

Can Aviation Enthusiasm Claim a Spot in Special Interest Tourism?

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Abstract

Special Interest Tourism (SIT) is characterized by bespoke travel experiences tailored to the unique passions and interests of individuals. Within this context, the article explores whether “Aviation Enthusiasm” merits a distinct classification within SIT. Aviation enthusiasts, colloquially termed “avgeeks,” demonstrate a fervent passion for all facets of aviation, from aircraft and airlines to historical events and technological advancements. Their travel patterns often diverge from mainstream tourism, with journeys centered around airshows, aviation museums, plane spotting at iconic airports, or experiencing specific inaugural flights. This niche yet growing segment has prompted the travel industry to acknowledge and cater to its demands, evidenced by tailored packages, exclusive airport viewing areas, and event-specific itineraries. Drawing parallels with established categories within SIT, such as wine tourism or eco-tourism, this article delves into the nuances of aviation-centric travels. It argues for the recognition of Aviation Enthusiasm as a valid and emerging category within Special Interest Tourism, emphasizing its economic potential, cultural significance, and distinct identity. As the lines between traditional and niche tourism blur, understanding and catering to specific interests like aviation can pave the way for a more inclusive and diverse travel landscape.

1. Introduction

The realm of tourism has long been a stage for the convergence of diverse passions and interests, where individuals embark on journeys not only to explore new destinations but to immerse themselves in their most cherished

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hobbies and enthusiasms. Special interest tourism, a dynamic and evolving sector within the broader tourism industry, caters to the unique interests and passions of travelers. In this context, aviation enthusiasts, a dedicated and passionate subculture, have claimed their spot as a noteworthy and impactful segment of special interest tourism. Aviation enthusiasts, often known as “avgeeks,” are individuals whose interests in aviation go beyond the ordinary. Their fascination with aircraft, airports, aviation history, and all things flight-related forms an integral part of their identity. These enthusiasts actively seek opportunities to connect with the aviation world, embarking on journeys that are far from typical vacations. Instead, they engage in aviation-centric tourism activities, visiting airshows, aviation museums, aircraft spotting locations, and even participating in flight simulations. The purpose of this paper is to delve into the phenomenon of aviation enthusiasts’ participation in special interest tourism. The paper will explore the motivations that drive them, the unique experiences they seek, and the contributions they make to the tourism industry.

2. Who are Aviation Enthusiasts?

Aviation Enthusiasm refers to a passionate interest in or fascination with various aspects of aviation, including aircraft, airlines, history, design, technology, and the act of flying itself. Individuals with this passion, often termed “aviation enthusiasts” or “avgeeks” (a combination of “aviation” and “geek”), can be found indulging in a range of activities that relate to the aviation industry.

Aviation enthusiasts, from over the world come together to form communities, driven by their love for aviation. They gather on platforms engaging in discussions about the latest news in the aviation industry exchanging interesting facts and organizing trips to aviation hubs or events. Some of the activities which are including but not limited to can be listed as follows:

2.1. Planespotting

A plane spotter can be defined as “a person who observes, photographs and catalogues aircraft as a hobby” (Collins Dictionary, n.d.). Planespotters travel around the world to photograph and film the aircraft as they take-off, land or, taxi. After the invention of the internet, there was an increase in the websites dedicated to the spotters and that made the hobby even more popular (Lichter-Marck, 2016: 52).

The act of Planespottting was originally started as a civilian duty, rather than a hobby. The term “Planespotter” was first used in 1910s during the World War I. Since there was no radar capable of tracking and identifying enemy aircraft, countries encouraged civilians to observe the aircraft flying over them and report hostile aircraft upon encountering them. In Great Britain this task was given to the “Royal Observer Corps” and “Aircraft Warning Corps” which were organized by civilian volunteers. Planespotters also held importance in World War II and even in the Cold War all the way to the 1950s since the United Kingdom was not able to place an effective radar capable of tracking Soviet Aircraft effectively until 1958. However, The Observer Corps kept operating until 1995 (Volan, 1969).

