

THE RISING IMPACT OF ASIA ON NEW ZEALAND SPORT



Asia New Zealand
Foundation

Te Whītau Tūhono |



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Dr Tom Kavanagh (PhD) is a sport sociologist in the Department of Tourism, Sport and Society at Lincoln University. Tom's research primarily focuses on socio-cultural aspects within rugby union environments, particularly issues of masculinity and culture. He is an early career researcher who has authored several journal articles and book chapters, and aims to produce research which has a meaningful impact on communities.

Introduction



The *Asia New Zealand Foundation's* mission is to equip New Zealanders to thrive in Asia. We aim to grow Kiwis' knowledge, understanding and confidence of the region to make the most of the exciting opportunities it offers.

Sport is one of the key avenues for achieving this. The 'language of sport' is one that many Kiwis feel comfortable with, whether they play or are involved in sports themselves or enjoy supporting Aotearoa, New Zealand sportspeople from the sidelines or the couch.

Asia is having an increasing impact on New Zealand's sports engagement. The region is more frequently hosting global sports events, drawing talent from around the world, driving audience growth, and leading innovation in sport technology. New Zealand sportspeople are highly influential role models throughout our communities and can change New Zealanders' perceptions of Asia - as well as represent their own country in the region.

But are New Zealand's sports codes making the most of the exciting opportunities that Asia presents?

This research draws on a wide range of sports sector representatives who have competed and worked in Asia, including athletes, coaches, administrators and media. It was commissioned to provide an overview of New Zealand's current sports activity with Asia, and to start the conversation about how New Zealand's sports sector can plan and prepare effectively in order to thrive in Asia.

There are strong existing ties between Aotearoa and Asia in the sports sector. New Zealanders have recently been enthralled watching sportspeople compete on the international stage in Asia, with Japan and China hosting mega events such as the 2019 Rugby World Cup and the 2020 Summer

and Winter Olympic Games. A passion for cricket ties New Zealand to the countries of South Asia, and professional New Zealand rugby players and management staff frequently accept contracts with clubs in Japan.

However, this research highlights that numerous other New Zealand sports codes are regularly competing in and with countries in Asia, and individual New Zealand athletes and management staff outside of rugby are also building successful careers in clubs, leagues and franchises across the region.

This report demonstrates that Asia has enormous potential for New Zealand sports. Asia offers a comparatively low-cost alternative to competing in Europe and North America, and is playing host to an increasing number of competitions in world-class venues. Asia provides exciting locations and cultural experiences as well.

However, we also learn that there is much more which can be done in New Zealand to maximise the opportunities, through more long-term planning, stronger networks and better cultural preparation for our sportspeople.

The report highlights that cultural as well as athletic preparation will improve performance and mental wellbeing in the competition setting. It raises questions about how New Zealand can best prepare its sports representatives to have more positive and enriching experiences outside of the competition space, so they can excel on the field.

We hope you enjoy reading this research, which provides a useful reference for New Zealand's sporting communities and sports organisations. It will help guide our own work here at the Asia New Zealand Foundation, also.

Simon J Draper

Asia New Zealand Foundation
Te Whātau Tūhono

Introduction

This research report explores the increasing impact of Asia on New Zealand sport and was created to answer the following research questions:

- What are New Zealand sportspeople's experiences of and lessons from travelling, training, competing and working in Asian countries?
- How are Asian sports organisations and companies leading innovations in sport?
- What is the current and future impact of these trends on the sports and sport-related sectors in Aotearoa?
- How can New Zealand sports organisations better prepare their people for successful and culturally rewarding experiences in Asian countries?

The aim in answering these questions is to provide the New Zealand sports sector with the knowledge to help them best prepare and respond to the quickly changing global sporting landscape, and particularly the fast-paced innovations in sports production, consumption and participation that are occurring across Asia.

This research was commissioned by the Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono from the University of Waikato, and co-led by Professor Holly Thorpe (University of Waikato) and Dr Tom Kavanagh (Lincoln University).



Methods overview

This project used a multi-method approach, including a survey, interviews and media analysis. The report brings together data across these three different methods, each designed to capture diverse voices, knowledge and perspectives of the sporting relationships between Aotearoa and Asia.

The survey included 127 New Zealanders who have visited Asian countries for sport related purposes (i.e. athletes, coaches, administrators, medical support, journalists).

A subsequent short questionnaire was sent to Paralympics New Zealand and New Zealand Olympic Committee, who agreed to share it with their national sports organisation database. We received 11 responses, mostly from Aotearoa New Zealand's smaller codes.

Semi-structured interviews (averaging an hour in length) were conducted with key members of Aotearoa New Zealand sports organisations. A total of 25 interviews were conducted to understand their experiences, observations and the knowledge they have acquired through their interactions and relationships in Asian countries. To understand media representations of New Zealand sport engagement in Asia, the research team also conducted an analysis of coverage by New Zealand media outlets.

We are grateful to all those who gave their time to share their experiences of travelling to Asia for sport-related purposes. Dr Julie Brice and Thandiwe Keet were valuable members of the wider research team. For more information on the research methodology used, please see Appendix 1.



PART 1: THE RISE OF ASIA IN GLOBAL SPORTS





1

Part 1: Overview

Over the last several decades, Asia has risen to become a leading force in the global sports industry. Many Asian countries are now successfully bidding for and hosting mega events such as the Olympic Games, World Cups and major championships and, in doing so, are setting

new trends in the production, consumption and participation of sport. They are also leading the way in the use of new digital technologies that have the potential to revolutionise not only what we consider sport in the coming years, but also how it is presented, manufactured and distributed.

Key findings

The past decade has seen a steady increase in the number of sporting mega events hosted by Asian countries, demonstrating their power and presence in the global economy.

'Asia' encompasses a diverse geographical and sporting landscape, and there is significant variation in how countries are investing resources in the sports sector.

Hosting mega events also involves significant investment in facilities and training of staff and building strong relationships with international sports organisations and business partners.

Aotearoa's sports organisations have built strong relationships with some countries in Asia, but there are opportunities to build further connections across the region.

As Asia's presence on the global sporting stage continues to grow, there is potential for New Zealand's sports organisations to work more closely with Asian sporting confederations, and to create more mutually productive relationships and synergies.

Asia is increasingly hosting the world's mega and major events

The number of mega and major sporting events being hosted in Asian countries has steadily increased in the last two decades. Driven by economic growth and rising global influence, countries such as Japan and China have hosted the Olympics, Paralympics and Winter Olympics (e.g. Tokyo 2020/21; Beijing 2022).

By hosting major international sporting events, Asian countries are growing their global profile, and also their relationships. Events such as the Asian Games offer important opportunities to build country-to-country connections within Asia, as well as between international sports organisations and networks.

Playing host has also enabled Asian countries to rebrand themselves and profile their investments in new facilities, technologies and infrastructure, as well as project their soft power as a global leader in sports. Research participants recognised that hosting major events was transforming Asia into an international sport powerhouse.

" Asia is just generally very good at hosting sports events. And they are often bidding for big sports events. With that, it must come with good effective government support and investment. For example, in Tokyo there is government support around the events, attracting international visitors and ensuring that they have a good experience and therefore want to go back... hence contributing to the tourist industry as a segue into that as well."

National sports organisation leader

" It's not only the mega events, but also the major events. Mega events have been big World Cups and Olympic Games, and FIFAs and the like. But there's many, many other sports... badminton, hockey... those sorts of sports we don't necessarily see, but a lot of them now are being hosted [in Asia] more and more, and because they are really popular sports in Asia-basketball, volleyball, hockey, badminton, table tennis, a lot of the martial arts."

National sports organisation leader

Major sporting events in Asia - past, present and future



2018
(Winter)
PyeongChang,
South Korea



2019
Rugby World Cup,
Japan



2020/21*
(Summer)
Tokyo, Japan

* The Olympics/
Paralympics was
postponed until
2021.



2022
(Winter)
Beijing-Zhangjiakou,
China



2022
Asian Games
Hangzhou, China



2023
FISU World University
Games (Summer)
Chengdu, China



2023
FIFA U-20 World Cup
Indonesia



2024
Winter Youth Olympics
and Paralympics,
Gangwon, South Korea



2025
World Masters Games,
Taipei



2026
Asian Games
Aichi-Nagoya,
Japan



Summer and Winter Olympics
and Paralympics



Other mega events



Other international
multisports events

Sport in Asia is intertwined with soft diplomacy and legacy-building projects

One outcome of Asia playing host to more mega and major sporting events is that sport is increasingly playing a role in soft diplomacy, demonstrating to the world that Asian countries are highly advanced and holding an increasingly powerful position in global affairs. In addition, the investment into such events has ongoing benefits in terms of funding of highly trained staff and facilities.

“ There is a ‘sport diplomacy’ that takes place with these things, so people are trying to redefine who they are and the way the world looks at them and treats them. You can see that in South Korea, you can see that in Tokyo... the use of sporting events to change people’s perceptions of a country.”

National sports organisation leader

“ Strategically, a country like China feels quite deliberate in their international approach. Hosting events links into their global approach and they then leverage off it in various ways. I definitely see that in China; I see that in Japan and in South Korea as well.”

National sports organisation leader

“ The resources they’re putting in, China for example, I think they were the first country to have indoor snow facilities. That’s really good. In high performance, we talk about a ‘thousand hours’ or a ‘thousand times’ to learn a new skill. Well, we’ve got three months of snow in New Zealand; in Beijing they’ve got it 365 days a year because they’ve got indoor facilities. Again, that’s going to provide a return on investment massively in the future.”

National sports organisation leader

“ Events, given international exposure and increased broadcasting, can increase not only government support but commercial support and sponsorship too. That then provides a showcase for athletes to get personal sponsors through organisations that are seeing international events coming to the region. I think that’s a legacy of the increased commercial sponsorship following broadcasting rights being secured within the region.”

