

THE STATE OF SPORTS TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN THE ANDAMAN TOURISM CLUSTER: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Few sectors in global tourism have grown as quickly as sports tourism, yet no prior study has systematically examined the state of sports tourism management within the Andaman Tourism Cluster—Thailand's largest and most economically significant tourism region, covering six provinces: Krabi, Trang, Phang Nga, Phuket, Ranong, and Satun. This study set out to examine sports tourism management across five dimensions: purpose, participants, settings, impacts, and support needs. A mixed-methods design was used, drawing on a questionnaire completed by 384 residents and semi-structured interviews with 30 purposively sampled sports tourism stakeholders. Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics; interview data were analyzed through thematic content analysis. Residents rated sports tourism management at a high level across all five dimensions. Sports competition and recreational activities stood out as the most prominent purposes; natural sports venues ranked highest among setting types; and economic impacts were the most visible dimension. Partnerships and community involvement topped the list of development support needs. Together, the results support established frameworks for sports tourism management and offer evidence-based direction across five priority areas: expanding competitive events and nature-based recreational programming, engaging the full range of participant types, leveraging the cluster's exceptional coastal settings, addressing the gap between economic and cultural impact awareness, and building multi-stakeholder governance structures to meet expressed community support needs—providing a practical foundation for more sustainable and inclusive sports tourism strategies across the Andaman cluster and comparable coastal destinations.

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INTRODUCTION

Sport represents one of humanity's most powerful social innovations, elevating physical competition into a form of entertainment that connects people across the globe under a shared framework of rules and regulations. A high-quality sporting contest demands skilled athletes, physical resilience, and sportsmanship, alongside adequate equipment, purpose-built facilities, and accessible spectatorship. These elements are simultaneously preconditions and products of the sports economy. An examination of the world's ten most popular sports—Football (Soccer), American Football, Basketball, Cricket, Tennis, Formula 1, Baseball, Golf, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), and Esports, as compiled by Sports Venue Technology (2024), shows that sport has long outgrown recreational competition to become a major economic force. The sports industry now generates substantial revenue, with sports-related businesses tied closely to the broader tourism economy (Wongsawat & Boonkoum, 2024).

Projections indicate that the global sports industry will reach a valuation of USD 826 billion by 2030. Wider internet access has boosted sport's commercial value considerably, particularly through bigger audiences and rapidly rising broadcast rights fees. Social media has also given athletes new tools to build personal brands and reach well beyond traditional markets. In alignment with these global trends, Thailand's 7th National Sports Development Plan (2023–2027) articulates a vision of sport as a driver of human development, social cohesion, and national economic value creation. The plan positions sport as a strategic mechanism for economic growth, with explicit policy directives to promote sports tourism activities and international sporting events as national priorities, and to develop the sports industry across services, events, and tourism sectors (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2023).

Sport tourism has carved out a substantial place in global tourism over the past few decades. The extraordinary results of major international sporting events—most notably the Paris 2024 Olympic Games—underscore how effectively sports-motivated travel boosts visitor spending and lifts regional economies. Data released by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) indicate that the worldwide tourism sector contributed USD 10.9 trillion to global GDP in 2024, equivalent to 10% of the total global economy (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2025), while the global sports tourism industry alone was estimated at USD 564.7 billion in 2023, with projections suggesting an expansion to USD 2,327 billion by 2032 reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.8% over the forecast period (Grand View Research, 2026; Wadhvani & Ambekar, 2024). Scholars have broadly classified sports tourism into three principal forms: active sports tourism, involving direct physical participation in sporting activities; passive sports tourism, defined by attendance at live sporting events as spectators; and nostalgia sports tourism, encompassing visits to sport-related heritage destinations (Gibson et al., 1998), with contemporary market analyses revealing that passive sports tourism currently holds the dominant share, accounting for roughly 55% of all sports tourism engagements (Wadhvani & Ambekar, 2024).

Situated along Thailand's western coastline, the Andaman Tourism Cluster (ATC) encompasses six provinces—Krabi, Trang, Phang Nga, Phuket, Ranong, and Satun—and stands as the nation's most expansive and economically vital tourism destination. Statistical records from 2022 indicate that the cluster attracted approximately 29 million tourists, yielding tourism revenues of 600 billion baht and recording per capita daily expenditure of 4,800 baht—a figure surpassing all other coastal tourism clusters across Thailand's five designated zones (Program Management Unit for Competitiveness, 2024). Unspoiled marine ecosystems, multicultural heritage, and competitive infrastructure together make the ATC a natural fit for sports tourism, with particularly strong potential in water-based and aquatic activities.

Despite the growing academic interest in sports tourism globally, no prior study has systematically examined the state of sports tourism management specifically within the Andaman Tourism Cluster. Existing research in the Thai context has largely focused on individual provinces or general tourism development, leaving a significant gap in understanding how sports tourism is perceived and managed across this multi-provincial cluster as an integrated system. In particular, no study has assessed the five core dimensions of sports tourism management—purpose, participants, settings, impacts, and support needs—across this multi-provincial cluster simultaneously, leaving destination planners without a comprehensive, evidence-based framework to guide policy and investment decisions. Without a comprehensive baseline assessment, relevant stakeholders including sports tourism operators, government agencies, and private sector organizations lack the research-based evidence needed to strengthen sports tourism management capacity and formulate effective development strategies. This gap needed filling. In light of this, the present study examines the state of sports tourism management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster across five key dimensions: sports tourism purpose, participants, settings, impacts, and support needs for sports tourism development. The aim is to give practitioners in the Andaman provinces a clearer, evidence-based picture of where sports tourism management currently stands and where it can go.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To examine the state of sports tourism management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster across five dimensions: sports tourism purpose, participants, settings, impacts, and support needs for sports tourism development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sports Tourism