Plane photography, on the other hand, started with the first aircraft ever invented. John T. Daniels photographed the flight of the “Wright Flyer” which was the first aircraft ever built and consequently took the first photo of an aircraft (Crouch, 2002: 300-305). After the invention of the aircraft, the aviation industry took a rapid increase. The number of aircraft photographs also rose immensely. Even though we are not sure when or where aircraft photography turned into a hobby, we can say that in recent years the popularity of planespotting has risen drastically. The increase is visible in the traffic statistics of the popular planespotting websites, where spotters upload their photos and socialize in the forums.

The reason for that increase might be attributed to several reasons. Transportation to and from the airports became easier, owning and operating a camera became easier, and spotter forums and social media pages for spotters increased, lastly the information about the aircraft is more easily reachable since there are applications like Flightradar24 and Flightaware where you can track almost all of the civilian aircraft at real time.

The planespotters usually travel to different airports and countries to photograph different airports and aircraft. The motivation for their travel can be derived from several reasons. The first reason is the aircraft traffic of the airport. If the airport is more crowded the spotter would get the chance to photograph more aircraft. So, a lot of spotters travel to main hubs like Frankfurt Airport, London Heathrow Airport, or Istanbul Airport to do so.

Another reason is the physical features of the airport. Some airports (or runways of said airports) have good spots for photography thus enabling better photos of aircraft to be taken. Airports like Princess Juliana Airport at St. Marteen or Skiathos Airport in Greece have runways right at the end of a beach. So, spotters get a chance to take unique pictures of the aircraft that they cannot take elsewhere.

Sometimes, the spotters travel to airports just to photograph unique or rare aircraft. Before it got destroyed in the Russia - Ukraine War in 2022. The biggest aircraft of the world was the Soviet made Antonov An-225 (Khianthongkul, Bunyavejchewin & Saisaeng, 2023: 537) and a lot of people traveled the see and photograph this particular aircraft. There are aircraft like Airbus Beluga or Boeing Dreamlifter which are known for their unique looks and sizes. Those aircraft also attract a lot of crowds for themselves. Lastly, some people travel to ex-Soviet countries to photograph Soviet-made aircraft, which got rarer to stumble upon over the years.

In some instances, rather than the aircraft, the airport itself is the subject of the photography. There are unique airports like Lukka in Nepal or Courchevel in France are known for their difficult approaches made through the mountains and their sloped runways. Filming and photographing aircraft landing and taking off from those airports is an important travel motivation for the spotters.

2.2. Aviation Museums

Aviation museums (also known as air museums or air and space museums) can be described as places where exhibits of aircraft, models and equipment are held. Even though private collectors began collecting and exhibiting parts of the aircraft or the whole aircraft themselves, the history of the dedicated aviation museums are fairly new. Even though some attempts were made in the late 1940s the first air museums were opened in the 1960s and 1970s (Fopp, 1997: 5).

The number of aviation museums grew rapidly after that date. Today there are more than 500 dedicated aviation museums in 77 countries. These museums can be categorized as military, civilian, space or mixed (List of Aviation Museums, 2023, Oct. 9). Some of the most popular aviation museums can be listed as follows:

2.2.1. Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (Washington DC-USA)

The museum was first established in 1946 and named “National Air Museum”. The original building was fairly small and only showcased some captured aircraft from World War I and II and some aircraft used by the United States’ Army. However, after the space race of the 1960s, a new museum needed to be built in order to showcase the United States’ accomplishments in the space technology. So, a great exhibition hall, consisting of 71.000 m² was constructed. Today visitors can see the Apollo 11 capsule, which put

astronauts on the moon, The Wright Flyer, which is the first aircraft ever made, Chicago, which is the first aircraft to fly around the world, Bell X-1 which was the first aircraft to break the sound barrier and so on (Smithsonian Air and Space Museum, n.d). The museum accompanied 6.2 million visitors in 2018 which made it the 8th most visited museum in the world (National Air and Space Museum, 2023.).

