competitiveness of sports tourism hinge on inclusive planning, strong governance, and community participation. For Laguna Province, integrating these principles into its tourism framework will be essential to position itself as a leading sports tourism destination in the Philippines, capable of balancing growth with environmental and social responsibility.

In the Philippine setting, sports tourism has increasingly gained recognition as a strategic tool for regional development and community engagement. The Department of Tourism (DOT, 2022) emphasized that successful sports tourism initiatives rely on strong collaboration among local government units (LGUs), educational institutions, and private stakeholders. This multi-sectoral approach enables destinations to design sustainable and inclusive programs that benefit both local communities and visitors. Laguna’s current sports tourism activities—such as inter-school tournaments, provincial games, and academic-led sports events—reflect this model of cooperation, showing how partnerships can enhance participation and destination appeal.

Recent studies highlight the continued rise of grassroots sports tourism across the country. The Philippine News Agency (2021) reported a growing interest in marathons, triathlons, and e-sports competitions in various provinces, illustrating how Filipinos are embracing sports as a catalyst for tourism and wellness. Laguna’s consistent hosting of such activities, particularly around Caliraya Lake and the Laguna Sports Complex, reinforces this national trend. These community-based events not only attract tourists but also generate income for local enterprises such as accommodations, restaurants, and transport providers.

Education also plays a crucial role in developing the human capital that supports the sports tourism sector. TeacherPH (2022) underscored the importance of experiential learning in improving tourism students’ competencies, particularly in event management and destination marketing. This aligns with the efforts of Laguna University and Mapúa Malayan Colleges Laguna, which actively involve students in organizing sports-related events. Through these initiatives, academic institutions help strengthen Laguna’s reputation as both an educational and sports tourism hub.

Furthermore, the Institute for Environmental and Economic Sustainability (IEES, 2022) found that regional sports tourism can contribute to environmental awareness when properly managed. Eco-sport activities such as trail runs, kayaking, and cycling promote appreciation for natural resources while encouraging responsible behavior among tourists. For Laguna—known for its lakes, hot springs, and mountainous terrains—this insight underscores the importance of integrating environmental safeguards into event planning and policy-making to ensure long-term sustainability.

Finally, the legacy of the 2019 Southeast Asian Games continues to influence sports tourism development in the Philippines. Philstar (2023) noted that major events create a ripple effect by improving local infrastructure, stimulating civic pride, and inspiring smaller-scale competitions across the regions. Laguna exemplifies this impact, as the province has invested in sports facilities and community recreation spaces to accommodate both provincial and regional tournaments. These developments highlight how sports tourism serves not only as an economic driver but also as a platform for cultural pride and social unity.

3. Methodology

The study employed a **descriptive-exploratory research design** anchored on a **mixed-methods approach** to gain a comprehensive understanding of sports tourism in Laguna Province. This design was selected to capture both measurable data and in-depth insights regarding the trends, impacts, and future pathways of sports tourism. The descriptive component allowed the researchers to present an accurate profile of Laguna's sports tourism landscape, while the exploratory aspect enabled a deeper examination of issues and opportunities that have not been extensively studied in previous literature. To address the study's objectives, **quantitative and qualitative data** were collected and analyzed concurrently. Quantitative data were gathered from **280 respondents**, composed of **tourists, local residents, and business owners** who have directly or indirectly participated in or benefited from sports-related activities within the province. The structured survey questionnaire focused on respondents' experiences, perceptions of sports tourism impacts, and opinions on its potential for sustainable development. This method provided numerical evidence of how sports tourism influences economic activity, social interaction, and environmental awareness in Laguna.

Complementing the survey data, **qualitative information** was obtained through **18 key informant interviews (KIIs)** with individuals who play crucial roles in sports tourism development. These included **local government officials, event organizers, and academic representatives** from institutions involved in sports and tourism programs. The interviews explored themes such as policy support, event organization challenges, community participation, and long-term strategies for sustainability. This qualitative component enriched the analysis by providing first-hand accounts and expert perspectives that helped contextualize the numerical findings. The research covered major sports tourism locations strategically selected for their active engagement in hosting sports events: **Sta. Cruz** (Laguna Sports Complex) as the center for provincial competitions; **Cavinti and Lumban** (Caliraya Lake) known for triathlons and water sports; **Los Baños** (Mt. Makiling) for eco-sport and trail activities; and **Cabuyao** (Mapúa Malayan Colleges Laguna) representing academic involvement and indoor sports programs. These sites collectively illustrate the diversity of sports tourism experiences in Laguna—from community-based events to institutional initiatives.

