



**New Zealand-based Sports Tourists' Attitudes and Perceptions Towards
Thailand's Aspirations of Becoming an International
Sports Event Tourism Destination**

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ABSTRACT

Over the past twenty years, sports event tourism has been proven to contribute to the development of local tourism and hospitality businesses, largely through the revenue generated as a direct and indirect consequence of hosting major sports events. Large sporting fixtures (spectator-driven and participant-driven) have been placed front and centre of many domestic and international-focused destination management and marketing strategies. Thailand, like many other nations, relies on the tourism industry to provide a significant contribution to the nation's GDP. This exploratory qualitative study sought to offer fresh insight into the attitudes and perceptions of sports tourists towards the Thai government's aspirations of becoming an international sports event tourism destination. Attitude is defined as an acquired behavioural disposition, positive and negative evaluation levels, or a mental and neural state of readiness exerting a dynamic influence upon behaviour.

The aim of this thesis was to determine the significant determinants that could influence attitudes towards Thailand's well-established tourism industry targeting sports event tourists. More specifically, the researcher was interested in exploring the reactions of New Zealand-based sports tourists who had a pre-existing personal connection to Thailand. All of the participants on this occasion were New Zealand-based sports tourists with a historic personal connection to Thailand. The research question created at the start of the study was; "To what extent do sports tourists with an existing connection to Thailand consider Thailand to be an international sports event tourism destination?"

The research design used in this study was based on the interpretive philosophy. The primary data was derived from the contribution of nine one-on-one semi-structured interviews carried out during an eight-week period. Thematic analysis was eventually applied as the primary method for analysing and summarising the qualitative data. The researcher followed the four phases and stages of theme development in doing so, consisting of initialisation, construction, rectification, and finalisation. The participants comprised of five males and four females, aged between 25 and 35

years, all of whom were New Zealand residents or citizens. Four of the participants were born in Thailand, two were born in New Zealand, and three were born elsewhere. Seven of the participants had previous experience of living and working in Thailand. They all claimed to be physically active individuals who engaged in sporting activities on a regular, if not daily basis. Five of the participants had actively participated in a sporting event in Thailand, and three had attended sports events in Thailand as spectators.

The participants' socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences clearly influenced their attitudes towards Thailand as a potential international sports event tourism destination. The participants all perceived Thailand's existing tourism brand to be attractive, reputable and positive. The accessibility and affordability of Thailand as a tourism destination was found to be significant strength by all of the participants. However, the participants also identified a number of threats to the Thai government's sports event tourism aspiration, for example, Thailand's reputation for being a nation that suffers from political instability. Several of the participants also expressed doubts or concerns regarding the local Thai event organiser's ability to deliver safe and secure events for a large number of international sport tourists. Perceptions were shared around the importance of athlete's being able to trust the event organisers and the significance of entering an event where the safety and security of the participants were clearly prioritised ahead of any financial gain/profits or future destination marketing opportunities. The impact of COVID-19 on Thailand's aspirations was also discussed, with many of the participants sharing their belief that Thailand's tourism industry would recover once the borders were reopened.

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

PUNNAWIT CHAI-UDOM

Date: 25th July 2021

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Thank you to "my family". Of course, I am grateful to my family. I am the luckiest person born in the Chai-Udom family. My thanks started from my father, my first coach, who introduced me to the world of sports. Secondly, my mother, the most excellent motivator who motivates and encourages me to keep studying and gaining new knowledge. Thirdly, my one and only sister, my personal advisor, always gives me amazing advice to walk through all problems. Finally, my partner, a person whom I love, has always been standing beside me for 11 years.

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DEDICATION

To dedicate to the Chai-Udom, my most incredible family. Because of you and your encouragement to push me on this adventurous journey.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUT	Auckland University of Technology
AUTEC	Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019 Former: 2019-Novel Coronavirus Disease (2019-nCoV)
DMS	Destination Management Strategies
EPL	The English Premier League
FIFA	International Federation of Association Football
eWOM	Electronic word-of-mouth
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IOC	The International Olympic Committee
LPGA	Ladies Professional Golf Association
MICE	Meetings, Incentives, Conventions/ Conferences, and Exhibitions
NESD	The National Economic and Social Development Plan
NHL	National Hockey League
PIS	Participant Information Sheets
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
S-O-R	Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory
TA	Thematic Analysis
THB	Thai Baht (The official currency of Thailand)
TOA	Token of appreciation
UNWTO	The World Tourism Organization
USD	The United States Dollar (The official currency of the United States of America)
WOM	Word-of-mouth

GLOSSARY

Terms	Definitions
ASIAN Games	A continental multi-sports event for all countries in Asia
SEA Games	The Southeast Asian Games, a sub-continental multi-sports event for the eleven countries of Southeast Asia
The All Blacks	The New Zealand national rugby team
The Code	Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for research
The Ironman	A series of long-distance triathlon competitions consisting of 2.4-miles swimming, 112-miles cycling, and 26.2-miles marathon running
Ultra-marathon	Any running event longer than the traditional marathon length of 42.195 kilometres (26.2 miles), the most common distances are 50 kilometres (31.07 mi), 100 kilometres (62.14 mi), 50 miles (80.47 km), and 100 miles (160.93 km)
XTerra	An extreme series of cross triathlon competitions consisting of swimming in the ocean, mountain biking, and trail running
Zoom	A cloud-based video conferencing service that people use to have virtually distancing meetings

ETHICS APPROVAL

Faculty of Business, Economics, and Law

Re Ethics Application: 20/298 New Zealanders' attitudes towards Thailand's aspiration to become an international sports event tourism destination.

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 16 December 2023.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

“Thailand is positioning itself as a dream destination for sports tourism by promoting the kingdom’s world-class sporting facilities, wide-ranging expertise, and reputation for hosting successful regional and international sporting events and tournaments”.

(Elliott, 2016, p.1)

Thailand, like many other nations, relies on the tourism industry to provide a significant contribution to the nation’s GDP (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019). The Southeast Asian nation was one of the world’s most popular tourist destinations, with tourism contributing 19.7% to the nation’s GDP, or approximately USD107 billion (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019). However, in 2020, the World Tourism Organization (2020) presented a report showing that the level of international tourism was expected to drop worldwide by 60-80% because of the COVID-19 pandemic impacts. The actual decrease in the overall number of tourists travelling is estimated to be around 65% (Reuters, 2020). The sudden mass closing of international borders and strict restrictions on leisure travel, has, for example, led to a large decrease in the number of Chinese tourists entering Thailand (BBC, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has also adversely affected the Thai government’s aspirations around establishing itself as an attractive international sports event tourism destination, with many events being cancelled or postponed through no fault of the host.

The introduction chapter provides the background and rationale for this exploratory qualitative study of sports event tourism in Thailand. The aim of this thesis was to determine the significant determinants that could influence sports tourists’ attitudes towards Thailand as a sports event tourism destination. More specifically, the researcher was interested in exploring the reactions of New Zealand-based sports tourists who had a pre-existing personal connection to Thailand. The research aim and question is introduced in this chapter along with three inter-related research objectives. Finally, an overview of the succeeding chapters is also provided.

1.2 Background and Rationale

There are many different areas of special interest tourism, all of which possess a range of unique characteristics according to the tourists' intention and behaviour (Weaver & Lawton, 2014). Pilgrimage tourism, medical tourism, cultural tourism, cruise tourism, heritage tourism, gastronomy tourism, eco-tourism, dark tourism, sports tourism, wellness tourism and event tourism are just some of the many fields situated within the world's biggest export industry (Page, 2015). Of all those listed, the combination of sports activities and travel activities have been identified as one of the most established and fastest-growing (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Malchrowicz-Mosko & Munsters, 2018; Venkatachalam, 2009). Gammon and Robinson (2003) highlighted that sports tourism relates to sports events or fixtures as activities. Sports event tourism has been proven to contribute to the development of local tourism and hospitality businesses, largely through the revenue generated as a direct and indirect consequence of hosting major events (Ferreira et al., 2018).

In 2020, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) outlined their desire to increase the opportunities for more nations to host their events by modifying the bidding process in an attempt to reduce costs and remove barriers (The International Olympic Committee, 2020). Whilst many scholars have questioned the large costs attached to hosting major sports events, few would argue that they can generate significant global media attention and expose tourism destinations, established or emerging, to worldwide audiences who may otherwise not have seen or heard about that location (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Kim et al., 2014). Events are frequently leveraged to promote, develop and create recognition and reputation (Aicher et al., 2020; Gibson, 2001; Oshimi & Harada, 2016). Destination marketers also consider hosting attractive events as a significant tool for creating destination management strategies (Presenza & Sheehan, 2013). Presenza and Sheehan (2013) highlight that sports events are considered an essential element in contributing benefits to host destinations in all areas among various sectors of the tourism industry, especially economic and social benefits. In addition, hosting sports events is an essential tool to generate publicity and enhance and

rejuvenate images of host destinations, tourism promotion, and destination branding (Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012; Chalip & McGuirly, 2004; Getz, 1997).

In sum, hosting sports events has been found to contribute to top-to-bottom revenue generation within the global tourism industry (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Chalip & McGuirly, 2004). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism was widely considered to be the world's largest industry and employer (Chang et al., 2020). For the past decade, tourism has also been in a state of continual growth. The World Travel & Tourism Council (2019) reports that the global tourism industry has an estimated total revenue of USD 2.3 trillion. Between 2015 and 2020, the growth of the tourism industry in Southeast Asia (Figure 1.1) alone had increased by 8% (World Tourism Organization, 2018). Over the same time period, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia have all shown interest in hosting major sports events, including the Asian Games, the Commonwealth Games, and rounds of the Formula 1 Grand Prix season. These nations have also invested in the provision of sports facilities and the tourism/travel infrastructure needed to stage such fixtures (ASEAN Tourism, 2020).

The Thai government pays close attention to the development of the tourism industry in Thailand, documenting its growth within the National Economic and Social Development (NESD) Plan. In 2017, the Thai government's twelfth NESD plan identified sport event tourism as a viable means of changing, rejuvenating, and re-developing the national image in the global tourism industry. The 2017–2021 plan focused on sustainability and the development of an infrastructure and logistics system able to support new forms of tourism, including sports, health and wellness tourism, but also in meeting, incentive, convention and exhibition (MICE) activities (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2017). Furthermore, the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2017) also published a strategic plan for 2017–2021, in which sports tourism was also identified as a particular focus of attention. The plan identifies that sports tourism activity is growing globally, with an annual growth rate of 14%. Hosting major sporting fixtures was therefore identified as a

viable means of reimagining the country as the region's leading event tourism destination (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017; Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2017).

Figure 1.1

The Southeast Asian Countries Map



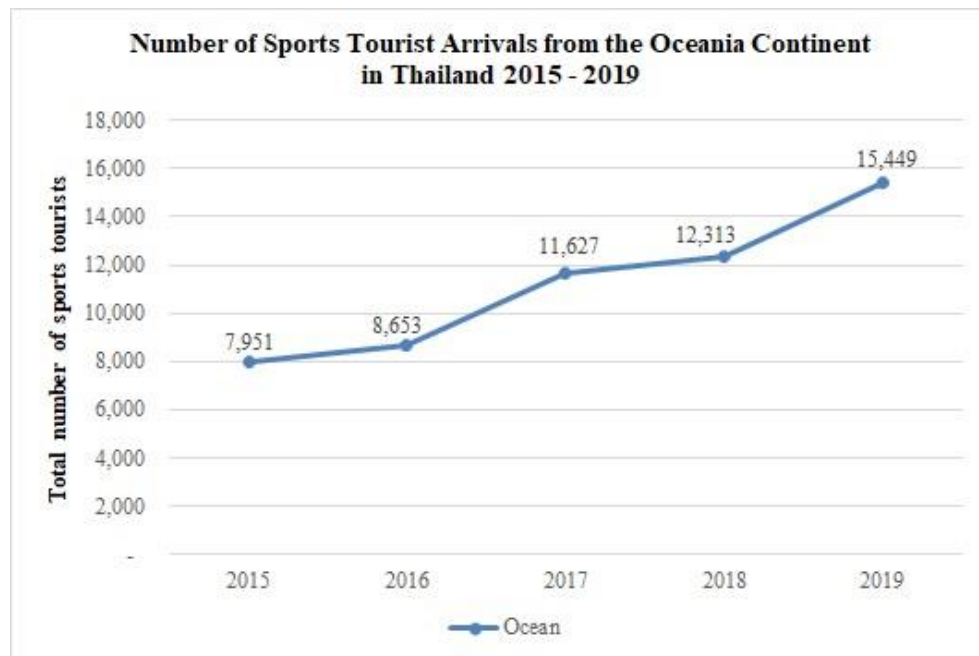
Source: Adapted from Asia Highlights (2020)

Worapinij et al. (2017) support the move by the Thai government, concluding that Thailand has high potential to develop a sports tourism industry. With a government-funded plan to develop the necessary infrastructure and sports facilities in place, the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports has publicly expressed its desire to seek suitable opportunities to both promote and develop Thailand's potential as a sports event tourism destination. Major sports events such as the Thailand MotoGP (motorcycle racing, Chang Circuit, Buriram), Tennis Thailand Open, Honda LPGA Thailand (Golf), and Phuket's King's Cup Regatta (International Sailing competition) were all listed as

existing/established events worthy of showcasing to international event operators/owners, the sports media and, most importantly, international sports tourists. Thailand has hosted more than 30 international sporting events (Appendix F) (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017; National Olympic Committee of Thailand, 2020; Somphong, 2020). Prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, Thailand's sports tourism generated approximate revenues of USD 700 million, which can be subdivided as follows: USD 650 million from sports activities, USD 69 million from sports ticket sales, and USD 17.6 million from hosting international sport tournaments. The impact of COVID-19 has, however, changed everything, including attitudes towards international travel and the importance of hosting spectator-driven major sports events (Keshkar et al., 2021).

Figure 1.2

Number of Sports Tourist Arrivals from the Oceania Continent in Thailand from 2015 – 2019



Source: Adapted from National Statistical Office (2019)

The Oceania continent, including Australia, New Zealand, and other countries, is one of the most significant markets for the Thailand tourism industry (Ministry of Tourism and Sport, 2020). Although the total population in the Oceania continent is less than in other continents such as Asia,

Europe, and America, this continent contributed a substantial number of tourists travelling to Thailand (National Statistical Office, 2019). Figure 1.2 exhibits the continual growth of sports tourists from the Oceania continent travelling to Thailand. New Zealand is sought as a potential market for the Thailand sports tourism industry, as the number of sports tourists who travelled to Thailand increased by 22.6% in 2019 (National Statistical Office, 2019). The continual growth of New Zealand sports tourists raised the Thai government's intention to appeal and stimulate New Zealand sports tourists to travel to Thailand to participate in and/or attend sports events (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017).

Attitude is defined as an acquired behavioural disposition, positive and negative evaluation levels, or a mental and neural state of readiness exerting a dynamic influence upon behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). Whilst, attitudes include people's beliefs, feelings and behaviour toward an object (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), perceptions are determined by people's interpretation and comprehension from attitudes (Bogan et al., 2020; Gon et al., 2016; Martinez-Garcia et al., 2017; Schnitzer et al., 2020). Xu et al. (2018) explain that in the context of tourism marketing research, destinations are the places in which visitors or tourists perceive they have had a memorable and positive and negative experience. As a result, attitude and perception are significantly important in determining the success and sustainability of a tourist destination (Crouch, 2004).

Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) propose that the pre- and post-experience of tourists and/or visitors influence the attitudes and decision-making process towards the destination, which can be both positive and negative. Similarly, both Baloglu (2000) and Echtner and Ritchie (2003) consistently argue that destination image has been significantly considered a key variable in the individual attitude and behaviour of tourists and/or visitors, as it is conceived as a representation of the destination in the individual's mind. More recently, McGillivray et al. (2019) highlight that, in the event bidding process, the attitudes of international audiences can play a significant factor in influencing the vote. Thus, all internal issues and external images attached to a potential host destination, such as political instability, corruption issues, and human rights, or environmental

problems, are significant factors that are considered by those who decide who get to host the biggest international sports events (McGillivray et al., 2019).

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The exploratory qualitative study sought to offer fresh insight into the attitudes and perceptions of sports tourists towards Thailand's aspirations of becoming an international sports event tourism destination. All of the participants on this occasion were New Zealand-based sports tourists with a historic personal connection to Thailand. The target audience for this study was adults who were born or had visited, lived and/or worked in Thailand. Once selected, the participants were individually invited to share their experiences and expectations towards the development of sports event tourism in Thailand. The research question created at the start of the study was:

“To what extent do sports tourists with an existing connection to Thailand consider Thailand to be an international sports event tourism destination?”

Three research objectives were created to help the researcher answer the above question. The objectives were:

- To determine the attitudes and perceptions of New Zealand-based sports tourists who were born or had visited, lived, or worked in Thailand towards Thailand as an international sports event tourism destination.
- To determine the significant determinants that could appeal to sport event tourists when deciding whether or not to travel to Thailand to participate in and/or attend international sports events.
- To consider ways to improve the branding of Thailand as a sports event tourism destination according to the attitudes and perceptions of New Zealand-based sports tourists with a historic personal connection to Thailand.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis and Chapter Overview

The first chapter is an introductory chapter, which provides the background of the study, including its aim and objectives. Following Chapter two, the Literature Review chapter focuses on the concept of sports event tourism, comprising key theoretical principles in sport, events and tourism. In that chapter, key determinants that influence people's attitudes and perceptions are determined. Finally, the conceptual framework of this research study is exhibited to represent the researcher's synthesis of the literature on the relationship of sports tourists and key factors of intention to participate in and/or attend sports events that influence and connect sports tourists' attitudes towards Thailand. Chapter three is the Methodology and Method chapter, where the research philosophy and theory, including ontology and epistemology, are discussed, and the research objectives are linked to the research approach adopted. The data collection and analysis process is explained in this chapter, along with the ethical issues and limitations of the study.

The findings and discussion are included in Chapter four, which focuses on the justification of the emergent themes from data collection, with participant profiles described in this chapter. Three key themes are also introduced: accessibility and affordability, risks and reputation, and COVID-19. The fifth chapter contains the conclusion, which is based on the findings taken from the data collection. Within this chapter, the researcher links the findings to the research objectives introduced within this introductory chapter. Chapter five is also used as a platform to offer the researcher's interpretations and the potential implications.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

“An emerging challenge in sport event tourism is to incorporate events more strategically into the destination’s overall mix of tourism products and services”.

(Chalip & Costa, 2005, p. 218)

Over the past few decades, and prior to the emergence of COVID-19, the international sports event industry was growing at a faster rate than any other form of tourism (Byun et al., 2019; Getz, 1997). As a result, large sporting fixtures (spectator-driven and participant-driven) have been placed front and centre of many domestic and international-focused destination management and marketing strategies over the past twenty years (Abujamous et al., 2019; Presenza & Sheehan, 2013). Events not only generate increased recognition but can also rejuvenate an ageing destination’s image/identity (Allameh et al., 2015; Knott et al., 2016). Events can also promote a host destination, city, or country to a new or wider market (Chalip & McGuirly, 2004). Positive attitudes influence decision-making, especially when it comes to event-related travel and tourism activity (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). According to Chalip and Costa (2005), sports events are increasingly being leveraged as a way of building a positive destination brand. Moreover, the hosting of successful sports events can help transform a poor image into a positive one (Simpson et al., 2016).