Sports tourism—a distinct segment of special interest tourism—covers travel for athletic participation, event spectatorship, leisure, entertainment, and visits to sports-related attractions (Gibson, 1998; Kurtzman & Zauhar, 1993; Zajadacz, 2016; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2011; Hinch & Higham, 2011; Jakovlev et al., 2017). The field gained significant academic and industry attention following the 1971 meeting of the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education, with growing recognition that engagement in sport and physical activity contributes meaningfully to physical and mental health outcomes and overall well-being. Scholars have defined sports tourism from a range of perspectives: Gibson et al. (1998) characterize it as travel motivated primarily by participation in sports competitions, observation of sporting events, or visits to sports-related attractions, with travelers encompassing athletes, spectators, coaches, and team managers alike; Standeven

and De Knop (1998) extend this conceptualization to include recreational travel associated with sport in any form—whether active participation, spectatorship, or engagement with sports media—undertaken away from one’s primary place of residence, and potentially involving both commercial and non-commercial competitive contexts; while Weed and Bull (1997) offer a more concise framing, describing sports tourism as holiday-based engagement with sport, either as a participant or as a spectator. Although these definitions vary in scope and emphasis, they converge on the notion that sports tourism involves purposeful travel in which sport serves as the primary motivation. For the purposes of the present study, the definition proposed by Gibson et al. (1998) is adopted as the conceptual foundation. This definition explicitly identifies the three principal forms of sports tourism engagement—active participation, passive spectatorship, and nostalgia-based visitation—that most accurately reflect the diverse sports tourism activities observed across the Andaman Tourism Cluster. Across these definitions, a common thread runs: sports tourism is purposeful, multi-dimensional, and extends well beyond athletic competition.

State of Sports Tourism Management

This study examines sports tourism management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster through five dimensions, each chosen for its fit with the region’s geographical, cultural, and economic context. The first dimension, sports tourism purpose, covers five key components: sports competition, training and competition preparation, recreational activity participation, visits to renowned sports venues, and sports-related business activities (Gibson et al., 1998; Higham, 2005; Neirotti, 2003; Orams, 2005). Gibson et al. (1998) established the foundational classification of sports tourism purposes by distinguishing active participation, passive spectatorship, and nostalgia-based visitation—a framework that directly informs how purpose is operationalized in the present study. Neirotti (2003) and Higham (2005) subsequently refined this classification by emphasizing the role of training and preparation alongside competitive events, while Orams (2005) extended it to include commercially oriented business travel linked to the sports sector. In the Andaman context, these purposes are reflected in a diverse range of activities—from competitive water sports and adventure racing to recreational diving, golf, and Muay Thai. Participant composition forms the second dimension. Eight distinct visitor categories have been identified: competitive athletes, spectators and fans, recreational participants, family members and friends accompanying athletes, sports administrators, sponsors and business representatives, specialized support personnel—including coaches, physicians, physiotherapists, psychologists, and technical staff—as well as sports media professionals (Gibson et al., 1998; Higham, 2005; Neirotti, 2003; Orams, 2005). Gibson et al. (1998) first proposed the athlete–spectator–support staff typology that underlies this classification. Neirotti (2003) and Higham (2005) broadened the framework to include support personnel such as coaches and medical staff, while Orams (2005) highlighted the role of sports media professionals as a growing participant category with distinct infrastructure and service requirements. The diversity of this participant base is particularly relevant in the Andaman cluster, which draws both domestic and international visitors across all categories. Settings—the physical environments where sports tourism takes place—form the third dimension, falling into three broad types: natural sports environments, purpose-built sports facilities, and sports heritage sites such as museums, halls of fame, and historically significant stadiums (Gibson et al., 1998; Higham, 2005; Neirotti, 2003; Orams, 2005). Gibson et al. (1998) first identified the physical setting as a defining element of sports tourism experience by distinguishing natural environments, purpose-built facilities, and heritage sites. Hinch and Higham (2011) elaborated on this typology by demonstrating how setting type influences the character and sustainability of sports tourism development, a concern especially relevant in environmentally sensitive coastal destinations such as the Andaman cluster. Orams (2005) further documented how natural sports environments generate distinctive resource pressures that require targeted management responses. The Andaman cluster’s exceptional coastal assets—its marine environments, beaches, cliffs, and rivers—make natural settings a defining feature of sports tourism here. A fourth dimension covers the impacts that sports tourism generates, measured across ten variables spanning economic, social, cultural, and environmental domains (Chen, 2001; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Gursoy et al., 2002; Hritz & Ross, 2010; Kitnuntaviwat & Tang, 2008; Pongprasert, 2015; Prayag et al., 2013; Yoon et al., 2001). Chen (2001) and Gursoy et al. (2002) provided early frameworks for assessing residents’ perceptions of tourism-related economic benefits and costs, while Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) refined these models using structural approaches to examine how economic dependency shapes resident support. Kitnuntaviwat and Tang (2008) and Hritz and Ross (2010) extended impact assessment to social and community dimensions, and Prayag et al. (2013) demonstrated the mediating role of overall resident attitude in shaping support for sports mega-events. Pongprasert (2015) applied this multi-domain impact framework specifically to the Thai context, providing the closest existing empirical baseline for the present study. Understanding these impacts matters greatly in the Andaman provinces,

