

Research on the Empowerment of High-quality Sports-Tourism Integration by Island-wide Special Customs Operations in Hainan FTP

Li Xizi^{1,*}, He Jiong²

¹College of Finance and Economics, Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, Hainan, China, 571126

²College of Finance and Economics, Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, Hainan, China, 571126

*Corresponding author

Abstract: In late 2025, Hainan officially launched island-wide special customs operations, with the implementation of the "freer access at the first line, regulated access at the second line" policy framework unleashing a series of policy dividends. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the resource endowments of coastal sports tourism in Hainan and the current state of sports-tourism integration development. Drawing on practical cases from Haikou, Wanning, and Lingshui, it analyzes the multi-dimensional logic of policy empowerment and proposes optimization strategies for deepening industrial integration through the FTP's special customs policies. The findings indicate that visa-free access for citizens of 86 countries, zero-tariff customs clearance, and event incentive policies have significantly promoted the integration of sports and tourism industries. However, constraints such as insufficient resource integration, product homogenization, and talent shortages continue to impede high-quality industrial development. Accordingly, this paper proposes optimization pathways from the perspectives of policy coordination, resource integration, product innovation, and international brand cultivation, providing practical references for Hainan to achieve deep integration of sports and tourism and high-quality development by leveraging the advantages of island-wide special customs operations.

Keywords: Island-wide Special Customs Operations of the FTP; Policy Empowerment; Sports-Tourism Integration; High-Quality Development

1. Introduction

By the end of 2025, the Hainan Free Trade Port (FTP) officially launched its island-wide special customs operations, with the comprehensive implementation of the "freer access at the first line, regulated access at the second line" institutional framework. Consequently, Hainan has continued to unleash policy dividends across taxation, trade, and entry-exit facilitation. Boasting a 1,944-kilometer coastline and numerous high-quality bays, Hainan's coastal sports tourism is highly aligned with the FTP's industrial transformation orientation and serves as a core lever in building Hainan into an international tourism and consumption destination.

In 2025, Hainan received 106 million domestic and international tourists, with total tourist expenditures reaching RMB 225.432 billion. Among these, inbound tourists increased by 35.2% year-on-year. In the first six months following the island-wide special customs operations, the number inbound and outbound foreign nationals rose by over 30%. Throughout the year, a total of 526 sports events at various levels were hosted nationwide, with "spectating + vacation" emerging as a new consumption trend^[1]. At the same time, however, industrial shortcomings have become increasingly evident: the integration of coastal tourism resources across the island remains insufficient, water sports products are plagued by severe homogenization, and there is an acute shortage of interdisciplinary in international event operations and cross-border cultural tourism. As a result, the policy dividends the special customs operations have yet to be fully transformed into core industrial competitiveness.

In light of this, this paper systematically reviews the resource endowments of coastal sports tourism in Hainan and the current state of development against the backdrop of island-wide special customs operations. It analyzes the multi-dimensional empowerment mechanisms of visa-free access, zero-tariff policies, and event subsidies, while drawing on existing practices in Haikou, Wanning, Lingshui, and

Sanya to propose optimization pathways. Theoretically, this study fills the research gap on sports-tourism integration from the perspective of special customs operations; practically, it provides feasible references for Hainan to leverage its opening-up advantages and promote deep industrial integration.

2. Coastal Sports Tourism Resource Endowments and Development Status in Hainan

2.1 Overview of Resource Endowments

Hainan boasts unique and abundant coastal sports tourism resources, which lay a solid foundation for integrated industrial development. As China's only tropical island province, Hainan has a 1,944-kilometer coastline and 68 scenic bays, making it naturally suitable for coastal sports development. According to a SWOT analysis of Hainan's coastal sports tourism projects, the region's strengths lie in its rich natural resources, distinctive sports characteristics, and strong policy support. The 2026 Marine Tourism Year initiative further emphasizes Hainan's strategic transition toward immersive, activity-based marine experiences, with plans to offer 60 high-quality marine tourism products and develop 14 water sports bases across the island^[2]. The province has established 12 National Sports Training Southern Bases, which regularly host professional teams from both domestic and international circuits for intensive training, with its reputation as a "Winter Training Paradise" continuing to expand.

