

# Sports as a Tool to Boost Tourism: Marketing Strategies, Media Circulation, and Fan Engagement

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## Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the role of the cricket as a tool for promoting the sports tourism, focusing on how cricket and its related activities influence the destination marketing, destination image and the tourists' decision making process. This shall also explore how the marketing strategies, media circulation and fan engagement contribute to enhancing the visibility of tourist destinations. This study shall adopt a conceptual and an analytical approach based on the key theoretical frameworks such as destination image theory, place branding, event leveraging and push-pull motivation theory. It shall draws on the secondary data and existing literature to analyze the relationship between the sports, fans and tourism development. This study finds that cricket significantly enhances the recognition and the global visibility of the particular destination. The collaborative effort between the cricket boards and tourism organizations effectively is promoting the destinations through event based marketing. The enthusiasm of the fans, identity and loyalty strongly is influencing their travel decision. In addition to this, cricket tourism also contributes to the regional development and strengthens the overall tourism strategies by creating unique travel experiences and increasing destination competitiveness. The paper shall provide an integrated perspective on how the of cricket with media and tourism are intersecting by highlighting how the sports function as a strategic tool for the destination branding and promotion. It shall contribute to the existing literature on sports tourism by putting emphasize on the role of fan engagement and media circulation in shaping the tourism outcomes.

**Keywords:** Sports Tourism; Destination Marketing; Place Branding, Media Circulation; Fan Engagement.

## 1. Introduction

The tourism has changed a lot in recent years, with more number of people looking for some meaningful engaging experiences instead just the traditional holidays. Travellers nowadays want to feel connected to the places they visit, which has led to the growth of new forms of tourism. One of the most important among these is sports tourism, which combines travel with the excitement of sports. It allows people to enjoy events, connect with others, and experience different cultures at the same point of time. Sports tourism is very closely interlinked with the media, culture and economy. With the growth of technology and global communication, sports events are now being watched and followed all over the world. Big

tournaments and leagues attract large number of audiences, both in person and online. This gives the cities and countries a chance to promote themselves and attract tourists from different parts of the world. In today's digital age, social media and live broadcasts plays an important role in shaping the people's interests in travelling. Fans are following their favourite teams and players online, share their experiences and influence others to visit the same place. Because of this, sports events are not just about the game but they also create interests in travel and help people imagine new destinations. In this particular context, cricket is especially very important, particularly in the regions where it is deeply connected to the lives of the people and culture. Its popularity and strong fan base makes it a powerful tool for attracting the tourists. A cricket event not only brings people together but also helps promoting the destinations, supporting local economies, and increase global recognition.

Departing from traditional holidays, Global Tourism industry has synergized with sports to usher experience based travel with regard to collective movements, economic and destination prominence, in the context of large-scale sports. In the social media prominent age, famous sports personalities shape destination curiosity by influencing tourism interest globally. A study from the Boat Charter has revealed the destinations favoured by the world's top players. Coming out on top was Dubai, which has been frequented by England and Everton goalkeeper Jordan Pickford, as well as former Manchester City ace Riyad Mahrez (Sherlock, 2025). Cricket, being an important cultural and economic sport, links international matches and the tournaments to develop tourism and national branding strategy. "Intersecting sports consumption and tourism practices, sports can replicate a mediated environment where travel motivations are not only exclusive to the sporting event but to experiential aspects" (Gammon et al., 2017, p. 71). Cricket stadiums, in such regards, become a centre for tourism, promoted via sports narratives, cultural agents, and geography. Echtner and Ritchie's *Destination Image Theory and Anholt's Place Branding* justify how such events underscore visibility and differentiation, i.e. smaller cities hosting high profile matches. The South-Asian region, with regard to India and Sri Lanka, sees sidetracking of heritage, coastal, and urban tourism, along with the concerned cricket-oriented tourism. In other regards, South Africa promotes wildlife and wine tourism, which alters to diaspora attractions when focused upon Middle Eastern countries.