where environmental sensitivity and community well-being are central concerns. Two theoretical frameworks inform how these impacts are conceptualized and measured in the present study. Social Exchange Theory (Ap, 1992) posits that residents evaluate tourism development by weighing perceived benefits against perceived costs, and that their willingness to support tourism is shaped by this exchange calculation. This theory provides the explanatory logic for why residents who perceive strong economic benefits tend to report higher overall support, while those bearing disproportionate social or environmental costs are more likely to resist development. The Triple Bottom Line framework (Elkington, 1997), which assesses performance simultaneously across economic, social, and environmental dimensions, offers a complementary structural lens for organizing and interpreting the ten impact variables examined in this study. Together, these two frameworks provide a theoretically grounded basis for measuring and interpreting the multi-dimensional impacts of sports tourism management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster. The fifth dimension covers community support and development, comprising fifteen components aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015)—from partnerships and community involvement, local support, sports event organization, cause-driven events, and the introduction of new sports, to technological integration, multi-resource tourism combinations, safety provisions, resident participation, gender inclusivity, accessibility, sustainable resource use, environmental management, education of tourists and residents, and cross-sector facilitation (World Tourism Organization, 2019; Centre for SDG Research and Support, 2021). The World Tourism Organization (2019) established the foundational linkage between sports tourism development and the SDG framework, identifying sports tourism as a vehicle for economic value creation, social inclusion, and environmental stewardship. The Centre for SDG Research and Support (2021) elaborated on the specific SDG targets most relevant to sports tourism—including decent work and economic growth (SDG8), sustainable cities and communities (SDG11), responsible consumption (SDG12), climate action (SDG13), and partnerships for the goals (SDG17)—providing the conceptual basis for the fifteen support components examined in the present study. In the Andaman context, where local participation and environmental stewardship are inseparable from long-term viability, this dimension carries particular weight. The five dimensions collectively provide a comprehensive framework for examining sports tourism management—one broadly applicable across contexts, yet specific enough to capture what makes the Andaman cluster distinctive.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What is the state of sports tourism management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster across five dimensions: sports tourism purpose, participants, settings, impacts, and support needs for sports tourism development?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Bringing the two together allowed questionnaire findings to be checked against and deepened by interview evidence. Specifically, a concurrent triangulation design was employed, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same period and analyzed independently before being integrated at the interpretation stage. The questionnaire data established a broad, quantifiable picture of residents' perceptions across all five dimensions, while the interview data served to confirm, elaborate, and contextualize those findings. Integration took place at two points: in the Results section, where quantitative and qualitative findings are presented side by side within each dimension, and in the Discussion, where both data sources are interpreted together to develop a fuller account of sports tourism management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster. Ethical approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Phuket Rajabhat University (COA No. PKRU2568/23).

Participants

The study population comprised 2,302,351 Thai residents in the Andaman Tourism Cluster, Thailand. This population consisted of 419,675 residents in Phuket Province, 481,687 residents in Krabi Province, 633,649 residents in Trang Province, 262,855 residents in Phang Nga Province, 180,095 residents in Ranong Province, and 324,390 residents in Satun Province (Department of Provincial Administration, 2025). In addition, 30 key informants who were sports tourism stakeholders in the Andaman Tourism Cluster were included in the study.

The sample size of 384 residents was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination method (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The selection criteria specified Thai citizens, both male and female, aged 18 years and above (Chen, 2001), who resided in the Andaman Tourism Cluster. The sample distribution included 70 residents from Phuket Province (18.23%), 80 residents from Krabi Province (20.83%), 106 residents from Trang Province (27.60%), 44 residents from Phang Nga Province (11.46%), 30 residents from Ranong Province (7.81%), and 54 residents from Satun Province (14.06%). Residents were selected using proportional quota sampling, with the number of respondents from each province determined in proportion to its share of the total Andaman Tourism Cluster population. Regarding the 30 key informants who were sports tourism stakeholders in the Andaman Tourism Cluster, they were selected through purposive sampling and comprised representatives from government agencies, private sector organizations, tourism and sports clubs and associations, and academics. Five key informants were recruited from each of the six provinces—Phuket, Krabi, Trang, Phang Nga, Ranong, and Satun—ensuring equal provincial representation across the Andaman Tourism Cluster. Potential participants were contacted directly by the researcher and invited to take part based on their direct involvement, recognized roles, and a minimum of five years of experience in sports tourism management.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire was built to examine the state of sports tourism management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale to measure both perception and need levels. The instrument comprised six parts: Part 1 collected respondent demographic information; Parts 2–5 measured perception levels across four dimensions—sports tourism purpose, participants, settings, and impacts, respectively—and Part 6 assessed need levels related to support for sports tourism development in the Andaman Tourism Cluster. The scale points were defined as follows: 5 = highest perception or need, 4 = high, 3 = moderate, 2 = low, and 1 = lowest perception or need.

Content validity was assessed by five qualified experts specializing in physical education, sports tourism, sports management, or related fields, each holding a minimum of a master's degree. The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) yielded values ranging from 0.67 to 1.00, indicating acceptable content validity. The revised questionnaire was subsequently pilot-tested with 30 residents of the Andaman Tourism Cluster who were not included in the main sample. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient, producing a reliability value of 0.80, indicating good reliability.

A semi-structured interview guide was also prepared to explore sports tourism management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster in greater depth. It was built from a review of relevant literature and organized around the same five dimensions: (1) sports tourism purpose, (2) participants, (3) settings, (4) impacts, and (5) support needs for sports tourism development. Five experts in physical education, sports tourism, or sports management reviewed the guide for content validity, each holding at least a master's degree. The IOC yielded an overall value of 0.92. The guide was then refined based on expert feedback before use.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected during September–December 2025. The researcher personally administered questionnaires to residents across the Andaman Tourism Cluster. Questionnaires were administered at sports tourism venues across the six provinces, including natural sports sites, purpose-built sports facilities, and sports-related attractions such as Muay Thai camps and golf courses. The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants, including representatives from government agencies, private sector organizations, tourism and sports clubs and associations, and academic institutions. Interviews were conducted in person, by telephone, or via online platforms according to each participant's preference and convenience. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and supplemented with written notes taken by the researcher. All data were treated with strict confidentiality: participants' identities were not disclosed, findings are reported in aggregate form only, and all recorded data will be destroyed upon completion of the research in accordance with the stipulated data retention period. All participation was voluntary, and participants retained the right to decline involvement or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics—frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation (S.D.). Interview data were analyzed through thematic content analysis, with recurring patterns and themes identified across participant responses. The thematic analysis process followed six steps. First, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed alongside the written notes to ensure accuracy. Second, the transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data. Third, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful units of text relevant to each of the five dimensions. Fourth, the codes were grouped into potential themes reflecting patterns across participants’ responses. Fifth, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data as a whole. Sixth, the final themes were defined and named, and representative excerpts were selected to illustrate each theme in the findings.

