

Original Paper

Research on the Development Bottlenecks and Countermeasures
of Ethnic Traditional Sports Tourism Industry in Gannan
Western China Autonomous Prefecture

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Abstract

Currently, with the gradual realization of the goals of China's rural revitalization strategy, the national traditional sports tourism industry has rapidly developed, becoming a new format driving the growth of the sports industry. Gannan Prefecture possesses abundant natural resources for sports tourism and unique cultural resources in sports tourism, indicating the potential value of developing the national traditional sports tourism industry. However, the development of this industry is constrained by seasonality, insufficient exploration and development, poor accessibility, inadequate supporting infrastructure and services, and a lack of skilled personnel. This paper proposes various reasonable measures to address the bottlenecks hindering the development of the national traditional sports tourism industry.

Keywords

Traditional ethnic sports, Sports tourism industry, Sports tourism resources

1. Overview of Gannan Western China Autonomous Prefecture

Gannan western China Autonomous Prefecture is an autonomous prefecture under the jurisdiction of Gansu Province, and one of the ten western China autonomous prefectures in China. It is renowned as "Little western China of China, the Backyard of Gansu." Bounded by Aba Prefecture in Sichuan to the south, adjacent to Huangnan Prefecture and Golog Prefecture in Qinghai to the west, and neighboring Dingxi City, Longnan City, and Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture to the east and north, it covers a total area of 45,000 square kilometers. The prefecture consists of seven counties - Xiahe, Luqu, Maqu, Diebu, Zhugqu, Lintan, and Zhuoni, as well as the city of Hezuo. As of 2021, the total population is

752,200, comprising 24 ethnic groups including western China, Hui, Mongols, Tu, Sala, Bao'an, Dongxiang, etc. Among them, western China account for 56.28% of the total population.

The terrain within the prefecture is intricate, featuring high elevations in the northwest and lower elevations in the southeast. It encompasses three geomorphic regions: mountainous and hilly areas, high mountain valleys, and mountain plateaus. With an average elevation of 2,960 meters, the highest point reaches 4,920 meters, and the lowest point is at 1,172 meters, with an average temperature of 1.7 °C. Gannan boasts rich tourism resources, including national-level natural reserves, forest parks, various natural scenic spots, numerous western China Buddhist monasteries, revolutionary historical sites, and traditional folk festivals.

2. Ethnic Traditional Sports Resources in Gannan Western China Autonomous Prefecture

The organic integration of ethnic traditional sports with natural and cultural landscapes facilitates the comprehensive development of ethnic traditional sports tourism resources. On the one hand, the juxtaposition of ethnic folklore and the picturesque scenery can create unique sports tourism resources. On the other hand, the integration with ethnic festivals can attract widespread participation from tourists. Gannan western China Autonomous Prefecture, with its diverse ethnic groups, has developed distinctive ethnic traditional sports projects. For example, traditional western China competitive sports include horse racing, yak racing, archery, western China-style wrestling, and more. Mass traditional sports activities comprise western China chess, tug-of-war, and school-based traditional sports such as Guozhuang dance and formation dance. Religious traditional sports activities involve mask dance and western China opera. Hui ethnic traditional sports activities mainly consist of wooden ball racing and martial arts. Dongxiang ethnic traditional sports include stick pulling, walking with mules, and wooden plank rowing, as shown in Table 1.

Additionally, the Shangbala Tourism Arts Festival stands out as the largest comprehensive tourism event in Gannan during the peak summer season. This festival seamlessly integrates natural landscapes, religious culture, folk customs, and traditional ethnic sports, creating a national leisure celebration. The event will feature traditional sports activities such as ethnic dances, Guozhuang dance, western China opera, horse racing, yak racing, running, wrestling, archery, tug-of-war, and more.