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section begins with the introduction, consisting of the definition and concept of destination branding. Also, several existing theoretical notions found in the destination marketing research are discussed and explained within this section, including the relationship between branding, brand equity and destination branding in the tourism industry. The second section focuses on the differentiation and interrelationship between tourism, sports tourism and sports event tourism. The key theoretical classifications and frameworks are acknowledged and discussed, including those that focus on understanding the attitude and perceptions of sport event tourists.

2.2 The Implementation of Destination Branding towards Tourism

Globalisation has resulted in an increase in the number of international tourism destinations (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2018). Many destination marketers attempt to promote destinations and create changes in destination image by applying co-branding as a marketing strategy by pairing events and destinations together (Xing & Chalip, 2006). Destination branding, also referred to as place branding, is the name, logo, symbol and wordmark that encourages identifying and distinguishing destinations from others (Morgan et al., 2011; Morrison, 2013). Brands and branding can create recognition and enhance a consumer's understanding about a seller's products and services (Richelieu, 2018b). A brand is a complex bundle of consumer perceptions, attitudes and experiences (Wood, 2000). A brand influences consumer behaviour by differentiating the products and services of sellers from their competitors (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006; Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). The relationship between brand, brand image and brand equity can be explained as follows.

- A **brand** is the distinction of a product or service provided to consumers (Coomber, 2002; Kotler & Armstrong, 2017).
- **Brand image**, as a set of perspectives and beliefs (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017) and the approach to consumer attitudes towards interpreting a brand and a product or service (Coomber, 2002), is a complete perception, perspective and experience of consumers towards products or services (Faircloth et al., 2001).
- With a strong brand and positive image of products or services, "**brand equity**," as a positive indicator, establishes brand power, influences customer behaviour to respond to products or services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017), and creates a high level of customer brand awareness and loyalty (Brassington & Pettitt, 2006; Wood, 2000).

Destination branding attempts to indoctrinate consumers' minds with a heap of attitude, information and reasons for purchasing to differentiate destinations (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004; D'Hautesserre, 2001). It is a form of marketing strategy along with the application of public relations, product promotion and corporate identity activities to regions, cities or countries, as if they are mere

commodities (Morgan et al., 2011). Destination branding is an essential mechanism of marketing activities to promote and establish a destination's name, identify the destination's uniqueness for attracting visitors and tourists and differentiate its destination competitors (Venkatachalam, 2009). Furthermore, destination branding conveys visitors' expectations and perceptions of travel experiences associated with the uniqueness of a destination, encouraging an emotional connection between the destination and its visitors, and conducting consumers' search costs and perceived risk (Che, 2008; Hall & Amore, 2019). Collectively, these marketing activities are tools to create a destination's positive image (Pike, 2009). Tourism, as an industry, can be considered a form of "place branding" to help solidify the belief that destinations establish guaranteed positive experiences (Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2020). In sum, destination branding can be defined as the creation of a positive image designed to influence, encourage and attract visitors and tourists as attractive selection choices in the destination competition (Chalip & Costa, 2005).

One of the tourism industry's most rapidly growing segments is the combination of sports activities and destinations (Venkatachalam, 2009). Furthermore, destination marketers have used the "sports diplomacy" concept to create a positive image and enhance a destination's brand (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Richelieu, 2018b). Hosting sports events can make a significant contribution to the reputation of the host destinations, thus increasing awareness and interest within new and established consumer markets. Events, and the legacies they create, can also be leveraged to promote a destination's brand image, pushing or pulling visitors to the destination where the sports event took place (Presenza & Sheehan, 2013). However, hosts must decisively consider the various aspects involved, such as the generation of publicity, enhancement of occupancy, stimulation of local and regional economies and the attraction of repeated visits when hosting sports events (Abujamous et al., 2019). Furthermore, not all legacies are planned or positive, and there is a lot of academic literature documenting the negative impacts of hosting sports events, especially those categorised as being mega or major (Wright, 2021).

Bowdin et al. (2011) argue that event evaluation is a significant part of the event management process, as it enables event managers to evaluate final outcomes, whether they succeed or fail and communicate event outcomes to key stakeholders. While the economic evaluation dominates much in sports events literature and practice, social and environmental impacts are significantly recognised by host destinations and researchers alike (Van der Wagen & White, 2018). In terms of economic impact, Ferreira et al. (2018) highlight that the failure of hosting sports events, especially mega or major sports events, dominates the nation's economy as a whole. The cancellation of the international men's cycling race 'Tour of Croatia', for example, dominated the tourism industry in Croatia where sports tourists cancelled their trip to Croatia, as well as accommodation reservations, with local business being affected (Perić & Vitezić, 2019). Moreover, socio-environmental impacts are significantly recognised as negative results. Ribeiro et al. (2020) argue that although the 2016 Rio Olympic Games were likely to contribute to positive economic impacts for the country, the event affected residents who lived near sports venues, such as the increase of pricing on consumption products, and dislocation of residents who felt uncomfortable and insecure living around sports venues.

Hosting sports events, especially mega or major events, is considered an effective tool in promoting the place branding of destinations, cities and countries (Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012; Ferreira et al., 2018). Sports events can also contribute to an increase in the areas of investment, employment, skilled workers, visitors and an overall contribution to their economy (Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012; Presenza & Sheehan, 2013). Many countries and marketers have been forced to pay attention to the impact of hosting mega or major sports events (Bresler, 2011; Chalip & McGuirty, 2004). Sports event tourism, as a result, has become an essential element within many destination management strategies (DMS) (Abujamous et al., 2019; Presenza & Sheehan, 2013). DMS are an effective mechanism in measuring the economic implications of sports event tourism in the short term and the longer-term impacts for the host destination (Candrea & Ispas, 2010; Che, 2008).

As identified within the opening chapter, hosting sports events is also considered to be an effective destination marketing strategy (Hemmonsbey et al., 2018; Sant et al., 2013) and an essential component of destination management strategies (Presenza & Sheehan, 2013). Sports events can create awareness and recognition of the host destinations' brand image (Armenakyan et al., 2013; Chalip & Costa, 2005), as events can draw the world's attention to host cities and countries (Heslop et al., 2010; O'Reilly et al., 2016). Therefore, sports events are widely promoted as an effective tool to enhance destination image as a tourist destination and the host country's image from an international marketing perspective (Kim et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2019). In addition, hosting sports events helps host cities and countries create, promote and change their destination image, in what many destination marketers refer to as "*city branding*" or "*city imaging*" (Hall & Amore, 2019; Liu, 2015).

2.3 The Interrelationship between Tourism, Sports Tourism, and Sports Event Tourism

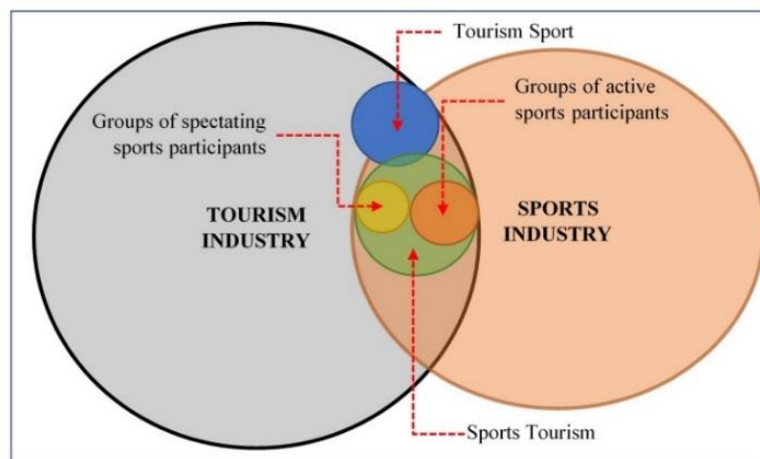
Tourism is one of the largest sectors in the global economic system (Jeong & Kim, 2019a). The World Tourism Organization (2018) defines tourism as temporary travel activities of individuals or groups to other places outside their homes for different purposes, such as leisure, business or religious pilgrimage. Weaver and Lawton (2014) view tourism as a combination of the relationship and interaction between tourist activities, stakeholders and destinations relating to tourists' experiences. With this holistic approach, tourism can be seen as an essential element for study when analysing best practices and the approach to managing the tourism industry and attracting tourists and visitors (Neirotti, 2003; World Tourism Organization, 2018).

Sports tourism is just one of many special interest categories located under the tourism umbrella. Sport and tourism are two key components of an ever-evolving global culture. Sports tourism, as the name suggests, is directly derived from "sport" and "tourism". Sports tourism is identified as a field of knowledge that reconstructs the history of tourism and sports and strives to go beyond the construction of a spontaneous philosophy to reach an elaborated code or content, a hermeneutic interest and an emancipatory interest (Pigeassou et al., 2003). Chalip and Costa (2005)

argue that sports tourism is essentially a combination of sports and travel activities. Whilst it dates back to ancient Greece and pre-dates the Roman Empire, its history as a subject of academic research is less than fifty years old (Standeven & De Knop, 1999, as cited in Gibson, 2004). In fact, sports tourism only reached the stage of emancipation and autonomy which separated it from the field of sport and tourism around the start of the 21st century (Pigeassou et al., 2003). Over the past two decades, however, sports-related tourism has firmly established itself as one of the fastest-growing and most sought-after sectors within the world's largest export industry (Page, 2015). Arguably, sports tourism is also one of the most popular forms of event tourism (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004). Sports event tourism is defined as the specific intention and purpose related to active and/or passive sports activity involvement in sports events (Watanabe et al., 2018).

Figure 2.1

Components of “Sports Tourism”



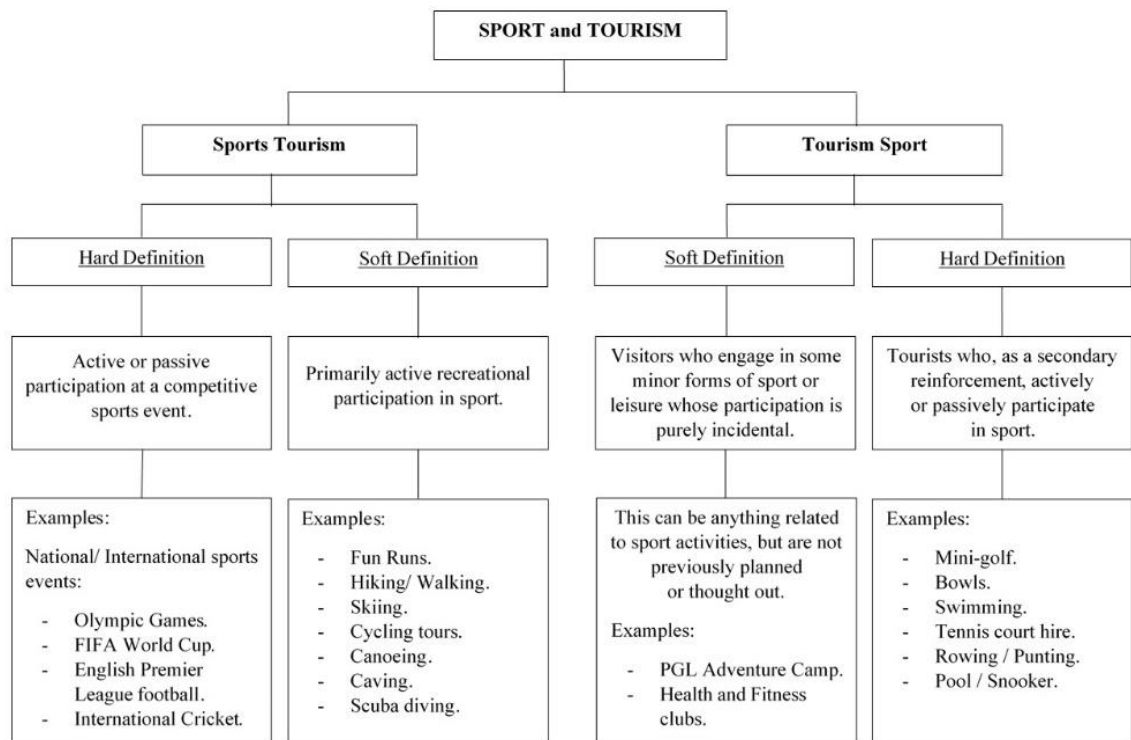
Source: Adapted from Chalip and Costa (2005) and Gammon and Robinson (2003)

With the collaboration of the two fields of sport and tourism, Gammon and Robinson (2003) provide in-depth explanations of “Sports Tourism” and “Tourism Sport” based on the primary purpose of travelling. Those travelling because of a specific sports event/fixture or with the primary intention of engaging in some forms of sport-related activity are deemed to be consuming “Sports tourism” (Figure 2.1). Individuals and/or groups of people who actively or passively engage in some

unplanned/ad hoc recreational sports activities while on holiday were classified as having engaged in something called “Tourism Sport” (Figure 2.2). More recently, Malchrowicz-Mosko and Munsters (2018) provide a more explicit picture of sports tourism, referring to it as a specific type of travel to, or residing in, a place outside the usual environment of individuals and/or groups of people who have the primary purpose and motivation of actively or passively participating in sports-related activities.

Figure 2.2

Conceptual framework of “Sports Tourism” and “Tourism Sport”



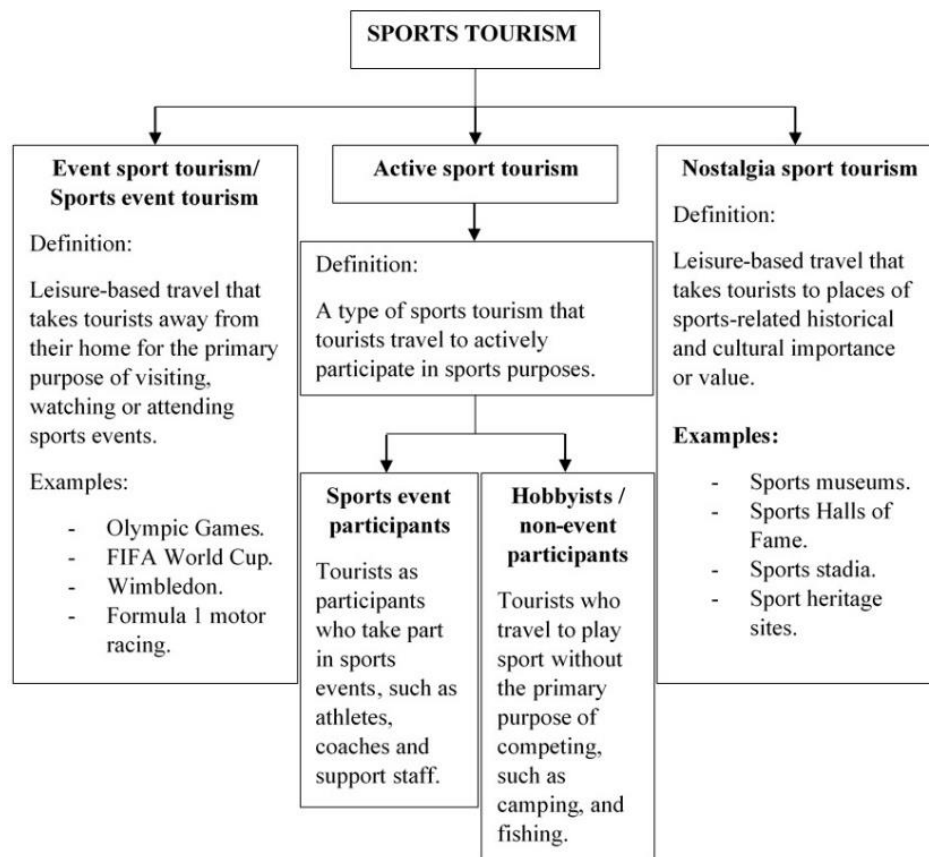
Source: Adapted from Gammon and Robinson (2003)

Many scholars have classified and categorised sports tourists according to their behaviour, intention and purposes (Table 2.1) (Gibson, 2004; Malchrowicz-Mosko & Munsters, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2002; Schlemmer et al., 2020). One of the earliest sport tourism studies divided sports tourism activity into three specific groups based on the activity, consisting of “Active Sport Tourism”, “Event Sport Tourism”, and “Nostalgia Sport Tourism” (Figure 2.3) (Gibson (1998a). One of the most recent,

published by Schlemmer et al. (2020), categorises sports tourists into two broad groups based on the products and activities consumed (Table 2.1). The groups are participants, those who travel to actively participate (e.g., athletes, coaches, and staff) and spectators, and those who travel for the specific intention and purpose of spectating (e.g., followers, families and fans). Standeven and De Knop (1999, as cited in Gibson, 2004) also explicitly classified sports tourists into two distinct groups based on comparing their existing knowledge and behaviour. The ‘connoisseurs’ are defined as tourists who are experts in the sport being observed or actively consumed. In contrast, the ‘casuals’ are defined as tourists who are less specialised in knowledge and who travel for health benefits or to enjoy the moment.

Figure 2.3

Classification of Sports Tourism



Source: Adapted from Gibson (1998b)

Table 2.1*The In-depth Classification of Tourists in the Sports Tourism Industry*

Groups of sports participation travel	Groups of sports spectatorial travel
<p>This group “travels for the specific intention and purpose of participating in sports activities.”</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Athletes. - Coaches and support staff. 	<p>This group “travel for the specific intention and purpose of spectating sports activities and events.”</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Athletes’ followers. - Sports fans.
<p>The in-depth classification of a group of travelling sports participants is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The connoisseurs</i>: Elite/ professional athletes 2. <i>The casuals</i>: Amateur athletes <p>The connoisseurs are more specialised in their knowledge and behaviour than the casuals.</p>	<p>The in-depth classification of a group of travelling spectators is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The avid spectator/ fan</i> or “<i>sports junkie</i>”: <p>This group has the primary purpose and rigorous intention to attend sports games or sports events without participating in non-sports activities.</p> 2. <i>The frequent spectator/ fan</i>: <p>This group also has a primary purpose of attending sports games or sports events. However, they can be tempted to take some part in other non-sports activities if they explore something interesting around the sports event venues.</p> 3. <i>The casual spectator/ fan</i>: <p>The purpose of attending sports games or sports events is not the primary purpose of this group. Sports games or sports events are just one of the activities included in their vacation.</p>

Source: Adopted from Gibson (2004), Malchrowicz-Mosko and Munsters (2018), Ritchie et al. (2002), and Schlemmer et al. (2020)

In 2002, Ritchie et al. (2002) identified groups of travelling sports event spectators into three types, based on their passion, intent, and purpose of travelling to sports events, categorised as follows:

- The avid spectators/ fans or “sports junkies” are identified as sports spectators who have primary purposes and serious intentions to attend only sports events without other non-activities in the destination.
- The frequent spectators/ fans are described as a group of sports spectators who have primary purposes and intentions to attend sports events as same as the “avid spectators”, but the frequent spectators/ fans can enjoy other interesting non-sports activities in the sports event destination.