RESULTS

Section 1 of the Analysis of the State of Sports Tourism Management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster Based on Questionnaire Data

The questionnaire employed a 5-point rating scale, with mean scores interpreted according to the criteria established by Best and Kahn (1986). Scores ranging from 4.50 to 5.00 indicated the highest level of perception or need, while scores between 3.50 and 4.49 indicated a high level. Scores between 2.50 and 3.49 reflected a moderate level of perception or need, whereas scores between 1.50 and 2.49 indicated a low level. Scores falling between 1.00 and 1.49 were interpreted as the lowest level of perception or need. Resident perceptions of sports tourism purpose were high overall. Looking at individual items, sports competition received the highest mean score at 4.60, followed by recreational activities participation with a mean score of 4.55, while sports-related business activities received the lowest mean score at 3.83.

Table 1: The state of sports tourism management in terms of sports tourism purpose

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Level
Sports Competition	4.60	0.49	Highest
Sports Training or Competition Preparation	4.41	0.49	High
Recreational Activities Participation	4.55	0.43	Highest
Visiting Renowned Sports Venues	4.10	0.69	High
Sports-Related Business Activities	3.83	0.50	High
Total	4.30	0.27	High

Perceptions of sports tourism participants were similarly high overall. At the item level, athletes participating in sports competitions received the highest mean score at 4.54, followed by recreational activity participants with a mean score of 4.50, while sports activity administrators received the lowest mean score at 3.96.

Table 2: The state of sports tourism management in terms of sports tourism participants

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Level
Athletes Participating in Sports Competitions	4.54	0.50	Highest
Sports Spectators or Sports Fans	4.44	0.50	High
Recreational Activity Participants	4.50	0.49	Highest
Athletes’ Family Members or Friends	4.26	0.59	High
Sports Activity Administrators	3.96	0.59	High
Sports Sponsors and Sports Business Personnel	4.13	0.67	High
Sports Experts	4.18	0.53	High
Sports Media Personnel	4.20	0.49	High
Total	4.28	0.28	High

Resident perceptions of sports tourism settings also came in at a high level overall. Broken down by item, natural sports venues received the highest mean score at 4.36, followed by built sports facilities with a mean score of 4.28, while sports heritage sites—referring to historical sports locations such as sports museums, halls of fame, and sports stadiums—received the lowest mean score at 3.19.

Table 3: The state of sports tourism management in terms of sports tourism settings

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Level
Natural Sports Venues	4.36	0.50	High
Built Sports Facilities	4.28	0.46	High
Sports Heritage Sites	3.19	0.68	Moderate
Total	3.94	0.32	High

Sports tourism impacts were perceived at a high level overall. Among individual items, economic impacts scored highest at 4.53, with environmental impacts at 3.53 and social impacts at 3.43, while cultural impacts received the lowest score at 3.10.

Table 4: The state of sports tourism management in terms of sports tourism impacts

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Level
Economic	4.53	0.50	Highest
Social	3.43	0.62	Moderate
Cultural	3.10	0.49	Moderate
Environmental	3.53	0.67	High
Total	3.65	0.57	High

For support needs, residents expressed a high level of need across the board. Partnerships and community involvement (SDG1, SDG8) topped the list with a mean of 4.70, followed closely by support of the locals (SDG1, SDG8) at 4.68, while sport events for a cause (SDG1, SDG8) received the lowest score at 4.04.

Table 5: The state of sports tourism management in terms of support needs for sports tourism development

Variable	Mean	S.D.	Level
Partnerships and Community Involvement (SDG1, SDG8)	4.70	0.43	Highest
Support of The Locals (SDG1, SDG8)	4.68	0.45	Highest
Sport Events (SDG1, SDG8)	4.65	0.46	Highest
Sport Events for A Cause (SDG1, SDG8)	4.04	0.47	High
New Sport (SDG1, SDG8)	4.22	0.47	High
Technology (SDG1, SDG8)	4.55	0.48	Highest
Combining Sport Tourism with Other Tourism Resources (SDG1, SDG8)	4.48	0.48	High
Safety (SDG1, SDG8)	4.42	0.48	High
Participation of Residents (SDG3)	4.60	0.50	Highest
Consideration of Women (SDG5)	4.05	0.49	High
Enhancement of Accessibility (SDG11)	4.63	0.49	Highest
Sustainable Use of Natural Resources (SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, SDG15)	4.59	0.46	Highest
Environmental Measures (SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, SDG15)	4.27	0.60	High
Educating Tourists and The Locals (SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, SDG15)	4.33	0.61	High
Encouraging Interactions (SDG16, SDG17)	4.30	0.56	High
Total	4.43	0.21	High

Section 2 of the Analysis of the State of Sports Tourism Management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster Based on Interview Data

Interview data broadly confirmed what the survey numbers had already suggested. Across the Andaman provinces, sports tourism draws visitors for a remarkably varied set of reasons. Competition was among the most frequently cited—several informants pointed out that the region has previously hosted national and international sporting events, attracting both competitors and spectators from outside the area. Recreational sport emerged just as prominently: informants described a rich array of activities available to visitors, from surfing and scuba diving to rock climbing, sailing, canoeing, mountain climbing, trekking, cycling, Muay Thai, golf, and yoga. A number of informants also mentioned sports-related business activities and visits to well-established venues such as Muay Thai camps and golf courses as recognizable, if sometimes overlooked, dimensions of why people travel to the cluster. One observation stood out consistently: while sports heritage visitation—trips to museums, halls of fame, and historically significant stadiums—is recognized in the literature as a meaningful form of sports tourism, informants described it as largely peripheral in the Thai context, far less common than active participation or spectator-oriented travel. Overall, the interviews depicted sports tourism purpose in the Andaman Tourism Cluster as spanning both active and passive engagement, with heritage-based visitation clearly trailing behind the other two forms. *As one informant noted: “There are many recreational activities available here, such as surfboard, diving, rock climbing, river rafting, sailing, canoeing, mountain climbing, trekking, cycling, Muay Thai, golf, and yoga”* (Key Informant 1).