Table 1. Traditional Sports Projects of western China, Hui, and Dongxiang Ethnic Groups in Gannan western China Autonomous Prefecture

| category | project |
|--|--|
| Traditional western China competitive sports | Da Jiu (horse racing), yak racing, Duoja (holding stones), Archery, Beiga (western China wrestling), Getun (neck strength tug of war), Saga (elephant tug of war), Shebi Xiu (firing arrows), carrying water in a wooden bucket, riding a fire gun, picking up |

| | |
|--|--|
| Traditional western China sports for the masses | Hada on horseback, waist pulling, and Jiazhe (horn strength) Urdo (throwing stones), Mimang (playing western China chess), Jiren (playing western China billiards), lifting a leather bag, Tama (high jump), wrestling, tug of war, Guozhuang dance, mountaineering, archery, running, throwing stones into holes, and Luoluo dance |
| Traditional western China religious sports | Mask dance, Dharma King dance (religious dance), Divine dance (religious dance), western China opera, western China Qigong |
| Traditional sports programs in western China schools | Guozhuang Dance, Formation Dance |
| Traditional Hui Sports | Driving wooden balls, waist pulling, bullfighting, spinning tops, throwing stone locks, throwing sandbags, martial arts, square chess, archery |
| Traditional sports of Dongxiang ethnic group | Up mute strong (pulling sticks), pressing horse (walking mules), Bahabong land (wrestling), riding wood and rowing, horse racing, sheepskin raft racing |

3. Analysis of the Development Advantages of Gannan Ethnic Traditional Sports Tourism Industry

3.1 Rich Natural Resources in Sports Tourism

Sports tourism natural resources are inherently endowed resources formed by a combination of various geographical elements, including geological features, hydrology, and meteorological conditions. Gannan is located in the transitional zone between the Qinghai-western China Plateau and the Loess Plateau, characterized by complex topography, giving rise to numerous natural landscapes such as mountains, rivers, stone forests, canyons, and grasslands. With two national-level natural reserves, namely Ga Hai Lake and Zecha Stone Forest, and two national forest parks, namely Lianhua Mountain and Yeli Guan, along with dozens of renowned natural landscapes like Zhagana, the first bend of the Yellow River, Dayu Gou, and Dangzhou Grassland, these areas not only attract tourists to experience traditional ethnic sports such as horse racing, wrestling, and archery but also provide abundant sports tourism natural resources for developing activities such as camping, hiking adventures, mountaineering, rock climbing, self-driving tours, and winter sports. Refer to Table 2 for details.

Table 2. List of Sports Tourism Natural Resources and Development Projects in Each County (City) of Gannan

| region | Sports tourism natural resources | Developmental projects |
|--------|---|---|
| | | Experience traditional ethnic |
| Hezuo | Dangzhou Grassland, Meiren Grassland, Hezuo Forest Park, Taizi Mountain, Gangcha Cave, and the Jinxiu Taohe River Scenic Area. | sports, self driving tours, camping, leisure sightseeing, exploration, hot air balloons, paragliding, ice and snow sports |
| Xiahe | Sangke Grassland, Ganjia Grassland, Darzong Lake, Ganjia Ecological Camping Site, Yaneu Sangke International Camping Park Site, Amigon Tent Camping Site, Dalijia Mountain, Panda Gou, and Taiyang Gou. | Tent camping, RV camping, leisure sightseeing, self driving tours, paragliding, grass skiing |
| Lintan | Lianhua Mountain National Forest Park, Yehai, Red Cliff Valley, Yeligan Scenic Area, Hutou Mountain, Yemu Gorge, Ten Mile Sleeping Buddha | Hiking, rock climbing, mountaineering, ice and snow sports, mountain biking, canyon drifting |
| Luqu | Gahai Lake, Zecha Stone Forest, Bailong River Canyon, and Hongshi Cliff | Leisure sightseeing, canyon drifting, self driving tours, camping, river tracing, and drifting |
| Zhouqu | Laga Mountain, Cuifeng Mountain, Selbu Scenic Area, Bazhaigou, Beach Forest Park | Leisure sightseeing, mountain outdoor activities, self driving tours, rock climbing, exploration, and rafting |
| Diebu | Zhagana, Xiannv Lake, Cuomei Peak, Yangbu Shuimo Group | Hiking, rock climbing, mountaineering, self driving tours |
| Maqu | Awanchang Wetland, the First Bend of the Yellow River, Maqu Grassland, Hequ Horse Farm, Keqionghu, Jixiang Flower Beach, Qixianv Peak, Zongka Stone Forest | Leisure sightseeing, self driving tours, camping, and orienteering |
| Zhuoni | Jiudongshan Forest Park, Dayugou National Forest Park, Guanggai Mountain, Qibulinka Resort Park, and Kangduoxia | Leisure sightseeing, mountaineering, self driving tours, and rafting |