For data analysis, the study applied **descriptive statistics** to summarize quantitative data, including frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores that reflected respondents' attitudes and perceptions. Meanwhile, the qualitative responses were subjected to **thematic analysis**, where emerging patterns and narratives were identified, categorized, and interpreted to explain the underlying meanings behind participant responses. The integration of both datasets allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how sports tourism operates within Laguna's socio-economic and environmental context. Strict adherence to **ethical research standards** was maintained throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents and interviewees. Data confidentiality was guaranteed by anonymizing responses and securely storing collected information. To ensure the accuracy and credibility of research instruments, **expert validation** and **pilot testing** were conducted prior to data collection. The reliability of the survey instrument was further established using **Cronbach's alpha**, confirming consistency in measuring the constructs related to sports tourism impacts.

Overall, the chosen methodology provided a balanced and holistic framework for exploring Laguna's sports tourism sector. By combining empirical data with stakeholder perspectives, the study not only identified current trends and challenges but also generated practical insights that can guide future policies and development programs aimed at positioning Laguna as a leading sports tourism destination in the CALABARZON region and beyond.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the findings derived from the surveys, interviews, and document analyses conducted among various stakeholders in Laguna Province, including local government officials, event organizers, business owners, residents, and visitors. The results are discussed in alignment with the study's objectives: (1) to identify sports tourism trends in Laguna, (2) to assess their economic, social, and environmental impacts, and (3) to determine strategic pathways for sustainable development. Both quantitative and qualitative data were integrated to provide a holistic view of Laguna's sports tourism landscape. Quantitative results established measurable patterns, while qualitative insights provided context and meaning to those patterns, allowing for an in-depth understanding of stakeholder experiences and perceptions.

Table1. Summary of Quantitative Findings

Dimension	Indicator	Result /Percentage	Interpretation
Trends	Annual participation in sports events	62%	Majority of locals and tourists are actively involved in sports-related tourism
Economic Impact	MSME revenue increase	20–40%	Sports events contribute significantly to local business income
	Average tourist spending per event	₱2,500	Visitors spend moderately, benefiting hospitality and retail sectors
Social Impact	Community pride and involvement	81%	High level of community engagement and identity building
Environmental Impact	Environmental awareness	69%	Positive awareness observed, but sustainability issues remain

Table2. Summary of Qualitative Findings

Raw Data Excerpt (Interview Responses)	Open Codes	Axial Codes (Category)	Selective Theme (Core Meaning)
"Sports events like triathlons and fun runs bring more people to our area and help small businesses earn extra income."	Increased tourist arrivals; Boost in MSME sales	Economic Opportunities	Economic empowerment through sports tourism
"The youth get more involved in sports during local tournaments. It builds teamwork and discipline among students."	Youth participation; Skill development; Teamwork	Social Development	Community engagement and youth empowerment
"We make sure events are aligned with our eco-tourism policies, but crowd management is still a challenge."	Event regulation; Environmental concern; Policy alignment	Sustainability and Management	Balancing tourism growth with environmental sustainability
"Partnerships with schools and the private sector help us manage and promote sports events better."	Inter-agency collaboration; Institutional support	Governance and Collaboration	Multi-sectoral partnerships in sports tourism
"We lack a unified promotion platform for sports events in the province. Each town promotes separately."	Limited promotion; Fragmented marketing efforts	Marketing and Promotion	Need for integrated tourism marketing strategies
"Events like the Caliraya Triathlon bring attention to Laguna and motivate residents to stay active."	Destination image; Health awareness	Image and Well-being	Enhancing destination branding and healthy lifestyles

This section presents and interprets the findings gathered from surveys, interviews, and document analysis conducted among key stakeholders in Laguna Province, including local government officials, event organizers, business owners, residents, and visitors. The results are organized according to the study's main objectives—to determine sports tourism trends, assess their economic, social, and environmental impacts, and identify strategic pathways for sustainable development. Quantitative data are complemented by qualitative insights to provide a holistic understanding of Laguna's sports tourism landscape. The discussion connects these findings to existing theories and literature, highlighting how Laguna's experiences both affirm and expand current knowledge about sports tourism within the Philippine context.

Findings revealed that Laguna's sports tourism is dominated by event-based and active activities. About 62% of respondents reported annual participation in sports-related events, while 74% recognized the economic contributions of such activities. The most visited venues include the Laguna Sports Complex and Caliraya Lake, where triathlons and water sports attract both domestic and foreign participants. Economic Impacts: Local micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) reported revenue increases of 20–40% during sports events. Hospitality and transport sectors benefited most, with average tourist expenditures reaching ₱2,500 per event visit. Social Impacts: 81% of respondents expressed pride in Laguna's sports initiatives, citing improvements in youth engagement and community identity. Environmental Impacts: While 69% acknowledged positive environmental awareness from eco-sport events, concerns persist regarding waste management and crowd control. Challenges identified include limited marketing reach, insufficient infrastructure, and the need for environmental safeguards. Nevertheless, collaborative efforts among LGUs, educational institutions, and the private sector present opportunities for integrated sports tourism planning aligned with Laguna's sustainable development goals.

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