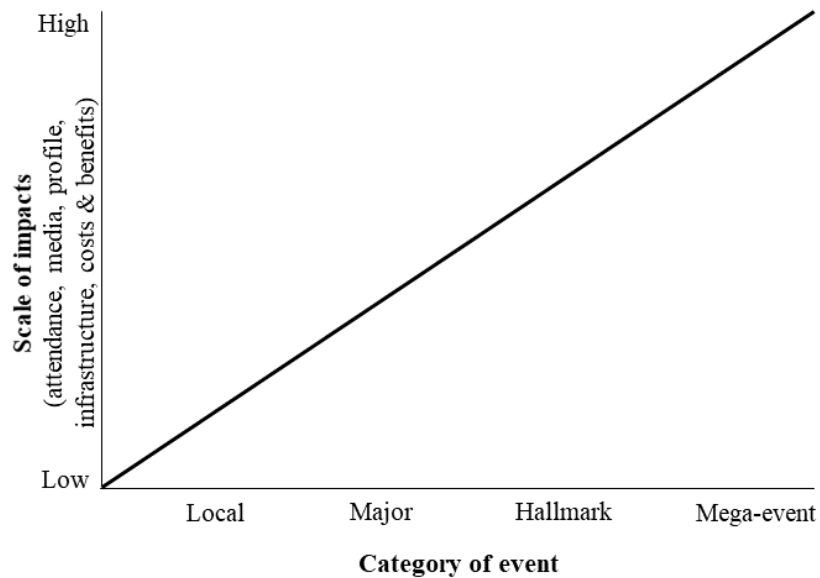
The casual spectators/ fans are explained as a group of travellers who take part in their vacation to attend sports events as one of the leisure activities, and attending sports events is not their primary purpose to travel.

2.3.1 The relationship between Sports Tourism and Sports Events

Many sports tourism scholars have documented the multitude of socio-economic legacies attached to hosting major or mega sports events, not all of which are positive or sustainable (Almeida, 2019; Wright, 2021). Event tourism is considered an occasional, temporary and short-time activity outside a regular or routine programme, with planning and management (Getz, 1997; Van der Wagen & White, 2018). Getz (1997) categorises event tourism products into two forms by (1) referring to the size and scale of events that relate to a number of audiences, media coverage and impacts on host destinations, consisting of local or community, major, hallmark and mega-events (Figure 2.4), and (2) using the contents and purposes of events, consisting of cultural, business and sports events (Table 2.2). Neirotti (2003) defines sports events as sports activities or competitions capable of attracting a considerable number of visitors, either as participators or spectators.

Figure 2.4

The relationship between a category of events by size and scale of impacts



Source: Adapted from Bowdin et al. (2011)

Sports events can be categorised as being either local, major, hallmark or mega, according to their size and scale (Getz, 1997; Jordan, 2010; Van der Wagen & White, 2018). Whitford et al. (2013) distinguish more deeply between the different types of sports events, suggesting that local sports events are small-scale events that primarily target participants from within the community or region. As a result, these events attract little media attention and have fewer visible impacts on the economy of the host destination. In contrast, major, hallmark, and mega sports events typically gain international attention and media interest. These large-scale events can generate noticeable economic benefits, but also require significant investment from private and public sector sponsors (Van der Wagen & White, 2018).

Table 2.2*Typology of Events*

		Event Classification	Key Characteristics
By size and scale of impacts		Local events	- Small-scale events, compared to other event types in the list, hosted by the community at the level of town or city, called “community events”, which mainly target local audiences or participants with the primary purpose of creating socialisation, fun, and entertainment value, and engendering patriotism and pride in the community.
		Major events	- Major events, usually hosted by governments, and often driven to contribute to economic development by creating place promotion, attracting and stimulating investment, generating employment and capturing significant national and international visitor numbers and media coverage.
		Hallmark events	- Hallmark events, considered to be tourism image-makers, enhance the appeal and profitability of a tourism destination, providing a competitive advantage for the host destination as becoming so identified with the spirit or ethos of a town, city or region, and synonymous with the name of the place. In addition, hallmark events can gain widespread recognition and awareness from national and international visitor numbers and global media coverage, such as England’s Wimbledon Tennis Tournament.
		Mega-events	- Mega-events, the largest type of events, mainly target international visitors and global media coverage, and affect and create social, cultural, environmental and economic impacts on host countries.
By form and content		Sports events	- Specific sports purposes events provide a multitude of benefits to an array of stakeholders, including competitors and event staff from outside the region and locally, tourists attracted to the event and the local community, including spectators, participants, volunteers and support workers.
		Business events	- Commercial primary purpose events, known as “MICE” (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions/Conferences, and Exhibitions), are considered an extremely lucrative market based on the spending of business tourists compared to other purposes of travelling tourists.
		Cultural events	- The common event form as “Cultural celebration,” including festivals, religious events, art and entertainment, are often hosted at the community level to enhance and preserve culture, tradition and history, promote creativity, increase tourism and rejuvenate community cohesion.

Source: Adopted from Bowdin et al. (2011), Getz (1997), Van der Wagen and White (2018), and Whitford et al. (2013)

Key stakeholders, especially national governments, realise sports events can contribute significant benefits to the place and the sport tourism industry (Jeong & Kim, 2019a; Kim et al., 2014). In particular, hosting large-scale sports events helps to establish a reputation for a place and contributes to the top-to-bottom revenue generation within the tourism industry (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Chalip & McGuirty, 2004). Hosting large-scale sports events can lead to other dimensions, including the stimulation of investment, development of infrastructure, increase in employment, cultural exchange of visitors and residents, development of education and the overall reputation of the destination and country (Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012; Ferreira et al., 2018; Heere et al., 2019). Undoubtedly, the integration and collaboration of sport and event tourism have captured the attention of many worldwide marketers, which in turn has inspired many local and national governments to chase the opportunities attached to hosting large-scale sports events (Bresler, 2011; Chalip & McGuirty, 2004; Mackellar, 2015).

As mentioned in section 2.2, although sports events can contribute to the economic and social well-being of cities, regions and entire nations (Hallmann & Breuer, 2010; Van der Wagen & White, 2018). However, there is a mountain of evidence to suggest that they can also fail to deliver and fall short of expectations (Wright, 2021). Orr and Jarvis (2018) argue that host destinations and event organisations cannot neglect or avoid planning potential risks and threats and impacts and legacies whether pre-, during, and post-sports events. Well-prepared plans can help host destinations to forecast and prevent potential risks and negative economic, socio-cultural, or environmental impacts (Simona, 2019; Van der Wagen & White, 2018). Drózdź (2020) argues that sports event organisers must take responsibility for organising, managing, and planning sports competitions whilst also associating and dealing with the probability of harm or negative incidents occurring to sports participants and spectators, as well as locals, around sports event venues. The outcomes of managing, organising and running events impact neither positive nor negative attitudes towards event organisers in terms of reliability and trustworthiness for future events (Devine & Devine, 2012).

Attitude is an essential concept in marketing and tourism research, as it is a mediator between beliefs, feelings, and behavioural intentions. Attitudes can also change according to the variables that impact people (Pizam et al., 2000). Echtner and Ritchie (2003) argue that a positive destination image is a significant key variable influencing tourists' attitudes in their decision-making process before travelling to the destination. Tourists' attitudes can change according to their perceived information before deciding to travel to the destinations and their experience whilst travelling to the destinations (Simpson et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2018). Müller (2015) notes the changes in attitudes towards the perceived benefits of staging mega sports events, visible in the reduction of destinations bidding for the hosting rights. McGillivray and Turner (2018) also note the growing global resistance that is evident amongst communities who fail to see the value or viability of hosting large-scale sports events.

2.3.2 The sports tourists' decision-making process

Fodness and Murray (1997) state that the current destination selection process is more complicated than in the past. Many tourists and/or visitors currently spend much time searching for information using different methods and sources. In the past, before making their final decision, tourists and/or visitors relied on and believed commercial sources to form a destination image (Fodness & Murray, 1997). Katsikari et al. (2020) suggest that the application of the "push and pull" strategy can help destination marketers understand tourists' travelling motivation by the relationship between Push and Pull factors. Push factors explain tourists' intrinsic needs and desires for different travelling purposes, whilst Pull factors express extrinsic tourists' determinants that drive them to choose destinations (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Dann, 1977; Newland & Aicher, 2018).

Additionally, Mehrabian & Russell (1974, as cited in Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020) suggest the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) theory helps host destinations seek positive opportunities to understand, encourage and influence tourists' attitudes towards destinations. Implementing the push and pull strategy and S-O-R theory is an effective combination to stimulate tourists and/or visitors to have positive attitudes and influences their decision to travel to destinations (Katsikari et al., 2020;

Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020). Vegara-Ferri et al. (2020) and Jeong et al. (2020) argue that hosting sports events is an essential platform to implement the S-O-R theory to create positive attitudes of destinations and apply the push and pull strategy to encourage tourists' motivation to travel to particular destinations (Giddy, 2018; Katsikari et al., 2020). Successful sports events can encourage tourists to create positive destination images (Allameh et al., 2015; Halpenny et al., 2016) and destination branding for host destinations (Morgan et al., 2011; Richelieu, 2018a).

There are a variety of factors, such as reputations of sports events and images of destinations, that can effectively influence sports tourists' decisions to participate in or attend sports events (Puente-Díaz, 2018), and these different factors vary based on the organisation or the sport (Puente-Díaz, 2018). Asada and Ko (2016) and Halpenny et al. (2016) assert that word-of-mouth (WOM) is a key factor in attracting sports tourists travelling to a destination. WOM is defined as the essential communication without any commercial involvement between communicators regarding token of appreciation (TOA) marketing of products, services or brands (Harrison-Walker, 2001, as cited in Asada, 2016). In addition, Sotiriadis and Zyl (2013) maintain that people currently search for and receive information and feedback about travel plans, sports events and destinations by communicating with other people via online platforms. This online communication is called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Bhattacharya and Dutta (2016) argue that eWOM is one of the most effective tools to improve destination branding in the tourism industry. In contrast, Vegara-Ferri et al. (2020) argue that negative WOM and eWOM can influence visitors' decisions to participate in or attend sports events.

Silveira et al. (2019) argue that the quality of sports facilities, including sports stadiums or arenas, is another essential determinant for sports tourists considering whether to participate in and/or attend a sports event. Yu (2010) presents various significant factors for non-professional athletes and sports spectator groups, such as tourism attractions, infrastructure, facilities, entertainment, and other leisure activities. In addition, Heere et al. (2019) conclude that in the tourists' decision-making process, accessibility of destinations, infrastructure and facilities of destinations, additional leisure

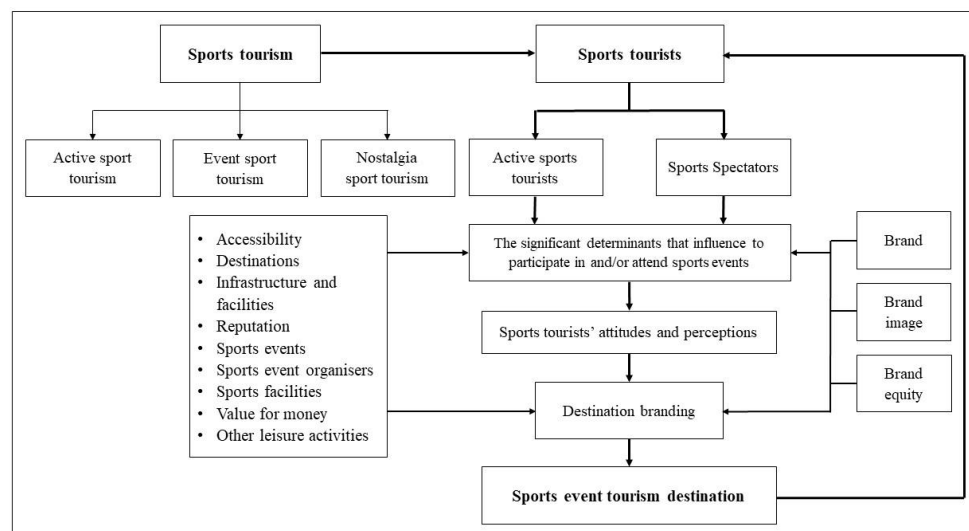
activities of destinations, and travelling costs are significant determinants influencing tourists' decisions to travel to destinations for participating in and/or attending sports events (Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012; Newland & Aicher, 2018). Destination marketers must strategically consider essential determinants of sports tourists or visitors to incorporate sports events into destination branding (Newland & Aicher, 2018). A sports event destination requires an appropriate combination of sports activities that support sports events, destinations that offer attractive leisure and recreational activities, such as sightseeing venues and shops, and other activities consistent with the value or interests of the sports and strategic risk management plans (Chalip & Costa, 2005).

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework (Figure 2.5) maps out the actions required in this thesis, according to the knowledge obtained from the existing literature presented within this chapter. This framework also represents the researcher's synthesis of the literature on the relationship of sports tourists and the factors of intention to participate in and/or attend sports events that influence and connect sports tourists' attitudes towards branding a destination to become a sports event tourism destination.

Figure 2.5

Conceptual Framework of the study



2.5 Chapter Summary

Sports event tourism is a specific and niche market and one of the fastest-growing markets in the tourism industry. The continued growth of sports event tourism attracts the intention of destination marketers as an essential tool to develop a broad reputation and recognition of a host destination, as well as encouraging and stimulating economic development and the tourism industry in many dimensions, both short-term and long-term. Thus, hosting international sports events has become a significant component of destination management and marketing strategies. Events can even influence tourism development strategies. Although there is plenty of evidence to suggest that hosting large-scale sports events rarely deliver the long-term benefits promised, they have also been proven to be an effective means of growing global recognition and regenerating the image and branding of a host destination, city, and/or country. In sum, the positive image and reputation of destinations can influence tourists' attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, regardless of whether the hosts are able to deliver on the legacies promised to the local community. What's more, the success of hosting international sports events can turn tourists' negative attitudes and perceptions into positive ones while also enhancing the overall destination's image.

This chapter has discussed the meaning and importance of destination branding within the competitive tourism market. The relationship between destination branding and the inter-relationship between tourism, sports tourism and sports event tourism are explained. It has also identified the different experiences and expectations of travellers who have specific sports-related travel objectives. The inter-relationship between tourism, sports tourism, and sports event tourism was also discussed, along with the different attitudes of sports tourists. Finally, the chapter provides the conceptual framework that will underpin the collection of primary data from a small cohort of New Zealand-based sports tourists with a historic personal connection to Thailand. The following chapter introduces the methodology and research methods used to collect and analyse this data.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Walliman (2011) argues that nowadays, many people misunderstand and use research in the wrong direction, such as collecting facts or information without an explicit purpose. He noted how common it was to see researchers reassembling and reordering facts or information without interpretation and applying the activity with irrelevance to daily life (Walliman, 2011). This chapter presents and examines the author's methodology and the research methods used within this exploratory qualitative study. Methodology is a practical key, which enables the researcher to understand the explicit direction that needs to be followed, what needs to be explored and examined, who the target of the investigation is, how to collect the data and information, and how to interpret and analyse the data.

A research approach is a significant process that enables the researcher to explicitly clarify and understand the theory, beginning with raising significant questions that concern the research design (Saunders et al., 2019). Conducting research can be divided into two forms according to the purposes and context of the study, consisting of basic or pure research and applied research (Gray, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Basic or pure research is undertaken to understand or study the process and outcomes that will stimulate the academic community to develop and expand knowledge (Gray, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Applied research is conducted and manipulated in order to understand specific problems of social or organisation practically and to find solutions (Bell & Waters, 2014; Gray, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019; Walliman, 2011). This study adopts a basic research approach as a topic, and the research objectives are determined by the researcher.

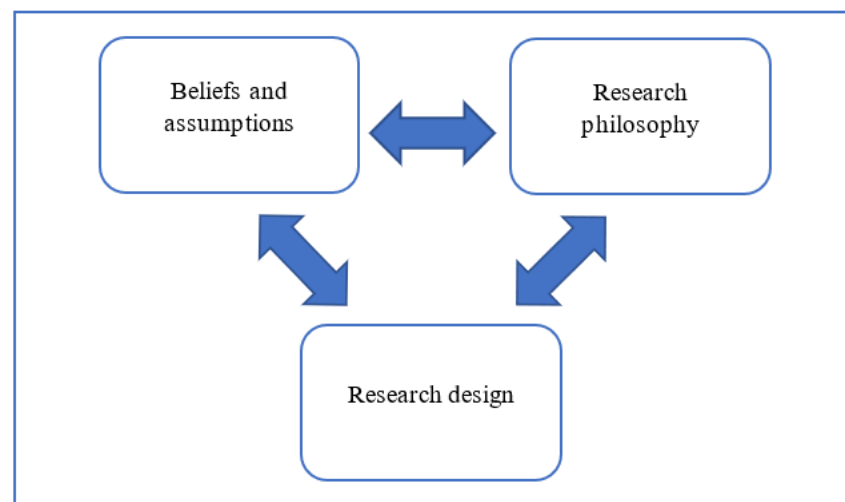
3.2 Research Philosophy and Theory

Theory is an essential tool that helps researchers consider the research design approach, as it is a systematic core of knowledge in empirical evidence that is used for purposes of explanation or prediction (Saunders et al., 2019). Research philosophy is a significant element that demonstrates the researchers' understanding and distinction, and the meaning of research paradigms (Table 3.1)

(Davies & Fisher, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Research is a systematic way to study, examine, investigate and explore facts to understand a topic (Bell & Waters, 2014; Cavana et al., 2001; Gray, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Saunders et al. (2019) illustrate the correlation of beliefs and assumptions, research philosophy, and research design (Figure 3.1) that encourage researchers to reflect on their beliefs or notions and the research design in order to conduct their research.