3.2 Unique Cultural Resources in Sports Tourism

Sports tourism cultural resources comprise a cultural landscape composed of various elements, including

social historical environments, cultural arts, traditional folk sports activities, and folk festivals. Gannan, rich in the essence of western China and Han cultures and strategically located along the Silk Road, is adorned with western China Buddhist monasteries such as Labrang Monastery, Langmu Temple, and Chenduo Monastery, scattered throughout the region. Numerous religious Buddhist events, such as the New Year's Dharma Assembly, Lhasa Festival, and Linka Festival, are closely intertwined with ethnic traditional festivals. The region hosts a variety of premium sports events, such as the Diebu International Strongman Competition and Zeba Invitational, Luqu Ten Thousand-Person Cauldron Dance Competition, Maqu Gesar Horse Racing Festival, Lintan Yeliguan Cup China Tug-of-War Open, and the legendary Cooperation western China Area Cycling Race. Historical sites related to the Red Revolution, including the Lazi Mouth Site, Cizhina Village (the former residence of Mao Zedong), and the former site of the Soviet Government in Lintan, such as the Red Army Long March Memorial Hall, collectively constitute the distinctive, culturally rich sports tourism human resources in Gannan, characterized by regional uniqueness and profound cultural charm.

Table 3. List of Sports Tourism Cultural Resources, Traditional Sports Activities and Projects in Each County (City) of Gannan

| region | Sports tourism and cultural resources | Traditional sports activities and events |
|--------|---|--|
| Hezuo | Andomiraba Buddha Pavilion, Hezuo Temple, Gannan western China Autonomous Prefecture Museum, Losar Festival, western China Legendary Cycling Race | Tourism, western China opera, horse racing, archery, tug of war, wrestling, western China chess, and Guozhuang dance |
| Xiahe | Labrang Monastery, Bajiaocheng Site, Folk Museum, Erecting Arrow Festival, Xianglang Festival, January Prayer Ceremony, Plateau Half Marathon Race | Sightseeing, Climbing, Mask Dance, western China Opera, Guozhuang Dance, Horse Riding, Horse Racing, Tug of War |
| Lintan | Xincheng Scenic Area, Taozhou Conference Memorial Hall, Chajian Festival, Hua'er Gathering, Dragon God Festival, and the Yeliguan Cup China Tug-of-War Open are notable attractions and events. | Sightseeing, Guozhuang dance, tug of war |
| Luqu | Langmu Temple, Folk Museum, Xianglang Festival, Horse Racing Festival, Guozhuang Dance Competition | Horse racing, mountain spinning, mountaineering |
| Zhouqu | Memorial Hall of Catastrophic Mountain Torrents and Debris Flows, Folk Museum, Flower Picking Festival | Mountaineering, Guozhuang Dance, Tourism, Leisure Tourism, |
| Diebu | Baigu Temple, Ancient Diezhou City Site, Lazikou Battle Site, Xianglang Festival, International Hercules Competition | horse racing, tug of war, mountaineering, Guozhuang dance, sightseeing |

| | | |
|--------|---|---|
| Maqu | Waixiang Temple, Xianglang Festival, Arrow Insertion Festival, Gesar Horse Racing Festival | Mask dance, mountaineering, sightseeing |
| Zhuoni | Gongba Temple, Yang Tusi Revolution Memorial Hall, Folk Culture Tourism Festival, Jockey Club, China Sky Run Series | Guozhuang, horse racing, horse racing and archery |

3.3 Policy Support

The development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry cannot be separated from the strong support of national policies. The Guiding Opinions on Vigorously Developing Sports Tourism issued by the National Tourism Administration and the General Administration of Sport in 2016 pointed out the need to accelerate the development of sports tourism, improve the guarantee measures for sports tourism, and build 100 sports tourism destinations and tourism demonstration bases with significant influence by 2020; In 2018, the Gansu Provincial Government issued the "Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of a Strong Tourism Province", proposing to vigorously develop sports tourism, cultural tourism, self driving RV tourism, red tourism, and health tourism, combined with Gansu's unique tourism resources, to promote the transformation and upgrading of tourism industry products; In recent years, the government of Gannan Prefecture has fully implemented the Opinions of the Provincial Government on Promoting the Reform and Development of the Tourism Industry and the Notice on Launching the Creation of "National Comprehensive Tourism Demonstration Zones" based on the actual situation. It has proposed to comprehensively promote the reform of the tourism comprehensive management system, establish mechanisms to adapt to the development of comprehensive tourism, and clarify the goals and directions for the development of sports tourism in Gannan.

