

Study on the Outdoor Sports Tourism Development in Hubei Province

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Abstract—Taking outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province as the research objective, this paper discusses the connotation, characteristics and industry development trend of outdoor sports tourism, and summarizes the relationship between them as: sports is an important resource for the development of tourism industry, and tourism is an important driving force for the promotion of sports industry. On the basis of in-depth investigation, this paper analyses the problems existing in the development of outdoor sports tourism in China. This paper analyses the advantages of developing outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province from three aspects: natural resources, human resources and social environment. At the same time, it also analyses the main factors that restrict the development of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province. On this basis, by means of expert interviews, on-site research and other methods, the paper puts forward eight countermeasures and suggestions for the development of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province, aiming at promoting the development of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province and the construction of healthy Hubei Province, and showing the world the beautiful card of outdoor sports tourism of Hubei.

Key words: *Sports tourism; Outdoor sports tourism business; Natural resources; Tourism resources*

I. INTRODUCTION

With the improvement of living standards, when people have solved the problem of “food and clothing”, leisure and recreational activities, including tourism, have been included in the agenda of life. Because of its geographical advantages, convenient transportation and beautiful environment, Hubei has attracted a large number of tourists from the whole country and even from all over the world. The number of outdoor tourists is also increasing year by year [1]. “Speeding up the cultivation of tourism pillar industries and vigorously promoting the construction of a strong tourism economy province” has become one of the major policies of the provincial government. “Hubei Sports Tourism Economic Circle” has gradually formed.

The so-called sports tourism refers to tourists to participate in or watch sports as the main purpose of organized tourism activities [2]. According to the data of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the sports tourism industry is growing at an annual rate of 14%, exceeding the overall growth rate of the tourism industry of 4% - 5%, and the global sports tourism market is expected to exceed 400 billion US dollars by 2020. In recent years, the annual growth rate of

sports tourism in China is 30%-40%, but the proportion of sports tourism in the whole tourism industry is still small, compared with 25% in developed countries and only 5% in China which shows an obvious gap.

The survey results present that the development of outdoor sports industry has attracted much attention, but the development of outdoor sports tourism is relatively lagging behind [3]. Making full use of the natural sports environment and the sports conditions built for many years, constructing the industrial chain of outdoor sports tourism and tapping the market value is also an important subject to be studied urgently, and is also the goal of this paper.

II. OUTDOOR SPORTS TOURISM AND ITS INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

A. *The Meaning of Outdoor Sports Tourism*

Outdoor sports refer to all kinds of activities carried out in mountain, water, desert, plateau and other specific natural environments by means of sports (hiking, skiing, mountaineering, cycling, etc.) in leisure time to meet the needs of people’s health, relaxation, interpersonal communication, stimulation and adventure [4]. Outdoor sports tourism is an activity for this purpose played as a special form of sports tourism and is emphasized the participation of tourists [5]. They are going to explore caves, cross jungles, and climb mountains bravely and so on, so as to gain the spiritual experience of being close to nature, feeling nature and integrating nature.

Sports tourism business is an important part of sports industry and a new bright spot of tourism development. It is a new economic field produced by the cross-penetration of sports and tourism industries, and a new industrial form of deep integration of both industries, which covers a series of economic activities, take sports as the core, on-site tournaments, participation experience and visits as the main forms, to meet the purpose of health and entertainment, travel and leisure, and provide relevant products and services to the public, involving fitness and leisure, competition performance, equipment manufacturing, facilities construction and other forms of business.

To sum up the relationship between the two in a sentence, that is, sports is an important resource for the development of tourism industry, and tourism is an important driving force for the promotion of sports industry.

With the rapid development of China's economy, the increase of leisure time and the increasing awareness of fitness, sports tourism is becoming one of the most dynamic sunrise industries in China [6].

B. Characteristics of Sports Tourism

Compared with other service industries, sports tourism has its own characteristics, mainly:

(1) Comprehensiveness

Sports tourism is to make profits by providing and meeting the needs of sports tourists. It covers moving, travelling, accommodation, food supplying, shopping and entertainment during the whole period of sports tourism. The goods and services contained in these different needs are offered by enterprises of different types and industries, which are complex, diverse and comprehensive.

(2) Service

Sports tourism belongs to the tertiary, that is, service industry. Its products include not only the factors of some tangible ones, but also the "memory" or "experience" of sports tourism, which are obviously valuable intangible products.

(3) Dependency

Sports tourism is a highly dependent industry. Firstly, it relies on sports tourism resources. Secondly, it depends on the development of national economy. At the same time, it rests on the cooperation and coordinated development of all relevant departments and industries.