In terms of natural resources, Riyue Bay in Wanning offers over 200 days of surfable conditions annually, while the bays of Sanya and Lingshui are respectively suited for diving and sailing activities. Regarding sports infrastructure, Haikou has built international-class venues for beach volleyball, sailing, and golf. Wanning has developed a "one center + three bases" water sports cluster. In 2025, China's first multi-functional Olympic-grade artificial wave pool was completed, capable of accommodating surfers of all age groups. In terms of cultural resources, Hainan is endowed with rich intangible cultural heritage resources of the Li, Miao, and Danjia maritime cultures, which can be deeply integrated with event activities. For instance, the visual design of the Asian Beach Games and the opening ceremony of the Wushu World Cup both incorporated local folk elements, endowing sports tourism with a distinctive cultural identity and laying a solid resource foundation for industrial integration. (See Table 1 for details)

Table 1: Classification of Coastal Sports Tourism Resources in Hainan

Resource Type	Specific Contents	Typical Representatives
Natural Landscape Resources	Coastline, beaches, bays	Riyue Bay (Wanning), Haitang Bay (Sanya), Qingshui Bay (Lingshui)
Sports Infrastructure Resources	Training bases, competition venues, artificial wave pools	National Surfing Training Base, CTS Artificial Wave Pool
Cultural Resources	Maritime culture, folk customs, event culture	Danjia culture, Li and Miao culture, surfing culture

2.2 Practical Achievements of Sports-Tourism Integration Development

Against the backdrop of island-wide special customs operations, the outcomes of coastal sports-tourism integration in Hainan have become increasingly evident. First, a year-round event system has taken shape, with 77 key events planned across the province in 2026^[3]. In a single month, Haikou hosted three top-tier international events—beach volleyball, golf, and triathlon—while the Wushu World Cup attracted competitors from 29 countries, achieving a schedule of "international events every month". Second, city- and county-level differentiated brands have become well-established. Wanning has positioned surfing as its core IP; in the first four months of 2026, the city received 4.67 million tourists, with 70 percent participating in water sports, cementing its status as a youthful, trendy sports destination. Third, diversified land-sea-air initiatives have taken root, with towns in Wanning jointly developing paddle boarding, cycling, and jet-skiing projects, while Sanya's rainforest-integrated event was recognized as a national outstanding case of sports-tourism integration. Fourth, a mature model of culture-sports-business-tourism synergy has taken shape. During the Wushu World Cup, Haikou launched a "ticket-stub economy," offering spectators discounts at partner scenic spots, duty-free shops, and hotels, thereby transforming event spectators into island-wide tourism consumers and initially forming a closed-loop model in which sports events drive consumption. (See Table 2 for details)

Table 2: Typical Cases of Coastal Sports Tourism in Hainan

Region	Development Positioning	Core Business Formats	Landmark Achievements
Haikou	Premier City for Sports Events	Top-tier international events	Wushu Taolu World Cup: 206 athletes from 29 countries
Wanning	World-class Surfing Destination	Surfing + water sports	Over 4.67 million tourists received from January to April 2026
Lingshui	International Sports Tourism Destination	Equestrian + golf + study tours + diving	Mermaid Diving World Cup; CGA Elite Program
Sanya	Premier City for International Events	Beach sports + Asian Beach Games + tropical rainforest challenge events	Asian Beach Games: 3,798 athletes from 45 countries