Figure 3.1

The Correlation of Beliefs and Assumptions, Research Philosophy, and Research Design



Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2019)

Table 3.1

Summary of the Characteristics of Each of the Major Paradigms

Characteristics	Positivist	Post-positivist	Interpretive	Critical	Pragmatic
Aim	Production of predictive, generalisable data	Uncover the meaning of reality as understood by individuals or group	Description, exploration and understanding of experience	Raise awareness and elicit social change	Solving “real world” problems
Ontology	Single reality: real-world driven by natural causes	Critical realism	Multiple subjective realities mentally constructed by individuals	Historical realism	Single and multiple realities
Epistemology	Researcher objectivity and detached impartiality; control	Modified objectivity	Researcher entwined in production of knowledge; dialectical	Knowledge is socially constructed	None
Research methods	Quantitative	Qualitative and quantitative – triangulation	Qualitative	Qualitative	Quantitative and Qualitative
Common designs/ methodologies	Descriptive, cohort, cross-sectional, case-control, experimental randomised control trials	Modified experimental, critical multiplism	Phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, narrative, biographical	Neo-Marxist, Feminist Research, Queer Theory, Participatory Action Research	Mixed methods research
Criticisms	Does not take into account individual experiences	Does not always produce the well-defined answer	Limited transferability and generalisability	Does not always guarantee its aims of emancipation	Flexibility in approach can lead to confusion

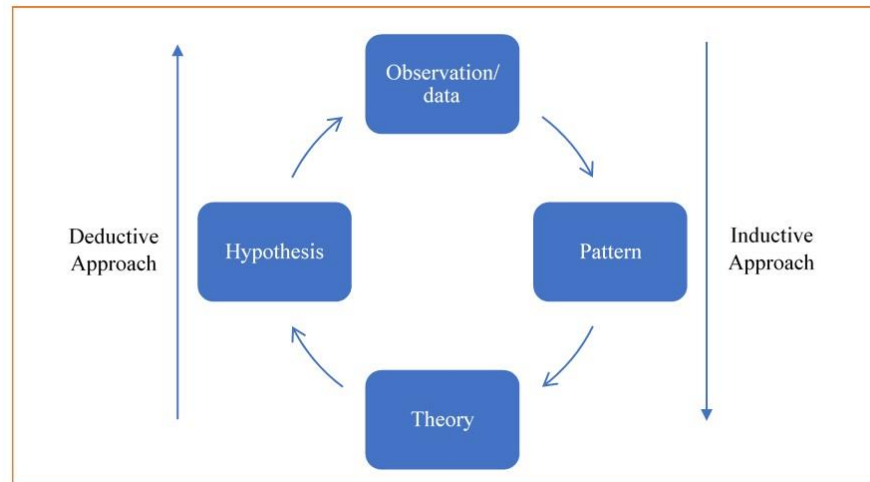
Source: Adapted from Davies and Fisher (2018)

Winit-Watjana (2016) exhibits the framework of research reasoning or logic of inquiry (Figure 3.2) to distinguish the inductive approach and deductive approach. Winit-Watjana’s framework presents that the deductive approach, known as deductive reasoning, is to work on theory before experimental design, which is contributed from general to distinctive attention and refers to the argument that is accurate and reliable by definition since philosophical logic, science and mathematics are included. The deductive approach starts from a theory, creates hypotheses from the theory, tests assumptions or hypotheses, and develops the theory. In contrast, the “induction approach”, known as “inductive reasoning”, works oppositely from the deductive approach as it derives from the conclusion that researchers gain from observations or data collection. The inductive approach is to undertake the accumulation of facts, data, etc., before hypothesis or theory testing, as it starts from something particular then goes to something general by establishing empirical observations in the interesting phenomenon and creating concepts and theories from that phenomenon

(Gray, 2018; Ormerod, 2010; Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018; Worster, 2014). Therefore, the inductive approach was considered the most applicable approach for this study.

Figure 3.2

The Research Reasoning or Logic of Inquiry



Source: Adapted from Winit-Watjana (2016)

3.2.1 Ontology and epistemology

Saunders et al. (2019) explain that ontology is the relevance of the assumptions of reality and nature. Moreover, ontology is the philosophy behind the study in reality or nature of being and existence, and existing basic categories with the correlation. Ontology is a significant tool to examine the belief system, as it relates to the nature of all phenomena (Gray, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Epistemology is related to how we study, explore, and understand what it means to know (Gray, 2018). Epistemology is about the basis of knowledge and aspects of researchers on the nature of reality (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Winit-Watjana, 2016). Therefore, epistemology is the assumption of knowledge, what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge, and how researchers communicate knowledge to others (Gray, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

3.3 Research Objectives

This exploratory qualitative study aims to determine attitudes and perceptions of New Zealand-based sports tourists with a historic personal connection to Thailand towards Thailand's aspirations of becoming an international sports event tourism destination. The objectives set up for this study are guided by the research question ***"To what extent do sports tourists with an existing connection to Thailand consider Thailand to be an international sports event tourism destination?"***. More critically, the objectives of this study are:

- To capture and compare the attitudes and perceptions of New Zealand-based sports tourists who were born or had visited, lived, or worked in Thailand towards Thailand as an international sports event tourism destination.
- To determine the significant determinants that could appeal to sport event tourists when deciding whether or not to travel to Thailand to participate in and/or attend international sports events in Thailand.
- To consider ways to improve the branding of Thailand as a sports event tourism destination according to the attitudes and perceptions of New Zealand-based sports tourists with a historic personal connection to Thailand.

3.4 Research Approach and Design

The research design used in this study was based on the interpretive philosophy, as it refers to a naturalistic or constructivist paradigm and is based on a relativist ontology that views reality as being subjective and differs from person to person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The exploratory qualitative research method is used in interpretive research with small sizes to collect rich, in-depth data and information that describes individual experiences (Schreier, 2018). It can be seen that interpretive research is dialectical as the process of this research is going through dialogue and interaction between the subject and the researcher to generate the findings of the study. Hence, in the interpretive research, the produced knowledge with possible biases is acknowledged rather than eliminated (Charmaz, 2014, as cited in Davies & Fisher, 2018). In contrast to quantitative research,

qualitative research allows for the provision of an in-depth, cultural and socio-contextual, and detailed description of a research topic or social phenomena (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

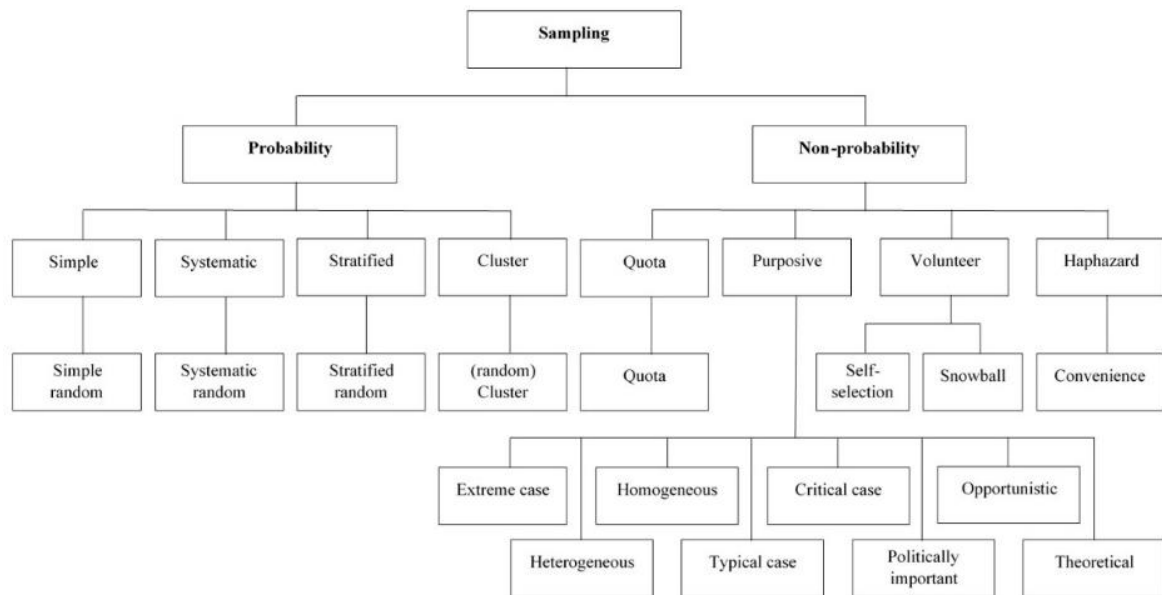
In the research procedure, data collection is a significant process that helps the researcher achieve the research solution (Cavana et al., 2001). Saunders et al. (2019) demonstrate that there are three sources of data consisting of the primary source, secondary source, and tertiary source. The primary source is the empirical data or information that the researchers originally collect to explore or find the solution of the study. The secondary source is the data or information that has been discovered and published by other academics. The tertiary source is the data or information that has been summarised, extracted, and synthesised from the research in secondary sources.

According to Figure 2.5 the conceptual framework of the study is drawn from scholars' research, theory, and concepts. The study found that many significant determinants, such as accessibility, destinations, and sports events, dominate and influence the decision-making process of people to travel to destinations for participating in and/or attending sports events, but also, ensure and/or changing their attitudes and perceptions to destinations. The primary data collection method was applied to examine and determine attitudes and perceptions of a specific group of New Zealand-based sports tourists with a historic personal connection to Thailand towards Thailand's aspirations of becoming an international sports event tourism destination. As this study was an exploratory qualitative study, the primary data was derived from the contribution of the one-on-one semi-structured interview. Participants were recruited using non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is a technique where participants are selected based on the researcher's subjective judgement rather than random selection. Non-probability sampling is widely used in qualitative research (Gray, 2018). To select the most appropriate sampling technique and the sample, the combination between "purposive sampling" and "volunteer sampling" were implemented in the research. Purposive sampling is generally used with very small samples, and the researcher needs to use judgement to select cases that will enable the researcher to answer the research question and meet

the research objectives (Cassell, 2015). Volunteer sampling consists of two techniques, including snowball sampling and self-selection sampling (Figure 3.3) (Saunders et al., 2019).

Figure 3.3

Sampling techniques



Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2019)

Snowball sampling is a technique where the researcher contacts a small number of interviewees or cases and asks them to identify further new interviewees or cases (Cassell, 2015; Gray, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). Self-selection sampling is a technique where the researcher publicises the sample recruitment through the appropriate media, or approaches them to participate and allows the case to identify their desire to participate in the research (Saunders et al., 2019). The purposive sampling technique was applied to select the samples based on the research judgement with a small sample size. The volunteer sampling techniques, both snowball sampling and self-selection sampling techniques, were applied to recruit samples by advertising the sample recruitment via social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and asking one sample to recommend others. This researcher initially aimed to recruit between ten and fifteen participants across New Zealand within the recruitment of the following categories of participants (Appendix B).

- Participants are New Zealand residents or citizens aged 18 and over.
- Participants were born or had visited, lived, or worked in Thailand
- Participants have travelled to Thailand or other countries to compete in or spectate at a sports event.
- Participants are athletes, including elite, semi-professional or amateur athletes, and sports spectators.

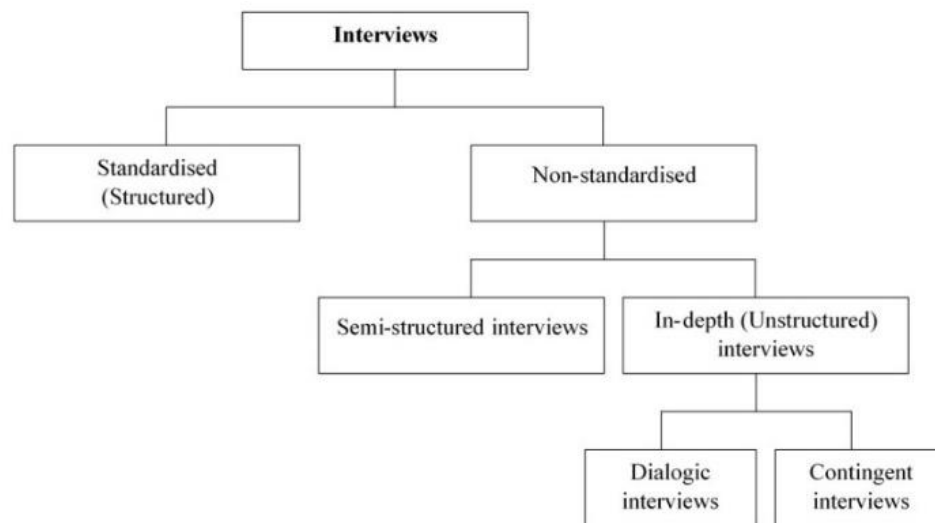
3.4.1 The interviews

With a small sample size, the interview is considered the best tool to use in the data collection process (Cassell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). The interview enables the researcher to explore new information (Table 3.2), as it involves having a conversation with the participant (Gray, 2018). Semi-structured interviewing, as considered non-standardised interviewing (Saunders et al., 2019), was applied in the study, following the construction of a pre-determined list of themes and key guideline questions. The questions were designed in a manner that enabled the participants and the interviewer the flexibility to express their attitudes, opinions, perceptions and views without a pre-determined structure (Figure 3.4) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Symon & Cassell, 2012). Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewer the freedom to ask follow-up questions should any new issues be raised during the interview. In the meantime, lists of questions may change or expand, subject to the situation during the interviews (Gray, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). During a more in-depth discussion, interviewers can also analyse and compare interviewees' responses to identify the information revealed (Cassell, 2015; Gray, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

Table 3.2*The Relationship Between the Purpose of Research and Types of Interviews*

The purpose of the research	Types of interviews
1. An exploratory study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>In-depth interviews</i> or <i>unstructured interviews</i> - <i>Semi-structured interviews</i> <p>Both interviews provide important background or contextual material for the study. Also, to conduct an exploratory study, an inductive approach is implemented to the research design as qualitative interviews.</p>
2. A descriptive study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Structured interviews</i> <p>In conducting structured interviews, a deductive approach is implemented to test a theory as the standardised data will make it easier to test statistical propositions or hypotheses.</p>
3. An explanatory study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Semi-structured interviews</i> To use to understand the relationship between variables. - <i>Structured interviews</i> To use in a statistical context of an explanatory study. <p>Inductive and deductive approaches are adopted in an explanatory study in order to explain why relationships exist.</p>
4. An evaluative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Semi-structured interviews (Popular to use)</i> <p>Other types of interviews or a combination of interviews types can be used with an evaluative study according to the nature of the research.</p>

Source: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2019)

Figure 3.4*Overview of Interview Types*

Sauce: Adapted from Saunders et al. (2019)

A pilot test was facilitated with a participant who was a New Zealand-based sports tourist with a historic personal connection to Thailand. The interview ran smoothly without any hesitation from the participants related to the questions being asked. According to Polit (2006), a pilot or preliminary study is referred to as a preparation stage or pre-test of a small-scale data collection for a particular research instrument of a major study. A pilot test can be conducted in qualitative, quantitative, or even mixed-method research (Silverman, 2005). Van Wijk and Harrison (2013) summarise the pilot study's general application in qualitative research as follows. First, the pilot study helps the researcher find problems, limitations, and/or barriers related to participants' recruitment, such as the limitation of access to participants according to cultural sensitivities, not being interested in participating in the interview, and being unwilling to participate in the interview due to the differentiation of gender from the researcher. Second, the pilot study helps the researcher to assess the acceptability of the interview and observation protocol (Van Wijk & Harrison, 2013). A pilot study also helps the researcher to engage with the participants, ensuring that they select an appropriate

interview venue, elicit the in-depth data during interviews, and seize opportunities to probe emerging issues during interviews (Van Wijk & Harrison, 2013).

The data collection was carried out during an eight-week period from 22nd February until 21st April 2021. In total, 25 participants were recruited from around New Zealand, but only nine were able to be interviewed for a variety of reasons beyond the control of the researcher. The COVID-19 pandemic hampered the recruitment of additional participants due to Auckland and Wellington entering regional lockdowns that ranged in duration from a few days to a couple of weeks. Some of the participants had to prioritise their family, work and sporting commitments during this time, whilst others had to change their intensive training routines due to the cancellation and rescheduling of events in New Zealand and overseas. Nine one-on-one semi-structured interviews were facilitated, with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in English. Even though some interviewees were Thai native speakers, they were comfortable and preferred to have interviews in English. The interviews were conducted face-to-face via Zoom. Zoom is an innovative video conferencing platform that helps a researcher perform online interviews with interviewees while being at another location (Archibald et al., 2019). All interviews were individually recorded via the Zoom application, then transcribed and interpreted in MS Word documents. All participants were offered the opportunity to share their opinions and, if possible, their past experiences related to Thailand's tourism industry and/or the production of sports event tourism.

Next, they were informed about the Thai government's sports event tourism aspirations and asked to discuss the viability/feasibility. Finally, they were asked to comment on the appeal of Thailand as a sports event tourism destination and to reflect upon the likelihood of them ever travelling to Thailand to engage in sport or spectate at a sports event. The questions asked during the interviews deliberately consisted of "what", "why", and "how" questions to encourage, clarify, gain, and elicit rich and in-depth interviewees' information, attitudes, opinions, perceptions, and expectations. The participants' personal identities were protected and anonymised using pseudonyms. Table 3.3 reveals the participant profiles of the interviewees, including their pseudonyms,

occupations, ages, genders, countries of birth, status in sports, sports engagement in Thailand, years of residence in Thailand, and experiences of participating in and/or attending local and international sports events in Thailand and other countries.

Table 3.3

Participant Profiles

Participant pseudonyms and occupations	Age	Gender	Country of birth	Status in sports	Sports related in Thailand	Years living in Thailand	Purpose of travelling to Thailand	Experiences of participating in or attending sports events in Thailand and other countries
Dick: - Mechanic in the recreational vehicle industry.	53	Male	New Zealand	Semi-professional athlete	Athlete	10	- Work. - Participate in sports events as an athlete.	- Participate in local and international mountain bike races, road cycling, XTerra, triathlons and marathons in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore.
GM: - General manager in the hotel industry.	53	Male	Austria	Semi-professional athlete	Athlete	8	- Work. - Participate in sports events as an athlete.	- Participate in local and international golf tournaments, marathons, triathlons and Ironman triathlon competitions in Thailand, Malaysia, and Australia. - Participate in local and international golf tournaments in Thailand, and Australia.
Jetts: - General manager in the fitness industry.	42	Male	Fiji	Semi-professional athlete	Athlete	4	- Work - Participate in sports events as an athlete.	- Join a football club in Hong Kong as a semi-professional footballer. - Participate in local and international triathlon and Ironman events in Thailand, and Hawaii
Katie: - Ex-bank teller. Currently a full-time housewife.	35	Female	Thailand	Amateur athlete	Spectator	18	- Travel and visit family.	- Attend international sports events in Thailand and overseas, such as the Australian Tennis Open, the EPL (English Premier League football) and the Volleyball World Grand Prix in Thailand.
Nakhon: - Spa advisor, public speaker, writer and tour guide.	50	Male	Thailand	Amateur athlete	Athlete	40	- Travel and visit family. - Participate in sports events as an athlete.	- Participate in local and international road running races in Thailand such as Laguna Phuket Marathon.
Nick: - Hotel spa supervisor.	34	Female	New Zealand	Amateur athlete	Spectator	0	- Travel and visit grandparents.	- Attend only one international sports event in Thailand, namely a beach volleyball tournament.
Siri: - Healthcare worker in the healthcare industry.	34	Female	Thailand	Amateur athlete	Athlete	30	- To travel and visit family. - To participate in sports events as an athlete.	- Participate in local and international road and trail running events in Thailand and Malaysia. - Qualify and participate in XTerra Series in Thailand and Malaysia.
Sky: - Hotelier at a hotel in New Zealand.	25	Male	Singapore	Amateur athlete	*Considered to be 'Spectator'*	0	- Leisure.	- Attend Basketball tournament in USA - Attend the English Premier League in UK - Has never attended any sports event in Thailand
Tao: - Ex-hotelier. Currently a full-time housewife.	37	Female	Thailand	Amateur athlete	Spectator	20	- To travel and visit parents' family.	- Attend international sports events in Thailand, such as the Badminton World Series in Bangkok, Thailand

3.5 Data Analysis

Vaismoradi et al. (2013) suggest that in qualitative research, there are two commonly used approaches in data analysis. These consist of qualitative content analysis (QCA) and thematic analysis (TA). QCA and TA are similar in terms of philosophical backgrounds, and both focus on description and interpretation and the consideration of data as being unavoidably contextualised (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). However, Braun et al. (2019) identify that TA is an umbrella term that is applied to capture, identify, describe, and elucidate patterns or “themes” across datasets of qualitative research as the final products of data analysis. Schreier (2018) argues that QCA is a hybrid method that allows researchers to apply qualitative procedures in an exclusively quantitative discipline.

