

Abstract

This thesis has investigated the area of fitness tourism focusing on the fitness tourists and the intention of uncovering their experiences and identify formation. Fitness training has become a popular form of leisure activity in Denmark and alongside this there is a tendency that tourists desire more active vacations. Fitness tourism is a subfield to the overarching field of sport tourism, which has been explored by multiple researchers, while fitness tourism in itself is yet unexplored from an academic perspective. Health and wellness along with tourism are areas which have previously been well covered by research and these are therefore used as a base for the research on fitness tourism. Fitness tourism may, as with other tourist fields, be evaluated from a provider perspective and a consumer perspective and for this thesis it is the latter which is in focus.

The approach for the research has been qualitative with empirical data gathered from interviews with three expert and five fitness tourists. The expert interviews were conducted with an academic within the field of sport and health, a practitioner within the fitness industry, and a head manager from a fitness tourism company. The expert interviews provided data on both fitness in general and fitness tourism in particular in order to classify the field and provide a basis for further investigations.

Through interviews with fitness tourists it was found that fitness tourists live an active lifestyle with fitness being an integrated part of their daily lives. The fitness tourists are motivated by being able to create vacation experiences without the trivialities of everyday life, but while still encompassing their desire for physical activities. The fitness training during fitness vacations is more focused than the training at home due to the lack of disturbances and at the same time there is more room for experimentation. The objective for fitness tourists is to challenge themselves physically while gaining personal insight through the experimental training.

At home, there is rarely any kind of interaction with the other people in a fitness setting and you mainly pay attention to yourself and your training while in a fitness tourism setting there is a greater degree of social interaction. The fitness tourists generally travel in groups and the fitness tourists doing so, do however tend to have less of the deep social interaction as opposed to tourists who travel alone. In addition to the social aspect being important for fitness tourists, the experience room plays a large role as being away from home and training alongside people with similar interests is found to provide a positive vacation experience. A part of the differentiated setting is the change in the meta-communicational frame which on fitness vacations provides for greater leeway in emotion expressions and sharing of accomplishments amongst the participants.

Based on the interview data it is found that fitness training is an essential aspect of the identity of fitness tourists. Fitness tourists use their active vacations as a part of their self-image and personal presentation as independent and responsible people who care about the shape of their body. Through consumption the fitness tourists affiliate themselves with other active individuals. This falls in line with the general society trend of consuming as a part of creating and communicating identity. The self-presentation is found to be an important aspect for fitness tourists who radiate slight narcissistic tendencies in their desire for a well-trained body.