

# *Sports tourism in Barbados: the development of sports facilities and special events*

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## **Introduction**

Sports tourism has been defined by some practitioners in tourism as an attempt on the part of tourism facility managers (hotel or destination) to attract tourists by deliberately promoting its sport services and facilities along with its amenities.

The development of sports facilities and the organization of sporting events, generates increased tourists to any destination which has promoted this concept. Moreover, special events are quickly emerging as a major component of tourist attractions.

Sports tourism has been adopted by many countries in the last twenty years or so in the form of high-priced sporting events. Examples of some of these events are the Adelaide Grand Prix in Australia, the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Tournament in Great Britain and the Boston Marathon in the U.S.A. However, one major point to note is that most of these events are seasonal. Barbados, because of its warm and sunny climate is in a very advantageous position for the hosting of major sporting events throughout the year.

Within the past ten to fifteen years Barbados has been host to several sports clubs, teams and groups from many countries participating in various disciplines, but mainly cricket and field hockey. Indeed, the increase in visiting sporting groups to Barbados prompted the Barbados Men's Hockey Association to take a policy decision in 1980 to encourage "Hockey Tourism".

In 1987 the Government of Barbados made a firm commitment to improve its sporting facilities in order to fulfil two main objectives. The first objective was to further the development of sports in the country in order to enhance the performance of Barbadian athletes in the regional and international arenas. The second objective was to reinforce the sports tourism concept which had helped to reduce seasonality in the tourism sector, sustain development over the traditionally slow summer months and boost tourist earnings.

To further facilitate this development, the portfolios of sports and tourism were merged into one Ministry. This merger brought together two major government

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organizations, namely the National Sports Council and the (then Board of Tourism, now called the) Barbados Tourism Authority. This merger helped to strengthen the process of developing sports tourism.

Results of this merger could be seen in the very successful Run Barbados Marathon and 10K Road Race events which are held on the first weekend in December of each year. The Barbados Tourism Authority have organized the events since 1982 and are without doubt, the most exciting events on Barbados' annual sporting calendar. Participants from Africa, Canada, Europe, Scandinavia, South America, the U.K., U.S.A. and the Caribbean have competed.

A vigorous marketing campaign has also been launched by the Barbados Tourism Authority to promote Barbados as a sporting destination internationally.

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\*Extracted from the 1988–1993 Development Plan compiled by the Barbados Ministry Responsible for Planning.

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## **Sporting Facilities**

Barbados boasts four major sporting arenas for hosting international sporting events, ie. the Barbados National Stadium, Kensington Oval, the Garrison Savannah and the Wildey Sports Complex. In addition to these facilities, there are other venues which are utilized for other special international events.

### *The Barbados National Stadium*

In October 1970, the Barbados National Stadium was opened at Waterford, St. Michael to host three main events, namely athletics, soccer and cycling. The Stadium was designed as a multi-purpose facility to seat approximately 7,000 persons. There also is a concrete velodrome at the National Stadium which is one of the largest in the world, making it unique for international cycling events. In the early seventies, several international cycling competitions were held at the Stadium. These events were organized by the Barbados Cycling Union and attracted amateurs from among other countries, namely, Canada, Russia and England.

Regional and international sporting events have also been held at the Stadium. Barbados have held the Texaco Games with participants from Europe, North America and the Caribbean; the Shell Cup Football Championships and the Carifta Games for Caribbean teams; and the Barbados Cup for junior footballers, which hosts teams from North America and the Caribbean.

### *Kensington Oval*

Kensington Oval, the West Indies headquarters for cricket in the Caribbean, is one of the four international test cricket grounds in the West Indies. As one of the main cricket centres in the world, Barbados has hosted frequent test matches between the months of January and April. Most of the cricket teams in the international arena have participated, namely England, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan and India. Barbados was also host to the first South African team to play internationally after the sports ban was lifted in April of 1992.

The hosting of cricket matches in the West Indies creates a great boost to its tourist arrivals. Increases in tourist arrivals are usually recorded from countries like England, Canada, U.S.A. and Bermuda during the hosting of the test matches. In 1994, the West Indies will be hosting the English team and to date 3,000 persons from the U.K. have booked flights to Barbados for the one-day matches in February and the test matches in April.

In addition to these international matches, several visiting club teams from the U.K. plus some U.S.A., Canada and the Caribbean have been invited by the Barbados Cricket Association and the Barbados Cricket League to play against local club teams.

Kensington Oval is also the host ground for one of the fastest growing sports in Barbados – field hockey. The field hockey season in Barbados runs from May to October. However, during the rest of the year, visiting clubs from the Caribbean, Europe, North America and South America and even one from Northern Africa, engage local teams in club competitions.

The Banks International Field Hockey Festival was introduced in 1986, and immediately became one of the most popular field hockey events in the world. This festival made Barbados a sought-after field hockey destination. In fact, since 1980, more teams, (with the possible exception of cricket) have come to Barbados to play field hockey than any other sport. So far one hundred teams have come from Europe, eighty teams have come from the Caribbean and South America and forty teams have originated from North America. The Barbados Men's and Women's Field Hockey Associations have estimated that approximately BDS\$1Million is accrued each year in accommodation, meals and transportation from the visit of field hockey clubs.

### *The Garrison Savannah*

The Garrison Savannah is the home of the “sport of kings” – horse-racing. Horse-racing in the Barbados is a seasonal sport with the first season extending from January to April while the second one is from August to November. Each season, horse-racing attracts stable-owners and jockeys from Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and Martinique. Many compete in all the events on the racing calendar.