2.3 Existing Problems

At present, the coastal sports tourism industry in Hainan faces multiple developmental shortcomings. The mechanisms for island-wide resource coordination and cross-regional synergistic support remain inadequate. In the eastern coastal area, similar coastal sports projects are densely distributed, leading to pronounced intra-regional homogeneous competition, while the development of high-quality coastal resources in the central and western regions remains insufficient, with weak supporting infrastructure and a lack of unified top-level planning for industrial development. Existing products are predominantly oriented toward superficial sightseeing, with beach sports largely confined to traditional categories such as beach marathons and beach volleyball, while supply is insufficient in deep experiential and personalized offerings. Although Hainan has hosted multiple international events, the industry's overall international visibility lags behind established coastal sports tourism destinations such as Australia's Gold Coast, and it has yet to develop an internationally influential industrial IP with long-term impact. Meanwhile, there is a notable shortage of multidisciplinary professionals in sports event operations and water sports management. In the surfing instruction sector, there have been instances of unlicensed practitioners and price wars, indicating that the overall standardization of industry services needs to be improved.

3. The Multi-dimensional Empowerment Effects of Island-wide Special Customs Operations on Coastal Sports-Tourism Integration

3.1 Policy Dividends Unleashed by the Island-wide Special Customs Operations

Following the implementation of island-wide special customs operations, the government has introduced a series of supporting policies to provide systematic support for the integrated development of coastal sports tourism. In December 2025, Hainan Province issued the Several Fiscal Measures of Hainan Province to Further Promote Tourism Consumption, introducing 16 fiscal support measures covering sports events, cultural performances, inbound tourism, and product development. These measures took effect on January 1, 2026, with a validity period of three years^[4]. The main policies are presented in the table below(See Table 3 for details):

Table 3: Overview of Supporting Policies Accompanying the Island-wide Special Customs Operations

Policy Area	Specific Measures	Policy Highlights
Event Financial Rewards	Rewards for 10 provincial key events	Up to RMB 5 million for international events; up to RMB 3 million for national-level events
Off-season Event Incentives	20% bonus increase for events held from April to September	Encourages off-season event hosting to balance year-round event calendar
Streamlined Event Approval	Negative list management; filing system replacing tiered approval	Most international events can be directly filed and held in Hainan
Entry Facilitation	86-country visa-free access + 240-hour transit visa-free access	393,000 visa-free entries in the first half (December 18, 2025–June 17, 2026) of special customs operations
Customs Clearance Facilitation	"Advance declaration, release upon arrival" zero-tariff customs clearance	Rapid clearance of event equipment, reducing operational costs
Talent Tax Incentives	Top-tier talent personal income tax capped at 15%	Attracts international sports professionals
Enterprise Tax Incentives	15% corporate income tax rate for encouraged industries	Reduces operational costs for sports tourism enterprises

3.2 The Triple-dimensional Policy Empowerment Transmission Mechanism

The island-wide special customs policies empower the deep integration of sports and tourism through three transmission pathways. First, the cost-reduction mechanism: zero-tariff equipment imports, low-tax business operations, and substantial event subsidies reduce the operating costs of event organization and enterprises, allowing surplus funds to be reinvested into product iteration and service upgrades. The Wushu Taolu World Cup, for instance, significantly reduced cross-border organizational costs and improved event efficiency by leveraging customs and tax policies. Second, the resource-agglomeration mechanism: visa-free access removes barriers to international mobility, attracting foreign athletes, event-operating enterprises, and sports capital to Hainan. The 6th Asian Beach Games attracted nearly 3,800 athletes from 45 Asian countries; Wanning's surfing industry, supported by inbound tourism subsidies, has seen a substantial increase in long-stay experiential tourist orders from Russia and Australia, accompanied by a steady influx of overseas sports talent. Third, the brand-spillover mechanism: regular international events, amplified through global media coverage, enhance Hainan's overseas visibility. The Asian Beach Games, held in April 2026, further bound the island's cultural tourism resources with the beach sports IP, continuously elevating the international recognition and brand premium of Hainan's coastal sports tourism.