TA is considered as an appropriate method to uncover and expose the underlying meaning of information through idiosyncratic or subjective interpretation (Braun et al., 2019). Guest (2012) suggests that themes of subjective interpretations are derived and constructed from the data analysis that considers explicit words or phrases and focuses on the identification and description of both implicit and explicit ideas. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) state that TA is an effective method that encompasses and develops codes in a high degree of generality and a common point of reference to explicit notions and ideas according to the subject of inquiry. Braun et al. (2019) consistently argue that coding helps researchers better understand data description and categorisation of data into “patterns of meaning”, with the ability to contextualise and deeply extract meanings of the subjective information. In this study, “thematic analysis” (TA) was applied as the primary method for analysing data and summarising the phenomenology from the qualitative data. In doing so, the researcher followed Vaismoradi et al. (2016) four phases and stages of theme development in thematic analysis, consisting of initialisation, construction, rectification, and finalisation (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4

Phases and Stages of Theme Development in Thematic Analysis

Phases	Stages
Initialisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading transcriptions and highlighting meaning units - Coding and looking for abstractions in participants' accounts - Writing reflective notes
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classifying - Comparing - Labelling - Translating and transliterating - Defining and describing
Rectification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immersion and distancing - Relating themes to established knowledge - Stabilising
Finalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing the storyline

Source: Adopted from Vaismoradi et al. (2016)

Vaismoradi et al. (2016) suggest that as the primary data analysis step, the initialisation phase helps researchers understand and focus better on the most significant issues, and data in the phenomenological study consisting of three stages follows. The first stage helps researchers contribute, generate, and look into explicit and implicit ideas in the transcription by reading transcripts, considering and listing possible meaningful and important issues in data based on their judgement, and providing clues for developing data analysis themes. This stage also encourages researchers to draft the analytical process, expose researchers' perspectives and gather data collection. Finally, the initialisation phase also provides researchers' opportunities to remember, question, and gain the meaning of data by discovering participants' perspectives for developing the theme development's validity.

In most qualitative approaches, the coding process is the data reduction process of data organisation in qualitative approaches. Researchers enable to organise and facilitate codes with the classification and comparison of codes in different types before the subsequent analytical steps by following the five steps of coding below (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

- 1) **Conceptual code:** This coding type is to identify significant elements, domains and dimensions of data from the study.
- 2) **Relationship code:** This coding type is to demonstrate links between elements, domains and dimensions of data.
- 3) **Participant perspective code:** This coding type is to expose the participants' perspectives, opinions, and attitudes, including positive, negative or indifferent feedbacks or comments about their particular experience.
- 4) **Participant characteristic code:** This coding type is to generally present participants' characteristics.
- 5) **Setting code:** This coding type is to show the place where the phenomenological issue has taken place.

In the construction phase of data analysis in TA, Vaismoradi et al. (2016) argue that it provides an opportunity to the researcher by creating a reflection on the organising codes' process and compares similarities and/ or differences of codes relating to the research questions. With the construction phase, there are five stages, consisting of:

- 1) **Classifying:** The classifying code, as the “typification” stage, creates general grouping codes in an extensive range by offering a common meaning and various features to a group of codes.
- 2) **Comparing:** It is an iterative process that allows researchers to reveal the link between codes and nominates themes by using the researchers' judgement.
- 3) **Labelling:** This concept is to capture some critical issues or data from participants. This stage encourages researchers to expose the main ideas.
- 4) **Translating and transliterating:** This coding process stimulates researchers to create and understand codes by identifying and describing themes through language use.
- 5) **Defining and describing:** This process encourages researchers to define a theme by drawing and drafting maps and charts for the themes' descriptions. It helps researchers understand the phenomenological study, create typologies, and explore associations between themes to meet the requirements of analytical interpretation.

The rectification phase is considered the TA's verification and refinement process from creating data familiarity, the exposure of units of meaning, the tightening and aligning of data into patterns, and the conversion of data into the explicit themes, moreover, this phase is the verification and refinement phase. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) present three stages, consisting of immersion and distancing, relating themes to established knowledge, and stabilising, as the process of checking, monitoring and confirming, to ensure the associated certainty of developed themes.

- 1) **Immersion and distancing:** This is a paradoxical process that researchers need to immerse in the data whilst keeping their distance from the data to reveal themes and to assess and examine the certainty of the coding process.

- 2) **Relating themes to established knowledge:** The qualitative method is inductive research where researchers must consider in-depth literature review after completing most data collection so as to prevent bias and perceived notions as some academics believe that a priori theorising may cause to affect researchers innovatively developing themes. Hence, once the theme is developed and the literature is studied, researchers can present the fact that they were promptly enabled to formulate theme statements and collaborate theoretical models with themes to develop the study's storyline.
- 3) **Stabilising:** In the stabilising stage, researchers consider describing themes and variations by offering a list of themes and related subthemes without showing the connections or using them to explain the phenomenological study.

The final stage is finalisation. This covers the development of a storyline, from the participants' perspectives. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) argue that finalisation is a stage in which researchers explore specific themes by describing and connecting researchers' subjective interpretations and units of meanings. The storyline is an essential tool to allow researchers to review the entire process of data analysis, promote ideas, and collect more data, if necessary, to improve theme saturation. Furthermore, Birks et al. (2008) demonstrate the four main principles guiding the development of participants' stories, as follows:

- 1) **Theoretical precedence:** This is the story-writing process where researchers consider to write themes and sub-themes with their precedential relationships properly.
- 2) **Variation:** Is an explanation of every specific individual case.
- 3) **Limited gaps:** Helps researchers to identify and remove gaps or conflicting information.
- 4) **The use of evidence and appropriate style:** Researchers consider being creative while maintaining the certainty of data.

The finalisation phase explicitly suggests that researchers link their storyline to the literature in order to create the content of themes and facilitate full understanding with coherence and logic in the study for readers to easily pass through the study.

3.6 Ethical Issues

This study was designed and conducted following the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for research (“the Code”). The objective of the code is to ensure that researchers are exemplary ethical role models when out in the field, and are undertaking their goals with integrity, respect, and compassion (Auckland University of Technology, 2019). This research was carried out with the highest ethical standards according to the Code, by incorporating the three principles of partnership (respect, beneficence, and justice). Before starting the research project, two applications required approval. First, the research proposal (PGR1) was approved. The second application was then submitted to the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC), which included the semi-structured interview question guide (Appendix C) and the one-on-one semi-structured interview protocol (Table 3.5). Approval was obtained prior to the commencement of data collection (Appendix A).

Table 3.5

The One-on-one Semi-interview Structured Protocol

Step	Details
1	Participants are voluntary samples with precise requirements of the target samples of the research in social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Also, some participants may have a direct approach to potential respondents from the recommendations of other participants.
2	Participants are provided with participant information sheets (PIS) to introduce and offer general information on the research (Appendix D).
3	Participants have the opportunity to ask any query to the researcher via telephone or email. Also, they can withdraw from the interview at any time.
4	Participants are provided with consent forms with all information to waive their confidentiality rights and are requested to sign the consent forms.
5	Participants are informed to be aware of the recording and transcription of the interviews through the participant information sheets (PIS), the consent form, and verbal information before the interview starts.
6	The interview duration is between 60 – 90 minutes, subject to the situation and conversation during the interview.

3.7 Limitations

This research is subject to some limitations, which have some obstructive impacts on the findings and results of the research. It was challenging in recruiting participants due to the sampling criteria. That was participants must be New Zealand-based sports tourists with a personal connection to Thailand. Moreover, The COVID-19 locked downs and Alert level changes made the recruitment process harder than first anticipated. As a result, the number of interviews was slightly lower than what was expected.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter reveals the researcher's understanding of research and research philosophy. It also discusses and explains the methodological process implemented to achieve the research objectives. In sum, this research is an exploratory qualitative study to explore opportunities with feasibility studies towards Thailand becoming an international sporting event tourism destination. The inductive approach and exploratory qualitative research methods were applied to elicit in-depth information of attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of New Zealand-based sports tourists with a personal connection to Thailand, including New Zealand residents and citizens, to Thailand about sports event tourism destinations. The semi-structured interview was considered the most appropriate method to collect the data. Non-probability sampling, in the form of purposive sampling and volunteer sampling techniques, was adopted, using the snowball technique and self-selection technique to recruit the participants. The key themes which emerged from the primary data will be discussed and presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the emergent themes from nine semi-structured interviews conducted during February, March and April 2021. Saunders et al. (2019) argue that data analysis is an important and necessary stage of the research process. Data analysis leads researchers to explore, reveal and understand the topic of a study. In the thematic analysis, subjective interpretations are constructed based on the identification of words or phrases that connect individual responses visible within a series of interview transcripts. These interpretations typically focus on implicit and explicit ideas, attitudes and perceptions (Guest, 2012). Coding these themes can help qualitative researchers to capture the subjective memories of past lived experiences shared by a small number of participants (Braun et al., 2019; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). As discussed in the previous chapter, data was collected using the Zoom cloud-based video conferring service prior to being transcribed and interpreted in MS Word documents (refer to section 3.4.1 for further details). The participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect and conceal their identity and respect their privacy.

The following section provides a breakdown of the participants' individual profiles, including their primary reasons for travelling and their personal connection to Thailand. The second part of the chapter reveals the three key themes that emerged from the data. These themes are: (1) Accessibility and Affordability; (2) Risks and Reputation; and (3) The COVID-19 Pandemic. The relevance and applicability of the academic literature reviewed in Chapter Two will also be discussed throughout the chapter.

4.2 Participant Profiles

Nine participants were interviewed, comprising five males and four females. The interviewees were all New Zealand residents or citizens aged between 25 and 35 years. Four were born in Thailand, two were born in New Zealand, and three were born in Austria, Fiji, and Singapore. Seven had previous experience of living and working in Thailand. Two had no experience of living in Thailand, although one was born of Thai parents. They all claimed to be physically active

individuals who engaged in sporting activities on a regular, if not daily basis. Five of the participants had actively participated in a sporting event in Thailand, three had attended sports events in Thailand as spectators, and one participant had never attended any sports events in Thailand.

Dicki: A 53-year-old kiwi mechanic in the recreational vehicle industry, who was born in New Zealand and lived in Thailand for ten years, is passionate about two-wheels and extreme sports competitions. For almost two decades, he has participated in local and international events of mountain biking and road cycling competitions, marathons, triathlons, and XTerra: An extreme series of cross triathlon competitions consisting of swimming in the ocean, mountain biking, and trail running in Thailand, New Zealand, and other Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. The study considered him an active sports tourist defined as a connoisseur or elite or professional athlete.

GM: A 53-year-old general manager of a top international chain hotel was born in Austria, then moved to New Zealand and married a Kiwi woman who has experienced over 20 years in the hotel industry in Thailand, Australia and New Zealand. He lived in Thailand for eight years before moving back to New Zealand. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and the closed borders in New Zealand, he was unable to come back to his home in New Zealand, and he was interviewed via Zoom whilst he was stuck in Australia. Since he was a child, he has played many sports, starting from rugby, football, skiing, and golf. He has participated in many local and international triathlon competitions and international Ironman triathlons: A series of long-distance triathlon competitions consisting of 2.4-miles swimming, 112-miles cycling, and marathon running for almost ten years in many countries such as Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, and Thailand. In addition, apart from extreme sports, he has also participated in local and international golf tournaments. He is a father who encourages his family to become a sports family. He supports his daughters to participate in international and national sports events such as skiing and golf competitions. The study considered him an active sports tourist, defined as a connoisseur or elite or professional athlete.

Jetts: A 42-years-old kiwi general manager, was born in Fiji and grew up in Auckland, New Zealand. He has been working in the fitness and health club industry for almost 20 years in many Asian countries, including Hong Kong, Singapore, and lived in Thailand for four years. His childhood dream goal was to become a professional rugby player for the All Blacks: the New Zealand national rugby team. However, he changed his sports career because of rugby injuries and became a semi-professional footballer, playing for a football club in Hong Kong. He eventually changed his sporting career once again to become a triathlete and an extreme triathlete. He has travelled worldwide to participate in many international triathlons and Ironman tournaments, but mostly in Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, because he worked in Thailand and tried to balance his work career and sports career. His two notable events were “The Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii” and “The Ironman 70.3 World Championship in New Zealand. The study considered him an active sports tourist, defined as a connoisseur or elite or professional athlete.

Katie: A 35-year-old dual citizen of Thailand and New Zealand was born in Thailand and lived there 18 years before moving to New Zealand. She was a bank teller and currently is a full-time housewife who lives in New Zealand. She is an amateur athlete who has occasionally participated in local sports events for exercise and leisure. At the international sports event levels, she is a sports spectator who has travelled to many countries for leisure and takes part in her trips to attend and watch sports events such as The English Premier League in the UK, the Volleyball World Grand Prix in Thailand, and the Tennis Australian Open in Australia. The study considered her as a sports spectator who is defined as a casual spectator/fan.

Nakhon: A 50-year-old New Zealander and permanent resident from Phuket, Thailand, married a Kiwi woman, and has presently lived in New Zealand for five years. He has a hospitality and tourism background, working in the spa and wellness industry for almost 30 years. He is also a writer, speaker, and tour guide in Thailand. He is an amateur runner who has participated in local and international road running events in Thailand and New Zealand for his sporting career, and is

currently training for an ultra-marathon competition. The study considered him as an active sports tourist who is called the casual that defines amateur athletes.

Nick: A 34-years-old Kiwi-Thai woman, was born in New Zealand and raised with Thai parents, but has never lived in Thailand. She has moved to Canada for working as a spa supervisor in a hotel in Canada, according to her two years working contract in Canada. She likes to play volleyball, basketball and tennis as hobbies. She is a sports spectator and mainly likes to attend sports events in Canada, such as National Hockey League (NHL). In addition, she has travelled chiefly for primary leisure purposes and takes part in her trips to attend sports events such as the international beach volleyball tournament In Phuket, which she attended whilst visiting her grandparents. The study considered her as a sports spectator who is defined as a casual spectator/fan.

Siri: A 34-year-old New Zealand permanent resident was born and lived almost her entire life in Thailand, but married a Kiwi husband and moved to and has lived in New Zealand for four years; she currently works as a full-time healthcare worker. She has sports and tourism backgrounds, previously working in the yachting industry in Thailand. She is also an amateur runner who likes road and trail running. She has participated in many local and international running events in Thailand, Malaysia, and New Zealand. Her notable event was the “XTerra Series”, which she won and qualified for the world-class tournament in 2017. The study considered her as an active sports tourist who is called the casual that defines amateur athletes.

Sky: A 25-year-old Kiwi-Hindu-Singaporean, was born in Singapore and moved to New Zealand when he was two years old. Currently, he is a hotelier at a hotel in New Zealand. He was a table tennis player at school level, and usually plays sports for fun and leisure time. He considers himself a sports spectator at the international sporting events level, and likes to attend and watch football and basketball. He planned to attend the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020, but the event was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. He has travelled to Thailand once during his school break for leisure and played sports activities while travelling there, but he has never attended any sporting

events in Thailand. The study considered him as a sports spectator who is defined as a casual spectator/fan.

Tao: A 37-year-old dual citizen of Thailand and New Zealand was born and lived in Thailand for almost 20 years before moving to New Zealand. She is a full-time housewife who has previously worked in the hotel industry. She currently lives in Thailand because of the Covid-19 lockdown in Thailand and New Zealand, while travelling to visit her family in Thailand. She considers herself an amateur athlete who participates in local sports events for exercise and socialisation, but is a spectator at the international sports events level. She likes to watch and attend rugby games. The All Blacks are her most favourite team. Her experiences attending international sports events have occurred as part of her holiday or leisure trips, such as the Badminton World Series in Thailand, while travelling to visit her family there, and the Rugby World Cup 2011 in Auckland, while travelling to Auckland for holidays. The study considered her as a sports spectator who is defined as a casual spectator/fan.

4.3 Purpose for Travel

As first addressed in Section 2.3.1, Gammon and Robinson (2003) distinguish the differences between sports tourism and tourism sport based on the primary purposes of travel. Sports tourism is a type of travel, which individuals and/or groups of people undertake with the primary purpose and motivation to participate actively or passively in and/or attend sports-related activities (Gammon & Robinson, 2003; Gibson, 2001; Malchrowicz-Mosko & Munsters, 2018). In this study, five participants were considered “active sports tourists” (Gibson, 1998) based on the semi-professional or amateur sports-related activities/sports events that they claimed to have participated in whilst away from home. In contrast, “tourism sport” is said to occur when tourists actively or passively engage in unplanned or ad-hoc recreational sports activities while on holiday (Gibson, 2004; Malchrowicz-Mosko & Munsters, 2018). Four of the participants were considered to be passive sports tourists who would also fit under the umbrella of ‘tourism sport’ (Gammon & Robinson, 2003).

According to Dicki, he had been a competitive age-group mountain biker and road cyclist for over twenty years. During this time, he had participated in international biking and cycling competitions and had, by his own admission, *“travelled a fair amount to race”*. He recalled travelling to races in Singapore and Malaysia, *“maybe three or four times”* and revealed that he loved *“the challenge”* of competing overseas. Similarly, GM talked fondly about his overseas sports event-related travel, noting how, *“I went to Malaysia to do a full Ironman.... I went to Sydney, Australia, to do Oxfam, which is a 100km walk-run... and..., I went to Australia for skiing... because my children are in the ski team of their school”*. GM explained that as a child he *“played rugby union a lot”*, but also enjoyed *“a lot of exercise”*. Growing up, he also skied, before taking up the game of golf. He started competing in triathlons in his thirties. Over the past ten years he claimed to have competed in *“many events in Thailand”*, including around 15 triathlon events and five or six golfing events.

Jetts also started playing sports when he was young. When asked how many times a year he travelled overseas to participate in international sporting events prior to COVID-19, he answered *“once a quarter... every three months”*. Jetts also revealed that, when not overseas, he travelled every two weeks to participate in domestic sports competitions all over New Zealand. Like GM, he became interested in triathlon competitions in his mid-twenties, but only after getting injured while playing semi-professional rugby.

“Growing up in New Zealand, of course, I was playing rugby, and I always had the goal to become a professional. And I did make certain age groups... in Palmerston North... and then in Auckland. But shortly after that, I moved to Hong Kong... I played for the Hong Kong football club” (Jetts).