2.2.2. Imperial War Museum (Duxford- United Kingdom)

With almost 200 aircraft, the Imperial War Museum stands as the largest aviation museum of the United Kingdom. The museum also provides photographs, films, documents and artifacts about aviation. The museum stands on the ex-Duxford Aerodrome which was used as a military base from 1918 to 1976. After the closing of the base, the British Government decided to convert the base into a museum. However, the airfield's runway is still active, and it hosts some airshows from time to time. The museum mostly exhibits aircraft from WWI and WWII era. However, they also exhibit some fairly modern aircraft as well (Kavanagh: 1988). The exhibition showcases 7 variants of the legendary British-made Spitfire, Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird, which is the fastest operational aircraft in the world, Concorde which is the fastest passenger jet ever flew and so on. They also exhibit some land and sea equipment used by the Royal Army and Navy (IWM Duxford Aircraft and Vehicles List, n.d).

2.2.3. Le Bourget Air and Space Museum (Paris-France)

The museum stands in the Paris Le Bourget Airport which is the second main airport of the city. The history of the museum dates back to the year of 1918 when the Ministry of War of France ordered to collect and showcase the aeronautical collections which have been made so far. In 1921 a dedicated museum for aviation was constructed. However, the museum got destroyed in the year 1940 and did not get rebuilt until the year 1961. Being one of the oldest aviation museums, Le Bourget has one of the most iconic collections of the aviation world. It exhibits the first prototype of the Concorde, an Airbus A380 which is the largest passenger airplane ever made, and a lot of vintage and modern fighter aircraft. The museum got approximately 320.000 visitors in the year 2019 (Musee Air Espace, n.d).

Aviation museums serve as rich tapestries that weave the history and evolution of human flight. Avgeeks, with their intrinsic passion for aviation, are naturally drawn to these spaces, seeking a deeper connection to the aircraft and stories they cherish. They relish the opportunity to witness firsthand the machines they've extensively read about or discussed. For the

general public, these museums offer an educational journey, showcasing the marvels of engineering and human ingenuity. From evoking nostalgia in older visitors familiar with past aviation eras to inspiring younger ones with dreams of the skies, aviation museums resonate with a broad audience, blending education, admiration, and inspiration.

2.3. Airshows and Aviation Events

Airshows are public events where various types of aircraft are displayed and demonstrated, both on the ground and in the air. They are often organized to showcase the capabilities, advancements, and aerobatics of military and civilian aircraft. At airshows, attendees can witness high-speed flybys, complex aerial maneuvers, formation flying, and sometimes even simulated combat scenarios. While the flying demonstrations are the main attraction, many airshows also feature static displays, where aircraft are parked on the ground for attendees to get a closer look, interact with pilots, and learn more about each machine's features and history.

Airshows can serve multiple purposes. They can be commercial events where aerospace manufacturers display their latest innovations to potential buyers, military events aimed at demonstrating a country's aerial prowess, or community events meant to entertain and educate the public about aviation. Popular airshows attract enthusiasts, professionals, and the general public from all over the world, making them significant events in the aviation calendar.

In history, the first airshow was held when the Wright Brothers took their first flight. After that, a lot of people made and flew their own aircraft and attracted a significant crowd while doing so. Back then, the events were called "Flying Circuses" since the act of flying itself was seen as a stunt (Fusco, 2018: 1). These Circuses got a lot of attention and in a short time the first international air gathering was organized in Reims, France. The event was organized as an air race and the winner was awarded with 200.000 Francs (760.000 USD today). The event took one week and attracted around 500.000 visitors. After the Reims Air Meet, a lot of similar air shows were organized in early 1900's. Up until the end of WWII, the main purpose of the events was racing and aerobatics. Because until then, airplanes were only seen as military equipment, but after the Wars airplanes became a method of transportation as well and civilian people became more familiar with airplanes and aviation in general. And at the end of the 20th century, airshows became events both for the exhibition and the racing of the aircraft (Hallion, 2003: 258-259).

Today, more than 50 airshows are organized annually around the world. With thousands of attendees, the air shows can be counted as one of the biggest aviation attractions for aviators, enthusiasts and the sector of aviation itself. Some of the most popular airshows around the world can be listed as follows:

2.3.1. Dubai Air Show

The Dubai Airshow started its journey in 1986 as “Arab Air”. Served as a regional trade show for civil aircraft. The venue was the Dubai World Trade Centre. Over time the show gained prominence. Expanded on a scale becoming a captivating international exhibition that attracted major players in the aerospace industry. This growth was greatly influenced by Dubai’s location as a hub connecting East and West. As the reputation of the show grew so did its range of exhibits including both civilian and military aircraft. The increasing number of deals made, and partnerships established during this event demonstrated its growing significance, within the aviation community. In 2019 more than 160 aircraft were displayed at the event, and it attracted a total of 104.000 attendees. And at the event around 78 million USD worth of aircraft sales were made (Dubai Airshow, 2023, May 29).