(4) Risk

Sports tourism is a sensitive industry, full of risks, and is easily impacted by the changes of various social factors [7]. A small wave in natural, political, economic and social factors may lead to greater fluctuations.

(5) Relevance

Sports tourism is an industrial group composed of various industries, which is comprehensive and dependable and involves not only those industries that directly provide products and services for sports tourists, such as accommodation, catering, transportation, entertainment, etc., but also those industries that indirectly provide products and services for sports tourists, such as gardens, textiles, foreign trade, posts and telecommunications, real estate and food.

(6) Foreign-related nature

Sports tourism is a foreign-related industry that involves interpersonal communication between countries. Contemporary sports tourism has crossed national boundaries and is closely related to the country's foreign policy, expatriates policy and United Front policy.

C. Benefits of Sports Tourism

Sports tourism could bring three benefits as mentioned below.

1) Benefits of Intellectual Growth

Sports tourism is useful for people to strengthen their understanding of nature and themselves, to know more deeply the connotation of sports, to acquire rich knowledge, and promote the development of human intellectual resources constantly.

2) The benefits of fitness and health care

Compared with traditional journey, sports tourism is a higher level of travel. Tourists could improve their health awareness and take the initiative to exercise and build up their bodies by participating in various exercises. In a larger sense, sports tourism is capable to improve the quality of the whole people, stimulate the national spirit and promote the construction of healthy China.

3) Economic Function and effectiveness

Developing sports tourism and attracting participants from all over the world can increase national foreign exchange earnings, improve the investment environment, provide employment opportunities, promote foreign economic cooperation and exchanges, and establish China's image and status in the world.

D. Problems in the Development of Sports Tourism in China

Due to the late development of sports tourism in China, the regulations and facilities services are not perfect, mainly manifested as follows:

The communication between sports organizer and tourism department is insufficient, and neither department has put forward specific and targeted management measures for sports tourism. The safety, purpose and specialty of sports tourism are not guaranteed, which seriously affects the development of sports tourism.

Safety and insurance measures for outdoor sports tourism are still inadequate [8]. At present, outdoor sports injury insurance in China only sells to organizations, which makes it difficult to get compensation for the frequent "donkey friends" (as Chinese usually called) accidents and damages in recent years. On the one hand, the public has a strong demand for participation in outdoor exploration, but on the other hand, the lack of corresponding institutional safeguards increases the risk of people engaging in outdoor sports, and inhibits the development of outdoor sports industry [9].

Sports tourism professionals are scarce. At present, sports tourism, as a new subject, is still in the stage of development in the early stage in China, which needs compound professionals who are proficient in sports, tourism, management, management, law and so on. Nowadays, the situation of sports tourism professionals is not optimistic in terms of specialty, total quantity and quality, and the professionals could not meet the needs of the society. Therefore, it has greatly hindered the development of sports tourism in China.

E. Development Trend of Outdoor Sports Tourism

Outdoor sports tourism has become an important choice for travellers. Overall, the vast majority of Americans love outdoor sports; the United Kingdom people have a strong love for rock climbing; Switzerland is world-famous for skiing,

which earns \$7 billion a year; and Germany's hiking is worth 3.7 billion a year.

The domestic outdoor sports tourism market is also very promising [10]. It is estimated that the number of people participating in outdoor sports in China has exceeded 10 million. Outdoor sports are still the new content and fashion of urban life. Strong participation is an important driving force to promote the development of sports tourism market in China.

The development of outdoor sports industry promotes the development of outdoor sports tourism prominently [11]. Through the development of outdoor sports industry in Guizhou Province, people in Ziyun Geluo River Scenic Area, Xiasi Town in Majiang County and Shibing County in southeastern Guizhou Province are all proved to be useful ways to lift people out of poverty. The development of outdoor sports tourism is of great value in promoting social and economic construction [12].

III. ADVANTAGES OF DEVELOPING OUTDOOR SPORTS TOURISM IN HUBEI PROVINCE

A. *Natural Resource Advantages*

Located in the central part of China, Hubei Province not only has the reputation of "the province of thousands of lakes", but also has rich natural scenery such as mountains and rivers [13]. The third largest river in the world, the Yangtze River; the largest tributary of the Yangtze River; Wudang, a famous Taoist mountain; the primitive forest of Shennongjia with a long history, the fairyland high valleys, the dreamlike exotic garden, and countless other beautiful places, ecological fairyland, all of those produce lots of natural outdoor stadiums almost everywhere.