3.4 Clean and Pleasant Overall Tourism Environment

The livable and tourist friendly tourism environment has laid the foundation for the development of traditional sports tourism industry in Gannan. Gannan Prefecture regards the creation of a comprehensive tourism and garbage free demonstration zone as one of the goals for developing the traditional ethnic sports tourism industry. In 2016, it issued the "Opinions on Seizing the High Ground of" Green Rise", Creating an Upgraded Version of "Environmental Revolution", and Deepening the Comprehensive Improvement of Urban and Rural Environment", integrating resources throughout the prefecture, improving urban and rural environmental hygiene, changing the previous appearance of "dirty and disorderly inspections", and achieving a "garbage free" area of 45000 square kilometers throughout the prefecture. At the same time, the state will fully implement the "plastic ban order", eliminate "white pollution", strive to create a clean and ecologically sound comprehensive tourism ecological area, and create a livable and suitable ecological tourism environment for leisure. These powerful measures not only enhance the quality of life of local residents, but also effectively improve their production and lifestyle, providing strong endogenous impetus for the development of traditional sports tourism industry in Gannan.

4. Dilemmas in the Development of Gannan Ethnic Traditional Sports Tourism Industry

4.1 Constrained by Seasonality and High Coldness

Due to its proximity to the northeastern part of the Qinghai western China Plateau, Gannan is affected and constrained by climate factors. Except for a few areas where there is no severe cold period, other areas have long winters without summers, and spring and autumn are short. Most of the time is in the high cold season, with a cold climate. The average annual temperature in various regions is between 1-13 °C, and the suitable season for tourism is concentrated in June to October each year. During this period, the number of tourists visiting Gannan has significantly increased, causing significant pressure on the passenger carrying capacity of various scenic spots and attractions. Not only does accommodation, transportation and other infrastructure fail to meet the needs of tourists, but it has also exacerbated environmental pollution and ecological damage.

4.2 Insufficient Development of Ethnic Traditional Sports Tourism Resources

Due to the relatively backward socio-economic development, underdeveloped road transportation, and fragile ecological environment in Gannan, the development of the local ethnic traditional sports tourism industry is limited. At present, the traditional ethnic sports tourism industry in Gannan is still in the initial exploration stage dominated by sightseeing, and there is a lack of sufficient exploration and deep scientific planning and development of ethnic traditional sports tourism resources. Most scenic spots begin to operate after simple development, and there is a lack of rational thinking in the construction and planning of tourist attractions, as well as a lack of overall cultural packaging and exploration of ethnic cultural connotations. At the same time, Gannan is constrained by seasonality and high coldness, with long and cold winters and abundant ice and snow sports tourism resources. However, the development of sports tourism projects is relatively small, resulting in serious waste of ice and snow sports tourism resources.

4.3 Insufficient Supporting Service Facilities for Scenic Spots

Most counties have established tourism management institutions and have carried out preliminary development and construction of a number of tourist attractions with local characteristics. However, the construction of six supporting facilities and services, namely "transportation, accommodation, food, tourism, shopping, and entertainment", lags behind. The transportation, catering, accommodation, communication, tourist reception centers, shopping places, entertainment venues, and other facilities in most tourist attractions are seriously insufficient, resulting in poor tourist experience and a certain obstacle to customer sources. In addition, the development goals of key scenic spots in each county are not clear, and there are a large number of scenic spots included in the tourism development plan. The integration and binding of resources between counties are not strong enough, and the degree of integration between scenic spots is poor, without forming a unique sports tourism loop and sports tourism products.