2.3.2. Paris Air Show

The history of the Paris Air Show can be traced back to 1908 when aircraft were first showcased as a part of the Paris Motor Show. In that year a specialized air show took place at the Grand Palais from September 25th to October 17th. This event attracted around 100.000 attendees who came to witness the offerings presented by 380 exhibitors. Before World War I four similar events occurred. After a pause, the air show resumed in 1919. Has been held every two years since 1924 except for disruptions caused by World War II. Following the war, the event made a comeback in 1946. Has been scheduled in numbered years starting from 1949 onwards. While the Grand Palais remained a venue flight displays began taking place at Paris Orly Airport in 1949. By 1953 the show shifted its location from Grand Palais to Le Bourget. The popularity of this event skyrocketed during the 1960s. It has been internationally recognized as a leading benchmark, for aviation since the 1970s (Obrazcova, 2017, Jun 17).

In the year 2023, the event was a massive convergence of exhibitors, professionals, and the general public. It boasted the participation of 2500 exhibitors from 46 countries. These exhibits sprawled across a vast 125.000 m² of space, comprising exhibition halls, chalets, and static displays. This space also accommodated an impressive lineup of 150 aircraft. Over the

course of the week, the event saw an influx of 300.000 visitors, with 130.000 unique professional attendees, 43% of whom came from outside France, cumulatively marking 210.000 entries. The general public also turned up in significant numbers, with 170.000 visitors, bringing the week's total footfall to a staggering 380.000 entries. In terms of official delegations and media coverage, the event was widely covered by the media, with 1850 journalists from 75 countries accredited for it. A testament to the show's significance in the aviation and defense sectors, approximately \$150 billion worth of contracts were inked during its duration (Dubai Air Show, n.d.).

2.3.3. Farnborough Airshow

The Farnborough International Airshow made its entrance into the aviation industry at a later time compared to its counterparts. It held its first event in 1948, after sporadic shows organized by the Society of British Aircraft Constructors, which began in 1932 at Hendon Aerodrome. These shows took place annually until 1936, then took a break and resumed in 1946, eventually evolving into the Farnborough show in 1948. Starting from 1962, the show adopted a biennial schedule. During the period leading up to the 1970s, the show prominently showcased aircraft manufactured in Britain. Significant aircraft debuts included the de Havilland Comet in 1949, followed by the Bristol Barbizon and Vickers Viscount in 1950. The event saw the presence of the Comet 4C, BAC 1-11, and Vickers VC10 by 1962. In 1970, the Concorde made its first appearance at Farnborough, only a year after its premiere in Paris. With more than 1500 exhibitors, 100.000 m² of exhibition space, a static aircraft and flying display, and over 80.000 visitors over the trade days, Farnborough Airshow stands as one of the largest air shows in the world (Farnborough International, n.d.).

The air shows are significant for enthusiasts' because they provide with the opportunity to witness the mesmerizing aerobatic displays and precision maneuvers performed by skilled pilots, igniting passion for aviation. Additionally, airshows often feature a diverse array of aircraft, including rare and historic planes, allowing avgeeks to get up close and personal with these remarkable machines. Beyond the aviation spectacle, airshows also serve as a meeting ground for the aviation community, fostering connections, knowledge-sharing, and a sense of belonging among avgeeks. In essence, airshows are not just events, they are a source of inspiration, camaraderie, and celebration for aviation enthusiasts.