Tourist's movement and the enthusiasts of cricket in the cricket tourism are influenced by various combinations such as intrinsic motivational forces and extrinsic attractions. The push-pull motivation theory is an effective model for explaining the motivations of fans and the cricket enthusiasts to visit in a specific destination of cricket tourism while ignoring the other places. The intrinsic motivational force includes emotional attachment to the cricket teams, the national identity, group identity and the need for various novel experiences. On the other hand, the extrinsic motivational forces include the appeal of cricket venues, cultural attractions, accessibility and other promotional activities. This presence of supporters is an illustration of how the cricket fans and enthusiast can be motivated to visit any cricket tourism destinations repeatedly, therefore treating the cricket matches as an opportunity to enhance, boost and access tourism products.

Event leveraging is crucial in this regard as it suggest that leveraging sporting events to create long term tourism benefits. So, it is important to understand that the tourism benefits of cricket do not come automatically. Gibson's categories of sports tourism namely active, event and nostalgia remain evident in the spherical patterns of tournaments, bilateral series and franchise leagues which crowd hubs like Dharamshala, Galle, and Cape Town. Pertaining to it, the aspect of intrinsic loyalty, extrinsic pull and coordinated planning strategies remain theoretically justified by the push-pull theory by Dann and event

leveraging by Chalip respectively. Thus, cricket tourism becomes a strategy shaping regional development and global branding.

Another very important aspect of the cricket tourism is its strong and firm economic impact on the host destinations. The large scale matches and tournaments generate revenue through ticket sale, accommodation, transport, and local business. The hotels, restaurants and small vendors benefit greatly from the increased flow of visitors during the season of the cricket. This not only is supporting local economies but also creating employment opportunities, both directly and indirectly. Cricket tourism too encourages the exchange of culture and social interaction among the fans from different regions and countries. The supporters who are travelling to watch the matches often explores local traditions, food and heritage, which enhances their overall travel experience. This interaction helps to build a positive image of the particular destination and promotes mutual understanding among the diverse groups of people.

## 2. Venue Branding, Fan Mobility, and the Strategic Geography of Cricket Tourism

Strategy is more than just logistics; it's part of the bigger picture of global sports venue selection, branding, and tourism management. Picturesque spots in Dharamshala, Galle, Cape Town, or Middle East's waterfronts and desert cities are now gateways, open via cricket-playing venues open to global audiences. Fostering sporting spectacle in the backdrop of nature and culture, these places retain strategic importance in spreading strong imagery through live broadcasts, weighing through sports for destination commodification.

The Himalayas become a backdrop to the HCPA stadium of Dharamshala, exemplifying the 'scenic capital' through cricket tourism, televised apart from conventional venues. "Situated in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh, the region recorded 6,538 foreign tourists in 2022, 16,222 foreign tourists in 2023, and 26,195 in 2024" (Ovais, 2025). To which, local authorities attest to international cricket matches and other sports events of global repute being the sole reason. With Indian Ocean and the Galle Fort on either side, the Galle International Stadium in Sri Lanka, the venue retains the prospects of a picture postcard, than a sports arena. Depicted as "enchanting rather than simply entertaining" (Manongsong, 2025). Matches here underscore heritage landscapes, reinforcing experiences with tourism visibility. Similar functioning as the country's tourism marketing campaign, maybe seen with Newlands Stadium in Cape Town, South Africa, with Table Mountain as the scenic backdrop. Engaging, thereby as South Africa's stance, ideal for lifestyle, nature and sports, further strengthened by a 2024 blog article:

"Nestled in the heart of Cape Town, with majestic Table Mountain and Devil's Peak as its backdrop, Newlands Cricket Ground stands as one of the most iconic cricket venues in South Africa. Known for its scenic beauty and electric atmosphere, Newlands offers cricket enthusiasts an unforgettable experience. Whether you're watching a thrilling Test match or a high-paced T20, the setting is one-of-a-kind, blending natural splendor with a rich sporting heritage" (RoundSeed, 2024).

Match repetitions in these destinations, isn't coincidence but rather materializes the value of sports in constructing destination image. Hence, cricket boards often reinforce matches in venues with tourist-concerned symbolism and visual appeal. In order to portray this, a brief overview of the cities, their visual and cultural appeal, and the tourism outcomes is given in Table 1.