The landscape of Hubei is mainly hilly area, which is suitable for outdoor sports. There are many mountains, lakes and rivers in Enshi, Shiyang, Huangmei, Qichun and other places. The suitable sites for outdoor sports such as camping, fitness trails, crossing, hiking, tracing streams and exploring are easily to be found. The abundant outdoor sports natural resources bred in Dabie Mountains, Daye and Western Hubei need to be exploited and utilized effectively.

B. *Human Resource Advantages*

Abundant natural conditions have brought unique advantages and conditions for outdoor sports in Hubei Province. Many universities in Hubei, such as China University of Geosciences (Wuhan), Wuhan University and many other universities, rely solely on the natural resources of the campus, they have set up many outdoor sports teaching places such as rock fall, orientated cross-country, outward bound training, so on and so forth [14]. Through careful design and reasonable planning, not only the training base for outdoor sports professionals has been built, but also richful human resources for outdoor sports professionals have been accumulated. The achievements have been praised as "Hubei phenomenon" by the industry. At present, there are 23 registered outdoor sports clubs in Hubei, which have been awarded the title of "Top Ten Outdoor Sports Clubs in China" 10 times above.

Outdoor sports professionals trained by universities such as China University of Geosciences (Wuhan) are going to provide sufficient human resources for the development of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province. At the same time, after more than 10 years of exercise, Hubei has developed a number of powerful outdoor sports clubs, which contain human resources more enough to be conducive to the construction of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province [15]. These high-quality talents should be trained in tourism business, and they will be able to effectively undertake the development task of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province.

C. *Social Environmental Advantages*

Although the outdoor sports tourism industry in Hubei has not formed a large scale yet, the construction of outdoor sports tourism landscape is an important part of the development planning of sports industry in Hubei Province. In order to fully develop the economic and social value of the built landscape, it is the only way to introduce market demand into the tourism area. Due to the abundant resources suitable for the development of outdoor sports tourism landscape in Hubei Province, only drifting field has been built in 12 places (there are still many not completed), so it is necessary to design and integrate professional outdoor sports tourism products, and guide the rational development of it in Hubei, taking into account industrial construction, market development and environmental protection.

IV. THE MAIN FACTORS RESTRICTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUTDOOR SPORTS TOURISM IN HUBEI

Currently, outdoor sports tourism is still a new concept for many people. Although government departments in Hubei are indeed carrying out a number of outdoor sports tourism construction projects, the development strategy from a larger perspective has not taken shape already. Comprehensive analysis shows that the main factors restricted the development of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province include those mentioned below:

A. *Develop idea is not clear*

Although outdoor sports tourism is a sunrise industry, the government departments have not yet formed a clear development idea. Due to the lack of specific leadership of those functional departments, outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province mainly stays in the exploiting of natural resources and the building of hardware facilities, product development and market promotion have not formed to a scale, and few people engaged in outdoor sports tourism. In other words, the lack of policy guidance is considered to be the main reason for the slow development of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei. The essence of the problem is that the government's functional departments have not made a clear judgment on the development prospects of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province. Therefore, an in-depth investigation and study on this topic is carried out to provide the basis for decision-making of relevant functional departments and to promote outdoor sports in Hubei. The development of tourism has important practical value [16].

B. Lack of market management norms

Through the investigation of several outdoor sports clubs in the province, it is found that the main existing form of outdoor sports tourism is self-help travel, which leads to: (1) the resources reserve fails to reflect the market value; (2) the irregular market operation increases the risk of tourists. By strengthening the construction of outdoor sports tourism and linking tourists with scenic spots through intermediary agents, outdoor sports injury insurance is able to enter the market organically, which is not only conducive to standardizing the market, forming a mature industrial chain as soon as possible, but also conducive to reducing the risk of tourists' outdoor sports participation.

C. Absence of Professional Agents

At present, sports clubs in Hubei Province seldom organize outdoor sports tourism activities, even those named outdoor sports clubs. Only Chinese youth international travel agency has the project involved in outdoor sports which focuses on outward bound training. Imagine that: Enshi hiking, Honghu fishing, Mulan mountain climbing, Dabie mountain camping in spring; drifting, River tracing, cave exploration, fishing in the river in summer; camping in Himalaya in autumn; ice climbing and skiing in the north in winter. This is a very good idea, but it is difficult to form an ideal industrialization development model because of the absence of agents.