3. Aviation Enthusiasm and Special Interest Tourism

Special interest tourism is a distinct subdivision of the broader tourism industry. It targets individuals seeking particular experiences or engagements tailored to their unique interests, hobbies, and passions, making it different from all-encompassing mass-market travel. Its purpose is to cater to those eager to explore in-depth certain features of a destination or an activity (Rittichainuwat, 2018: 8). The term SIT emerged in the 80s however the act of traveling because of special interests is nothing new. The first acts of tourism can be attributed to special interests. For example, the travel for the Olympic Games or religious festivals in antiquity can be considered as SIT as well (Douglas et al, 2002: 4). According to Aggarwal, Bubsy and Huang, the key characteristics of SIT can be listed as follows:

- SIT is motivated by a new desire to engage in new or existing interests in novel or familiar location,
- SIT is the opposite of mass tourism,
- SIT is undertaken for a specific or distinct purpose,
- SIT emanates from the desire to deliver a more sustainable form of tourism,
- SIT involves flexible delivery, market segmentation and advances in technology (Aggarwal et al, 2018: 4).

According to Brotherton and Himmetoğlu, the special interest tourists' have several attributes. Those are listed below:

- Constituting a minority of the travel population,
- They are usually from middle to high economic income groups,
- They are generally less price sensitive compared to general interest tourists,
- They tend to be sophisticated and experienced travelers,
- They have high expectations related to the event and activity. But do not care that much about the accommodation,
- Adventurous, allocentric and do not like to follow the majority,
- Have no specific social obligations for their travel. They don't need to be "socially acceptable" with their travels,
- They are able to choose alternative destinations for their travels (Brotherthon and Himmetoğlu, 1997:18).

Aviation enthusiasts' traveling to destinations for reasons mentioned above, fits every definition of the SIT. These individuals possess a deep passion for aviation, which fuels their desire to explore specific destinations and immerse themselves in their interest. With their specialized knowledge, they have an ability to identify unique aircraft, grasp the significance of aviation history, and participate in niche aviation events. This passion driven travel not only contributes to the local economy but also gives rise to distinct preferences and needs, such as seeking accommodations close to airports or prioritizing visits to places with aviation significance. Furthermore, their involvement in local and global communities of fellow enthusiasts fosters vibrant events and gatherings.

In recent years, the travel rates among avgeeks, aviation enthusiasts, have notably increased. This surge can be attributed to factors like easy access to flight information online, strong online aviation communities, affordable air travel options, and the desire to experience aviation-related events and attractions. As a result, avgeeks are traveling more frequently to witness airshows, visit aviation museums, and connect with fellow enthusiasts, contributing to the growth of tourism. This increase can be seen through the attendee numbers of some popular airshows:

Dubai Air Show	72.000 (2017)	84.043 (2019)	104.000 (2021)
Paris Air Show	322.000 (2017)	500.000 (2019)	Canceled Due to Pandemic (2021)
Farnborough Air Show	73.000 (2018)	Canceled Due to Pandemic (2020)	80.000 (2022)

Sources: dubaiairshow.aero, farnboroughairshow.com, siae.fr

In conclusion, the population of avgeeks is steadily growing, and their enthusiasm for traveling to various destinations and aviation events is on the rise. It is evident that greater attention should be directed toward catering to the needs and interests of avgeeks in the field of tourism, both within the industry and in academic research.

4. Türkiye's Potential for the Aviation Enthusiasts

Türkiye holds significant appeal for aviation enthusiasts due to its unique position at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. This strategic location means that its airports, especially in Istanbul, witness a diverse array of aircraft from numerous global airlines. The recently inaugurated Istanbul

Airport, intended to be one of the world's busiest in terms of passenger traffic, is a testament to the country's expanding aviation footprint. Prior to this, Atatürk Airport served as a bustling hub teeming with aviation activity. Furthermore, other cities like Ankara, Izmir, and Antalya also boast major airports that see a mix of domestic and international carriers. All these factors combined make Türkiye a rich tapestry of aviation activity, providing ample opportunities for enthusiasts to indulge their passion.