National sports organisation leader

“ There were obviously the games in Kuala Lumpur and Delhi... And there is quite a strong push generally in the Olympic world into the Asian Games, and that’s a massive event. We had limited opportunities because we only get invited in certain sports. That’s the Oceania region, so they kind of incorporate Oceania but in a limited way. But for us it’s just programme overload. There’s just too many things going on, too many events, and sports just need to prioritise their attendance. But there’s quite an expansionist approach in the Asian Games space.”

National sports organisation leader

“For athletics, we have the potential to go to the Asian Games, which is massive. I definitely think there’s a global shift to Asia hosting sporting events.”

Former athlete and national sports organisation (governance role)

Sporting confederations: changing geographies and new pathways?

As Asia becomes more active and influential in international sports codes, some sports organisations are revisiting the geographical boundaries around which competitions are set. In the name of 'growing the game globally', research participants noted that New Zealand and Australian sports codes were increasingly moving towards incorporation within Asian confederations rather than Oceania or Australasia. Such trends signal greater opportunities for New Zealand athletes training and competing in Asia now and in the future.

"What I'd love to do would be to join Asia and have a North and a South/Southeast Asia grouping, and Australia and New Zealand would be part of that. That would give us real opportunity to be in Asia and get the benefits, compared to where we are right now. I can see that happening more and more as international federations make their call as to how they're trying to grow the game globally."

National sports organisation leader

"There is now a move towards having your confederation as part of Asia. You look at basketball now - it's Pacific and Asia. If you look at Australian football, they're in the Asian confederation; we're still in Oceania. So, there is a move more and more towards that, and also to qualify spots for events. You're getting a lot more interaction because international federations are seeing it as a way of determining rankings for tournaments."

National sports organisation leader

"Asia is on our doorstep every day. There's obviously been a lot of interaction through immigration, tourism and the like, and then business, and that's also led into some sports, and the professional sports arm like America's Cup and rugby, [with increasing] professionalism and interaction."

National sports organisation leader



Sport in Asia: A diverse landscape

While noting the growing visibility and prominence of Asian sport, some research participants noted that 'Asia' is a broad umbrella to discuss a region which covers one third of the world's land mass, and is diverse in terms of language, culture and economic development.

Some countries in Asia are investing heavily in sport, hosting mega and major events, and building commercial opportunities and networks with the global sporting media industry, whereas other countries in the region are yet to do so. Noting the highly varied investment in sport, New Zealand's relationships are much stronger with some Asian countries (i.e. Japan, China, India) than others, but with new relationships growing and developing.

"I think we talk about Asia as one thing but it's massively vast and different. I almost see three categories there. You've got your 'superpowers', and then you have very big, populated countries – Indonesia, it's massive... And yet they don't have a global sporting presence. I think there's many Asian countries we don't really engage with in a competitive or developmental way. There's a whole bunch. Then we have a number of countries that I think we do have relationships with, like Singapore, Malaysia, India, Pakistan. Whether it's squash or badminton or cricket or hockey, there's certain connections in there."

National sports organisation leader

"Asia is just so big, so vast and so different in its characteristics. But what I have certainly observed, I think there's quite a lot of contact and incredible goodwill between those superpower countries. China and Japan, and perhaps South Korea, would look at New Zealand as a very strong sporting nation. They would look at us and see us as a high-integrity nation in our sporting endeavours and representation."

National sports organisation leader



PETER MISKIMMIN:

From youth athlete to CEO



From a young hockey player competing in Asia in the 1970s to past CEO of Sport New Zealand, Peter Miskimmin has a wealth of experience and knowledge in New Zealand-Asian sporting relationships. As part of the New Zealand hockey team in his late teens and early 20s, Peter had the opportunity to travel around Pakistan and India. While the team often stayed in nice hotels and was quite sheltered, Peter describes the culture-shock he experienced initially: “We were pretty naïve. That was just the big wide world.” Although he was surprised at the visible signs of poverty and homelessness, and struggled with communication, he found the people “incredibly warm and inviting” and has taken several non-hockey-related trips over subsequent years through India, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma) and Malaysia.

Years later, working as CEO of Sport New Zealand, Peter witnessed immense changes throughout Asia. In particular, he notes the rising influence of Asia in elite sport, with various countries able to commercialise competition, finance and develop competitive leagues, capitalise and open up new sporting markets, and host major international sporting events.

Peter also notes how countries such as Australia and New Zealand are viewing and using Asia more and more as an effective and lowercost pathway for athletes and teams to get exposure to international competition through mega events and world-class daily training environments. Similarly, he highlights the soft power of such mega events being held across Asia or “the using of sporting events to change people’s perceptions, image, brand of a country.” For Peter, Asia’s influence on sport is growing exponentially with great potential for Aotearoa and Asian countries to develop stronger relationships and exchanges.

PART 2:
**ASIA'S INCREASING
IMPORTANCE FOR
SPORT IN AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND**





2

Part 2: Overview

Of the national sports organisations surveyed, there was clear indication of a trend towards greater Asia engagement for New Zealand sports codes. Looking back over the past five to 10 years, three quarters of national sports organisation respondents acknowledged an increase in their athletes and teams travelling to Asia.

Looking ahead, it was clear that the New Zealand sport sector envisages growing engagement with Asia, with **83 percent** anticipating more athletes and teams from their sport to travel to Asia over the next five to ten years.

Key themes

that emerged from the national sports organisation survey included:

- Qualification for pinnacle events is increasingly through Oceania/Asia pathways
- Interest in New Zealand being able to participate in the Asian Games
- The recognition of expertise in Asia that could help New Zealand develop players and officials
- A growth trajectory for women's leagues in Asia
- Increasing opportunities for Paralympic sports in Asia
- Despite a desire to attend more events in Asia, funding remains the ultimate decider

Key findings

Asia is now providing New Zealand sports with an exciting, commercially attractive, and cost-effective alternative to the 'traditional' sporting markets in Europe and North America.

New Zealand's reputation on the global sporting stage offers potential to continue building relationships, creating pathways, and expanding commercial opportunities in Asia.

Mega events and traditional exchanges have established relationships between New Zealand and Asia that have led to increasing flows of skilled professionals and knowledge.

Media coverage of sporting engagement in Asia has been increasing. This will form an important part of creating future opportunities and building connections between Asia and New Zealand, and within New Zealand's Asian communities.

Asia holds opportunities and possibilities for New Zealand sports professionals

There are a number of clear opportunities and advantages for New Zealand athletes, teams and sports professionals by travelling to Asia for training and competition. While the 'traditional' sporting pathways remain, particularly into Europe and North America, Asia is now providing an alternative avenue for many sports, with large commercial markets, increasing competition, and exciting locations. Some of the advantages for New Zealand athletes, teams and professionals travelling to Asia include:

- There's an increasing number of competitions, and growing opportunities for coaches and athletes to train and compete in Asia.
- Asia offers increasingly more competitive pathways than Australasia/Oceania.
- Asia offers a comparatively low-cost alternative to Europe and North America.
- In many sports, there is likely to be more competition from Asian teams/athletes as investment levels in sport in Asia increase over time.
- Sports growth in Asia is increasing broadcast revenue and sponsorship opportunities'.
- Asia increasingly provides potential to compete in world-class facilities, in events that are highly professional, and with crowds that are very engaged.
- There are significant opportunities for New Zealand sports brands to reach new markets and audiences in Asia, and to build profile among a growing consumer base.
- Events and pre-event tournaments in Asia are executed to high standards.
- Asia provides opportunities to experience cultural, linguistic and environmental diversity.

“Many more New Zealand athletes and coaches can now go to Asia and ply their trade and are recognised for the skills they have. The opportunity now [in] those bigger, commercial markets is where you can make a lot of money.”

National sports organisation leader

“ As the world emerges from COVID-19 we see significant opportunities to send our Development, Junior and Senior teams to Asia to either compete in FINA [International Swimming Federation] events, or National events (if we were able to enter) or for development camps if costs were not prohibitive.”

Representative from artistic swimming

“ The population base and the possible television revenue far outweighs what New Zealand can produce on its own. New Zealand needs partners to do that. I think Japan's a natural ally there.”

Athlete-rugby

Many avenues exist for growing collaboration and knowledge-sharing between New Zealand and Asia

As more and more New Zealand sports organisations build relationships with their counterparts in Asia, there are increasingly flows of athletes and other sports professionals between the two regions. While many of these exchanges (particularly for lower-profile New Zealand sports) have low public visibility, each code is playing its part to slowly deepen relations, grow knowledge and confidence, and lift the profile of the partnership. There are also many opportunities to share information and collaborate between sports codes. Some of the wider opportunities of this two-way relationship include:

- Mega events are increasingly acting as catalysts for relationships to be built between New Zealand and Asian sporting organisations and new exchanges to be made.
- New Zealand is an attractive exchange destination for Asian sports professionals in terms of lifestyle and culture, and is widely recognised as a nation of sports passion and expertise.
- Some Asian locations have diversified their sporting presence and offer sophisticated development programmes, representing opportunities for collaboration.

“ There’s a pathway for Asian players coming to New Zealand and that’s great, not only for New Zealanders but also for our Asian communities living in New Zealand. To gain life experience and experience really good competition and good facilities, exchanges with Asian teams offer real opportunities for different sports.”

National sports organisation leader

“ What you saw in the lead-up to the Beijing Winter Olympics and the PyeongChang Winter Olympics was that there had been considerable interaction with the athletes coming and spending extended periods of time in New Zealand in a training environment. There is a lot more breadth and depth to that ongoing contact between New Zealand and Asian sport.”

National sports organisation leader

“ There’s a lot of invisible, to the public anyway, activity and exchanges going on. People may only think about rugby, football, netball, whatever, but there’s a lot of New Zealand sportspeople in Asia because these are popular sports and often go under the radar here in New Zealand.”