Who counts as a sports tourist in the Andaman cluster? Informants described a notably wide field. Competitive athletes were an obvious starting point, but the picture expanded quickly—spectators and club members, casual recreational participants, and family members accompanying athletes all featured prominently in informants’ accounts. Less visible to casual observers, but equally present, were sports administrators, business representatives, coaching and medical support staff (physicians, physiotherapists, sports psychologists, technical officials), and members of the sports media. Informants were particularly attentive to the relationship between who shows up and what gets built. When large groups of competitive athletes arrive for an event, they create demand for specific types of facilities; when recreational tourists predominate, different infrastructure requirements follow. This feedback dynamic—participants shaping settings as much as settings shaping participants—emerged as a consistent theme across the interviews. The questionnaire data aligned with this picture, with competitive athletes and recreational participants scoring highest in residents’ awareness, reflecting their relative visibility in the day-to-day landscape of the cluster. *One informant observed: “The most visible group is recreational activity participants—people who come specifically to take part in sports and outdoor activities”* (Key Informant 2).

Informants’ accounts of sports tourism settings highlighted the Andaman cluster’s remarkable physical landscape. Seas, cliffs, and rivers that define the region’s geography were described as natural venues for surfing, river rafting, fishing, and a range of water and adventure-based activities—assets informants consistently regarded as among the cluster’s most distinctive competitive strengths. Purpose-built facilities formed a second major category: stadiums, golf courses, artificial climbing walls, and Muay Thai camps were all mentioned as spaces serving both training and competitive functions. A third category—sports heritage sites such as museums, athletes’ halls of fame, and historically significant stadiums—was acknowledged, but consistently described as underdeveloped compared to the other two. Informants were also attentive to the downstream consequences of these settings: the characteristics of a venue—its location, capacity, environmental sensitivity, and maintenance quality—directly shape the economic, social, and environmental outcomes that sports tourism generates. A natural coastal setting used without adequate care will erode in ways that undermine the very tourism it supports; a well-managed purpose-built facility can provide more durable economic returns. The survey results supported this view, with natural venues receiving the highest scores, consistent with the region’s identity as a coastal and marine destination. *As one informant described: “The natural settings here are exceptionally beautiful—the sea, the cliffs, the rivers. The purpose-built facilities, such as stadiums, golf courses, climbing walls, and Muay Thai camps, are also modern and well-equipped”* (Key Informant 3).

Informants did not shy away from the complications of sports tourism’s impact on the region—they described gains and costs in roughly equal measure. On the economic front, the positives were familiar: job creation, increased visitor revenue, and fresh investment in local businesses. But informants were also candid about the downside, pointing to rising prices and a higher cost of living that places real pressure on residents who do not directly benefit from tourism income. Social impacts

followed a similar pattern. Sports tourism was credited with revitalizing parts of the urban fabric, building provincial pride, and creating opportunities for cross-cultural encounter. At the same time, informants pointed to physical disruption around sports tourism venues and, in some areas, rising crime rates as costs that communities have to absorb. Cultural effects were more nuanced. Informants appreciated the way sports tourism can support local cultural activities and strengthen community identity—but several raised concern that sustained exposure to large numbers of visitors from different backgrounds carries risks of cultural change that communities may not always welcome. Environmental impacts drew some of the strongest responses. Better utilities, improved roads, and maintained historical structures were acknowledged benefits; so were overcrowded outdoor spaces, habitat destruction linked to stadium and golf course construction, and worsening traffic, waste, and pollution. Running through these accounts was an implicit logic consistent with social exchange theory: communities that experience tangible benefits are more willing to support further development, while those bearing disproportionate costs grow more resistant. This dynamic mapped directly onto the questionnaire data, where economic impacts led all categories and cultural impacts scored lowest. *One informant captured the economic dimension clearly: “Sports tourism creates jobs, expands employment opportunities, and generates income from tourists for local communities”* (Key Informant 4).

When asked what the region actually needs to develop its sports tourism potential responsibly, informants were specific and wide-ranging. On the services side, they pointed to coaching development programs and leadership training, accessible sports information resources such as maps and guidebooks, safety and accident prevention systems, sports science and research infrastructure, and sports souvenir retail. Infrastructure gaps were no less urgent: improved stadiums and competition venues, better utilities including water supply, electricity, communications, and waste treatment, stronger transport connections across roads, rail, and public transit, and a more robust food and dining offer in key sports tourism zones. Equally apparent was informants’ sense of how these needs connect to the broader system—one central to economic development (SDG1, SDG8)—as sports tourists typically spend at higher rates than general tourists, given the costs associated with equipment hire, instruction, and activity participation. Informants spoke of the specialized employment it creates—guides, instructors, event staff—and its role in broadening the destination’s offer and smoothing seasonal demand fluctuations. The survey reinforced this emphasis on collaboration: Partnerships and Community Involvement and Support of the Locals topped the list of support needs, signaling that for residents, the governance architecture of sports tourism development matters as much as the physical infrastructure it supports. *This sentiment was captured by one informant who stated: “What we need most is cooperation and participation from all sectors involved in sports tourism development”* (Key Informant 5).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The State of Sports Tourism Management in Terms of Sports Tourism Purpose

The range of purposes that bring sports tourists to the Andaman cluster was well recognized by residents—a finding consistent with the region’s established reputation for both competitive and recreational sporting activity. Sports competition received the highest mean score, which is perhaps unsurprising given that the six Andaman provinces have previously hosted national and international sporting events—experiences that have shaped how residents understand and identify sports tourism in their communities. Recreational activities ranked closely behind, a pattern that aligns with the extraordinary diversity of nature-based sports available across the cluster, from surfing and scuba diving to rock climbing, Muay Thai, and golf. In contrast, sports-related business activities received a comparatively lower mean score, suggesting that residents remain less attuned to the commercial and transactional dimensions of sports tourism, such as trade fairs, sponsorship events, and sports-industry networking forums.