Nakhon, a Thai-born participant, often travelled to Thailand to visit family. Nakhon is an amateur endurance runner, competing in *“5km, 10km, half-marathons, full-marathons”*. Unlike Jetts and GM, however, he was not interested in competing for ranking points or prizes and claimed that he would only participate in sports events in Thailand if they matched his leisure travel plans. During one visit, for example, he decided to participate in a marathon being hosted close to his family’s

home. Siri, the only other Thai-born participant in the study, also liked road and trail running for exercise and the pleasure of participating in sports events locally and overseas. Like Nakhon, however, she rarely planned a holiday around a sports event, preferring to book the holiday before identifying what events might be on at the time of her trip.

Sky recalled how he had once travelled to Phuket and Phi Phi Island, *“really amazing places”*, during a school vacation. He remembered sailing and playing *“beach soccer”* with the locals. Nick, who was born and raised in Auckland, New Zealand, but *“in a Thai race and [with] Thai parents”*, had never lived in Thailand but had visited many times to see her extended family. She recalled a trip in 2008 or 2009 where she also attended a *“really good”* international volleyball tournament in Phuket. She remembered that *“It was international, so there were a lot of athletes from all over the world”*. She also shared her experiences of attending a National Hockey League fixture in North America.

Sky stated that before the COVID-19 pandemic, he attended EPL (English Premier League) fixtures in England and NBA basketball games in America as a spectator. Katie also revealed that she had travelled to many destinations for different purposes, such as taking vacations and visiting her family. While travelling, she usually took the opportunity to attend and/or watch local and international sports events. She revealed that she was originally from Thailand, but considered herself as a *“Kiwi-Thai”*. She talked about how she liked *travelling to places “where I can go [to] sporting events and also do sightseeing”*, before recalling the experience of attending an English Premier League fixture in London with her boyfriend. She visited Buckingham Palace and Brighton during the same trip. In terms of visiting Thailand for sports events, Katie revealed.

“I am originally from Thailand and my family and lots of friends are there. So, I would say that I am not going to Thailand just for attending sports games. I can meet my family, my friends, and I can enjoy the time together. Also, I can travel to many cities in Thailand like going to Phuket for watching sailing and enjoy my family time on the beach, attending the Volleyball World Grand Prix in Bangkok, then go shopping, and

attending the car racing in Buriram where is near my hometown with enjoying the sightseeing of heritage sites”.

In contrast to the other participants, Tao had never travelled with the express purpose of attending sports events as either an athlete or spectator. She had once attended the Badminton World Series whilst holidaying in Bangkok and enjoyed playing sport or being physically active whilst away from home. For example, she had travelled “*to Japan for skiing*” and “*to Australia for surfing*”. Tao shared her experiences of attending local and international sports events whilst at home, stating that “*I have never been abroad with the purpose of participating in any international sporting event... [but] in 2011, I attended the Rugby World Cup here in New Zealand*”. Having introduced the nine participants, the following sections will focus on the three key themes that have emerged from the personal memories they shared and the answers they offered to the questions asked during the interviews.

4.4 Accessibility and Affordability

The nine participants revealed similar attitudes towards the factors that influenced their travel choices, with accessibility and affordability of the destination being mentioned by all of them. They frequently connected these two closely related pull factors with the attractiveness of Thailand as a tourism destination. According to Pile (2009), destination attractiveness comprises many elements and dimensions, such as the quantity and quality of tourism attractions and travel-related infrastructure. Heere et al. (2019) argue that in tourists’ decision-making process toward destinations, tourists, including professional and non-professional sports tourists and tourism sports tourists as spectators, place more consideration on accessibility, infrastructure and facilities, and travelling costs (Bodet & Lacassagne, 2012; Newland & Aicher, 2018). Additionally, Chalip and Costa (2005) suggest to destination marketers that branding a sports event destination requires an appropriate combination of sports activities that support sports events, destinations that offer attractive leisure and recreational activities, such as sightseeing venues and shops, and other activities consistent with the value or interests of the sports.

Dicki confirmed that *“It comes down to the infrastructure... you travelled to race, but you also put a holiday around it”*. He considers holiday activities as one of his criteria because he often has a holiday after a competition. He revealed that Singapore is his favourite country to travel to participate in sports events, *“because they have got all the infrastructures there, it is a safe place. The weather is warm. And there are good restaurants”*. Dicki explained that he regularly travels to sporting events in Thailand because he had also experienced living, working and travelling around the country over a ten-year period. He noted that the country’s infrastructure met his requirements and that the travel costs were within his budget. In addition, he revealed that the warm-welcoming Thai people and the country’s accessibility was equally attractive to other active sports tourists that he had met on his travels. Dicki estimated that he had competed in around 60 different local races within Phuket, plus another 40 international events hosted all around the country. He stated that *“I know my way around, I know how to avoid the bad taxis”*. He added that assuming it was affordable, and he would undoubtedly travel back to Thailand to compete in more international events. He concluded that;

“Everything is there... all the infrastructure, the accommodation, the Thai smile. Also, Bangkok is a major hub from anywhere in the world. So, it is easy to get there and get back. It is very well priced... So, I think a lot of people would like to come in and have a holiday. Stay for a bit... in places like Phuket...where you can go hang out on a beach and the beautiful water... It is quite perfect”.

GM also expressed his opinion that Thailand has the potential to become an international sports event tourism destination. He explained that the reputation of the host destination was an influential factor. He discussed the importance of recommendations from friends who had attended previous events. When reflecting upon an Ironman event that he had attended in Malaysia, GM, recalled that, at the time in question, *“there was not such an event in Thailand”*. In addition, like several other participants, he admitted to choosing to compete in sports events held in destinations with well-established tourism activities. He concluded that *“before the triathlon, you do not really*

want to do sightseeing or do other things. But you want to do maybe some sightseeing or some a little bit of partying or going out afterwards". GM also stated that whilst living in Phuket, he had participated in *"many events in Thailand"*, including *"five to six golf events"*.

When considering Thailand's appeal to international sports tourists, GM thought that the nation's accessibility was a real asset, *"especially Bangkok"*. He referenced the capital city's infrastructure, including the three international airports and multiple accommodation options, and referred to it as *"a great destination to have a holiday"*. He also mentioned the ease at which people can travel from Bangkok to the surrounding cities of Pattaya, Sattahip and Chonburi. He added, *"I like those destinations... Because you go there, you do your event, and then you can also have a great holiday after"*. He believed that Thailand would also appeal to those where the sport was not the primary motive for travelling, suggesting that it *"has it all"* whether you are visiting *"as a family or as a couple or as a single"*.

Jetts also indicated that the destination's tourism-related infrastructure was a major factor considered when choosing to travel overseas to compete in a sports event. Jetts described how he would also *"look at how accessible it is. And obviously, the cost involved as well"*, before specifically listing Vietnam as being *"a great one for that"*. Jetts considered Thailand to be an accessible country with good infrastructure and sports facilities and shared similar opinions to Dicki and GM when considering the potential of Thailand as an international sports tourism destination. He referred to Bangkok as being *"quite accessible in the Southeast Asia region"*. When talking about his own sport of Triathlon and Ironman, he mentioned the country's outdoors and access to natural settings for road running, plus lake or open water swimming. Whilst living in Bangkok for four years, Jetts used to travel every couple of weeks around the country competing in local and regional races. A couple of years ago, he travelled to a World Championship qualifier hosted in Bang Saen: An east coast city located two hours out of Bangkok.

Jetts commented upon the good standard of roads that had been used for these endurance races, and the consistency of the weather *"for most parts of the year"*. Like Dicki and GM, Jetts also

believed that traditional Thai hospitality played a major part in pulling active sports tourists to events in Thailand, concluding that;

“In terms of a destination... Thailand has got it all... It is a big country. It is beautiful... I think Thailand ticks a box for all of those [active sports tourists]... I think Thai people are known to be warm and friendly, and welcoming. So, you generally get that feeling when you are participating... the support crews will be cheering you along, and that sort of thing... before COVID... Da Nang has a lot of triathlons, half Ironman races. They are very accessible, short, convenient fly, you get great hotel rooms and set up and everything. And, you know, it just it all works out pretty well. So, I guess, on top of choosing your goal race, the other one would be the convenience factors. And the value for money factor as well is another component”.

Siri was another one to acknowledge the importance of encountering appropriate host destination infrastructure when travelling to compete in sports events. She shared her opinion that *“it should be easy to travel”*, noting the need for athletes to find affordable flights, renting cars and finding suitable accommodation. Siri noted the accessibility of accommodation for international visitors *“from budget up to luxury”* and further acknowledged the importance that she placed upon the accessibility of restaurants, shops or department stores located around the event venue, admitting that she *“loved to do some leisure activities after a competition”*. Siri concluded that *“in Thailand there is everything”*.

Like Dicki and GM, Siri frequently referred back to affordability and the attractiveness of Thailand, calling it a *“beautiful”* tourist destination. In terms of the costs, Siri viewed Thailand as an affordable sports tourism destination, especially when considering the additional costs attached to entering events. In addition, she proudly rated the Thai hospitality sector as being *“number one”* in terms of making guests feel welcome. She expressed the only concerns around travelling to Bangkok to participate in a sports event related to the bad traffic and air pollution, which she claimed was *“not good for your health”* (an issue discussed later).

Nakhon shared Siri's opinions around the cheap cost of travelling to Thailand and the quality of the local hospitality encountered by international tourists upon their arrival. This was suitably captured within the following statement;

"I would say for sure, compared to other destinations around the world, the cost is very cheap... there are many amazing tourist attractions with cheaper food, a variety of accommodation, and amazing events. Thai people are friendly".

Katie, one of the passive sports tourists interviewed, looked for tourism destinations where she could enjoy a range of leisure activities whilst also following her partner to football matches. Katie also considered Thailand as affordable and attractive to tourists with a variety of interests. She acknowledged that she was unlikely to ever visit Thailand *"just for attending sports games"*, preferring to spend her time visiting friends and relatives. However, she added that being a Thai, she could travel around the country easily and cheaply. She specifically mentioned previous trips to Phuket *"for sailing"*, Buriram *"for motorsport"*, and Bangkok *"for Volleyball"*. Katie added, however, how she would *"like Thailand to improve transportation in the city [Bangkok] and intercity transportation"*. Whilst she claimed that it was not difficult to travel from the capital to other cities, there was still room for improvement, especially around access to and from some stadiums located outside of Bangkok.

Nick highlighted that she would consider attending sports events in Thailand when visiting her parents' family. She considers Thailand to be an attractive tourism destination for the following reasons: *"first of all, the weather is always nice. The people are very nice, like the locals, they are open, and they are very smiling. And the area has a lot to offer food vibes, cultural vibes"*. Sky, who also primarily travels for non-event-related purposes, also shared the factors that would influence him whether he would attend sports events in Thailand once the international borders re-opened, these being the infrastructure and sports facilities, the accessibility of tourist attractions, and the suitability of accommodation. He concluded that *"Thailand is a tourist-friendly country and a safe place... Thailand has everything... Nice stadiums and good places. It can definitely be a good host"*.

Finally, Tao also labelled Bangkok as convenient, safe, and affordable before mentioning the city's tourism infrastructure and sports facilities. Tao believed that Thailand had all the resources required to become an international sporting event tourism destination but conceded that the country requires more time to improve its image and branding before it could fulfil its true potential. She summed this up with the simple assessment that *"Thailand is not ready yet"*. Accessibility and affordability are two effective tools related to the pull factors with the attractiveness of Thailand as a tourism destination to attract and encourage tourists to travel to sports event destinations. The following sections will discuss two additional determinants that sports tourists and tourism sports tourists consider prior to travelling to destinations, namely risks and reputation. These two significant determinants are essential elements in enhancing destinations to become sports event tourism destinations with the reliability of tourists on destinations

4.5 Risks and Reputations

Destination branding, defined as "place branding", is an application of public relations, promotion, and corporate identity activities to destinations as a product (Morgan et al., 2011). Sports events are one of the trendiest elements that apply in promoting a place becoming a sports event tourism destination (Abujamous et al., 2019). Sports event management encompasses all activities in sports events, including planning, implementing, and marketing sports competitions (Bowdin et al., 2011). In addition, the event planning process includes the minimisation of the risks facing investors, organisers, participants and spectators (Luciani et al., 2017; Van der Wagen & White, 2018; Whitford et al., 2013). Van der Wagen and White (2018) define sports event organisers as a person or a group of people who plan, manage, and organise every piece of the sports event puzzles to prepare and facilitate sports competitions. Thus, sports event organisers are an important tool in running sports events smoothly and in minimising potential risks that may occur during events, and become one of the significant factors that participants and/or attendants look for (Bowdin et al., 2011; Getz, 1997).

All of the active sports tourists mentioned the potential improvements that could be made to safety and security management employed during sports events in Thailand. The active sports tourists

also highlighted the importance of athletes trusting the event organisers. In addition, the nations' political instability was mentioned as both a risk factor and source of reputational concern, especially to those promoting the country as an international sports event tourism destination.

Dicki highlighted that the reputation of the event organisers was one of the most important criteria when considering where to travel to participate in international sports events. He expressed that the previous international experiences of event organisers made him feel more confident that the event would be safe and well run. He noted how he would *"put some research into the event organiser, to see if they have done or they had done or arranged events in the past"*. He pointed out that athletes have high expectations and that the event managers must be trustworthy and well-organised. Whilst international sports events are important, he would always assess the risk of the events being cancelled abruptly and would look at online reviews of previous events, and added;

"If you are doing a triathlon, for example, you have to leave your bike in transition overnight. Obviously, you want good security around that because you do not want your stuff to go missing. If it is a road race... What sort of traffic controls are they using or doing? And how reliable are they?... Because you do not want to come screaming around a corner, and there is a car crossing the road in front of you... Everything becomes unstuck... Security obviously takes out the warring sort of areas; for example, you would not be going to Myanmar right now... you are investing a fair amount of money and travel in getting there. It needs to be well-run, highly marketable, because you might be promoting yourself in another way, as well... you can use it to market for your supporters or sponsors".

Dicki proposed that Thailand could improve its sports event industry by focusing on safety and security during competitions. As an endurance athlete, he also echoed Siri's concerns around the health risks attached to Bangkok's traffic-related air pollution, suggesting that it could potentially result in international athletes choosing not to participate in sporting events hosted within the city. Finally, in relation to the risks attached to political instability, Dicki acknowledged that some

countries such as America had advised tourists against travel to Thailand. He stated that *“Most countries have it [Thailand] on the warning list... It was a red flag... Some governments put a ban on Thailand... It has nothing to do with a sporting event, but it would potentially stop people travelling”*. Dicki claimed that Americans *“say that Thailand can be dangerous”*, which he referred to as being *“quite detrimental”*, especially to those trying to attract international sports events to Thailand.

GM admitted that he did a lot of research before deciding to participate in sports events. Like Dicki, he looked at the previous experiences of event organisers and their professional reputations, citing that *“For me, it is a lot about the organiser, who is actually organising and who is doing it”*. When reflecting upon some of the best sports events that he had entered in Thailand, he spoke about an event in Kanchanaburi, two to three hours west of Bangkok, that was *“very well-organised and super controlled”*. He also recalled a couple of *“fantastic”* competitions encountered in Phuket and Bang Saen. Bang Saen is a small city two hours east of Bangkok.

GM happily provided his thoughts around the safety and security of events, including the risk of accidents. He shared his expectation that *“Everything is really locked down, especially when it comes to the bike race because it can become very dangerous if you have motorbikes or car crossing what is not controlled”*. Like Dicki, GM revealed concerns around the reputational risk linked to the political instability in Thailand, adding that *“Thailand has its own challenges with downstate mobility... Let’s be honest, the political situation is not ideal... since I have left out of Thailand. I get more news and more updates than I was living in Thailand”*. Whilst discussing how international tourists may view Thailand, he also reflected upon the *“bad reputation”* of Thailand as being a sex tourism destination, suggesting that it could affect the country’s ability to attract major sports events.

Jetts also perceived that the event organisers are important. He believed that they must have acquired experience managing sports events at an international level, plus recruited a good team to run sports events smoothly. *“I think it is important”*, he said, *“So they know what level is the expected level”* Jetts also confirmed that he only travelled to participate in sports events with *“a well-run*

professional set up” where *“things run on schedule”*. In terms of the course layout and the setup for the particular sport, he would check prior to travelling that it was *“the international standard and in line with the guidelines”*. Upon reflection, he expressed his satisfaction with the *“pretty good”* sports event management encountered whilst competing at events in Thailand, citing *“It has been quite impressive... I think they are professionally set up... as professional here as other big countries around the world”*.

Siri also revealed a set of strict criteria considered when deciding where to partake in sports events. Like Dicki, GM and Jetts, she looked at the reputation of event organisers and their past experiences, noting her preference *“for a well-known and reliable organiser that has the experience of hosting international sporting events”*. Furthermore, Siri also acknowledged that the political situation in Thailand would affect the country’s reputation, especially in the sports event industry. She believed that some organisers would not want to organise international sporting events in the country, while some athletes would hesitate whether to travel to Thailand due to concerns around safety and security. She concluded that *“The political situation is really unstable during this time in Thailand. Some famous organisers do not want to arrange the sporting events in Bangkok, and some athletes also do not want to go... No one can trust that during their runs on the road in Bangkok, nothing is going to happen”*.

Tao shared his opinion that the organisers of some events *“were reckless in safety and security”*, suggesting that *“If anything happens, for example, the explosion, or riot, all visitors would not be safe”*. Tao also perceived that Thailand’s ongoing political problems could affect athletes or visitors in terms of their safety and security to participate in and/or attend international sporting events in Thailand. She believed that *“Everybody around the world knows about this. Thailand has a political problem, especially with the government. Some Thai people do not like the prime minister... I think that many visitors, especially athletes, may consider safety first if any international sports event is held in Thailand”*. Additionally, Tao also suggested that those working within the Thai sports

event industry needed to encourage its workers to improve their communication skills, especially in terms of learning to speak English.

Nick also raised the issue of the language barrier with many of the visitors unlikely to be able to speak or read Thai. Like Tao, she was of the opinion that those working in the event industry needed to improve their communication skills. Both Nakhon and Siri shared their perceptions around Thailand having reliable event organisers, although Nakhon later stated that *“I think they [the sport event industry] need more people, I mean quality people, to make this [further growth] happen”*. Nick supported Nakhon’s opinion about the lack of quality of workers, whereas Siri felt that *“There are potential event organisers... If something happens, you can trust the organiser to handle it”*.

Interestingly, Sky was one of the few participants to acknowledge concerns about the safety of being a tourist in Bangkok, adding that *“you can get scammed and things like that if you are not careful...”*. However, he added that he never felt at risk of being targeted and that international tourists were also targeted by criminals all over the world (i.e., not just in Thailand). Sky shared his opinion that Thailand must however improve its international image and distribute more information about major sporting events that it has hosted in order *“to attract more events and [more] visitors”*. In terms of perceived risk, Nick suggested that the *“social safety”* of Thailand’s infrastructure needed to be improved, especially at night time. She thought that *“the tourists have to feel safe to go out and be able to find help when they need it”*.

Different perceptions and expectations about the safety and security of tourists towards Thailand were raised as the active sports tourists highlighted that in order to participate in international sports events in Thailand, the reputations and experience in the international level of event organisers are important, whilst, tourism sports tourists look at the social safety and security. Meanwhile, the participants mentioned that Thailand’s political instability was a significant cause of concern in order to promote the country as an international sporting events tourism destination.