**Table I. Iconic Cricket Venues as Nodes of Destination Branding and Tourism Visibility**

Country/Region	City and Stadium	Distinctive Landscape/Cultural Feature	Strategic Role	Tourism Impact Indicators
<b>India</b>	Dharamshala (HPCA Stadium)	Himalayan foothills, snow-capped mountains	Scenic branding through international and IPL matches	Foreign tourist arrivals rising from <b>6,538 (2022)</b> to <b>16,222 (2023)</b> to <b>26,195 (2024)</b> ; enhanced destination recall.
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	Galle (Galle International Stadium)	Indian Ocean coastline, colonial fort	Heritage-driven international Test venue	Global recognition as a cricket heritage tourism site
<b>South Africa</b>	Cape Town (Newlands Stadium)	Table Mountain backdrop	Repeated international fixtures for visual branding	Reinforcement of lifestyle and nature tourism image
<b>UAE / Middle East</b>	Dubai / Abu Dhabi Stadiums	Waterfront skylines, desert cityscapes	Neutral hubs targeting the South Asian diaspora	Diaspora-led event tourism and extended stays.
<b>Middle East (Emerging)</b>	Doha / Muscat	Desert-coastal hybrid landscapes	Expansion of cricket into new tourism markets	Alignment with global sports tourism growth trends

With the leveraging on sports, fan mobility continues to play a role in this matter, where cricket travel synergizes with other tourism activities. This instance can be exemplified by the Barmy Army and the Bharat Army by John’s 2019 article which suggests

“The birth of the Barmy Army can be traced back to a story of undying loyalty and desire for having a good time in a hopeless situation. A struggling England side, led by Michael Atherton, visited Australia for the 1994-95 Ashes series, and before the start of the fourth Test in Adelaide, it was already losing the series 2-0. The travelling England fans, however, were unwavering in their chants and support. The Australian media called them ‘barmy’, which is a term for mad, presumably because of how insane those people must have been to travel all the way to support a team that was almost destined to lose. As it completes 20 years, the Bharat Army has grown from a UK-based supporters’ group to gain a global presence with supporters’ groups in India, Australia, UAE, USA, and New Zealand. It also arranges

tours for Indian fans travelling to tournaments and series around the world. However, Bharat Army is one of India's major fan groups" (John, 2019).

While, such individuals arrive as fans, their activities concerning consumptions of hotels, transports, food and sightseeing, closely align to tourist behaviour. A report's findings suggest that "47 percent of Indians plan travels around prominent cricket matches, with 80 % look forward an IPL match, while 50 % extend trips by 3-4 days to explore locales" (Online Bureau et al., 2025). The intent behind their presence adds to the glory of host cities during a sports event, as ascertained by destination marketing strategies.

With Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha as centres for cricket, the Middle East targets the South Asian diaspora. Effectively transforming sports into diaspora tourism, events hosted here reflect market demography analysis, air connectivity and consumer spending statistics. Cricket hence, bridges diasporic identity and tourism consumption, uplifting host city and engaging world tourism scenarios. "With, global sports tourism market at USD 618.69 billion in 2024, and expected to reach USD 2 trillion by 2032, market trends indicate demand for event-concerned travel" (TOI World Desk, 2025).

Partnering with tourism boards, cricket boards jointly decide venue allocation, scheduling and hosting of international tournaments, indicating a management-orientation towards increasing event promotions. Hence, visually distinct and globally recognized places concurrent with sporting imaginations reflect event leveraging cores in lieu for tourism gains. Dharamshala, Galle, Cape Town, and Dubai are iconic within cricket tourism landscapes, suggesting this process as selective, as boards select venues capable of sustaining international interest. While, enthusiasts refrain from visiting every centre, repeated returns to these spaces enhance global recognition and economic profile.

Cricket has evolved beyond mere sports and transformed into an event which is like a travelling cultural form which combines sport, mobility, and branding of a particular places. The stadiums are not acting just mere a big infrastructure but it got evolved into a performative space in which national tourism narratives are created. The combination of scenic space, for fan movements, and strategic management shows how the cricket has become a tool for the promotion of tourism, emphasizing its expanding importance within the contemporary tourism geography.