4.4 Traffic Congestion

The complex terrain and high altitude of Gannan make infrastructure construction difficult, and poor

transportation remains the main obstacle to the development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry in Gannan. Firstly, the transportation mode in Gannan is single, mainly relying on road and air transportation. The density and grade of the road network are relatively low, and the development of air transportation is insufficient. So far, railways have not been built and other transportation modes are in their early stages, greatly affecting the willingness of tourists from surrounding cities to travel to Gannan. Secondly, the coverage rate of most provincial, county, and township level highways in the state is relatively low, and the road connectivity between counties (cities) and scenic spots, as well as between scenic spots and scenic spots, is poor. There are no separate tourist routes or scenic spot tourist trips, resulting in a poor tourist experience. The backwardness of transportation greatly restricts the development of traditional sports tourism industry in Gannan.

4.5 Lack of Professional Talents in Sports Tourism

The relatively lagging socio-economic development level in Gannan has led to a large loss and shortage of sports professionals, which has constrained the development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry. The development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry requires professional sports tourism talents to build. The tertiary industry has become a pillar industry for the economic development of Gannan. Its complex terrain, distinct ethnic characteristics, and rich ethnic traditional sports tourism resources are more suitable for the development of the ethnic traditional sports tourism industry. However, there is a lack of personnel engaged in Gannan ethnic traditional sports tourism services, and there is a shortage of talents in sports tourism planning, development, management, and operation. The local government does not attach enough importance to sports tourism professionals and lacks training, The only sports workers lack systematic knowledge of sports and tourism, resulting in insufficient development of sports tourism resources and slow development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry.

5. Development Strategies for the Traditional Sports Tourism Industry of Gannan Ethnic Groups

5.1 Develop Seasonal Sports Tourism Based on Regional Characteristics

Due to the influence and constraints of climate, the development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry in Gannan needs to be comprehensively considered, combined with regional characteristics, and developed according to different climates. Vigorously develop the spring sports tourism industry, attract tourists by developing sightseeing projects, offering free admission to some scenic spots, and offering discounts on accommodation and hotel services; Summer and autumn are the golden seasons for the development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry in Gannan. By leveraging the advantages of sports tourism resources and highlighting regional characteristics, traditional folk festivals such as the Jiuse Gannan Xiangbala Tourism Culture and Art Festival, the Lintan Yeli Guan Cup tug of war open competition, and the Xianglang Festival are utilized to increase traditional ethnic sports activities and projects, injecting new vitality and development momentum into the development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry; Develop the ice and snow sports tourism industry in winter,

vigorously develop ice and snow sports tourism projects, build ski resorts, ice skating rinks and other venues, develop popular ice and snow entertainment projects, and hold ice and snow sports events such as snow climbing races and ice and snow mountain marathons.

5.2 Increase External Publicity and Build a Sports Tourism Brand

Fully leverage the unique advantages of traditional ethnic sports tourism resources in Gannan, and strive to build the "Nine Color Gannan Xiangbala" sports tourism brand. Firstly, actively utilize new media such as the internet, text messages, videos, and Weibo to promote and promote rich traditional ethnic sports tourism resources, and strengthen the recognition and perception of the customer market. Secondly, we will deeply explore the unique sports and tourism resources in Gannan, guided by the market and based on the principles of economic and social benefits, to develop traditional ethnic sports and tourism products, such as ethnic clothing, Taoyan, Tangka, western China knife and western China medicine bath health products, cordyceps sinensis, butter, barley wine, and other local characteristic products, to drive the economic development of Gannan. Thirdly, different types of events and activities are good carriers to promote the brand of sports tourism in Gannan, such as the World Tourism Image Ambassador China National Minorities Competition Area Gannan Finals, the 9th Dunhuang Silk Road International Tourism Festival, the national costumes exhibition of countries along the "the Belt and Road" and other cultural and tourism activities, as well as folk festivals such as the Xianglang Festival, the First Month Festival, the Luqu Ten Thousand People Guozhuang Dance Competition, the Maqugesar Horse Racing Congress The Diebu International Hercules and Zeba Invitational, as well as the western China Legendary Cycling Race and other sports boutique events, have attracted numerous domestic and foreign tourists to participate and watch the competition. Finally, tailored to local conditions, design different types of sports tourism and sightseeing belts in the east, west, and south of Gannan to attract sports tourists, strengthen publicity, and improve the visibility of Gannan. As shown in Table 4.