National sports organisation leader

“There’s a long history of Japanese distance runners training in New Zealand. Every year, Toshihiko Seko still has Japanese professional teams come out and he organises running camps for them. That includes the Japanese Olympic marathon teams. Not many people know about that.”

Former athlete, assisting other runners in Japan

JODY CAMERON

Basketball and the beauty of
cultural exchange



“I don’t know if it’s because I’m part Māori, part Polynesian, but there’s just a real familiar ease about Japan – welcoming. They bring you right in.”

Jody Cameron is known as one of New Zealand’s greatest female basketball players. More recently, she has become one of the top coaches, travelling throughout Asia coaching various New Zealand women’s teams. She has spent most of her coaching time in Asia in Japan, Taiwan and India. She loved her experiences in Japan, recalling a jovial and welcoming environment, excellent facilities and accommodation, and memorable experiences with local customs and traditions. In her own words, she described the Japanese people’s hospitality as a gift: “Their best selves presented forward given to you as a gift... The giving of everything.”

“I don’t know if it’s because I’m part Māori, part Polynesian, but there’s just a real familiar ease about it - welcoming. They bring you right in.”

Sport has allowed her to make meaningful connections across Asia: “Everything is intentional around why you’re there but what makes it special is those human connection pieces... Getting to know the culture, understanding why they do what they do. I think it’s the same - when you can relate on all levels why you’re there for sport and why they are there, it’s pretty special.”

One way that Jody has accomplished this is by researching and learning about the cultures of countries before visiting. Prior research is important, “because every town and city in Asia has their own little quirk about them and they generally present that. It’s in everything that they do in their town.”

New Zealand could put its sporting reputation in Asia to greater use

New Zealand's presence and continued success on the global sporting stage has helped build a reputation for innovation and maximising sporting potential. There was a perception among interviewees and survey respondents that New Zealand is perceived favourably in Asia compared with many other Western countries. There is potential to further leverage this reputation:

- For building mutually productive relationships, and knowledge and skill exchanges
- For creating alternative sporting pathways for athletes, coaches, researchers and other sports professionals
- For expanding commercial opportunities in the rapidly growing Asian sports economy.

"We were chicken feed in terms of our numbers compared with what they [Chinese organisation] deal with. But they were fascinated by the New Zealand school sports system and the quality that New Zealand gets at Olympic level when we're such a small country, with such a variance in regional/national sport."

National sports organisation representative

"Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Japan, they're very fascinated by New Zealand. They're immensely fascinated by how we get such large numbers participating. They're fascinated by a small country that produces an unbelievable amount of medals."

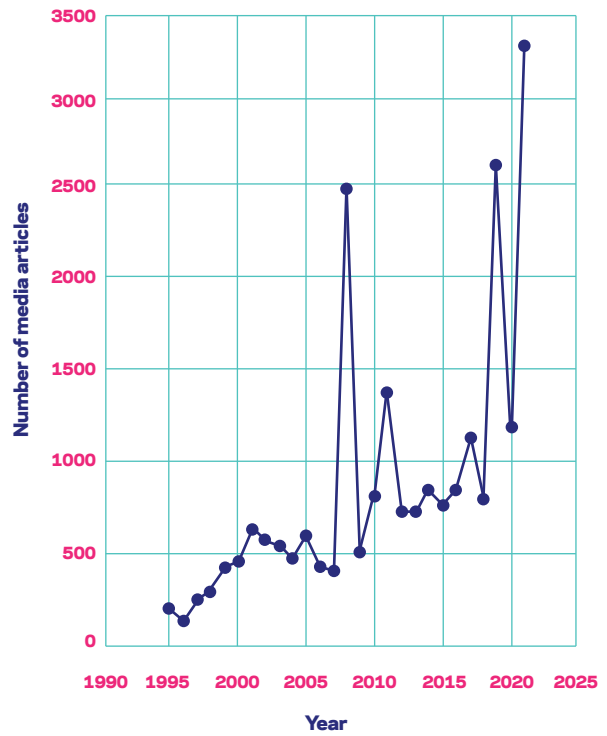
National sports organisation representative



Media coverage of New Zealand sporting participation in Asia has grown over time; possibilities exist for expanded coverage

Media coverage connecting New Zealand and Asia through sport has increased steadily over the past quarter century. Analysis of 15,000 media articles from New Zealand news sources from 1995 to 2021 shows that major sporting events such as the Beijing Olympics, Rugby World Cup in Japan, and the Tokyo Olympics propelled coverage. Media frequently focuses on events coverage, profiles of individual athletes, discussions of New Zealand teams competing within Asian sporting confederations, and the policies and investment decisions of Asian countries. While coverage tends to be reasonably balanced, with equal representation of genders and codes, there is an opportunity for New Zealand media to expand their coverage to a wider array of sports and athletes. In doing so, media will be helping not only to grow New Zealanders' awareness of Asia as a rising influencer in the world of sport, but also to grow future audiences – particularly of New Zealanders of Asian heritage.

Media coverage of New Zealand athletes and teams in Asia



PART 3: A STOCKTAKE OF NEW ZEALAND'S CURRENT SPORTS ENGAGEMENT WITH ASIA





3

Part 3: Overview

This section focuses on the experiences of New Zealand athletes, coaches and support staff travelling to Asia for sport-related purposes.

It explores:

- The destinations in Asia that New Zealand athletes and teams are travelling to
- The sporting and cultural experiences of New Zealand athletes in Asia
- The varied experiences of different genders
- Some memorable sporting experiences, events and places
- Networks, relationships and hospitality
- Cross-cultural learning and reflections
- Cultural and logistical challenges
- Insights about how sport is organised in Asia

Key findings:

Athletes and teams who had travelled to Asia overwhelmingly reported positive experiences. Experiencing different cultures, food, events, hospitality, and building relationships with their Asian colleagues, created special sporting memories.

For some, these experiences prompted reflection and inspired them to understand and connect with their own culture.

Research participants noted some cultural and logistical challenges when participating in sport in Asia. They highlighted the need to understand and be respectful of different systems to ensure a successful experience.

Preparation at the New Zealand-end before travelling is important for athletes and teams, to ensure successful and meaningful experiences in Asia.

Where in Asia do New Zealand athletes and teams travel?

New Zealanders are travelling to a wide range of Asian countries for sport-related purposes, with Japan and China the most frequently visited. Overwhelmingly, athletes, coaches, support staff and sports professionals reported positive experiences travelling to and competing/working in Asian countries.

- Just over a third (36 percent) of survey respondents reported that their first experiences of travelling to Asia for sport-related purposes were primarily as unpaid athletes.
- Of those travelling to Asia as unpaid athletes, 37 percent self-funded their visit, while a quarter (24 percent) were funded by a sports organisation. Just under a third (28 percent) combined some sports organisation funding with their own personal or fundraising contribution.
- Eighty-nine percent of all survey respondents felt visiting Asia for sport-related purposes to be a positive experience, with 56 percent reporting the experience as 'highly positive'. Some of the key highlights included interactions with locals, and exploring new places and new food.

Asian locations most travelled to by New Zealand athletes, coaches and sports professionals:



The size of the words demonstrates level of frequency.

Cultural experiences and networking help build long-term connections to Asia for New Zealand sports professionals

For many athletes, travelling to Asia meant prioritising their training and competition, and where possible enjoying cultural experiences around the primary reason of their travel: sport. In contrast to athletes, coaches, managers and administrators embraced opportunities to experience Asian culture, and many had built lifelong friendships, memories and a fondness for some of the places they visited. These relationships shaped their future professional and personal interests in Asia, with many maintaining connections with their Asian counterparts, colleagues and friends. Seventy-five percent of survey respondents felt that a key outcome of sport engagement in Asia was the chance to build networks in the region.

For those who had visited Asia multiple times, many noted that the first visit could be overwhelming. However, on return visits, they gained confidence, built relationships, expanded their cultural knowledge, and grew their passion and interest for travelling to Asia. Research participants spoke of how they would do their own research before travelling and they looked forward to particular experiences (i.e. favourite foods, visiting places and reconnecting with people). For some, the intensity of their experiences inspired them to travel more and reignited their passion for their sport.

Numerous survey respondents highlighted they felt that there was “something special” about Asia: a different rhythm of life that, once embraced, led to extremely meaningful experiences.

Survey respondents typically found host nations very welcoming, and enjoyed the lively spectator engagement. Food, accommodation, travel, language and weather prompted strong memories.

“ I always look at it from the perspective that it was just a big adventure, and every new experience was a good one, and if things are not what you're used to, well, they're not supposed to be what you're used to. That's the whole point of going overseas... to experience new things. People do things differently and so on, and you just adapt.”

Coach – golf

“ There's one athlete I've taken up there three times and the first year she was probably not the best at trying new things [particularly new food] but just got on with it. By the third year, she was loving everything that she could do and embracing the fact that she could try a lot of those different things that perhaps she wouldn't normally have done. That was the difference in that second year.”

National sports organisation leader

“ I'd never been to Japan by that stage but I was very lucky. We were invited to the Sanyo Cup by Japan Life Saving Association, who I'd never met at that stage. A neat aspect of the travel is you meet people and some of them are very close friends now. They come and stay at my house when they come to New Zealand.”

Coach – surf-lifesaving

“ I feel like my visit was life changing. The atmosphere was really cool — there were flares and drums and singing the whole time. The fans were buzzing. We were just like ‘wow, this is living, eh.’ I think that really was quite profound for me and lit my fire to keep going in the sporting realm.”

Athlete – hockey

What do New Zealand sports professionals find memorable on their first sport-related visit to Asia?