3.3 Multi-City Practical Case Studies

Haikou, leveraging its professional venues combined with visa-free access, zero-tariff policies, and event subsidies, hosts more than ten international events annually on average, with event-driven visitor flows and industrial consumption scale ranking first in the province. Wanning, centered on the surfing resources of Riyue Bay and supported by inbound tourism subsidies, artificial wave pool infrastructure, and other hardware and software assets, has built an integrated land-sea-air industrial chain. Sanya has seized the opportunity of the 6th Asian Beach Games, utilizing the 86-country visa-free policy to ensure efficient customs clearance for international participants, while simultaneously upgrading urban transportation and accommodation facilities, thereby enhancing the city's comprehensive competitiveness through a major continental-level sporting event. Lingshui has pursued a dual-track strategy of event attraction and talent cultivation, introducing international events in equestrian, golf, and diving to fill the gap in high-end sports talent development in Hainan, while continuously enriching the supply of premium coastal sports offerings. (See Table 4 for details)

Table 4: Differentiated Development Practices of Coastal Sports Tourism in Hainan's Cities and Counties

Region	Core Development Positioning	Leveraged Policies	Signature Projects and Achievements
Haikou	International Coastal Sports Events Capital	86-country visa-free access, zero-tariff equipment imports, substantial event rewards	Hosts over 18 international events annually; 79 events in 2025, attracting 752,900 event tourists and generating RMB 1.462 billion in event-related consumption, forming a year-round uninterrupted event matrix
Wanning	World-class Surfing Vacation Destination	Inbound tourism subsidies, water sports industry support	Completed China's first Olympic-grade artificial wave pool; built a surfing-led integrated land-sea-air culture-sports-business-tourism industrial chain; implemented a filing system for surf clubs to regulate industry practices; received 4.67 million tourists from January to April 2026, a year-on-year increase of 25.5%
Sanya	International Comprehensive Beach Sports City	86-country visa-free entry facilitation	Hosted the Asian Beach Games, the first continental-level multi-sport event after customs closure, connecting 22 kilometers of coastal venues; simultaneously upgraded 167 old residential communities and opened 16 traffic congestion points to achieve integrated development of event attraction, industry agglomeration, and consumption upgrading
Lingshui	High-end Specialized Sports Study Tour Destination	Personal income tax incentives for top-tier talent, zero-tariff event equipment	Hosted international equestrian exchange events, golf talent development programs, and the Mermaid Diving World Cup, filling the gap in Hainan's high-end sports events and professional talent cultivation

4. Optimization Strategies for Deepening Sports-Tourism Integration Leveraging Island-wide Special Customs Policies

4.1 Policy Coordination and Innovation: Breaking Down Cross-departmental Institutional Barriers

The provincial government should take the lead in establishing a joint meeting mechanism among departments of culture and tourism, sports, customs, and taxation, issuing special support rules for sports-tourism integration. On the basis of the existing 16 fiscal measures for tourism—which provide up to RMB 5 million for international events, RMB 3 million for national-level events, with a 20% bonus increase for events held from April to September—supporting provisions for small and medium-sized water sports enterprises should be added. The streamlined one-stop customs clearance and multilingual volunteer service standards adopted during the Asian Beach Games should be institutionalized, integrating visa-free access and zero-tariff policies into a comprehensive international event service package. The province should uniformly promote "spectating + island-wide tourism" linkage itineraries. Through high-level cross-departmental coordination, the pain points of fragmented policies and disjointed implementation can be resolved, maximizing the synergistic dividends of customs entry-exit and fiscal-tax policies.

4.2 Integrated Resource Allocation: Building a Differentiated and Synergistic Development Pattern

The island's coastal tourism highway should serve as the backbone for building a three-dimensional land-sea-air sports system, with surfing and diving as core sea-based IPs, cycling and marathons along the coast, and drones and paragliding as emerging low-altitude projects. The "one bay, one brand" differentiated layout should be promoted—a strategy already proving effective in Wanning, where Riyue Bay focuses on surfing, Shimei Bay on diving, and Shenzhou Peninsula on jet-skiing. Eastern cities and counties should develop high-end events, while the central and western regions integrate rainforest resources with folk culture and outdoor activities. The "ticket-stub economy" consumption model—successfully piloted during the Wushu World Cup in Haikou, where event tickets unlocked discounts at partner scenic spots, hotels, and duty-free shops—should be replicated across the province to connect consumption chains and extend tourist stay duration. This approach addresses resource dispersion and the east-west development imbalance while leveraging island-wide resource integration to capitalize on the inbound tourist flows generated by customs operations.

