

5-7 DECEMBER 2023 – AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

ANZALS 30TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

‘LEISURE FOR LIFE’



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‘LEISURE FOR LIFE’

Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies (ANZALS) 30th Anniversary Conference

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Leisure for Life.

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Transitioning from sex tourism to sports event tourism: A case study of Thailand's image repositioning efforts

Punnawit Chai-Udom, Richard Ajiee & Richard Wright (Auckland University of Technology)

Sports event tourism, a rapidly growing sector in the tourism industry, gained remarkable prominence prior to the COVID-19 outbreak due to its substantial impact on local tourism sectors through both direct and indirect revenue generated from hosting sports events. However, Thailand, a world-class tourism destination, grappled with a detrimental image as a sex tourism hub, challenging its reputation within the broader tourism industry. Recognising the pivotal role of tourism, Thailand's government integrated sports event tourism into its National Economic and Social Development Plan, aiming to reshape the nation's global image. This ongoing study focuses on Thailand's transition from a sex tourism destination to an international sports events hub. The study aims to address the knowledge gap regarding how countries with a sex tourism reputation can leverage sports events to change their image. The research explores Thailand's current image, stakeholder perceptions, challenges, opportunities, and strategies for enhancing its image as a sports tourism destination. Moreover, the study investigates the expected socio-economic impacts, potential changes in tourist behaviour, and initiatives facilitating Thailand's image transition. Using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, the research comprises three interconnected studies employing qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires. The first study will evaluate Thailand's international reputation, particularly its reputation in sex tourism. The second study will investigate internal strategies employed to mitigate the sex tourism image and promote a captivating sports tourism brand. The third study will explore the external actions required for Thailand's successful transition to a sports event tourism destination. The findings of this research are expected to provide valuable insights for regions facing similar image-related challenges, extending its applicability beyond Thailand. By understanding Thailand's efforts and experiences, other destinations can learn from its approach to reposition their image and promote sports event tourism as a pathway for economic development and growth. This research will eventually contribute to the broader discussion on sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: *sex tourism reputation; sports event tourism; sustainable tourism; Thailand transition; tourism image*