### **3. Marketing Strategies, Event Management, and the Fan as Tourist**

The movement of the fan and branding of the venue are facilitated through strategic marketing and coordinated event management. The event leveraging approach is adopted by the board in the selection and allocation of the venues, fixtures, and the grouping. This is not randomly executed. The high-profile fixtures are strategically assembled in different venues to increase the flow of the tourist.

A Skyscanner report, states that "47% of Indian travelers plan their holidays around live cricket, 80% are planning to attend an IPL match in person. And more than 50% are planning to stay for 3-4 days to explore other attractions" (Desk, 2025). This enables coordination between cricket boards, hotels, transportation proving services, and local attractions. Hotels close to the stadiums are filled to 95-100% capacity on match days, compared to 70-75% capacity on other non-match days. The rates are also 20-30% higher. Hence, the boards operate not merely as sports administrators but as strategic marketing agents converting fans into tourists (Desk, 2025). The Table below highlights the strategic practices and their outcomes in the major host destinations.

**Table II. Marketing, Management, and Fan-Oriented Strategies in Cricket**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Strategic Practice</b>	<b>Evidence from Cricket Events</b>	<b>Tourism Outcome</b>
<b>Event Marketing</b>	Concentration of high-profile matches in select cities	47% of Indian travelers plan trips around live cricket matches; 80% intend to attend IPL matches live	Increased destination visibility and match-led travel
<b>Fan-Centric Strategy</b>	Targeting emotionally invested fan groups	Over 50% of cricket travelers extend trips by 3–4 days beyond match schedules.	Longer stays and higher local tourism spending
<b>Destination Imaging</b>	Scenic and cultural framing in broadcasts	ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup 2023 generated USD 1.39 billion in economic impact in India	Enhanced travel aspiration and destination recall
<b>Event Management</b>	Coordinated hospitality and logistics during events	Stadium-adjacent hotels report 95–100% occupancy on match days vs. 70–75% non-match average; 20–30% higher room rates.	Improved tourist experience and revenue maximization
<b>Fan Mobility &amp; Transport</b>	Match-driven travel demand	30–35% spike in travel bookings during IPL seasons in high-traffic host cities	Reinforced accessibility and repeat visitation
<b>Diaspora Engagement</b>	Hosting matches in global hubs (Middle East)	Large-scale turnout of expatriate audiences at UAE-hosted IPL/ICC events	Conversion of diaspora identity into tourism demand

As summarized in the above table, tourism related to cricket is made possible through an integrated and synchronized approach to marketing and event management, as well as fan mobility.

Cricket based tourism depends on integrated marketing, event management, and fan mobilization. Marketing strategies portray the host cities as experiential destinations, not mere sports destinations, with media platforms featuring the mountains, beaches, heritage places, and skylines, which connect

cricket with tourism. In the case of the “ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup 2023, the impact on India is around USD 139. Billion, with USD 861.4 million going into accommodation, travel, transport, and food and beverages, along with the 1.25 million spectators visiting multiple destinations, the event demonstrated how cricket stimulates multi-site tourism flows” (ICC, “ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup 2023 Delivers Economic Boost to India”, 2025).

The fan culture further processed and amalgamates into the image building process. Cricket fans such as Barmy Army and the Bharat Army exquisitely transform the experience of attending a match into a culinary, heritage, and leisure experience. The travel data indicate a “30-35% rise in regional booking during recent IPL seasons, alongside significant hotel demand in high interest host cities” (TOI, 2025). This type of patterns aligns with the theory called experiential tourism, in which communal celebration and engagement with the destination emotionally enhance destination loyalty.

The people attending the tournament as diasporic audiences in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Doha would market the city as a sports hub with good connectivity, infrastructure, and a large number of population from outside. The quality of managing the event, coordinating the crowd, security, transport, and hospitality further paved the way for repeated visitation and the sustained reputation. Across the countries like India, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and the Middle East, the different marketing strategies are sharing a same logic, which is cricket as a sport function as a trigger for development of tourism. Catering more to the event, shaping the destination image, and fans mobilizing, the cricket turns from mere sport to a tool for strategic promotion of tourist and tourism.

