

# Surfing and bodyboarding as tourist products

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## Aim of paper and research questions

The objective of the research is to identify dimensions associated with the provision of surfing and bodyboarding as marketable touristic products at an island destination with ideal conditions for sea sports. It is important to determine which attributes produce a surf sport with competitive advantage in the adventure tourism industry compared to its competing destinations, how surfing and bodyboarding are promoted as touristic products and what are the best surf spots and which attributes are associated to them?

## Literature review

Surfing and bodyboarding tourism provides a global business opportunity and forms part of the multimillion industry of adventure tourism. In some popular tourist destinations such as Hawaii, Australia and Indonesia, surfing and body boarding tourism accounts for a substantial portion of touristic derived income, and has been estimated globally to be around ten million dollars annually (Buckley, 2002), while indirectly contributing to the development of offshoot activities for local economies. Leal (2007) maintains that the appearance of new and more sophisticated sports practices associated with the outdoors and those made available by the sea and coastline has contributed positively to the increase of youths and tourists searching for adventure and recreation tourism. Surfing and bodyboarding are two of the modalities associated with the sea which have most successfully attracted participants willing to scour the globe for locations and unique adventure experience, looking for the perfect conditions concerning the quality of the sea and waves (Flucker & Dolnicar, 2003; Flucker, 2003). Surf tourism includes not only surfers and bodyboarders, but also, spectators and companions. Nevertheless, and taking into account the demands of this phenomenon, it becomes essential to obtain information on how different groups of surfers list and compare the diversity of several surfing destinies. Therefore the following was examined by the authors: “surf related questions”, “personal characteristics” and “travel behaviour”. It was found that based on past destination choice, six market segments could be described, each with significantly different ages, surfing ability, length of stay, preferred wave type, and regularity of undertaking surf trips.

## Research design and data analysis

To identify the characteristics and natural potential of the region under investigation, the Island of Madeira, Portugal, we utilised the practical model of location characterisation of the *Surfrider Foundation* adapted to the reality of the conditions of the island, based on aspects such as geography, geology and meteorology (type of wave, direction, wind intensity, tides and undulations, as well as the support infrastructure where the activity is taking place). A visit was made to all (11) locations where surfing and bodyboarding is practiced (Sutherland, 2007), and all potential activities were recorded. In addition, twelve surfers and body boarders with more than five years experience were interviewed, critically commenting on site and activity characteristics of the 11 locations. The variables further evaluated were: features and attributes

of the activities, the most chosen locations of practice and the touristic promotion of the activities.

### **Discussion of progress**

Results highlight excellent climatic conditions, pleasant sea temperature and the high quality of the locations where activities are practiced, as well as hospitality of the locals and security. The results also suggest that surfing and bodyboarding provide touristic alternatives that successfully limit the phenomenon of seasonality, which is evident in the colder months that correspond to the greatest influx of tourists/athletes for such activities. These results also allow us to affirm that this region possesses various locations of practice, with diverse degrees of difficulty, allowing the sports practice from beginner to advanced levels. Furthermore, the fact that the island's odd characteristics allow for waves all year round helps to further diminish the phenomenon of seasonality which is very evident in other types of tourism. As a result of this, a better understanding of surf tourists choice patterns could benefit both the surfers (whose needs could better be catered for) and the tourism industry (that could better target this niche segment of sport tourists). This knowledge can be used in strategic marketing initiatives. A great advantage for these surfspots is that it offers variety and constant discovery. For this reason as opposed to other sporting activities, investment in infrastructures by authorities is not required. On the contrary of other sports, it does not need these activities what the authorities invest in infrastructures or require high levels of maintenance.

### **References**

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