Table 4. List of Gannan Sports Tourism Tourism Belt

| Sightseeing belt | Main attractions |
|--|--|
| Eastern Landscape Ecological Style Sports Tour | Yeligan, Lianhua Mountain, Meiren Grassland, Chanding Temple, Dayugou, Laga Mountain, Cuifeng Mountain |
| Western grassland religious, cultural, and sports tour | Labrang Temple, Ganjia Secret Realm, Sangke Grassland, Dangzhou Grassland, Zecha Stone Forest, First Bay of the Yellow River |
| Southern Canyon Forest Adventure Sports Tour | Zhagana, Cuomeifeng, Lazikou, Beach Forest Park |

5.3 Clarify Development Goals and Strengthen Infrastructure Construction in Scenic Areas

Each county (city) has put forward a strategy of "focusing on key scenic spots and supplementing them

with characteristic boutique scenic spots" to clarify the development goals of scenic spots. Xiahe focuses on building the Labuling Temple Scenic Area, Lintan focuses on building the Yeligan Scenic Area, Zhuoni focuses on building the Dayugou National Forest Park Scenic Area, Luqu focuses on building the Zecha Stone Forest Scenic Area, Maqu focuses on building the Awanchang Wetland Park Scenic Area, Dibu focuses on building the Zhagana Scenic Area, Zhouqu focuses on building the Laga Mountain Scenic Area, and cooperation focuses on building the current week's grassland scenic area, highlighting the uniqueness of Gannan's sports and tourism resources, Try to avoid homogenization of county (city) scenic spots. At the same time, we need to increase the construction of infrastructure in scenic areas and improve the supporting service facilities in scenic areas. In each key scenic area, basic supporting service facilities such as sports, tourism, catering and accommodation, tourism, transportation and communication, shopping venues, entertainment venues, service centers and large parking lots, as well as distinctive observation platforms, will be basically built. Public service facilities such as characteristic boutique scenic spots, public toilets, boardwalks, signs, water supply and drainage, communication and electricity, sewage and garbage treatment will be improved to meet the basic needs of tourists for transportation, accommodation, food, tourism, shopping, etc. Create convenient, safe, and comfortable travel conditions for tourists based on basic needs such as entertainment, and comprehensively enhance the comprehensive reception capacity and image of the scenic area.

5.4 Improve Transportation Facilities and Lay the Foundation for the Development of Sports Tourism Industry

The construction of transportation projects is a prerequisite for the development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry in Gannan. Gannan should scientifically plan, adapt to local conditions, and make up for transportation shortcomings. Strengthen the reconstruction and construction of existing roads and aviation in Gannan, connect and expand the tourist markets in Qinghai, Lanzhou, Chengdu, Xizang, Xi'an and other surrounding cities, and form a "three hour economic circle" pattern with the surrounding cities; Plan railway and high-speed rail projects, striving to build the entire state into a "one hour economic circle"; Transforming and increasing the number of car tourism routes and scenic spots, improving the road conditions between counties (cities) and scenic spots, and enhancing the coverage of provincial, county, and township level highways. This will lay the foundation for the development of traditional sports tourism industry in Gannan ethnic group.

5.5 Strengthen Talent Cultivation and Support the Development of Traditional Ethnic Sports Tourism Industry

The development of traditional sports tourism industry in Gannan ethnic group cannot be separated from the assistance of sports tourism professionals. The hosting of sports events, the promotion of national fitness, the development of traditional ethnic sports projects, and the formulation of sports tourism policies all require professional talents to implement. The cultivation of sports professionals can be based on the plans of higher education institutions in the province to establish sports tourism

related majors and cultivate related talents, introduce sports tourism talents, and adopt local government independent training models. Universities within the province such as Lanzhou University, Northwest University for Nationalities, and Gannan Normal University for Nationalities have established sports tourism majors and offered traditional sports courses for ethnic minorities, cultivating high-quality sports tourism talents proficient in both western China and Chinese languages, as well as sports tour guides and local guides familiar with local history, culture, ethnic customs, sports tourism routes, and traditional ethnic sports activities; Introduce professional sports and tourism talents; The local government organizes relevant training on the development of sports tourism to provide talent support for the development of traditional ethnic sports tourism industry

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