D. The market outlook is uncertain

“Central Rising Strategy” a Chinese central policy proposed by premier Wen Jiabao in March 2004, has helped the economic construction of Hubei Province [17]. The increasing income of the masses in the province has a strong demand for tourism. In 2008, the number of “People from Hubei Tour Hubei” reached 51.19 million. According to a survey conducted by the State Administration of Sports, 75% of tourists aim at fitness, rehabilitation and leisure, but at present the income of domestic sports tourism accounts for only 5% of the total income of tourism (outdoor sports tourism has a smaller share), while that of developed countries is as high as 25%. In addition, the development experience of outdoor sports tourism abroad also shows that it is a sunrise industry. However, after all, the investment risk is still there. There is no report on the industrial prospects and feasibility analysis of outdoor sports tourism. In the case of insufficient investor confidence, it is necessary to seriously investigate the development status and prospects of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province, and provide support to promote the development of this sunrise industry as soon as possible.

V. COUNTERMEASURES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUTDOOR SPORTS TOURISM IN HUBEI

Hubei Province has abundant natural resources for outdoor sports. There are many sports tourism projects that could be developed, such as: river tracing, drifting, camping, hiking, mountain climbing, exploration, orienteering and other activities. In addition, tourism agents in the province could organize tourists to climb mountains and ski abroad. With the development of our society, outdoor sports have become a new favorite of tourism. Especially the people affected by the

new culture have gradually become the mainstream of society, who is willing to risk their lives to go outdoors and seek spiritual experience. If the outdoor sports market is regulated, more abundant tourism products for "tourism" is provided, and more security for tourism is ensured, outdoor sports must become more popular and loved by the public.

Hubei Province has the fruitful resources and unique environment for the development of outdoor sports tourism. The development of this industry should be start as soon as possible, so as to strive to become the hub of outdoor sports tourism in China, activate the natural, human and social resources of outdoor sports, and promote the economic and social development of our province.

Based on the previous findings, this paper proposes some suggestions as follows:

(1) To clarify the natural resources reserve of outdoor sports in our province as early and quick as possible, and to provide theoretical support for the scientific development of outdoor sports tourism;

(2) To find out the current situation of outdoor sports tourism market in our province apace, including the needs of the masses for outdoor sports tourism, outdoor sports tourism projects carried out by travel agencies and outdoor sports clubs, landscape in the province available for the tourists, relevant product construction, and so on, so as to provide reference for formulating outdoor sports tourism strategy in Hubei Province;

(3) Establish an organic relationship of “market demand - tourism agent - outdoor sports tourism resources” inside and outside the province, guide the travel agencies and outdoor sports clubs to develop outdoor sports tourism industry, help them design reasonable products, provide policy support, and build a stable outdoor sports travel agent team in a limited time;

(4) Scientific planning, rational distribution, exploitation of natural resources and industrial construction are all necessary for the development of outdoor sports tourism [18]. At the same time, economic, social and environmental effects should be taken into account, and environmental protection should be paid attention to in the process of industrial development.

(5) Make full use of transportation facilities and information platform to build outdoor sports tourism products cluster, so as to achieve linkage effect with the products of the same area and adjacent regions, avoid duplication of construction, and form high-quality tourism products with distinct characteristics and rich connotations;

(6) Widening the thinking, making use of the resources within the province, actively expanding the resources outside the province, and making effort to establish our province a hub and core area of outdoor sports tourism in China;

(7) Careful planning, gradually promoting the development of outdoor sports tourism, and ultimately forming a sound multi-functional industrial chain. At present, the development of outdoor sports industry in China is not mature enough. And the coastal economic industry has the trend of transferring to the internal areas. This is a great opportunity to promote the

development of retail, product manufacturing, competitions and other multi-industries through the development of outdoor sports tourism in Hubei Province.

(8) Promote the sports tourism resources of Hubei to the whole country and even the whole world by using the advanced technical means and Internet channels in the information age, and make it a beautiful business card of Hubei Province [19]. For example: design an advanced search engine to realize the intelligent recommendation of outdoor sports tourism resources in Hubei Province [20]. This is also very helpful and effective for the promotion of healthy China construction.

VI. CONCLUSION

Outdoor sports tourism is different from sightseeing travelling, and not the same as single sports fitness activities. It is a special way of life that combines sports and tourism, which takes sports as connotation, tourism as carrier, sports provide resources, and tourism drives the market.

The geographical environment and outdoor sports resource reserve in Hubei Province are the innate advantages of outdoor sports tourism. It is important to base ourselves on developing outdoor sports natural resources in Hubei Province, and make good use of the current social development trend to develop outdoor sports tourism industry, so as to have confidence and determination to become the core of outdoor sports tourism and even outdoor sports industry in China. Make the development of outdoor sports tourism truly become the lever to move up the development of the whole industry chain of outdoor sports.

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