80%
FOOD

78%
INTERACTIONS
WITH LOCAL
PEOPLE

72%
VISITING
SPECIAL
PLACES

41%
LANGUAGE

41%
CULTURAL
PRACTICES,
CUSTOMS AND
WORLDVIEWS

Base: Survey respondents (n=97); multiple answers allowed

Making memories: experiencing events and places

New Zealanders travelling to Asian countries for sport-related purposes spoke passionately about the insightful and meaningful cultural experiences they had, including opportunities to learn cultural customs and traditions, as well as visiting special places and attending sports events.

“ Some of the best days of my life have been in Mongolia, just exploring, trekking. Somebody has to be there that speaks Kazakh and Mongolian, and then somebody has to be there that speaks Mongolian and English. You can imagine it's hard to translate; you just totally lose it. There's no subtlety. But exploring in terrain with horse people, living with Mongolians for two and a half months, experiences that I will go to the grave knowing I'm just so privileged to have had.”

Mountaineer

“ In Malaysia, we were young, exuberant and we got out to these night markets. There was a Diwali festival going on at the time, fireworks going off and people dancing away. It felt like there was an inch thick of firework debris on the road... In terms of perspective, it makes you realise how small New Zealand is when you're in their cities. Just that buzz – you don't really get that vibrational buzz from people and electricity in New Zealand.”

Athlete – hockey

“ Going to a baseball game and just sitting in the stadium, listening to to people chanting and sharing their drinks with you and their food. The little bento boxes they bring with them and just sharing that with random strangers. Just how open and giving and sharing Japanese people were. It was a beautiful hot day, and everyone was having a few drinks and the local supporters were just so giving.”

Athlete – rugby



Gender differences

Interestingly, survey analysis revealed gendered differences in the most memorable cultural aspects of travel to Asian countries for sport-related purposes. Women expressed greater levels of appreciation and enjoyment regarding interactions with local people; learning about Asian cultures and worldviews; and languages.

We suggest this is likely due to sportswomen historically receiving less funding and often travelling with smaller support teams. Consequently, they have engaged more with local people, rather than travelling in a tightly controlled 'bubble' with a larger entourage of support staff to arrange logistics.



LYDIA BRADEY:

Mountaineering and changes in sports tourism



“[Pakistan’s] mountains are so surprising and extreme and dramatic; it’s big and wild and harsh and terrifying and exotic.”

Lydia Braley (ONZM) is a well-known name in global mountaineering. Lydia was the first woman in the world to have climbed Mt Everest without supplementary oxygen. She spent years mountaineering and working as a mountain guide across Asia: Nepal, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Tibet, China, Cambodia and Thailand, experiencing “dramatically beautiful” terrain. She describes Pakistan as one of her favourite countries because “their mountains are so surprising and extreme and dramatic – it’s big and wild and harsh and terrifying and exotic.” She also recalls the people with affection, describing how “everyone looks after us” and that they are “super, super, super smart”.

Lydia has seen dramatic changes, particularly in Nepal, Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan as these countries have begun to attract Western tourists interested in climbing some of the world’s largest peaks. She has witnessed improved road conditions to access sites, more detailed maps and navigational equipment, better communication, increased food options and safety measures, and more luxurious lodging and amenities for adventure tourists.

Yet while some in the region have profited from sports tourism, Lydia feels Western tourists have often been prioritised over local people and cultures. “Even the porters speak English, and they haven’t even got socks and they’re walking on glaciers in plastic gumboots, they’re still so poor.” In the mid-1980s, no English was spoken in many of these areas and tourists were expected to eat local food and experience the culture. Now, however, “the sense of remoteness, the increase of the language, the food” have all changed. Lydia’s experience speaks to ways in which increasing sport tourism in various parts of Asia has had a lasting effect on the cultures, the sports and the people of the region.

How impactful is competing or working in Asia for New Zealand sports professionals?

Athletes, coaches, managers and other sports professionals described having had amazing sporting experiences in Asia, with a particular focus on the facilities and technological innovations in some countries. Many described phenomenal fan engagement, with Asian audiences bringing high levels of energy and enthusiasm to the games and performances. Interactions and relationships with other athletes and hosts, as well as the warm hospitality and great facilities, were also referenced as the most memorable aspects of New Zealanders' sporting experiences in Asia.

" I learned to respect my own culture more because I was living in Asia, in a very different culture. I think returning to New Zealand after all those years, I gained a different perspective because now I was a majority culture person not a minority culture and maybe I had a different empathy towards the people I was working with. Reflecting on my time in Singapore and trying to gain a perspective, I think it's changed. My whole perspective has changed."

Women's sports coach and administrator



What aspects of sport in Asia stand out for New Zealand sports professionals when they first visit Asia to compete or work?



Learning about culture and local etiquette is useful for New Zealand sports professionals visiting Asia

Research participants noted the importance of understanding cultural differences in Asian countries including culturally specific practices of care and reciprocity, such as the need to understand gifting etiquette:

" On all occasions there's been a big cultural element on arrival, either through the provision of gifts on arrival, the cultural exchange or tradition of gift giving... and also opening ceremonies or all the gala dinners etc. These have all had a huge cultural element of which you felt you were in an Asian nation and had the opportunity to be immersed into the culture of the nation that you were in."

National sports organisation leader

" The best thing, what we find when dealing with organising committees, is just actually going and finding the people and taking them out for a glass of wine and taking them some chocolates from New Zealand. All of that stuff, honestly it just matters so much. And they really appreciate it because it's manaakitanga, it's showing manaakitanga internationally, and that's what I think they find interesting about New Zealand really."

National sports organisation leader



STEVE VAUGHAN:

Sports networks and hospitality in Japan



“Some of the most eye-opening and spectacular six or seven days of my life.”

“Eye-opening” and “fascinating”: two words that New Zealander Steve Vaughan uses to describe his time in Japan. Steve was the assistant and head team manager for New Zealand’s national surf life-saving team, the Black Fins, from 2013 to 2021. During that time, he took the New Zealand surf life-saving team to the Sanyo Cup in Miyazaki and Fukuoka four times, working closely with the Japanese Lifesaving Association (JLA). As team manager, Steve was responsible for all the logistics of the team’s trips including flights, accommodation, uniforms and coordination with the JLA. He describes his first trip to Japan in 2015 as “some of the most eye opening and spectacular six or seven days of my life.” He learnt about Japanese food and culture and began to make friendships that continue today. Later, learning about Japanese culture became a pivotal part of the trips Steve and the athletes made to Japan.

While food and culture were highlights, he also talks about the amazing people he has met: “The greatest thing that stands out when you travel to Japan, in my eyes, is that the people are so lovely... The people from JLA literally went above and beyond in terms of the support they gave us to make sure we had an amazing, amazing experience.” Steve sees cultural experience and relationships as key to building successful sporting connections and ties between New Zealand and Japanese surf life-saving communities.

The benefits of cross-cultural reflection and learning

For some New Zealand sports professionals, their travels to Asian countries were life changing, prompting deep reflection and learning. A common theme was that travel had inspired some to connect more deeply with the history and culture of Aotearoa.

" Within the New Zealand team, we have a culture of manaakitanga, so respect for our own customs that we're bringing... but also really respecting the Japanese [culture], for example, in Tokyo last year. That intensified with the pandemic... So, I think there was an extra layer of respect as we're coming into someone's country. All those customs... we need to celebrate that as much as we celebrate our own..."

National sports organisation leader

"I personally started trying to understand more about Māori culture and New Zealand's history, because everyone asks you when you're overseas, 'what's New Zealand all about?' and I found myself providing some pretty generic information. I didn't really know where New Zealand sat in the world. But I think it's incredibly important."

Athlete - hockey

RICHARD JOYCE:

Cultural connections and reflections



“When I was immersed in the culture that I was in, I was just happier, I felt more one with myself. I think happiness and performance are proportional. They go well together.”

Although Richard Joyce did not start playing hockey until his first year of high school, he quickly took to the sport and soon qualified to represent New Zealand, as a member of both the Junior Black Sticks and Black Sticks. He played and travelled across Malaysia, India and Japan, leading to lifelong friendships, a love for the region, and reflections on his own relationship with New Zealand culture. It made him realise that many Kiwis were “quite disconnected from our culture” so when he returned to New Zealand he began to learn more about Māori culture and New Zealand’s history.

Richard believes cultural experiences can play an important role in athletes’ performance in sports. In some of his international tournaments, the New Zealand management would attempt to control the environment as much as possible (athletes staying in the confines of the hotel; only eating certain meals) to ensure optimal performance. However, for Richard, “I actually found the opposite to be far more beneficial for my performance... “When I was immersed in the culture that I was in, I was just happier, I felt more one with myself. I think happiness and performance are proportional. They go well together.” For many elite athletes, one’s happiness is dependent on the outcome of a sports match. But, as Richard says, “If you can have a wider scope in terms of what you want to achieve, everything just works hand in hand. Understanding of culture, relationships... I’m not sure what else is more important.”

Prior preparation is key to navigating cultural and logistical challenges in Asia

Participating in sports in Asia is not without its challenges. Reflecting on their first visit to Asia, many sports professionals noted they had little pre-departure preparation and experienced some initial 'culture shock'. For some, this was the accommodation; for others, the traffic, pollution, witnessing poverty, the scale of cities and populations, weather, and difficulties accessing their usual food. For athletes, nutrition and sleep are key aspects to their performance and recovery, so having minimal control over these factors could be confronting. Below is a list of common challenges identified through the research as impacting New Zealand sports professionals visiting Asia.

Some of the common challenges identified by research participants included:

Communication

Some reported experiencing communication difficulties, especially in emergency situations. Others noted that cultural differences in language could lead to misunderstandings.

Food

While often a highlight of experiences in Asia, this also provided challenges for elite athletes who could not read ingredients or find the food they needed for their sports nutrition programmes.

Visas

Some noted that visas could be expensive and difficult to organise.