4.3 Diversified Product Development: Creating Multi-tiered Experiential Offerings

A two-way development approach of "portalization of tourism and integration of sports into tourism" should be pursued. On one hand, international events should be tourism-packaged with spectator-vacation combo tickets; on the other hand, surfing, cycling and other sports should be embedded into regular island tour itineraries. "One event, multiple tours" featured routes should be launched, connecting coastal and rainforest resources—a model that Wanning successfully piloted by bundling events with tourism projects to effectively extend tourist stay duration. Emerging trend sports such as beach frisbee and drone football should be introduced, drawing on Sanya's simplified approval mechanism for new business formats to lower market-entry barriers. These measures address product homogenization while leveraging the diversified demand of inbound tourists under customs operations to create personalized sports tourism products.

4.4 International Branding Operations: Expanding Overseas Communication Channels

Top-tier event IPs such as the Asian Beach Games and the Wushu World Cup should be continuously strengthened, with competition venues converted into public leisure destinations post-event—as exemplified by Sanya's post-Asian Beach Games strategy, where the Sanya Sports Center Gymnasium will host regular public sports events and fitness activities, and the Yasha Park will be transformed into a tourism performance venue. A tiered event matrix spanning international, national, and provincial levels should be established, including a "Qiong-branded" mass sports event IP matrix featuring events such as the "Cun VA" volleyball league and the "Cun BA" basketball league. The four differentiated regional brands of Haikou, Wanning, Lingshui, and Sanya should be consolidated to create a cluster effect. Global broadcast channels of international events should be leveraged to promote surfing, golf, and other featured content to overseas markets—the Asian Beach Games alone generated 139 million views across 446 leading international media outlets including Associated Press and Fox News. This approach addresses the shortfall in international brand

recognition while expanding global source market appeal through the 86-country visa-free access window.

4.5 Consolidating Long-term Foundations: Pursuing Sustainable Development

Collaboration with universities and national-level associations should be established to build a local talent cultivation system. Hainan University's Sports College has already established a leisure sports program focusing on water sports such as sailing and diving; Haikou has selected 15 primary and secondary schools to form sailing and windsurfing school teams, adopting a "popularization + advancement" dual-track training model. Water sports courses should be popularized in primary and secondary schools, and certification standards for surfing and golf instructors should be improved. Hardware and software facilities such as artificial wave pools, coastal service stations, and national winter training bases should be upgraded to support multi-functional transformation. The filing system for sports clubs should be fully implemented—the Hainan Wushu Association has already established a provincial-level registration system for martial arts clubs and athletes—with industry self-discipline agreements introduced to address price wars and unlicensed operations. These measures address the shortcomings in professional talent, supporting infrastructure, and industry regulation, ensuring that the value of customs-related industrial support policies is steadily realized over the long term.

5. Conclusions

The visa-free entry facilitation, zero-tariff customs clearance, and event reward policies unleashed by the island-wide special customs operations have effectively promoted the integrated development of Hainan's coastal sports tourism industry through the triple transmission mechanisms of cost reduction, resource agglomeration, and brand spillover. Practices in Haikou, Wanning, Lingshui, and other areas demonstrate that policy dividends have already generated initial momentum in event attraction, business model innovation, and brand building.

However, the sustained release of policy empowerment effects still faces structural constraints in resource integration and talent supply. The transformation of policy dividends into core industrial competitiveness requires coordinated progress in institutional innovation and industrial upgrading. Future research could further quantitatively assess the differences in policy implementation effectiveness across cities and counties, and explore comparative analyses of the regional economic driving effects of different types of events, thereby providing empirical support for the precise optimization of island-wide special customs policies.

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