For spotters, Istanbul has always stood as a hub given its strategic location. The Atatürk Airport used to be the preferred spot due to runway 17R/35L's clear visibility from an accessible public route. This encouraged many spotters to converge near this area with hopes of enjoying visual contact with flying aircraft. However, following the shutdown of Atatürk Airport and the inception of Istanbul Airport was not a letdown for the spotters. The new airport offered spotters a dedicated lounge. Moreover, Istanbul Airport hosts some of the rarest airlines and aircraft. For example, The Tehran to Istanbul route is notably busy, bringing a lot of Iranian aircraft to the tarmac. Due to sanctions imposed on Iran after the Islamic Revolution, the country has been unable to acquire new aircraft for a long time, meaning many of their planes are older and rarer models. For Western enthusiasts who may find traveling to Iran challenging, Istanbul offers the best opportunity to photograph these unique aircraft. Beyond this, Istanbul Airport also hosts airlines from around the globe, ensuring a rich diversity of aircraft models and designs. Türkiye also has a great selection of aviation museums. Some of the most important museums of Türkiye are listed below:

4.1.1. Istanbul Air Force Museum (Yeşiköy-Istanbul)

After the end of World War I, there were initiatives to create an aviation museum, in Türkiye by gathering kinds of aircraft including planes built by Germans. However, many of these planes suffered damages either during transportation or in the War of Independence which caused a delay in establishing the museum. In 1960 General İrfan Tansel, who was the Chief of Air Force at that time revived the idea. As a result, Türkiye's first air museum was opened in Izmir Cumaovası in 1971. However, due to its remote location and other logistical issues, the museum needed relocation. By 1978, after considering factors like location and visitor potential, the decision was made to relocate near the Air Force Academy. Construction for the new museum began in 1977 and was completed in 1983, with interiors designed by Mimar Sinan University and the Istanbul Provincial Culture, Display and Monuments Directorate. The updated Air Museum was inaugurated on Oct. 16, 1985, by Chief of Air Staff General Halil

SÖZER. In the aircraft hangar and outdoor area, various aircraft and helicopters used by the Turkish Air Force are on display. In the Memorabilia Hall, there are personal items belonging to individuals synonymous with aviation history. The Engine Section houses various engines from propeller-driven and jet aircraft. The Weapons Hall displays various weapons used throughout aviation history and those in use today, along with information related to the development of aerobatic teams in Türkiye. In the Clothing Hall, imitations of uniforms worn by aviators from the Ottoman era to the present day are presented to visitors. The museum also includes a library (available to authorized researchers), a conference (cinema) hall, a cafeteria, and a souvenir sales section (Istanbul Air Force Museum, n.d).

4.1.2. M.S.Ö Air and Space Museum (Sivrihisar- Eskişehir)

The M.S.Ö. Air and Space Museum, known as M.S.Ö Hava ve Uzay Müzesi in Turkish, is situated within the Sivrihisar Aviation Center in Eskişehir, Türkiye. It is open to the public every day except for Mondays, and admission is free of charge. The museum boasts a collection of both airworthy historical aircraft and static displays. As for its location, the museum is directly linked to the western apron at the Sivrihisar Aviation Center. This allows airworthy aircraft to easily exit the hangars and perform display flights. To enter the museum, visitors use the B gate of Sivrihisar Aviation Center. The museum itself comprises four hangars, housing a wide range of exhibits that span from engines to dioramas to various aircraft. Additionally, the museum building houses the Aeronautical Information Service office and a museum store. The museum's collection of airworthy aircraft includes notable examples such as the North American P-51 Mustang "Ferocious Frankie" with serial number 44-13704, the Douglas DC-3 "Turkish Delight" with serial number 2204, the North American T-6 Texan "Happy Hour" with serial number SA079, the Boeing-Stearman Model 75, the Antonov An-2 with serial number 17805, and the Cessna 195. Furthermore, the museum serves as a venue for aviation-related events, including the Women and World Aviation Symposium, which was scheduled for March 2020 (Museum, n.d.).

4.1.3. Ankara Air Force Museum (Etimesgut-Ankara)

The Ankara Air Force Museum is a military aviation museum operated by the Turkish Air Force. It is located in Etimesgut, Ankara, covering an area of 64.321 m² (692.350 square feet). The museum displays a range of military aircraft, including MIG series planes, and features indoor exhibits related to the history of aviation in Türkiye and the world. Visitors can

also explore cockpits of the Lockheed T-33 and Northrop F-5 aircraft. The museum is open every day except Mondays, from 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM local time. It was inaugurated on September 18, 1998, in the presence of Sabiha Gökçen, Türkiye's first female combat pilot and Atatürk's adopted daughter (ankarahavamuzesi, n.d.). Türkiye also hosts several air shows. Those shows are listed below:

