

THE TRAJECTORY OF SPORTS TOURISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY: GROWTH, PANDEMIC DISRUPTION, AND PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 9 January 2026

Revised: 23 January 2026

Published: 8 February 2026

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a comprehensive review of sports tourism's evolution during the first quarter of the 21st century (2001-2025), exploring its dynamic landscape across economic, social, cultural, technological, and sustainability dimensions. It underlines sports tourism's expanding role beyond mere economics, fostering cultural exchange and community development. Utilizing a documentary research approach and a holistic framework, including PESTEL analysis and the concept of critical junctures, the study segments this period into pre-pandemic growth (2001-2019), COVID-19 disruption (2020-2021), and post-pandemic transformation (2022-2025). The analysis reveals a remarkable pre-COVID boom, fueled by mega-events, diverse participation models, and emerging technologies, with market values soaring into hundreds of billions. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a profound critical juncture, causing unprecedented cancellations, significant economic losses, and rapid shifts towards virtual events and accelerated digital adoption. The post-pandemic era signifies a gradual, albeit uneven, recovery characterized by a strong emphasis on sustainability, experiential tourism, and integrated stakeholder collaboration. The paper concludes by highlighting key policy and practical recommendations, emphasizing the need for resilient, sustainable, and inclusive sports tourism development to navigate future uncertainties and capitalize on its immense potential, projected to reach \$1.8 trillion by 2030.

Keywords: Sports Tourism, COVID-19 Impact, Sustainability, Digital Transformation, Tourism Resilience

CITATION INFORMATION: Maisook, K., Khumtabut, O., Rattanasirivilai, S., & Lacap, J. P. (2026). The Trajectory of Sports Tourism in the 21st Century: Growth, Pandemic Disruption, and Pathways to Resilience. *Procedia of Multidisciplinary Research*, 4(2), 30.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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