Talking with key informants added layers to what the numbers had shown. Sports tourism purposes in the Andaman context extend well beyond simple athlete-spectator dynamics—informants described training camps, visits to established venues like Muay Thai camps and golf courses, and, though far less often, nostalgia-oriented trips to sports heritage sites. One informant noted that this last category, while theoretically recognized as a form of sports tourism, remains largely peripheral in Thailand compared to counterparts elsewhere in Asia.

The multi-component frameworks of Gibson (1998), Orams (2005), and Standeven and De Knop (1998)—which characterize sports tourism purpose as encompassing participation, spectatorship, and heritage visitation—hold up well in the Andaman context. The pattern of high scores for active and passive purposes alongside low recognition of heritage-based activities mirrors Yuvanont’s (2018) findings from the Thai context, where sports competition was consistently dominant and business activities ranked lowest. The Andaman data go a step further; they suggest that this same hierarchy operates at the scale of a multi-provincial cluster, and that the limited development of heritage-based sports tourism is less a site-specific gap than a structural feature of how the sector has evolved in Thailand as a whole. This conclusion draws directly from the study’s findings that sports competition received the highest mean score ($M = 4.60$), while sports-related business activities scored lowest among purpose components ($M = 3.83$), and from interview accounts that consistently described heritage-based visitation as largely peripheral in the Thai context. Nostalgia tourism frameworks built largely on North American and European cases may therefore require adjustment to account for the infrastructural and cultural conditions that shape sports heritage visitation in Southeast Asian destinations.

These findings point to clear priorities for destination managers. The strong recognition of sports competition and recreational activities as primary purposes suggests sustained investment in competitive events and a broad, nature-based recreational sports programme as the core of any viable sports tourism strategy for the Andaman provinces. The business tourism and heritage tourism segments, by contrast, remain underdeveloped—and represent real opportunities for portfolio diversification. Sports trade and sponsorship forums, sports museums, and interpretive heritage programmes could draw visitor segments that are currently underserved, while also reducing reliance on the seasonal recreational market. Both directions align with the broader policy framework articulated in Thailand’s 7th National Sports Development Plan (2023–2027) and the Thailand Vision through Sports and Soft Power 2026 policy, which both position the Andaman cluster as a strategically significant destination for sports tourism expansion and international event hosting.

The State of Sports Tourism Management in Terms of Sports Tourism Participants

The Andaman cluster draws a wide and varied participant base, as residents’ survey responses made clear. Athletes attending competitive events and recreational activity participants received the highest mean scores—a reflection, most likely, of their visibility in the everyday landscape of sports tourism activity in the region. Sports administrators, by contrast, received the lowest score, suggesting that organizational and managerial roles in sports tourism remain comparatively opaque to the general resident population, even as they are essential to the functioning of the sports tourism ecosystem.

The interview accounts filled in what the survey data alone could not show. Across conversations, a broad and varied participant landscape emerged: competitive athletes, sports fans, recreational participants, family members accompanying athletes, coaches, physiotherapists, sports psychologists, business representatives, and media professionals—the full range of categories identified in the theoretical literature. What informants also highlighted was a dynamic the questionnaire could not capture: the scale and composition of the participant base actively shapes demand for venues and facilities, so that what gets built in the region is as much a product of who shows up as of any deliberate planning process.

The diversity of sports tourism participants found here is consistent with the typology established by Gibson et al. (1998) and subsequently elaborated by Neirotti (2003), Higham (2005), and Orams (2005). Pongprasert (2015) similarly identified this full range of participant categories in the Thai context, noting their direct influence on sports tourism destination characteristics—a relationship clearly observable in the Andaman setting. The aesthetic appeal factor highlighted by Inpongpan (2019) is particularly relevant here: the cluster’s coastal and marine environment serves not only as a scenic backdrop but as an active draw for recreational participants, reinforcing the interdependence between natural setting and participant composition.

Theoretically, the lower visibility of sports activity administrators among residents invites further reflection. This observation is grounded directly in the finding that sports activity administrators received the lowest mean score among all participant categories ($M = 3.96$), despite their essential role in the sports tourism ecosystem. The dominant theoretical models treat sports tourism participation as an athlete-spectator binary, with support roles—coaching staff, administrators, medical personnel—acknowledged in passing but rarely emphasized. What these data suggest is that such an emphasis can

quietly sideline the organizational infrastructure on which sports tourism actually runs. In developing destination contexts, where governance structures are less institutionalized, public recognition of administrative roles may be particularly important for building the legitimacy and visibility of sports tourism as a managed sector rather than a spontaneous activity.

Destination planners and event organizers would do well to design programmes that serve the full participant range—not only athletes and spectators, but support personnel, media professionals, and accompanying families—if they are to maximize both visitor yield and economic multiplier effects. Raising public awareness of the organizational dimensions of sports tourism matters equally: communities that understand who actually sustains sports events tend to extend broader support to the sector as a whole. The cluster's natural assets give it a particular edge in attracting recreational participants, and regional marketing and product development should leverage this advantage actively, in line with Thailand's 7th National Sports Development Plan (2023–2027).