#### **4. Media Circulation, Digital Spectatorship and the Amplification of Cricket Tourism Narratives**

Tourism related to cricket traditionally is understood by physically moving to places, visiting the stadiums, travelling to the host cities, and destination branding surrounding major tournaments. Today’s media driven landscape is shaped much before the actual travel, through television, various streaming platforms, and social media. The experience related to cricket is now based on screens creating virtual encounters with host place that go beyond the participation on the place live.

Covering sports and the related destination on television plays a vital role in portraying the particular host destination globally. The high definition visuals, aerial shots, and repeatedly covering the stadium’s surroundings highlighting the landscapes and scenic backgrounds, setting the particular destinations within imagination of the world. In the report it shows that, “The ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup 2023 reached 518 million live television viewers and generated 422 billion minutes of viewing time, with peak concurrency exceeding 130 million viewers on television alone” (ICC; BARC- Disney Star, 2023). In the same way, the “IPL 2025 season accumulated 840 billion viewing minutes and engaged over one billion viewers worldwide, with the final drawing 169 million television viewers” (BARC; Times of India, 2025). These repeated broadcasting connected to host destinations with leisure, building their tourism visibility.

Social media platforms help expand this visibility beyond the live coverage of the match. The content related to the cricket getting continuously circulated through shorts, reels, small highlights, reactions of the fans, posts related to the travel, making sure that the engagement with the host destinations does not go limited to the whole duration of the event. For example, in one of the Facebook post, it says:

“India’s Cricket Fever Ignites Travel Boom Across Ranchi, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Lucknow, Ahmedabad And Colombo. AirBnb data says Trivandrum recorded more than 110% growth during the ICC event than same period in last year. It also highlights Kerala’s growing prominence in event based

tourism, complementing its established appeal for backwaters and wellness retreats” (Trivandrum Indian, 2026).

The other example, the “ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2022 had 6.58 Billion video views on digital media platforms, underscoring the magnitude of non-linear, on demand engagement with cricket content” (ICC, “ICC Men’s T20 World Cup 2022 Breaks Digital Engagement Records and Live Streaming Milestones, 2022). This allows the viewers to visit these host places again for multiple times, getting detached often from the sports event, so increasing the tourist’s stay a little longer. In order to further exemplify the connection between the media reach and host place visibility, the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 “generated approximately 250 billion minutes of global watch time, with 137 billion minutes of television viewing and 110 billion minutes of digital streaming, with peak concurrent viewership reaching 122 million on television and 61 million on digital platforms for the final match” (ICC, 2025). These data shows that cricket acts longer duration global media events that continue to project the host places globally.

Continuous coverage of these matches by media reshapes the nature and structure of cricket tourism. Though cricket matches are happening according to the schedule fixed, the coverage and circulation of the promotional content, live coverage, and post match media continues to cover the event and engage the viewers before, during and after. As already discussed in the previous sections, this will continue to boost the tourism cycle of the host destinations, by increasing and extending the short term sports events into longer terms destination stories shaping the travel desires. However media coverage of these destinations shows some geographical disparities, as also identified in this study. Visually attractive host destinations, such as the places surrounding hills or beachside stadiums, they continue to get more coverage than the other places with less visually prominent attractions and these destinations remains comparatively less represented. This portrayal integrates the importance of showing some places as regular destinations within global cricket tourism circles, with the venues selected strategically and branding of the destination discussed in the earlier sections.

In the same context, the tourism related to cricket emerges as a mediated practice. The viewers may develop a familiarity who is exposed repeatedly to the destinations through media coverage and which turns to interest later translated into actual visiting of the place. The media and its spectatorship thus acts as a layer connecting sports consumption and the tourist mobility, stressing the main broader argument of this article that cricket is not mere a sport but simultaneously a cultural, and tourism generating phenomenon. The following table shows the media reach and the figures already been cited in the above discussions, brings together television with the online viewership of cricket tournaments.