Transport and accommodation

Some reported experiencing difficulties with their transport and accommodation details.

Gender

Several women noted that in some Asian countries gender hierarchies could pose challenges in their day-to-day experiences interacting with sports organisations and personnel.

Paralympic athletes' challenges:

Paralympic athletes experienced a wide variety of challenges across various locations in terms of visibility and facilities; transport and mobility; and building access.

Finding the right person to talk to

Sports organisations in Asia are often structured differently from New Zealand ones, and gaining access to the 'right people' to talk to (regarding logistics and organisation) could be difficult without the right connections.

" All the rooms are tiny, you're sharing, you're trying to fit all these multiple bikes in the shared room, which doesn't really work but you're going to have to make it work. You're always climbing stairs with the bikes, and food was always different... because you're used to your own [nutritional plan]."

Athlete - triathlon

" ...something we would be cognisant of in terms of dealing with Asian cultures is just really understanding how they make decisions... how their organisations are actually structured, how they actually think. Part of the gig is you respect that, and you adapt to that."

National sports organisation leader

While pre-departure preparation is strongly advised, research participants also spoke of the importance of having an open mind and remaining flexible when travelling to Asia. For New Zealand sports teams, it is helpful to understand and respect that there are different systems, processes and hierarchies which may influence the speed or the ways in which decisions are made:

" You can't criticise their process. Their process is their process; ours is ours. They're just different and so we can learn, and they're trying to learn from us as much as we're trying to learn from them, but culturally it is different."

National sports organisation leader

" We were taught as a team to relax and go with the circumstances and not rage against it, because you could get yourself completely out of sync. Athletes are pretty disciplined people. You want things when you want them, but it doesn't work that way in Asia so much."

Former athlete/national sports organisation leader

What are some of the biggest challenges New Zealand sports professionals encounter when travelling to and competing in Asia?



Elite sport strategies in Asia: staying inside 'the bubble' vs cultural engagement

The reality of most high-performance sporting environments is that athletes are concerned primarily with their performance. In fact, many athletes described the efforts undertaken to minimise cultural and environmental distractions with the aim of optimising performance.

Some team managers attempted to 'control' the environment as much as possible to 'protect' athletes from cultural and logistical 'distractions.' However, some athletes viewed cultural experiences as beneficial for their performance and for motivation in sport. As discussed in the Recommendations section on page 60, these findings highlight the value of including meaningful cultural experiences into athletes' travels to Asian countries:

" I've never quite enjoyed being controlled so I've always looked at alternatives. I had a few mates in the team who were keen to explore as well, because it's not all sport at the end of the day. Obviously, we're out there to do our best but there's more to life too."

Athlete – hockey

Research participants shared how Asia's sporting context can differ from to New Zealand's

New Zealanders are involved in organising sports events, working with sponsors, businesses and sports organisations across many locations in Asia. Much can be learnt from their experiences and observations about similarities and differences, and the possibilities for having meaningful interactions with their counterparts in Asian sports organisations.

Some of the key observations from research participants included:

- Considerable money on offer in some competitions has helped bring in foreign talent, which Asian athletes and sports organisations have benefitted from.
- Some Asian sports organisations can be very hierarchical and therefore difficult to access at times, highlighting the importance of cultural connections, relationships and networks.
- Asian sports organisations are prepared to invest in continuous learning and professional development. They demonstrate a willingness to embrace new ideas, and invite in athletes, teams and coaches from top countries to learn from and with them to test themselves against the best. Research participants particularly referenced the openness of Japanese organisations.

While representing one's country/region is a huge honour for many Asian athletes, there can also be considerable pressure and expectation attached to that privilege. Asian countries have very different training models from New Zealand's, with the focus tending to be on quantity over quality. Some research participants noted more regimented, authoritarian styles of coaching with early specialisation, pressure from parents, and little autonomy for athletes in some contexts. Some had observed burn-out as a result of such pressures.

There were also divergent views on the effectiveness of some sports development models used in Asia (with particular mention of Japanese and Chinese models of sport, and those adopted in a range of South Asian countries). For some, emulating 'elite models' was seen as a way of bolstering New Zealand's competitiveness, while others supported a focus on participation and athletes' wellbeing.

Some interviewees noted that the competitive training environment in Asia was great for honing skills for a short period of time, but ultimately felt that New Zealand's emphasis on quality over quantity was more beneficial for athletes' wellbeing and sustainable performance. Interviewees said, however, that the key is to learn from differences, not to criticise them.

Communicating across cultures

Other interviewees noted certain cultural differences in communication styles that were important to understand before engaging with people in the sports industry in Asia. Foremost among these was the notion of 'yes' culture. Multiple interviewees explained how people involved in sport, from volunteers to chief executives, were concerned with presenting the best-possible image of their organisation, and would therefore initially agree that they could fulfil any request. Unfortunately, it was only later that they would realise that these individuals had limited ability to complete the task and they would need to seek out further urgent assistance or permission. With knowledge of this cultural communication style, extra checks could be put in place to ensure more direct communication channels to avoid delays and disruption.

" Sport is very much a business in China. The ministry of sport [General Administration of Sport] is the ultimate decision-maker; they control everything. If you don't have connections, if you don't know the rules, if you don't know the system... there's no way that you could get into it."

New Zealand-Chinese sports administrator and facilitator

" When you've got a massive population base, it's often referred to as a conveyor belt. You just put people on the conveyor belt, and it doesn't matter how many break or fall off, there will be someone left at the end of the conveyor belt. That's what I've observed; there's just a massive attrition rate."

National sports organisation leader

" The likes of Singapore are really progressive how they're really trying to change the way their communities and society are active. The way that they've created sports hubs, which is different – we have clubs and schools; they don't have that model. There are things that Asian countries are doing, things that I think we should be curious about and interested in observing and learning from. Equally, there's stuff that we're quite good at; we should trade. Those sorts of conversations are happening, but I do think there's a lot more to be learnt from each other."

National sports organisation leader

" In Japan, they want to invite the best in so that they have someone to test themselves against. They're really passionate about growing their sport and developing their athletes. They run training camps regularly, a lot more regularly than we can afford to because we just don't have the budget here in New Zealand to allow us to do it as often as we'd like to."

National sports organisation leader – surf life-saving

PART 4: FUTURE-PROOFING: EQUIPPING AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND SPORT TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN ASIA





4

Part 4: Overview

This section focuses on how the New Zealand sports sector can better equip its sports professionals to be confident in training and competing in Asia. It examines how sports organisations and individuals currently prepare to travel, compete, or work in Asia before offering insights on how pre-departure preparation can be enhanced.

It explores:

- The value of cultural experiences
- Why seeking out cultural and logistical advice helps the overall experience on the ground
- The importance of information-sharing about Asia within the New Zealand sports sector
- The implications and possibilities of New Zealand's shifting demographics
- Why the New Zealand sports sector should develop a long-term plan for Asia

Key findings

Athletes desire more cultural preparation ahead of travelling to Asia. This was seen as important to ensure they were not overwhelmed by their experience, particularly on their first trip to Asia.

As elite athletes are highly focused on their performance, ensuring cultural experiences are well organised, timed carefully around events and are meaningful interactions is important.

Having cultural advisers or assistants to navigate cultural differences can be hugely beneficial for athletes and team leaders organising logistics in Asia. Sports organisation leaders engaging with Asia would also benefit from the guidance of advisers with both sporting and cultural knowledge of Asia.

Information-sharing is essential to ensure New Zealand athletes, teams and organisations are successful in Asia. New Zealand sports organisations would benefit from exchanging information with their counterparts in Asia, and New Zealand sports organisations can also benefit from sharing information with each other.

As New Zealand's population diversifies, there are opportunities to engage further with sports that are popular in Asia and tell the stories of New Zealand athletes with Asian heritage.

Longer-term planning is needed by New Zealand sports organisations to ensure success in and with Asia, and to better cater to the needs and interests of an increasingly diverse New Zealand.

"I strongly believe that athletes will get the best out of their experience and will perform better if they take the opportunity to engage with and learn from the local people and cultures. Asian countries are full of history and are very special places with different types of food, etc. These are things that will differentiate a good tour from an unforgettable one."

Survey respondent

"We're exchanging from the sporting point of view, but if you can bring in culture as well it just adds that other dynamic and really deepens connections with people from other countries. There's actually quite a few similarities, like between Māori culture and the Japanese. Where we start in terms of potentially learning about other people's culture and going to Asia and trying to really understand where everyone's coming from is firstly understanding where we come from as Kiwis."

Athlete - hockey



How do sports organisations currently prepare their athletes and teams for travel to Asia?

At present, very little pre-departure preparation is offered to New Zealand sportspeople travelling to compete in Asia. The majority (67 percent) of respondents who participated in this research reported having received no cultural preparation before travel, with only one third (33 percent) having had 'some cultural preparation before departure'. Among the organisations that had prepared their athletes for travel to Asia, the most common approaches to preparation were:

- Educational/information session about trip logistics: 65 percent
- Sport-specific training preparations: 64 percent
- Education/information session about language, food, cultural and religious considerations: 57 percent
- Provided with a network of contacts: 55 percent
- Some had also provided written or visual material to help athletes and teams prepare.

Other findings included:

- Most preparation focused on environmental issues such as climate and food, and less on cultural aspects.
- Some coaches and managers created their own educational resources for their athletes. They reported this helped prepare athletes for a positive experience (and avoid surprises or 'culture shock'), with associated performance gains from being well-prepared and not feeling anxious or concerned about factors out of their control.
- Cultural preparation is particularly important for younger athletes and those who are travelling to an Asian country for the first time. Without such cultural preparation, some athletes' performances can be negatively impacted by logistical challenges and uncertainties of travelling, training and competing outside of their 'comfort zones'.

What preparations do New Zealand sports professionals make themselves before travelling to Asia?