The State of Sports Tourism Management in Terms of Sports Tourism Settings

The Andaman Tourism Cluster's distinctive geography—its seas, cliffs, rivers, and coastal margins—underpins much of what draws sports tourists to the region, and this was evident in residents' perceptions. Natural sports venues received the highest mean score among all setting categories, followed by purpose-built facilities. Sports heritage sites, however, received a notably lower score at the moderate level, echoing the pattern observed in the purpose dimension and indicating an enduring gap in heritage-based sports infrastructure across the cluster.

Interview participants offered a detailed account of this landscape. They described natural settings as primary venues for surfing, river rafting, fishing, and similar activities; built facilities including stadiums, golf courses, climbing walls, and Muay Thai camps as spaces for both competition and training; and sports heritage sites—museums, halls of fame, historically significant stadiums—as a category present in theory but comparatively underdeveloped in practice. Informants were also attentive to the relational dimension: the quality and character of sports tourism settings, they argued, directly shape the economic, social, and environmental outcomes that follow from sports tourism development, making setting investment a matter with far-reaching consequences.

The three-typology framework of natural environments, purpose-built facilities, and heritage sites—established by Gibson et al. (1998), Hinch and Higham (2011), and Orams (2005)—is well represented in the Andaman data. However, the Andaman evidence adds something more specific: an account of how these three typologies are actually distributed—and weighted—within a particular destination. The cluster shows a pronounced concentration in natural and built settings, with heritage sites lagging significantly behind. This conclusion is drawn directly from the result that sports heritage sites scored at a moderate level ($M = 3.19$), substantially below natural venues ($M = 4.36$) and purpose-built facilities ($M = 4.28$), and was consistently confirmed by interview accounts describing heritage sites as underdeveloped in practice. This asymmetry challenges any assumption that the typology framework maps uniformly across all contexts, and reinforces the importance of attending to destination-specific histories and geographic endowments when applying established frameworks.

Several planning priorities emerge directly from these findings. Natural sports environments remain the cluster's primary competitive asset—destination managers should continue developing and promoting nature-based products that leverage the region's coastal and adventure landscapes. Purpose-built facilities need ongoing investment to maintain year-round capacity and meet the growing needs of a varied participant base. The underdevelopment of heritage-based settings is both a gap and an opportunity: targeted investment in sports museums, interpretive programmes, and heritage trails could draw nostalgia-oriented visitors who are presently largely absent from the market. These directions are broadly consistent with the 7th National Sports Development Plan (2023–2027), which identifies sports tourism infrastructure and sports heritage promotion as strategic priorities for enhancing Thailand's global competitiveness as a sports tourism destination.

The State of Sports Tourism Management in Terms of Sports Tourism Impacts

Among the four impact dimensions examined, residents' perceptions varied considerably. Economic impacts scored highest—at the highest level—while cultural impacts ranked lowest. This gap warrants attention. Economic benefits generated by sports tourism—visitor spending on accommodation, food, equipment rental, activity participation, and

related services—are directly observable in the daily commercial life of Andaman communities, making them highly legible to residents. Cultural and social impacts, while no less significant, are diffused across a broader range of social interactions and longer timeframes, and are therefore less immediately visible in residents' everyday experience.

Key informants painted a more complex picture that encompassed both gains and costs. On the economic side, sports tourism was credited with generating employment, increasing tourism revenue, and stimulating investment—but informants also acknowledged rising prices and increased costs of living as negative economic externalities. Social benefits included urban revitalization, enhanced provincial pride, and cross-cultural exchange; negative social impacts mentioned included increased crime rates and physical disruption around sports tourism venues. Culturally, informants highlighted support for local cultural activities and cultural exchange between tourists and residents, while also recognizing risks of cultural change and erosion. Environmental benefits—improved utilities, transportation infrastructure, and maintenance of historical structures—were offset by significant concerns about overcrowding, ecosystem destruction through construction of stadiums and golf courses, and increased waste and pollution.

The primacy of economic impacts in residents' perceptions aligns with Yuvanont (2018), who found similar results in the Thai context, and with the broader literature on resident attitudes toward tourism development reviewed by Chen (2001), Gursoy et al. (2002), and Gursoy and Rutherford (2004). World Tourism Organization (2019) and the Centre for SDG Research and Support (2021) further confirm that sports tourists tend to spend more per visit than general tourists—covering equipment rental, instructor fees, and activity costs—and that sports tourism generates specialist employment and broader business spin-offs.

The Andaman evidence offers a more detailed account of how different impact types register among residents across a multi-provincial cluster. The gap between economic impact scores—at the highest level—and cultural impact scores at the moderate level is substantial, and is not fully addressed by existing theoretical frameworks. It extends social exchange theory by showing that residents' support for tourism development rests most firmly on economic benefit perceptions, with cultural and social dimensions playing a peripheral role in their awareness. This has real implications for how models of resident support are built, particularly in developing destination settings where economic dependency on tourism is high.

Three practical priorities emerge from these findings. Strategies aimed at growing economic benefits need to be paired with concrete measures to protect local residents from the negative economic spillovers that sports tourism can generate—price monitoring and mechanisms for equitable benefit distribution among them. Raising public awareness of sports tourism's social and cultural contributions matters too: residents who perceive only economic impacts are likely to support a narrower and more transactional version of development than the sector can offer. And the severity of the environmental impacts informants described makes environmental management indispensable: carrying capacity assessments, waste systems, and ecosystem protection measures need to be treated as core components of any development plan, not afterthoughts. These priorities correspond directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG1, SDG8, SDG11, SDG12, SDG13, SDG14, and SDG15.

The State of Sports Tourism Management in Terms of Support Needs for Sports Tourism Development

Across all fifteen components of sports tourism development examined here, residents reported a consistently high level of need. This broad consensus reflects a well-developed community understanding of what responsible sports tourism development involves. Partnerships and community involvement and support of the locals received the highest need scores, at the highest level, signaling that residents view collaborative, community-centered governance as the bedrock of any viable long-term development strategy. Sport events for a cause, while receiving the lowest score among the fifteen components, still registered at a high level, indicating broad consensus rather than selective concern.