4.2.1. Teknofest (Various Locations)

Teknofest, Türkiye's sole aerospace and technology festival, is co-organized by various pivotal national technology entities. Launched in 2018 at Istanbul Airport, the festival encompasses technology competitions, air shows, concerts, and other events to foster technological interest and highlight Türkiye's technological transformation. In its inaugural year, it attracted 4333 teams and 20.000 participants across 14 categories. By 2019 at Istanbul Atatürk Airport, participation grew to 17.373 teams and 50.000 competitors from 122 countries in 19 categories. In 2020, hosted by Gaziantep Middle East Fair Center, numbers rose to 20.197 teams and 100.000 participants across 21 categories from 84 countries. The 2021 edition at Atatürk Airport saw 44.912 teams and 200.000 participants from 111 countries in 35 categories. In 2022, Teknofest Black Sea at Samsun Çarşamba Airport featured 40 tech competitions, with over 154.000 teams and 600.000 participants from 107 countries. That same year, an international edition in Azerbaijan's Baku Crystal Hall had 1010 teams and 5636 competitors across 10 categories (Teknofest, n.d).

4.2.2. Istanbul Air Show (Atatürk Airport- Istanbul)

The Istanbul Airshow, a biennial event hosted in Istanbul, Türkiye, focuses on the civil aviation markets in Eurasia and the Middle East. This prominent exhibition has been organized by AIREX since 1996. The Eurasian market presents several notable challenges, including significant investments in Türkiye's civil aviation and airport sectors, alignment with global aviation and airport regulations, the privatization of state-owned airline and terminal operations, the emergence of private airlines, air-charter, and air-taxi companies, a growing trend of private aircraft usage for business and general purposes, ongoing airport construction, renovation, and modernization efforts, evolving financing and management models, the imperative to enhance training facilities for various aviation roles, and the rising number of air travelers to and from the region (Istanbul Air Show, 2022, May, 9).

In conclusion, Türkiye holds immense potential for aviation enthusiasts, offering a diverse range of experiences and attractions. Istanbul, as a major aviation hub, boasts two international airports where avgeeks can observe a wide array of aircraft from around the world. The country's rich aviation history is celebrated in various aviation museums, which house impressive collections of aircraft and aviation artifacts. Additionally, Türkiye hosts the biennial Istanbul Airshow and Teknofest drawing aviation enthusiasts and professionals from across the region. The country's geographical diversity, from bustling cities to serene coastal regions, provides unique plane-spotting opportunities.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

This paper has explored the growing phenomenon of aviation enthusiasts' involvement in the realm of special interest tourism. Into the motivations, experiences, and contributions of these passionate individuals who seek to immerse themselves in the world of aviation. Throughout the examination, it has become evident that aviation enthusiasts are a formidable force in the tourism industry, contributing to the economic and cultural aspects of destinations they visit. As seen, their pursuit of aviation-related experiences goes beyond mere hobbyism; it forms an integral part of their identity and passion. By engaging in aviation-centric tourism activities, these enthusiasts not only satisfy their curiosity and deepen their knowledge but also foster a sense of community among themselves. Furthermore, aviation enthusiasts have proven to be valuable assets to local economies, often flocking to aviation museums, airshows, and aviation-related events. Their presence generates revenue, supports businesses, and aids in the preservation of aviation heritage. As such, tourism stakeholders and destinations should recognize and harness the potential of this niche market. In the future, the role of aviation enthusiasts in special interest tourism is likely to expand. The advent of new technologies, the resurgence of air travel, and the continual evolution of the aviation industry will provide enthusiasts with even more opportunities to engage with their passion. However, it is crucial for the tourism industry and aviation community to collaborate effectively to ensure that these enthusiasts' unique needs and interests are met.

Upon analyzing the results obtained during the research, it can be inferred that aviation enthusiasm can be categorized as a special interest tourism activity. For future studies, direct interviews with the participants can be conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods, which can help gather qualitative data in accordance with the participants' opinions. These data can be utilized in the tourism industry to influence and motivate tourists to participate in such activities.

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