Forty percent of New Zealand sportspeople who travelled to Asia for a competition reported making their own preparations before travel, and of these, 87 percent found this information helpful. Of those seeking out additional information before travel, the most common approaches included "talking to others" who had previously travelled to their destination country (72 percent) and using websites to learn about their destination country (58 percent).

Other approaches included:

- Learning some of the language
- Reading about cultural etiquette
- Gathering information about training specifics for the environment
- Talking to health professionals to prepare for upcoming travels
- Reading about the history of the country.

Some described how doing their own research had greatly enhanced their overall experience of travelling in Asian countries for sport-related purposes. They were also able to support others who they were travelling with (e.g. fellow athletes).

In this way, many New Zealanders travelling to Asian countries for sport-related purposes were proactive in helping to prepare themselves for the cultural, social and environmental aspects of their travels. However, there remains considerable scope to increase athletes' pre-departure preparation.

" I actually sat at my computer and did a whole lot of study around language. I created a document that had the key phrases that they were going to need to know. I knew only a few of the athletes had been there already, so I created documents for them on the area, on the language and things to expect, plus we had a little bit of information fed to us from the organisers. It was a little bit 'flying blind' that first year for me, but from then on, I embraced the opportunity to research it myself and prepare the team the best I could".

Coach – surf life-saving

SARAH COWLEY-ROSS:

Preparation is key to success



“We have a culture of manaakitanga, so respect of our own customs that we’re bringing but also really respecting the Japanese.”

When Sarah Cowley-Ross first started competing in international athletics tournaments in Asia in 2011, she had already spent time travelling around various Asian countries, and “experienced the intensity of Asia”. She looked forward to training and competing in Asia, particular in China, Hong Kong and Thailand. One thing she noted was just how densely populated many of the countries were and how this impacted the organisation and running of large athletics events.

While competing in China, event organisers brought in volunteers from all across the country with many of them having little knowledge about the event or area. Although the volunteers were not always knowledgeable about tournament logistics and there were difficulties communicating, they were extremely kind and tried to be helpful. She summarises their attitude as, “We want you to have a really good experience in our place so we’ll do anything we can to help you achieve that.”

Transitioning away from international competition, Sarah became involved in an array of sporting roles, including being a physiotherapist, sports journalist, and serving on various boards (New Zealand Olympic Committee Athletes Commission, New Zealand Olympic Committee, University Sport New Zealand). In these roles, she has tried to prepare athletes for their time in Asia, particularly in relation to cultural differences. In helping athletes prepare for the Tokyo Olympics, she describes how within the New Zealand team, “we have a culture of manaakitanga, so respect of our own customs that we’re bringing but also really respecting the Japanese.”

As a former professional athlete herself, Sarah is also very aware of difficulties and challenges athletes may face competing overseas, and in Asian countries. In her experience, language barriers and miscommunication at times led to not being provided with the right equipment for competitions or not having suitable transport. She encourages her athletes to be adaptable and patient, “something that athletes are not particularly good at, but it’s definitely something to be aware of.” For Sarah, being prepared for the differences of competing in Asia means athletes have a much better experience and can take in the joys of playing in another culture.

A call for more cultural preparation

As noted earlier, many athletes and coaches talked about the efforts undertaken to 'control' the environment, and carefully manage the cultural aspects of their trips – all with the aim of minimising distraction and optimising performance. Many also expressed concerns about the impact of a lack of cultural preparation before upcoming travel.

While some research participants were of the view that New Zealanders are 'naturally' good at understanding and respecting different cultures, a strong theme emerging from the research was that more can be done to build understanding and awareness of Asia before travelling. Many expressed that more information relating to their sport (e.g. facilities), the location (e.g. transport, accommodation, weather) and culture (food, etiquette, language) would be very helpful in mentally preparing for successful sporting experiences in Asian countries.

Numerous participants expressed the view that good cultural preparation was necessary for strong performances on the field, because athletes and staff would be less distracted by the unknown and aspects beyond their control (e.g. food, transport).

Athletes, managers and coaches offered a range of suggestions to help better prepare teams, including:

- Information sessions with people who have lived in the country or countries they were travelling to
- Cultural guides and translators
- Preparation for delays, communication challenges and staying focused when the unexpected occurs
- Using alumni networks to share information
- In-depth cultural histories and information about cultural etiquette and language before travel.

"With any team that's going abroad, there's a number of critical considerations. Where am I staying, what's the weather like, what are some of the local customs that are ultimately required in order to live and perform well while I'm there? Ensuring they had the right nutrition, and they had the right energy, and the food was cooked appropriately relative to what Kiwis would have needed and wanted was just one part of Team New Zealand's preparation around the Tokyo Games."

National sports organisation leader

"You want to get your preparation right. Especially the first couple of times, it's generally not worth trying to short-cut anything to save a few bucks. A lot of stuff can go wrong if you don't really 'think like a local!'"

Athlete – badminton

" When you're either competing in Asia or training in Asia, part of the preparation mindset is you understand the environment you're heading into - what's needed, what's required, what needs to be respected. The by-product of that is you're culturally sensitive, you're culturally educated. It's their rules, it's their reality, and part of the preparation is understanding that and adjusting your approach to actually leverage that, and for that not to be a barrier."

National sports organisation leadership role

" Understand access challenges better - whether they be disability needs or access to venues/ training times. They are rule-heavy and if you miss your allocated time no one on the ground can make an executive decision and allow you to have a variation from original plan."

Survey respondent

" Develop relationships with the countries/facilities in question and work closely ahead of time to develop communication channels and knowledge of local customs. Prepare everything in advance and allow three times the time to communicate. Understand and respect the differences in custom. Work out what must be adhered to and where there is flexibility."

Survey respondent



Mega events provide opportunities for cultural education as well as showcasing New Zealand sport

A great deal of work goes into facilitating cultural exchange and building relationships in association with mega events (e.g. Olympic Games). The relationship building, connections and knowledge exchange around such events are important for preparing New Zealand athletes. This can also act as a crucial form of 'soft diplomacy' by ensuring New Zealanders' represent their country well.

“In the lead-up to a big international event like the Olympics, we try to establish community relationships, and understand their culture and the food. It’s an educative process which we help facilitate, and then also telling athletes’ stories while they’re there. Having athletes out and about, we’re filming them and posting it and using it in social media.”

National sports organisation leader

“ We were talking about the connections with Māori culture in our development about the New Zealand team and the story, and you could connect that really strongly to Japan. There’s a lot of cultural alignment historically in our heritage.”

National sports organisation leader

“ We do try and create cultural awareness, understanding and thinking about the language, the food, the lifestyle and picking some iconic elements out of that. Then of course, behind that, with the programme that we do with Olympic values in schools, often there’s resources that will support that.”

National sports organisation leader

MEI WANWONG:

Navigating sport and business
between the West and the East



While New Zealander Mei Wanwong may not have been interested in sports when she first joined the Chinese Olympic Committee, she has become a top consultant for companies and organisations interested in working with the Chinese sports sector. As a multilingual Chinese-Malaysian-New Zealander, Mei has found she is able to bridge a gap between Chinese and Western sports industries. She has come away with many lessons for those interested in becoming involved with China's sports industry.

Mei emphasises how politics, culture and sport come together in China: "Everything is mixed together, so ... you have to balance the power, balance the business interest conflict, and everything." In particular, Chinese sports organisations are hierarchical with strong links to the government. "You need to be in a certain position or age or experience or profile to be able to meet with those people."

"Government endorsement is very important... you have to get the endorsement from the minister of sport and from the relevant department as well."

She notes it is not always easy for outsiders to enter the sports industry in China and instead must often rely on insiders. While there are many opportunities for New Zealand to build stronger connections with the Chinese sports industry, from Mei's experience, it is necessary to consult and recruit people familiar with both the West and the East to help build connections. With the right cultural support and guidance, the opportunities are endless.

Making time for cultural experiences

Athletes and coaches shared that they greatly appreciated the opportunity for well-timed and meaningful cultural experiences. They acknowledged the importance of planning these appropriately around training and competition schedules, and making sure there was time in the travel schedule to try to connect with local communities and to learn about cultural customs.

“The warmth of places like Japan and China and Singapore is amazing, is phenomenal and people will go a million miles for you, which is cool. Some well-chosen authentic experiences go a long way. I’ve been on trips, for example, where you are hosted to cultural experiences. And honestly, without being rude, generally they’re naff... In contrast, there was a town that was hit by a tsunami just a few years ago and we went to the local school. Now our team members were youngsters – they were 16 to 18 year olds – and we went and engaged with the local school for half a day. It was fantastic. Those things stand out.”

National sports organisation leader

Cultural advisers and assistants: the invisible helpers

Whether organising school sports teams, performing in elite sports competitions, or conducting business in Asian countries, good preparation and working with cultural experts will help navigate any anticipated or unanticipated challenges.

Athletes, coaches and team managers saw it as highly beneficial to have people who understand the language and culture to navigate these challenges. Businesspeople noted that these culturally informed individuals were crucial to gaining access to and working with leaders in the Asian sports industry.

For athletes, having such support people could mitigate concerns around nutrition or medical needs, and for team leaders, it could aid processes around logistics and networking.

“I think it would be hard to say that anyone wouldn’t get a positive experience out of going to Asia for sport. But if we were to reframe that to how to maximise the time there, I think a cultural guide or a translator would be great. That would have helped us solve a lot of issues right off the bat. And just proper research.”

Athlete, coach – badminton

“We did a lot of planning with people on the ground, used our networks. A lot of Kiwis based in the [Korean] resorts, we leant on them for a lot of local information to the point where one of our key people in our delivery and also our planning was a Korean national who was in Queenstown. He became a key part of our planning and delivery in PyeongChang. Looking back, that was a godsend!”