The qualitative data elaborated on these expressed needs in concrete terms. Informants identified coaching development and leadership training, sports information services, safety management systems, sports science research centers, and sports souvenir retail as essential service-side requirements. Infrastructure needs were just as urgent: stadium and venue development, utilities including water, electricity, and waste management, transportation networks, and dining facilities all featured prominently in informants' accounts. Informants also drew explicit connections between these support needs and

the upstream dimensions of the study's framework—recognizing that what sports tourism does to a place (impacts) and who and why people come (purpose, participants, settings) together shape the support requirements that follow.

Both the World Tourism Organization (2019) and the Centre for SDG Research and Support (2021) map out the multiple channels through which sports tourism contributes to sustainable development: economic value creation through visitor spending, specialized employment generation, enhanced destination competitiveness, and the promotion of social inclusion and environmental stewardship. The high need scores for technology integration, sustainability measures, gender inclusivity, and resident participation suggest that the Andaman community's vision for sports tourism development already incorporates SDG-aligned priorities spontaneously, suggesting genuine local readiness for a more structured and policy-supported development framework.

The range of support needs that residents identified—covering governance, education, gender equity, environmental management, and cross-sector working—challenges conventional sports tourism management models that tend to prioritize infrastructure provision and event hosting at the expense of these more diffuse institutional and social dimensions. That residents raised these priorities without prompting is significant: models built mainly around facility supply and event demand are likely missing a significant part of what community-embedded sports tourism management actually requires.

The implications for managers and policymakers are direct. Multi-stakeholder governance structures—giving local communities, government agencies, the private sector, and academic institutions genuine roles in planning and decision-making—are not optional features of sports tourism development. They are its foundation. Digital infrastructure and smart tourism technologies deserve investment as quality-enhancing and market-expanding tools, not peripheral luxuries. Natural resource management frameworks need to be taken seriously as preconditions for the cluster's long-term viability rather than mere compliance requirements. And gender-inclusive programming, both for participation and for industry employment, should be embedded in development strategies from the outset, consistent with SDG5. These priorities collectively find support in Thailand's 7th National Sports Development Plan (2023–2027) and the Thailand Vision through Sports and Soft Power 2026 policy.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the state of sports tourism management in the Andaman Tourism Cluster across five interrelated dimensions: sports tourism purpose, sports tourism participants, sports tourism settings, sports tourism impacts, and support needs for sports tourism development. Using a mixed-methods approach combining questionnaire data from 384 residents and semi-structured interviews with 30 key informants, results showed that residents rated sports tourism management at a high level across all five dimensions. Sports competition and recreational activities stood out as the most prominent purposes; athletes and recreational participants were the most visible groups. Natural sports venues ranked highest among setting types, consistent with the cluster's coastal and marine character. Economic impacts registered most strongly among residents, while partnerships and community involvement and support of the locals were seen as the most critical support needs for sports tourism development—indicating that community-centered, collaborative approaches are central to sustainable sports tourism management in the region.

This study makes several contributions to sports tourism research. It offers the first systematic empirical account of sports tourism management across the Andaman Tourism Cluster as an integrated multi-provincial system, showing that established frameworks proposed by Gibson et al. (1998), Orams (2005), and Hinch and Higham (2011) hold up well in a Southeast Asian context. The study also offers new empirical insights into the relative prominence of different sports tourism dimensions within a developing destination context, particularly the comparatively limited development of heritage-based sports tourism and the dominant salience of economic impacts in residents' awareness. On the practical side, this research provides relevant stakeholders—including sports tourism operators, government agencies, private sector organizations, and community groups—with research-based evidence to strengthen sports tourism management capacity and inform the development of effective, sustainable, and inclusive sports tourism strategies in the Andaman provinces.

Some limitations of the study should be noted alongside these contributions. The sample was restricted to residents of the Andaman Tourism Cluster and key informants drawn from local stakeholder organizations, and did not include sports

tourists themselves. As a result, the study captures how sports tourism management is perceived and supported from a community and governance perspective, but cannot speak to how visiting sports tourists experience the five dimensions. Sports tourists' motivations for visiting, their satisfaction with existing settings and facilities, their actual spending patterns across activity categories, and their assessment of the cluster's development needs remain outside the scope of the current data. This means the study reflects a supply-side and community perspective on sports tourism management, but not the demand-side experience. The cross-sectional data collection captures perceptions at a single moment in time, which means the findings may not reflect how management conditions and community attitudes evolve. Additionally, data collection took place during September–December 2025, which spans the transition from low to high tourist season in the Andaman region. Perceptions recorded during this period may therefore not fully represent conditions during peak season or the annual low season, when the intensity and character of sports tourism activity differ considerably. A further constraint is scope: while the study examined five key dimensions of sports tourism management, other potentially relevant factors—such as destination marketing, digital technology adoption, and post-pandemic recovery dynamics—were not explicitly addressed within the scope of this study.

Several avenues for future research follow from these limitations. Incorporating the perspectives of sports tourists, event organizers, and international stakeholders would give a more complete picture of sports tourism management in the Andaman cluster than resident surveys and key informant interviews alone can provide. Research with a longitudinal dimension would be particularly valuable for tracking how perceptions and outcomes shift as Thailand's national sports tourism policy frameworks develop. There is also clear scope for future work on the role of digital technology and social media as drivers of sports tourism demand and destination competitiveness, as well as on heritage-based sports tourism as a development opportunity that the present findings suggest is currently underutilized.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE

This article benefited from limited use of artificial intelligence tools for language refinement and editorial clarity during the revision process. All analyses, interpretations, and conclusions are solely the author's own.

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