Since 1982, one of Barbados' leading companies and bottlers of the famous Cockspur Rum, has sponsored the Cockspur Rum. This race is the highest-prized horse race in the southern Caribbean. Additionally, this race receives extensive media coverage worldwide through: ESPN (the U.S. total sports network) which feeds its coverage both domestically and internationally to North America and South America; TSN (the Canadian equivalent to ESPN) which supplies an edited version of the race along with other aspects of Barbados to Sky TV of London; and the BBC (U.K. national TV network) which also supplies information on the race to international magazines throughout U.K. and Europe.

Other prestigious events in the racing calendar are: the Barbados United Derby, (the most impressive race for three-year-olds in the southern Caribbean), the Manning Mile, the Barbados Fire and General Insurance Trophy, the Wayne Feeds Junior Creole Championship Trophy and the Hearst Invitational Caribbean Classic. The Ministry of Tourism and the Barbados Tourism Authority also sponsors a day of racing during the month of November each year. The day is highlighted by the race for the Minister's Independence Trophy.

*Willey Sports Complex*

The Government began, in 1988, the construction of this multi-purpose sporting facility at a cost of BDS\$22.0 Million. The facility, which was officially opened in 1992, consists of a fully air-conditioned gymnasium, six lawn-tennis courts, of which two are still under construction, and an Aquatic Centre which an Olympic size pool. Willey Sport Complex will be extended to include hockey, cricket and football fields, an exercise hall, a cricket academy and a dormitory to accommodate fifty to sixty persons.

The Gymnasium was designed to cater to twelve disciplines namely badminton, bodybuilding, boxing, basketball, gymnastics, handball, judo, karate, netball, table-tennis, volleyball and weight-lifting. The gym is fitted with two timing and electronic boards programmed to show international time, game time, current game and scoring data for basketball games.

The Gymnasium has a seating capacity of 4,000 patrons which makes it suited, not only for sporting events, but for cultural and religious events, concerts, exhibitions and conventions and other large gatherings.

Media facilities, a comprehensive sound system and excellent lighting complement the already diverse services offered at the Willey Sporting Complex.

The Centre is used as a training facility for local competitive swimmers and water polo teams. School-aged children and special groups use the facilities as well. The Centre has been marketed as a fitness facility and is used by members of the adult community for fitness or recreational reasons. Special interest groups like the Special Olympics Association and associated groups for the blind and the handicapped also use the Centre for therapy and fitness.

Teams from Canada, the U.K., Sweden and U.S.A. travel to Barbados for the exclusive purpose of training at the Aquatic Centre. Most of these teams, which represent national teams, clubs, universities and colleges, train in Barbados during the months of December and January away from the cold winter climate of their home countries.

*Other Venues*

The National Sports Council manages a number of playing fields which are used by schools and clubs for training, and cricket and football matches. For the past seven years, these playing fields have been used for the Sir Garfield Sobers School Boys' International Competition. This competition, held during the month of July, has attracted participants from England, Scotland, South Africa and the Caribbean. Eight teams participated in the 1993 competition.

Barbados also plays host to the "cream of the world amateur" surfers in the annual "Soup Bowl" competition. This event is held every other year in early November at Bathsheba, St. Joseph on the east coast. The competition, organized by the Barbados Surfing Association, has attracted eight countries fielding fifteen teams each. The participating countries include the U.S.A., Brazil, France, Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, Puerto Rico, Martinique and Guadeloupe.

A number of international golf tournaments are also held in Barbados each year at the Sandy Lane 18-hole golf course. Golfers from the Caribbean, England, France, Germany and the U.S.A. travel to Barbados for these tournaments.

## **Marketing of Barbados as a Sports Tourism Destination**

The Barbados Tourism Authority, the Government agency responsible for the marketing of Barbados as a tourism destination, has continued to target Sports Tourism as a market niche with significant potential for increasing tourist arrivals.

### ***Marketing Plan***

A comprehensive marketing plan has been launched to enhance Barbados' position as a major international sporting destination. This marketing plan has the potential to improve the image of the country as a sports tourism destination. It is hoped that through this strategy Barbados will become the Caribbean centre for the staging of major regional and international sporting events. The multi-faceted strategic plan established by the Barbados Tourism Authority looks to achieve this objective.

As a result of the establishment of the Sports tourism Plan, a number of considerations emerged:

1. Evaluation of existing and past sports tourism strategies with a view to identifying improvements for implementation.
2. Provision of assistance to sports clubs and groups in the marketing, promotion and management of sporting events.
3. Allocation of additional resources to increase the attractiveness of prizes and assistance in securing better sponsorship for sporting events.
4. Development and attraction of new regional and international sporting events to utilize the enhanced sporting facilities.

### ***Marketing Efforts***

The management of the Aquatic Centre carries out rather intensive marketing of its facilities. For the past two years the Aquatic Centre has been represented at the U.S.A. Swim Coaches Association's Conference and the various international Masters Games. The opportunity is always taken at these competitions to market the facilities offered at the Centre.

In 1995, Barbados will host the Central American and Caribbean Masters Games which will attract up to eight hundred swimmers. Barbados' success at bidding for this event resulted in no small part from the intensive marketing which the Centre has been given and also from the satisfaction gained by visiting teams who have used the Centre.

These marketing efforts have also been complimented by the Ministry Responsible for Tourism which has, since 1988, produced an annual publication called the Sports and Cultural Calendar. This calendar provides information on all the sporting and cultural activities. The publication is widely distributed to tourism agencies including Hotels and Barbados' Tourism Offices abroad.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Barbados has long been established as one of the world's favourite destinations for a holiday of total relaxation. The island's physical attributes, healthy climate and

pleasant temperature lends itself to a sportsman's paradise, a place for all-season activity. These attributes along with the improvement of Barbados' sports facilities and an improved marketing thrust, should see substantially increased benefits from Sports Tourism within the next five years.

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