National sports organisation leader

“Without a doubt, it was the translation and the ability to speak the language, and to understand the hierarchy and understand when you can push a little bit harder to get the answer you want or whether the answer is not going to change.”

National sports organisation leader

“We always got a lot of information about the region we were attending – the hotel and the culture. If we were going to a particular town, if there were any particular formalities around their cultural proceedings, we were always informed very early on. We always had a very lovely chaperone with us who always smoothed the way, always accommodating. If there was change, they dealt with change very well.”

Coach – basketball

Exchanges and knowledge-sharing are key for developing Asia confidence and capability

New Zealand's sporting and cultural reputation provides an opportunity to strengthen connections with Asian sports organisations. Many sports codes have built strong relationships that provide a platform for further collaboration and information-sharing. Team managers indicated that an area that New Zealand should focus on is fostering relationships and leveraging skills and knowledge in the Asian sports sector.

Some noted the importance of these relationships being reciprocal, considering what New Zealand sports can offer and what they can gain from the exchange of skills and expertise (i.e. coaching, sport science, public physical activity campaigns, event organisation, legacy building, audience engagement and technological innovation).

"Information-sharing – given the number of sports that have now visited various venues within Asia, I wonder if there's a lot of collation of information about those venues among sports organisations in New Zealand. For example, yachting may have been somewhere and then we go, but we haven't consulted with yachting, even if they know something about that venue and the accommodation. I think that's an opportunity for more information-sharing between sports."

National sports organisation leader

"We tried to develop pathways with other nations like Japan. We're pretty good at rugby; we'll give you some rugby expertise. We're not very good at martial arts – can we have some of your coaches come down to New Zealand? Equally it's about trying to place New Zealand closer to Asia as well, because it's the lowest-cost place for our sports to go. You can get a lot of what you need without the expense of going all the way to Europe or North America."

National sports organisation leader

"We recently had dialogue with the Singapore Sports Institute. They were leveraging indigenous technology and IP within their economy. We were really comparable around services or the sciences but [they had] greater support from industry in terms of sponsorship and investment into their sector. From an innovation point of view, the partnerships were developing and enabling different types of innovation that we possibly don't leverage because we don't necessarily have what you'd classify as a high-tech sector."

National sports organisation leader

"We have a strong relationship with Taiwan Baseball, which we will look to strengthen going forward. We hope to host travelling teams from the Asia region once we get our facilities up to standard for international hosting."

National sports organisation representative

Numerous interviewees also saw a need to build alumni networks to help better educate and prepare New Zealanders for working, travelling, competing and training in Asian countries. With many New Zealanders having lived and worked in Asian countries, and with many sports professionals living in New Zealand who have migrated from Asian countries, there is now a unique opportunity to bring these networks together for sharing of knowledge and further building strategic partnerships and relationships:

"There is much more work to be done using our alumni networks to help prepare athletes and teams. Because we've got more and more athletes, coaches, administrators going, there is a far bigger alumni that you can draw from, within each sport as well. I think those that operate there probably take it for granted [and so we need to] transfer that information onto newbies so they start better off than we have in the past."

Ex-athlete and national sports organisation leader

Giving back: how sport can aid development in Asia

Some research participants spoke of the value of informal and formal cultural, educational and sporting exchanges, and sharing skills with local children, schools and organisations while travelling in Asia.

Given the significant resource and organisational disparities across Asian countries, further consideration should be given to New Zealand's role in supporting existing and new sports for development initiatives. Sports organisations might consider how they could leverage off their travels to Asian countries to 'give back' to the communities they are travelling within.

Sport in Asia and New Zealand's changing demography

Statistics New Zealand has projected that one quarter of the New Zealand population will identify with at least one Asian ethnicity by 2043. Therefore, it is an important time for future-proofing the sports sector with research and understanding about the sporting needs of the growing and diversifying Asian communities here in Aotearoa.

There are opportunities to make connections between the growing number of New Zealanders with Asian heritage and with Asia through sport, particularly in sports outside of New Zealand's traditional strengths. How New Zealand builds on and develops these connections, and how New Zealanders are able to have meaningful and productive engagement with Asia, could determine the success New Zealand has in an expanding range of sports with a diversified sporting population.

There is also considerable potential to utilise the popularity of sports stars (e.g. Lydia Ko) to build further awareness and visibility of New Zealanders participating in sports popular among Asian communities in New Zealand and Asia.

The diversification of New Zealand sports, and the changing interests of New Zealand's increasingly diverse society are areas deserving more focused attention and research.

Some sports leaders and representatives of national sports organisations acknowledged the need to rethink investment in sporting opportunities both in Aotearoa and in Asian countries to better align with New Zealand's changing demographics. As our country's Asian population grows and gravitates to particular sports, national sports organisations would do well to consider opportunities to travel to compete and learn in Asian countries:

" Golf in New Zealand – it's a really strong participant game in New Zealand from an Asian perspective. There's a great opportunity then for us to leverage that and to leverage the success we already have with Lydia Ko as well, as a proud Kiwi on the world stage."

National sports organisation leader

" We're now diversifying the type of sports we work with because of the diversity of our population. We're going to be investing into sports we haven't typically invested in before because the Government wants to see a more distributed and diversified approach to supporting sports that represent Kiwis in modern New Zealand. Kiwis in those [traditionally] Asian-based sports will be typically heading to those countries to get ready to compete. That's a big opportunity for New Zealand"

National sports organisation leader

Asia and emerging trends in global sport

Research participants noted it is also important to plan for engagement in new and emerging sports, particularly eSports and new action sports (e.g. climbing, surfing, skateboarding) at the Olympics. Asian countries are investing heavily in the development of athletes and facilities in these newer Olympic sports. Some participants mentioned the successes of Japanese skateboarders and climbers at the Tokyo Olympic Games as an important trend, noting New Zealand seems further behind in investing in and supporting these newer sports.

Urban sports (e.g. skateboarding, basketball 3x3, sport climbing) are also growing in popularity as community sports in many Asian countries. As populations are becoming increasingly urban, New Zealand could learn from Asian countries about using small spaces for mass participation, as well as investing in facilities catering for both the public and elite sport.

" New Zealand's got a history about being early adopters, but in the skateboard competition in Tokyo, Japan was really strong. With Agenda 2020 and the adoption of street sports into things like the Olympic movement... I think we're going to see some [Asian] strengths in these new sports. We're really good at rowing and canoeing, rugby of course, but I'm not seeing New Zealand emerge in these new disciplines."

National sports organisation leader

" There are very few opportunities in Oceania for artistic swimming and yet Asia is on our doorstep with great depth in a number of countries. We have an increasing Asian demographic in our sport, and to create opportunities for another competition on our doorstep that is affordable to get to would be great. If we were able to get a special entry to compete in the Asian Games, it would be wonderful."

National sports organisation representative

LYDIA KO:

Athletic excellence and
cultural exemplar



*After moving to
New Zealand, golf took on
even more importance —
becoming the bridge that
would connect the two
cultures.*

Hailed by some as New Zealand's greatest sportswoman, professional golfer Lydia Ko has become an example of the strong ties many Kiwi athletes have to their Asian heritage. Describing herself as a "Kowi" or "Korean Kiwi", Lydia was born in South Korea, with her family moving to Auckland when she was six, her parents wanting a less competitive and more relaxed lifestyle.

Although most of her upbringing was in New Zealand, South Korea had an impact on her golfing career. Soon after she was born, golf became extremely popular across South Korea and many members of her family became involved in the sport. When she was five, her aunt took her to the driving range that would set Lydia on her path to become the youngest golfer in history to reach number one in any world ranking.

After moving to New Zealand, golf took on even more importance – becoming the bridge that would connect the two cultures. During golf lessons at Pupuke Golf Club, she began to learn English and more about the Kiwi lifestyle. Today, her success in golf is often attributed to the blending of her Korean heritage and Kiwi identity. She has described how she absorbed her work ethic and intense loyalty from her parents' and Korean ways of life, but simultaneously embodied the more laid-back Kiwi lifestyle.

Speaking to reporters at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, she said: "I think both cultures helped me to grow up to be the person that I am today and I know I will never forget where I'm from and where my roots are."

Long-term planning is key for New Zealand sporting success in Asia

One of the strengths that participants noted about Asian sports organisations is that they are highly strategic in planning and building their capabilities over a long timeframe. Rather than focusing on the next Olympic Games cycle, New Zealand sport could benefit from developing 10-20 or even 30-year plans to establish sustainable success patterns in Asia. This could include focusing on certain sports, or attracting coaching and managerial talent.

Planning could include strategies for Aotearoa to capitalise on upcoming mega events in Australasia (e.g. the 2032 Brisbane Olympics), building opportunities to host Asian sports teams, athletes and organisations before and after such events. More opportunities for knowledge exchange and mutually beneficial training camps could be established in Aotearoa.

In addition, such events and exchanges could be used to build connections with Asian communities in Aotearoa, and to inspire the next generation of athletes in a wider array of sports. Longer-term planning is necessary to consider how we can better engage with Asian athletes, teams and organisations to position New Zealand sport for future success at elite, recreational and community levels.

" The Olympics are going to be in Australia in 2032. [Can we have] more Asian athletes coming into New Zealand and training camp events in the lead-up? This is a massive opportunity for New Zealand to do a 10-year plan, and thinking, 'what's sport going to look like?' It is not just the Olympics, it is the Paralympics and it's a big showcase and the world is coming. And the time zone is such a blessing. The viewership of the Olympics in Tokyo was beyond normal, and that's really because it's basically the same time zone."

National sports organisation leader

" They [Indian cricket] brought in a professional competition model. They brought in people from around the world, the best players, and paid them big bucks. Obviously, these local players got to play with the best in the world and soak up all that knowledge. I think that's been so instrumental in India's near dominance now. It's not trying to be good for that next tournament. It's actually about, 'what can we do to provide success but also continue success for a generation?'"