As risks and reputations are concerns of both the active sports tourists and tourism sports tourists, these two significant factors can be considered as internal issues in the country and can also be solved within the country. The following section will discuss the current pandemic situation, Covid-19, as an external issue that impacts the world's domestic and international sports and tourism industry in the view of the participants.

4.6 The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is not just a health crisis, it has also significantly impacted economies and businesses (Dolbneva, 2020). COVID-19 is expected to have a long-term impact on the world's domestic and international tourism industry (Chang et al., 2020; Sheresheva, 2020). The participants thought COVID-19 was a critical risk that had affected their lives and behaviours. This section will discuss their views on these aspects.

Dicki, for example, acknowledged that the current international travel restrictions were necessary but *"frustrating as an athlete"*. He reflected upon the lives and livelihoods affected, especially *"amateur or professional guys who are not earning money because they cannot race"*, and gave an example of a postponed New Zealand-based cycling event that he would have to participate in alongside over 1,000 other participants. In addition, he highlighted that the sports event production of a domestic Rugby fixture in a New Zealand game was forced to play *"in the stadium with no spectators"*. Dicki believed that the *"outbreak is going to get worse"*.

GM had similar opinions, concluding that *"COVID has changed everything"*. He added that the pandemic had impacted all worldwide countries, *"not only Thailand"*, thus making many international events impossible to host. He believed that *"people are scared to travel, they are still worried that they might not come back... Even when things get back to normal slowly, and the destination will be rolled out, people will still be very suspect [suspicious]"*. He suggested that many athletes would probably *"prefer to stay within the country [New Zealand]"*. He talked about Thailand's medical and healthcare system based on his experiences of living and working there. He claimed that *"the International hospitals are fantastic. But people who live in other countries do not*

think like that. They think Thailand is a second or third world country". In conclusion, GM suggested that every country should *"start promoting domestic tourism first"*, and try to *"hold its own events"*. He suggested that the Thai people must push *"a lot of PR"*, especially in regards to the safety and security of their local events, all of which could be internationally promoted when *"Thailand opens"*. He believed that the experiences of hosting domestic events during the pandemic could be used to *"showcase"* the country to international audiences.

Jetts had thoughts similar to those who regularly travelled to participate in international sports events, but also noted the professional athletes who had *"lost a lot of money"*. Interestingly, Jetts revealed that he travelled to participate in *"a triathlon at Somroi-yod, Hua Hin, Thailand"*, during the pandemic but before the country lockdown. He happily shared his experiences of participating in this event, which was in his opinion *"strictly controlled and well-managed"*, following the Thai government's COVID-19 transmission prevention plan. Although the process of registering and participating was more time consuming than usual, with the *"QR scanning and temperature check"*, all the additional processes made him feel safe from getting the infection. He shared his beliefs that all international sports events might have to change in production management after the pandemic and that the races might not be as big as they used to be *"because of the limitation of participants and attendants"*.

Nakhon had a similar opinion to the other participants, noting how *"COVID has been affecting everything since last year"*. He revealed that he had registered for *"two marathon events"* in New Zealand in 2020, both of which were *"postponed for safety and the prevention of the Covid-19 transmission"*. He also accepted that the event organisers *"have to consider the events and protect all participants from the virus"*. Looking to the future, he acknowledged that *"people will behave differently compared to the past"*. Nakhon believed that;

"The organisers will have to adjust. People will prefer to stay at home or in their countries... as we have heard from the news, some countries will open the borders for tourists who have vaccines. This will also change the lives of all athletes".

Likewise, Siri expressed her thoughts that people would not travel until everyone had been vaccinated. She believed that amateur athletes such as herself would *“prefer to participate more in domestic sporting events [rather than travelling abroad]”*. She also revealed that *“demand to go to the [local] competition is high”*, noting that;

“People cannot do anything anymore, but people who love to do exercise or sport still do and train at their homes even though there is no race or competition... The COVID-19 cannot stop people from exercise. It can only stop people from participating in sporting events”.

Katie, one of the passive sports tourists, expressed how Covid-19 had ruined her travel plans for 2020 and 2021. Her opinion was that *“COVID-19 destroys everything”*. She referred to the English Premier League and the Australian Open, both of which were able to continue but with strict rules and restricted access. Like the others, Katie also believed that people would *“change their travel behaviour”*, especially in attending international sports events. Similarly, Nick revealed that she could see that COVID-19 had impacted international sports events. Additionally, she had noticed that spectators attending events overseas needed to *“go through temperature checking”*, *“wear facemasks”*, and *“apply hand sanitiser”*. She concluded that attending sports events *“would never be the same”*.

Sky also believed that *“people would still be careful”* even after everyone had been vaccinated and the borders reopened. In addition, he thought that the layout, design and allocation of seating at major sports events would be changed, stating that *“The organiser might set gaps between seat or the next bubble”*. Sky gave his opinions that the travel behaviours of all athletes and spectators would have changed forever. Finally, Tao shared similar concerns that people would be nervous *“going to crowded areas, especially in stadiums”*. She also added that *“seating design and [venue] set up might be changed”* to restore spectator confidence in the future. Eventually, she believed that event spectators would *“adjust their behaviour”* and pay more attention to *“protecting themselves... wearing masks and washing their hands with hand sanitisers”*.

COVID-19 had become a critical risk that had impacted all industries worldwide. The participants expressed that although this pandemic had affected their lives and behaviours, it had especially stopped them from travelling and made them nervous and worried about the transmission, but they had learned to adjust themselves to live and deal with it, and they would love to travel to participate in and/or attend international sports events.

4.7 Chapter Summary

Becoming an international sports event tourism destination, hosting international sports events to establish global recognition and regenerate the image and branding is an effective tool (Chalip & Costa, 2005; Grix & Kramareva, 2017) for Thailand. This chapter provides clear participant profiles and information that has led the researcher to understand the nature of the participants. In addition, to maximise the benefit from the participants' information and minimise any bias of their responses, this chapter clarifies the connection between the participants and Thailand.

Three themes emerged and were derived from the participants' interviews: namely, accessibility and affordability, risks and reputation, and COVID-19. The participants expressed and revealed their attitudes and perspectives towards Thailand being promoted as an international sports event tourism destination. The study found that the accessibility and affordability of Thailand as a country was found as attractive, according to the participants. To become an international sports tourism destination, the participants highlighted that the country needed more reliable and professional event organisers at an international level. On the other hand, the political instability in the country was an obstacle and a cause of the country's negative reputation against promoting it to an international level.

The final chapter brings the investigation comes to an end, with the discussion of the important findings in connection to the primary research objectives and the existing literature on destination branding and sports event tourism. The research's practical ramifications are then discussed, along with several recommendations to complement the primary findings and provide appropriate guidance for future studies on the topic.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has become a significant concern to governments worldwide, having forced billions of people to adjust their behaviours. As mentioned in Chapter One, the consequences of trying to contain or eliminate COVID-19 is expected to have a long-term impact on the global travel and tourism industry, with the sports event sector being one of the hardest hit in 2020 (Chang et al., 2020; Sheresheva, 2020). It has been predicted, for example, that people will be more hesitant when it comes to booking trips to attend mass social gatherings such as major sports events (Ludvigsen & Hayton, 2020). As a result, sports event organisers will have to adjust and change their event plans, such as scheduling of competitions, limitation of participants and audiences, and addressing more event rules and policies to participants and attendants (Parnell et al., 2020).

As introduced in Chapter One (section 1.3), prior to the emergence of COVID-19, the Thai government was actively seeking opportunities to promote and develop the country's potential as an international sports event tourism destination (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017; Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2017). The aim of this study was to assess Thailand's aspiration to become an international sports event tourism destination through the eyes of New Zealand sport tourists with a connection to the South-East Asian country. New Zealand represents a growing market for the Thai tourism industry. Furthermore, the New Zealand government has also invested a significant amount of public money into the sports event tourism sector over the past couple of decades, establishing itself as an attractive host destination for event organisers (Wright, 2019).

The final chapter of this thesis provides a summary of the key findings of this exploratory qualitative research. In doing so, it revisits the study's three objectives: the first of which focused on the exploration of the existing academic and industry sport event tourism literature, particularly that which focuses on the production and consumption of sports event tourism. The second objective was to capture the attitudes of the respondents regarding the sport tourism-related aspirations of the Thai

government. A mix of active and passive sports tourists with a pre-existing personal connection to Thailand was recruited for this study. An opportunity was then created for them to share their personal experiences and expectations within an online semi-structured interview setting. The significant determinants that influenced the participant's attitudes towards sports event tourism in Thailand were then explored within the third and final objective. The following sections offer a series of conclusions and recommendations based on the findings presented within the previous chapter.

5.2 The Existing Academic and Industry Literature

Sport event tourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments in the global tourism industry (Jeong & Kim, 2019b; Venkatachalam, 2009). Although hosting international sports always comes at a cost, the successful hosting of a major sports event can generate short and long-term benefits for those living within the host destination, especially those operating within the tourism and hospitality sector (Richelieu, 2018b). In addition, whilst there are many examples of poor planning and underwhelming event legacy development, hosting sports events has proven to be an effective tool in the application of destination branding strategies (Hall & Amore, 2019). As a result, prior to COVID-19, hosting spectator-driven sports events had become something that destination managers considered an essential component of destination marketing (Chalip & McGuirty, 2004; Presenza & Sheehan, 2013). In 2020 and 2021, despite the lockdowns and international travel restrictions established to prevent the spread of COVID-19, many sports events were able to continue entertaining global audiences, presenting positive images of host destinations and shaping those audiences' individual attitudes, perceptions, and expectations towards destinations as well as creating recognition to the host destinations. Thus, it is the researcher's belief that hosting international sports events, crowd or no-crowd, can help a host turn negative images or reputations into positive ones.

Many scholars argue that various determinants influence sports tourists' attitudes and perceptions towards destinations and decide to either participate in or not attend sports events according to the study's conceptual framework (refer to Figure 2.5). In the existing sports tourism literature, Gammon and Robinson (2003) provide a conceptual framework (refer to Figure 2.2) that

exhibits the distinction of sports and tourism in the tourism industry, namely “Sports tourism” and “Tourism sport”. The framework’s simplicity is arguably its biggest strength in that it is based solely on the primary travel purposes of tourists. Within this study, Nakhon visited Thailand to see his family but also ended up participating in a marathon. Tao and Nick both travelled to Thailand for non-sporting reasons but ended up attending sports events that were being hosted in the cities where they were staying. The decision-making process employed by these passive or casual sports tourists differed considerably from that employed by the active sports tourists who travelled primarily to actively compete in a sports event. Interestingly, however, their perceptions towards Thailand’s potential as a sports event tourism destination were much more closely aligned.

As discussed within Chapter Two, destination marketers are employed to attract tourists to destinations (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Dann, 1977; Newland & Aicher, 2018). To attract tourists, destination marketers need to first understand the consumers’ decision-making process and the intrinsic and extrinsic motives of tourists, including the relationship between their attitudes and perceptions (Katsikari et al., 2020). Mehrabian & Russell (1974, as cited in Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020) suggest the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) theory helps destination managers identify positive opportunities to understand, encourage and influence tourists’ attitudes towards destinations. S-O-R also helps these managers to design promotional campaigns that target tourists’ intrinsic needs and desires as well as the many extrinsic determinants that influence the decision-making process (Katsikari et al., 2020; Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020). The following section will give the conclusion of New Zealand-based sports tourists’ attitudes, perceptions, expectations and experiences towards Thailand as an international sports event tourism destination.

5.3 Expectations and Experiences

As mentioned in Chapter’s One and Two, attitude is an essential concept that marketing and tourism researchers take into account in their studies. Attitudes are beliefs, feelings, and behavioural intentions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). In addition, attitudes can change according to different variables, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, of a person (Pizam et al., 2000). The role of the second objective was

to examine the expectations and experiences of sports tourists with a personal connection to Thailand. More specifically, the researcher targeted sports tourists who resided in New Zealand. The nine participants were each asked to share their stories related to elite or non-elite sporting events in Thailand.

This study found that the participants had different determinants that influenced their attitudes to participate in and/or attend international sports events in Thailand. The participants' socio-cultural backgrounds and experiences clearly influenced their positive attitudes towards Thailand as an international sports event tourism destination (refer to section 2.3.3). All of the participants acknowledged that their local knowledge and prior experiences influenced their initial interest and active involvement in the research study. For example, all the participants agreed that Thailand was already an established international tourist destination. Most of the participants had experiences of either living and/or working in Thailand. Some participants were Thai-born, whilst others were born elsewhere but raised by Thai parents (i.e., in a Thai household). A detailed profile of the participants was created prior to the thematic analysis stage (refer to Table 3.3). The active sports tourists were obviously excited by the prospect of the Thai government investing in sport-related tourism, but also agreed that Thailand was not yet in a position to bid for or host a mega sports event.

Whilst the weather was considered an attractive pull factor, the current lack of suitable event-related infrastructure was noted by those who had travelled to compete in sporting fixtures/competitions hosted in Thailand and several other countries. Likewise, the sports spectators (passive sports tourists) also thought that Thailand had potential, based on its accessibility and affordability, but that it was still some way behind more host destinations such as England, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. The following section will offer some final reflections around the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats extracted from within the participants' attitudes towards Thailand as an international sports event tourism destination.

5.4 Accessibility and Affordability

The participants all perceived Thailand's existing tourism brand to be attractive, reputable and positive. Many noted the strength of and opportunities attached to marketing, the local Thai hospitality industry and the warm-welcome encountered by international visitors of all ages and ethnicities. The accessibility and affordability of Thailand as a tourism destination was found to be significant strength by all of the participants. Since the participants all had pre-existing connections with the country, however, many were also able to reflect upon the relative ease to which they were able to access Thailand and to travel around the country. The active sports tourists referred to Thailand as a convenient country for international athletes to compete in sports events, noting the proximity of Bangkok's three international airports. Likewise, the sports spectators shared positive perceptions related to Thailand's urban transport infrastructure and resort-style tourist facilities. The large variety of suitable accommodation options, from budget accommodation to luxury accommodation, was also noted by the participants, several of whom believed that Thailand would be able to offer reasonable packages for sports tourists to travel to international sports events.

Both the active sports tourists and the sports spectators noted that Thailand was an affordable destination with regard to accommodation, food, and travel, especially those travelling from New Zealand and other sports tourists. The participants also acknowledged the importance of Thailand's additional leisure tourism activities and its established reputation for being a relatively inexpensive place for New Zealanders to have a vacation. However, in terms of infrastructure and facilities, it was perceived that the Thai government would still need to invest in building or renovating stadia in order to enhance the country's ability to host international sports events. Some participants also perceived that Thailand was not ready in terms of providing domestic public transportation, especially outside of Bangkok. For example, while the Thai capital city's public transportation network was complemented, the inter-city public transportation in Thailand was seen as an area that required significant improvements if the nation were to host an event across multiple host regions.

5.5 Reputations and Risks

The participants identified a number of threats to the Thai government's sports event tourism aspirations. Thailand's reputation for being a nation that suffers from political instability, for example, was raised by all nine participants, with many sharing an attitude that this would seriously hinder the nation's ambitions of hosting a mega sports event such as an Olympic Games. As mentioned in Chapter One, according to the International Olympic Committee's bidding process outline, a host country's image and international audiences' perceptions are significant factors in the bidding process and the results. With this in mind, the Thai government would have to convince global audiences that the political instability witnessed in the past would not impact the hosting of any future sports events, especially those that require many years of planning and preparation.

Although political instability in Thailand was perceived to be both a major proven weakness and a potential threat, the active sport tourists who had competed in events in Thailand were less concerned than those who had travelled primarily to visit friends and family. The athletes acknowledged that the country had an internal political issue, but that this was not going to stop them from travelling to participate in sports events. Interestingly, they paid more attention to the international reputation of the events and the event organisers. This was an unexpected outcome of the research, and not an area of explored within the initial literature review (i.e., prior to the data collection process).

In sum, the active sport tourists involved in this study all shared a belief that Thailand would need to invest in the recruitment of professional sports event organisers with international experience. Several of the participants expressed doubts or concerns regarding the local Thai event organiser's ability to deliver safe and secure events for a large number of international sport tourists. Dicko, GM and Jetts, for example, all stressed the importance of identifying and employing organisers with established reputations, allowing the hosts the opportunity to build positive attitudes amongst the guests. Perceptions were shared around the importance of athlete's being able to trust the event organisers and the significance of entering an event where the safety and security of the participants

were clearly prioritised ahead of any financial gain/profits or future destination marketing opportunities. There was a consensus that international athletes, coaches, media and spectators would have different attitudes and perceptions towards risk tolerability and tolerance than the host community and/or any domestic sport tourists. This, again, was an unexpected outcome of the study, and therefore not an area of sports event management literature explored prior to the interviews.

Place reputation management is built upon the complex relationships and connections that exist between brand, image, reputation and identity (Morgan et al., 2011). Kim and Chalip (2004) argue that the reputations of popular sports events, the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup, for example, can globally draw attention to the host destination. Moreover, the reputation of hosting international sports events can also establish and enhance brand recognition (Chalip & Costa, 2005). Aicher et al. (2015) state that sports tourists, both active and passive, have different motivational determinants driving their individuals' decisions. Kaplanidou and Vogt (2010) outline five broad categories that influence sports tourists, these being: organisational aspects (e.g., event organisers, safety and security, and infrastructure and facilities), environmental aspects (e.g., new places, suitable location, and beautiful scenery), physical aspects (e.g., training, health, and physical conditions), social aspects (e.g., vacation, networking, and socialisation), and emotional aspects (e.g. relaxing, self-fulfilment, and enjoyment).

The reputations of those in charge, especially when it comes to safety and security, can help establish a sense of trust and reliability that is valued highly by active sports tourists (Choi et al., 2019; Lee & Beeler, 2009; Luciani et al., 2017; Meeprom & Silanoi, 2020; Van der Wagen & White, 2018; Vegara-Ferri et al., 2020). Kaplanidou and Vogt (2010) were one of the first to highlight that the reputations of the event organisers were valued by sports tourists, especially professional/elite and/or semi-professional athletes who travel for both business and pleasure. Ludvigsen and Hayton (2020), when discussing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, note that sports tourists, especially professional/elite athletes, are likely to look even harder at the trustworthiness and reliability of those responsible for the health and safety of event participants. Likewise, Parnell et al. (2020) argue that

the impacts of COVID-19 on the reputation of large-scale international sports events could result in active sports tourists reconsidering where they travel and the events in which they enter. In sum, they are likely to favour sports events with a specific action plan for COVID-19 that makes them feel safe. Choi et al. (2019) argue that the experience of the event organisers is one of the key determinants that influence active participation at international sports events.

In keeping with the theme of reputation and risk, some participants provided interesting comments about hospitality workers in Thailand, especially those from outside of Bangkok who were unable to understand English. The passive sport tourists all agreed that the language barrier would have a negative impact on the experience of international sport tourists visiting Thailand to compete in or spectate at an international sports event. There was a consensus that local operators would benefit from being able to communicate with athletes and spectators. The active sport tourists also shared their beliefs that potential problems and complaints during sports events could arise from the inability of the hosts and the participants to communicate in the same language. All agreed that the professional development of a skilled event workforce within the Thai sport and tourism was a priority.