**Table III. Global Cricket Viewership and Media Reach of Major Tournaments**

Event/Tournament	Year	Viewership Indicator	Recorded Data	Source
<b>ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup</b>	2023	Total global watch time	422 Billion minutes	ICC; BARC-Disney Star
<b>ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup</b>	2023	Live television viewers	518 Million viewers	ICC; BARC-Disney Star
<b>Indian Premier</b>	2025	Total cumulative	840 Billion	BARC; <i>The</i>

<b>League (IPL)</b>		watch time (TV + Digital)	minutes	<i>Times of India</i>
<b>IPL Final</b>	2025	Live Television viewers (final match)	169 million viewers	BARC; <i>The Times of India</i>
<b>ICC Champions Trophy</b>	2025	Total global watch time	250 Billion Minutes	ICC

As displayed in the table, the pattern of media coverage and spectatorship already discussed points toward an understanding of tourism based cricket as a sustained cultural and economic process not mere series of isolated events

### 5. Conclusion

This article explored cricket as not mere form of sports but a construct of varied cultural and economic factor. Significantly confluence of cricket with tourism, mobility and the concept related to marketing, which is studied based on broader theoretical context of sports tourism, event management, and destination branding. It shows how the cricket has evolved into a very significant strategy through which various cities and nations portray and projected their identity, visibility, and their presence globally. Sports spaces got transformed into tourism oriented destinations combining cricket events, venues and fan cultures. They reshaped how places are consumed and imagined in the economy’s context globally. The significant focus of this article lies in how transformation of places such as Dharamshala, Galle, Cape Town, and Dubai into an economic centres of significance. Repeatedly broadcasting of the international fixtures created powerful imagery, and selection of venues reflects how branding is executed and priorities that combines landscapes, heritage and spectacle. The uneven distribution of the match reinforces selected destinations within the sporting imagination. Fan moving and travelling to these places converts branding into tangible outcomes as the international fans stays at the particular destination for an extended period of time and stimulate local economies. Ultimately cricket operates as a sustained instrument of destination promotion in connected global tourism economies.

Another objective of the article which has been discussed based on the role of fan mobility in transforming the venue branding into tangible tourism flows. The international and diaspora fans and their movement supporting cricket plays a crucial role in sustaining the sports tourism economies. The groups of fan who travels for matches often time extending their stays, engaging in leisure activities and consuming the local service which closely is mirroring traditional tourist behaviour. This article also studied and demonstrated the cricket tourism is made and shaped by global mobility patterns and transnational cultural ties. In the places like Middle East, the sport cricket has been strategically organized to attract the South Asian fans, which eventually is transforming sports and the related events into forms of diaspora tourism. These types of developments shows how cricket acts as a bridge between the homeland attachment and consumption related to destination, which reinforces the sport’s capacity to facilitate emotional, cultural and economic capital across the borders. The synchronization of cricket match with the air connectivity, infrastructure and consumer spending patterns shows the increasing globalized nature of sports tourism.

Also, this particular article also emphasized the growing overlapping way in which the cricket governance and tourism management develop. The decisions related to the scheduling of the match,

allocation of the venue and international fixtures show a convergence of sports and commercial matters. The cricket boards nowadays operate along with the tourism authorities, sponsors and broadcasters within a shared ecosystem which aims at increasing the long term visibility and the economic impact. This pattern shows the broader principles of event leveraging, in which sports events are designed not merely to generate the short term revenue but also to produce the sustained benefits of the destinations. In the whole study, this article has maintained that contribution of the cricket to tourism is neither incidental nor accidental. But it is a result of deliberate strategic planning that understood the global reach of the sport, its emotional resonance and the power of media. The venues which are scenic, the travelling fan cultures and the repeated international exposure these collectively transforms cricket into a sophisticated tool of the promotion of destination. At the same point of time, the selective nature of the process actually raises important questions about the uneven distribution of tourism benefits issues which remain central to understanding the sport related development.

Combining these arguments, this article reaffirms its most important objectives which are: to show how cricket has become deeply embedded within the contemporary tourism economies through the venue branding, the fan mobility and strategic geography. The evolution of sport from a competitive pastime to a driver of global travel shows and reflects the broader shifts in how cultural events are leveraged within the market driven frameworks. This article ultimately concludes that cricket functions as more than just a game being played on the field. But it is a dynamic cultural event which mobilizes the people, images and the capital across the borders, linking the sports with tourism in complex ways. As this sport, cricket continues to expand into the new regions and markets, its role within the global tourism economies is likely to increase and intensify.

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