Athlete - hockey

" [In Asia] They think 20, 30 years ahead and then make really small changes, or they implement systems based on what they want in that timeframe... They don't try to change it overnight. They are intentional about everything that they do... they can see how sport can impact society."

Coach - basketball

MANOJ DAJI:

A sleeping giant in sport
that is waking up!



“Their continuous learning attitude, really, around professional development, I think that stands out for them.”

“Having a little bit of understanding, a little bit of respect for something that’s different to what we’re always experiencing.” – Manoj Daji describes this as one of the main lessons he’s learnt from working with international Asian sporting confederations. Raised in Auckland, Manoj has grown up in the hockey world, starting as a player then developing into a coach at many levels, including assistant coach for the New Zealand team. He is now the CEO of Auckland Hockey. In his roles, Manoj has participated in a variety of international hockey trips throughout Asia (Malaysia, Japan, Korea, China), and hosted Asian hockey teams in New Zealand.

While there are many takeaways from his experiences, he highlights his admiration for Asian teams’ dedication to improving. “Their continuous learning attitude, really, around professional development, I think that stands out for them.”

He has also observed Asian teams’ strengths in creating connections across both international sporting foundations and with local Asian communities in New Zealand. For example, when the Korean and Japanese hockey teams came to visit New Zealand, he was surprised at the number of Korean and Japanese New Zealanders who came to the matches. “All of a sudden we’re playing these games that we weren’t really even advertising... then the next minute they have a stand full of supporters that are Korean and Japanese nationals who are living in [New Zealand] with flags and stuff – so it’s like, woah, where did they all come from?”

In his experience, Asian teams’ willingness to learn, the strong connections formed with local communities, and their dedication and discipline have resulted in unlimited potential and an exciting future for Asian sporting confederations. “They’re a sleeping giant in sport.”

PART 5: RECOMMENDATIONS



5



Part 5: Recommendations

This section focuses on the experiences of New Zealand athletes, coaches and support staff travelling to Asia for sport-related purposes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, we have drawn together a series of recommendations as a starting point for sports organisations across the sector (from teams and clubs to national sports organisations and sport sector policy-makers). These recommendations are designed to better equip athletes and sports professionals to thrive in Asia, and to support the sector to increase the breadth and depth of its relationships and connections across the region.

The recommendations also highlight the necessity of strategic thinking to position New Zealand's sports sector in a world where Asia is at the forefront of global sporting developments. This section concludes with a call for additional and ongoing research to generate insights for the sector on the opportunities and possibilities on offer in Asia in the years ahead.

Preparation

1. Increase cultural preparation sessions for athletes, teams and staff, particularly before their first time travelling to an Asian country for sport-related purposes.
2. Create and share resources for New Zealanders travelling to Asian countries for sport-related purposes (i.e. cultural etiquette, contacts).
3. Build a network of trusted cultural advisers, support people and translators across Asia to support New Zealand teams and athletes while travelling. Pay additional attention to the cultural, gender and logistical issues for female athletes and staff, and athletes with disabilities. Preparation is key to success.
4. Provide pre-departure discussions with athletes to establish their interest in learning about aspects of Asian cultures during their trips, and to collaboratively consider options for meaningful cultural experiences.
5. Encourage sports organisations to work with the Asia New Zealand Foundation to create meaningful cultural experiences for New Zealand athletes and teams, timed around their competitions.

Growing exchanges with Asia

6. Identify and grow the range of opportunities for mutually productive knowledge exchanges between New Zealand and Asian sports organisations.
7. Undertake a stocktake of all formal and informal exchange programmes currently existing between New Zealand and Asian sports organisations, events and teams.
8. Establish an alumni network in Aotearoa and in Asian countries of New Zealanders who have spent time living in Asia and working in the sporting sector.

Strategic planning

9. With the growing importance of Asia in the global sporting landscape and its proximity to Aotearoa, sports organisations should engage in five-, 10- and 15-year planning to assess opportunities to build connections, partnerships and networks in Asian countries.
10. Sports organisations should map out key events in the near, medium and long-term, and engage in systematic and strategic planning about how to prepare their teams, to support them on the ground.
11. Increase strategic and long term planning to expand the opportunities for Aotearoa to host Asian athletes and teams before Australasian mega events (e.g. 2032 Brisbane Olympics).
12. Increase the opportunities for New Zealand sports journalists to expand stories beyond small number of sports teams' performances in Asia, and to cover stories of a wider array of sports (e.g. martial arts, eSports, skateboarding, surfing).
13. Linked to Recommendation 3, explore the development of a New Zealand-Asian sports database, i.e. greater documentation of New Zealand sports organisations travelling to Asian countries and their learnings and recommendations for other sports and teams travelling to this place. Such a database could be very useful for other teams and athletes in preparing for upcoming travel and without having to 'start from scratch' in considerations of logistics (i.e. transport, accommodation), cultural knowledge and networks.

Requiring further research

14. Undertake more research into how the hosting of Asian teams in Aotearoa can be used to connect with Asian communities in New Zealand, and how such events can be used to build relationships between countries and build new sporting audiences here in New Zealand and in Asia.
15. More work is needed to consider how national and regional sports organisations meet the needs of New Zealand's Asian communities. Asian communities in Aotearoa are diverse with generational differences, and ties to many countries, cultures and religious backgrounds. Future planning is needed to ensure the sport, fitness and active recreation experiences of Asian New Zealanders are given adequate attention, with members of Asian communities having an important voice in such planning.



Appendix 1: Methodology

This project utilised a multi-method approach, including an online survey, qualitative interviews and media analysis.

Online Survey

The online survey targeted New Zealanders who have travelled to Asian countries for sport-related purposes (i.e. athletes, coaches, administrators, medical support, journalists). The survey was distributed via Survey Monkey and consisted of 46 questions.

A total of 127 online surveys were completed. The survey was in the field between 8 November 2021 and 18 March 2022.

The demographic profile of online survey respondents was as follows:

Gender and age

Gender	%
Male	60
Female	39
Non-binary	01
Age	%
19-24 years	15
25-34 years	35
35-44 years	17
45-54 years	24
55+ years	09
Ethnicity	%
Māori	23
Pacific Peoples	05
Chinese New Zealanders	05
Pākehā/New Zealand European	73

Note: respondents were able to select multiple ethnicities.

Sport sector role	%
Athletes	26
Coaches	14
Administrators/Managers	09
Sports organisation leaders	09
Business representatives	07
Teachers	05
Officials	03
Event organisers	03
Other	23

A second short online questionnaire was shared with Paralympics New Zealand and New Zealand Olympic Committee who agreed to share it with their national sports organisation database. This survey was an important opportunity to hear from national sports organisations about their past, current and future engagement with Asia through sport. We received 11 responses mostly from Aotearoa New Zealand's smaller codes. While a small sample, a diverse set of codes responded (including golf, badminton, baseball), with results clearly indicating a trend towards greater Asia engagement for Aotearoa New Zealand codes.

Interviews

A key method in this research was semi-structured interviews (averaging an hour in length) with key members of Aotearoa New Zealand's sports organisations. These were used to better understand their experiences, observations and the knowledge they have acquired through their interactions and relationships in Asian countries.

A total of 25 interviews were conducted, including 15 men and 10 women. Across the sample, 14 identified as Pākehā, 3 Māori, 3 Asian, 2 Other European and 1 Pasifika.

Interviewees represented a range of sports, including cycling, rugby, surf life-saving, golf, hockey, badminton, basketball, mountaineering, para sports and Olympic sports. They held a range of roles in the sports sector, including athletes, programme managers, coaches, officials, consultants and leaders of national sports organisations.

Interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed. The research team then conducted a two-pronged thematic analysis, coding key themes and cross-referencing to ensure accuracy of coding.

Survey and interview results were examined individually, and then together to identify key themes featured in this report. In most instances, the survey identified broad trends that were then expanded on with more depth and nuance within the interviews, therefore providing contextual understanding of some of the survey findings. Where there are notable differences between survey and interview data, this is noted in the report.

Media analysis

To better understand how New Zealand and Asian sports (and sporting relationships) are discussed and portrayed in New Zealand media, the research team conducted a mapping of New Zealand newspapers using Newztext, the New Zealand-based database. Newztext is a research tool and archive that collates articles from a range of New Zealand news sources from 1995 to 2021. The Newztext search revealed 15,000 results, and the analysis included articles about Kiwi athletes competing in Asian countries, Asian teams playing against New Zealand national teams in New Zealand, features on Asian-New Zealand athletes, Asian sporting confederations, and sponsorship and media deals.

To conduct a more in-depth analysis of the key themes and trends in the articles, the next stage of analysis focused more specifically on those written in 2021. This consisted of a total of 700 articles (excluding Olympic Games coverage). While articles from 2021 were given more targeted focus, when carrying out a more general examination of the articles written about Asia, New Zealand, and sport over the past 20 years, there appears to be similar trends. These themes incorporate coverage of events, features on individuals, and discussions around New Zealand teams being within various Asian confederations and the policies. See Part 2 for a summary of the findings.



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ABOUT THE ASIA NEW ZEALAND FOUNDATION TE WHĪTAU TŪHONO

The Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono is New Zealand's leading non-partisan, non-profit authority on Asia. We were set up in 1994 to build New Zealanders' knowledge and understanding of Asia.

We provide experiences and resources to help New Zealanders build their knowledge, skills, connections and confidence to thrive in Asia. We work in partnership with influential individuals and organisations in New Zealand and Asia to provide high-level forums, cultural events, international collaborations, school programmes and professional development opportunities.

Our activities cover more than 20 countries in Asia and are delivered through programmes with a focus on arts, leadership, entrepreneurship, sports, business, media, education, research and informal diplomacy (Track II).

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