Finally, the global COVID-19 pandemic was discussed by all of the participants. Although this wasn't a focus of the study, the interviews were conducted at a time when COVID-19 was dominating the news all over the world, including in New Zealand and Thailand. The impact of COVID-19 on Thailand's aspirations was discussed at length, with many of the participants sharing their belief that Thailand's tourism industry would recover once the borders were reopened due to its accessibility, affordability and well-established reputation. The participants were less confident when it came to the use of sports events to speed up or strengthen the recovery process. Once again, the reliability and trustworthiness of the country's image was mentioned. On this occasion, however, it was linked to the Thai government's ability to control, organise, and manage the pandemic recovery plan. There was a shared belief that a strategic plan was required for the Thai tourism industry.

A couple of the athletes suggested that the Thai government should use the border closures and lack of international tourists as an opportunity to train and upskill those organising local sports events in the country. Others identified the importance of investing in community sports events that appealed to sport event tourists living in Thailand, including those born overseas. One of the participants shared an interesting experience of participating in a sports event (a triathlon race) in Thailand during the pandemic (refer to section 4.5). This event was one of the best practices and profiled the country by positively creating the country's image and reliability from international audiences that it was able to host sports events during COVID-19.

5.6 Concluding Statement

As noted within the limitation (section 3.7), the number of participants involved in this study was hindered by a number of external factors, including COVID-19. A number of regional lockdowns occurred during the data collection period, limiting time and access to some of the potential participants identified during the research design phase. Any further/future research on this subject would certainly benefit from talking to a larger cohort of sports tourists, including those without any previous or personal connection to Thailand. The expansion of the participant selection criteria would also allow for some interesting comparisons and further critical analysis. Unfortunately, due to time and financial constraints, this was not a viable option on this occasion. The findings and conclusions offered within this study are not generalisable statements of truth or fact. They do, however, offer some insight into the attitudes of a small cohort of New Zealand residents with a personal/emotional connection to the subject matter being explored. Data saturation was evident during the completion of the last three interviews, with the participants sharing similar attitudes and answers to the questions being asked.

According to the participants involved in this study, the key determinants of Thailand's aspirations to become an international sports event tourism destination are as follows: (1) the stabilising of the country's fragile/volatile political environment; (2) the recruitment of experienced international event organisers; (3) the upskilling/professional development of the Thai sports event

industry, to match that of the Bangkok tourism and hospitality sector; and (4) the development of suitable inter-city transport infrastructure and large-capacity sporting facilities to support the delivery of sports events in cities other than Bangkok. A key recommendation to emerge from this research is the need for scholars to further explore the influence/importance of reputational risk within the production and consumption of sports event tourism within established and emerging host destinations.

The themes extracted from this exploratory study suggest that the Thai government could benefit from invest in small- to middle-scale sports events based outside of Bangkok or the other established tourism resorts. In order to attract larger international events, the Thai events sector needs to demonstrate that it is well prepared and well organised with an established portfolio of fixtures that range in size and status. Ideally, these events should be run by experienced organisers who, once borders re-open, are given the opportunity to travel overseas and gain industry experience that they can then bring back to Thailand. The employment of migrants with international experience was seen as a much quicker way to create a sense of reliability and trustworthiness within the highly competitive marketplace. Although Thailand is not currently ready to bid for mega-events such as the Summer Olympic Games, the participants were of the opinion that the nation has the potential to become an international sports event destination. The risks attached to political instability in Thailand were perceived to be an obstacle in winning the rights to host some international sports events, especially mega or major sports events owned by the IOC.

As noted within the previous section, of all the findings to emerge from this study, the one that offers the most food for thought is the perceptions shared around the reputations of the local Thai event staff. According to the fourth strategic plan of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Thai government has also identified this weakness/threat and is committed to training local sports event organisers and developing a workforce capable of managing international sports events in Thailand. This investment should, in theory, reduce the risks attached to travelling to Thailand for the primary purpose of attending a sports event (as either an athlete or a spectator). Additionally, it should also

help Thailand attract more international sports events, which in turn would build trust and confidence amongst sports tourists and enhance the host's reputation and brand image. The existing events that have been identified as 'best practice' are the Bangkok International marathon, Phuket King's Cup International Regatta, and XTerra Samui's Triathlon.

To conclude, the participant's attitudes and perceptions around the political instability of Thailand and the lack of international event management expertise was interesting and somewhat unexpected. Overall, however, this study complements the existing academic literature looking at the importance of attitudes and perceptions within the sport event tourists' decision-making process. Moreover, the qualitative study offers those interested in exploring this subject further with some fresh insight into the aspirations of the Thai government to diversify their well-established tourism and hospitality industry and target the sports event tourist. Sports events were perceived to be a legitimate means of promoting Thailand's existing tourism sector to a new cohort of international visitors. Although Thailand was not considered ready to bid for, let alone host, a mega sports event, its accessibility and affordability was deemed highly likely to appeal to active and casual sports tourists from nations such as New Zealand.

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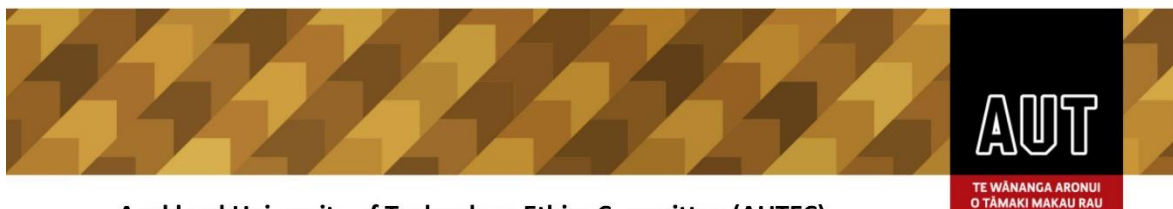
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Approval



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

16 December 2020

Richard Wright
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Richard

Re Ethics Application: **20/298 New Zealanders attitudes towards Thailand's aspirations to become an international sports event tourism destination**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 16 December 2023.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: fcj3305@autuni.ac.nz; Sally.rae@aut.ac.nz

Appendix B: Sample Recruitment Advertisement

RESEARCH STUDY ON SPORTS EVENT TOURISM DESTINATION IN THAILAND


AUT
RESEARCH &
INNOVATION

Research participants needed.

Are you a person who participate in sports events or other contact sport in Thailand?

Would you be interested in helping us understand the attitudes towards Thailand to become an international sports event tourism destination?

We are conducting a study to investigate the attitude of New Zealanders towards Thailand's aspirations to become an international sports event tourism destinations.

Our goal is to capture and compare the expectations and experiences of New Zealanders who have visited Thailand to compete in and/or spectate at sporting events, including their thoughts towards Thailand's aspirations to become an international sports event tourism destination.

WHO?

- You are New Zealanders.
- You are aged 18 years old and over.
- You are elite or semi-professional athletes.
- You have travelled to/ around Thailand to compete in or spectate at a sport event.

WHERE?

- Auckland University of Technology
- OR
- Online-platforms i.e. Zoom, Google Meeting, and Microsoft Teams.

HOW WILL MY DATA BE USED?

Your data will be anonymised.

Your information will be used only for this study.

INTERESTED?

If you meet the requirements for the study and are interested in participating, please contact Sabio Chai-Udom, email: fcj3305@aut.ac.nz or contact via phone at **021 272 0058** for more information.

This research study is being supervised by
Dr Richard Wright, email: richard.wright@aut.ac.nz &
Dr Sally Rae, email: sally.rae@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology
Ethics Committee on 11 September 2020,
AUTEC Reference number 20/298



Appendix C: The Semi-structured Interview Questions Guide

Interview Guide:

Theme 1: Introduction and general information	
Question 1	<p>Could you please introduce yourself and tell me about yourself?</p> <p>Probing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Background, ethnicity, age, employment status, occupation
Question 2	What sports do you play?
Question 3	<p>Do you play sports as a professional athlete or amateur?</p> <p>Probing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A professional athlete or an amateur
Theme 2: Sporting information, background, experiences	
Question 1	<p>Generally, how often do you go overseas to participate in an international sporting event in one year?</p> <p>Generally, how many times each year would you travel internationally for a sporting event</p>
Question 2	<p>What criteria do you use to select a sporting destination?</p> <p>Probing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why did you decide to participate in this particular sporting event? - How do you select this destination?
Question 3	<p>What is your favourite city or country to attend an international sporting event? Why?</p> <p>Probing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the most favourite city and country to participating in international sporting events? - Why did you like this city or country the most to attending international sporting events? - Are there any places you like? Why? - Are there any places that you don't like? Why?
Question 4	<p>What is your expectation of the destination where you decide to attend the international sporting events?</p> <p>Probing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why do you think to be specific are important for the sports destination?

Theme 3: Sporting information, background and experiences in Thailand	
Question 1	<p>How often have you visited Thailand to participate in or spectate at a sporting event?</p> <p>Probing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In Thailand, where do you usually go to attend sporting events? - If there are many cities, they have been to Thailand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What is your most favourite city in Thailand where you participated in sporting events? o Why did you like this city the most? o Are there any places in Thailand that you don't like? Why? - What experience have you received from participating in international sporting events in Thailand? - What is your greatest memory of attending sporting events in Thailand?
Question 2	<p>What criteria did you use to consider attending a sporting event in Thailand?</p> <p>Probing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why did you decide to participate in this sporting event? - How did you select Thailand for attending this sporting event?
Question 3	<p>What is your anticipation or expectation of Thailand when you decide to attend the international sporting events?</p> <p>Probing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why do you think these are important for the sports destination?
Theme 4: Potentials and areas of improvement for hosting international sporting events in Thailand	
Question 1	If one of the very important sporting events that you really want to attend is held in Thailand, do you consider going to Thailand?
Question 2	In your opinion, do you think Thailand is a suitable country for hosting international sporting events? Why? Or why not?
Question 3	In your opinion, what does Thailand have to improve in order to become an international sporting event destination?
Question 4	In your opinion, do you think Thailand has a high potential for promoting itself to become an international sports event tourism destination? Why? Or why not?
Question 5	In your opinion, do you think overall, Thailand could become an international sports event tourism destination? Why? Or why not?

Theme 5: Rating potential of Thailand as a sporting events tourism destination	
Question 1	On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate Thailand's overall quality in becoming a sporting events tourism destination?
Question 2	On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate Thailand's potential to become a sporting events tourism destination?
Theme 6: Point of views in participation in and/or attending a sporting event	
Question 1	What do you think should happen to participate in and/or to attend a future sporting event?

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

15 / 09 / 2020

Project Title

New Zealanders' attitudes towards Thailand's aspirations to become an international sports event tourism destination

An Invitation

Sawasdee krub!

I am Punnavit Chai-Udom, a postgraduate research student from Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. This research is a part of my master's degree, and taking part is completely at your discretion. Your decision to participate or not will take neither advantage nor disadvantage you. The following sections of this participant information sheet elucidate further about this research project.

'What do New Zealanders who have previously attended sports events in Thailand think about the Thai Government's desire to host more international sports events?'

What is the purpose of this research?

This study is guided by the following research question;

'What do New Zealanders who have previously attended sports events in Thailand think about the Thai Government's desire to host more international sports events?'

The aim is to capture and compare the expectations and experiences of New Zealanders who have visited Thailand to compete in and/ or spectate at sporting events, including their thoughts towards Thailand's aspirations to become an international sports event tourism destination. The study also seeks to determine the type of sports event that would appeal to New Zealand-based athletes.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You were selected to participate in this research based on your active involvement within a previously hosted sport in Thailand. Your experiences of attending sports events in Thailand provide you with an insight that few other New Zealanders possess. Your opinions will provide the researcher and the reader of this research with an increased understanding of the subject area.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If the interview is conducted in person, then you will be required to complete and return a consent form provided to you before the interview begins. If the interview is conducted online, as opposed to in person, I will require you to print and sign the attached consent form, scan it or take a photograph, and then email it through fcj3305@autuni.ac.nz prior to the start of the interview. Alternatively, should you not have access to a printer, scanner or smartphone, you can provide oral consent before the interview by confirming the statements in the attached consent form. Your declaration of consent will be audio-recorded and separated from the rest of the recording.

You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will be offered the choice between having any identifiable data as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, the removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

If you agree to participate in this research, a semi-structured interview expected to last between 60 and 90 minutes will be conducted. These one-on-one interviews will be face-to-face or online via Zoom. The interview's audio recording will be securely stored on the interviewer's password encrypted computer. The interviewer will transcribe the recording verbatim. None of the research data shall be provided to any individual or organization for any purposes. The research findings will be disseminated within a master's degree thesis, benefiting the primary researcher and his supervisory team.

What are the benefits?

Participating in this study provides you with an opportunity to share your opinions on a topic of interest to your sport and the future of Thailand as a future sport tourist destination for other Aucklanders.

How will my privacy be protected?

All privacy of participants will be protected by the removal of names within the final presentations. Participants will be identified within the text by using pseudonyms.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The interview may take approximately 60-90 minutes, depending on the flow of the conversation.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

One week

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes. The dissemination of findings can be presented through a copy of a summary of findings (research abstract). The findings will be sent through the participant's email or physical address (hard copy). A summary of the main results and conclusion will also be conveyed using infographics or/and illustrations.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Richard Keith Wright, richard.wright@aut.ac.nz, 0064 9 921 9999 ext. 7312

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Erin Moloney, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 0064 9 921 9999 ext. 8316

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this information sheet and a copy of the consent form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Punnawit Chai-Udom

Email: fcj3305@aut.ac.nz

0064 2 1272 0058

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Primary Supervisor

Dr Richard Keith Wright

Email: richard.wright@aut.ac.nz

0064 9 921 9999 ext. 7312

Secondary Supervisor

Dr Sally Rae

Email: sally.rae@aut.ac.nz

0064 9 921 9999 ext. 7611

Appendix E: Interview Consent Form



Consent Form

Project title: New Zealanders' attitudes towards Thailand's aspirations to become an international sports event tourism destination

*Project Supervisor: Dr Richard Keith Wright (Primary supervisor)
Dr Sally Rae (Secondary supervisor)*

Researcher: Punrawit Chai-Udom

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated _____.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature :

Participant's name :

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate) :

.....
.....
.....
.....

Date :

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 11 September 2020 AUTECH Reference number 20/298

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix F: Lists of Sports Events Held in Thailand

Year	Organisations	Events	Venues
1959	The Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF)	Southeast Asian Peninsular Games	Bangkok
1966	The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)	Asian Games	Bangkok
1967	The Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF)	Southeast Asian Peninsular Games	Bangkok
1970	The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)	Asian Games	Bangkok
1975	The Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF)	Southeast Asian Peninsular Games	Bangkok
1976	The Badminton World Federation (BWF)	BWF World Men's Team Championships	Bangkok
1978	The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)	Asian Games	Bangkok
1981	The ASEAN University Sports Council (AUSC)	ASEAN University Games	Chiang Mai
1985	The Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF)	Southeast Asian Games	Bangkok
1988	The ASEAN University Sports Council (AUSC)	ASEAN University Games	Chonburi
1988	The Badminton World Federation (BWF)	BWF Badminton World Cup	Bangkok
1994	The Badminton World Federation (BWF)	BWF World Badminton Grand Prix Finals	Bangkok
1995	The Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF)	Southeast Asian Games	Chiang Mai
1995	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Volleyball Women's U20 World Championship	Bangkok
1997	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Volleyball Girls' U18 World Championship	Chiang Mai
1997	The International Weightlifting Federation (IWF)	IWF World Weightlifting Championships	Chiang Mai
1998	The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)	Asian Games	Bangkok
1999	The ASEAN University Sports Council (AUSC)	ASEAN University Games	Bangkok
1999	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship	Sisaket & Ubonratchathani
2002	The World Archery Federation (WA)	WA World University Archery Championships	Bangkok
2003	The International Boxing Association (AIBA)	AIBA World Boxing Championships	Bangkok
2003	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Volleyball Women's U20 World Championship	Suphan Buri
2003	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Volleyball Boys' U19 World Championship	Suphan Buri
2003	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Beach Volleyball U19 World Championships	Chonburi
2004	The International Federation of Association Football (FIFA)	FIFA U-19 Women's World Championship	Bangkok
2005	The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)	Asian Indoor Games	Bangkok
2006	The World Taekwondo Federation (WTF)	WTF World Cup Taekwondo Team Championships	Bangkok

Year	Organisations	Events	Venues
2007	The Southeast Asian Games Federation (SEAGF)	Southeast Asian Games	Nakhon Ratchasima
2007	The International University Sports Federation (FISU)	Summer Universiade	Bangkok
2007	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Volleyball Women's U20 World Championship	Nakhon Ratchasima
2007	The International Weightlifting Federation (IWF)	IWF World Weightlifting Championships	Chiang Mai
2008	The ASEAN Para Sports Federation (APSE)	ASEAN Para Games	Nakhon Ratchasima
2009	The ASEAN Schools Sports Council (ASSC)	ASEAN School Games	Suphan Buri
2009	The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)	Asian Martial Arts Games	Bangkok
2009	The International Basketball Federation (FIBA)	FIBA Under-19 World Championship for Women	Bangkok
2009	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Volleyball Girls' U18 World Championship	Nakhon Ratchasima
2009	The International Weightlifting Federation (IWF)	IWF World Youth Weightlifting Championships	Chiang Mai
2010	The ASEAN University Sports Council (AUSC)	2010 ASEAN University Games	Chiang Mai
2012	The International Federation of Association Football (FIFA)	FIFA Futsal World Cup	Bangkok
2012	The United World Wrestling (UWW)	UWW World Beach Wrestling Championships	Chonburi
2013	The World Archery Federation (WA)	WA World Para-archery Championships	Bangkok
2013	The Badminton World Federation (BWF)	BWF World Junior Championships	Bangkok
2013	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Volleyball Girls' U18 World Championship	Nakhon Ratchasima
2014	The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA)	Asian Beach Games	Phuket
2014	The International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF)	ITTF World Tour Grand Finals	Bangkok
2014	The International Weightlifting Federation (IWF)	IWF World University Weightlifting Championships	Chiang Mai
2016	The ASEAN Schools Sports Council (ASSC)	ASEAN School Games	Chiang Mai
2016	The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)	FIVB Volleyball World Grand Prix	Bangkok
2017	The International Weightlifting Federation (IWF)	IWF World Youth Weightlifting Championships	Bangkok
2018	The Badminton World Federation (BWF)	BWF World Men's Team Championships	Bangkok
2018	The Badminton World Federation (BWF)	BWF World Team Championships for Women	Bangkok
2018	The International Motorcycling Federation (FIM)	Thailand motorcycle Grand Prix (MotoGP)	Buriram
2019	The International Motorcycling Federation (FIM)	Thailand motorcycle Grand Prix (MotoGP)	Buriram

Source: Adapted from National Olympic Committee of Thailand (2020)