

Yacht Tourism in the Tricity Area: A Comparative Study of Gdynia, Gdańsk and Sopot

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Citation: Ecer, Z.C., Visca, S.R., Petris, L.M., Wendt, J.A., & Grama, V. (2025). Yacht Tourism in the Tricity Area: A Comparative Study of Gdynia, Gdańsk and Sopot. *Geosport for Society*, 22(1), 69-77. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gss.2207-132>

Article history: Received: 13.04.2025; Revised: 25.05.2025; Accepted: 02.06.2025, Available online: 11.06.2025

Abstract: Poland's northern regions, particularly the Tricity metropolitan area of Gdańsk, Sopot, and Gdynia, play a crucial role in the nation's yacht tourism and shipbuilding industries. Renowned for its maritime heritage and advanced yacht production capabilities, Poland is a leading European hub for manufacturing luxury yachts and outboard motorboats. This study examines the dynamics of yacht tourism in the Tricity area, highlighting the impact of geographical features, infrastructure, and natural conditions on yacht activity and distribution. The findings underscore Gdynia's prominence as the most advantageous location for yacht tourism, thanks to its naturally protected harbour created by a coastal spit. Gdańsk benefits from the Martwa Wisła River, offering sheltered docking areas, while Sopot, despite its recreational appeal, lacks the geographic advantages present in the other two cities.

Keywords: yacht tourism, Tricity area, coastal geography, maritime infrastructure, tourism dynamics

Introduction

Poland is Europe's largest producer of outboard motorboats and a key player in luxury yacht manufacturing. Much of its production is centred in the northern regions, including Pomerania (Gdansk, Gdynia), Western Pomerania (Szczecin), Warmia-Masuria (Ostroda, Olecko, Gizycko), and Podlasie (Augustow). Boasting a strong maritime tradition and advanced shipbuilding expertise, Poland is home to 112 yacht builders employing nearly 49000 workers and 121 marine equipment and accessory manufacturers employing an additional 6800 people.

In Poland, which the Baltic Sea strongly influences, summers are neither excessively hot nor dry. Particularly in the northern regions, maritime effects moderate the climate. Wide, flat, sandy beaches along the Baltic coastline create opportunities for sea tourism during the short summer season. This is also a significant

contributing factor to the mutual growth of yacht tourism (Duczyc & Wendt, 2019). Furthermore, the coastal cities of Gdansk and Gdynia (Rembarz, 2016; Karzyński, 2018), which constitute the focus of this study, are among the country's largest ports and trade centres (Atasoy et al., 2017a).

The coastal cities of Gdansk, Sopot, and Gdynia play a pivotal role in Poland's yacht tourism industry, each contributing uniquely to the region's appeal. With its rich cultural and historical heritage, Gdansk attracts visitors interested in a blend of tradition and modernity. Sopot, famous for its iconic pier and vibrant leisure activities, is a relaxation and water sports hub. With its strong maritime legacy and cutting-edge nautical events, Gdynia caters to yacht enthusiasts seeking modern facilities and dynamic competitions.

Tourism development, especially in regions with distinctive natural or cultural resources, is increasingly influenced by seasonal dynamics, technological innovation and economic dependencies. Recent studies highlight how tourism infrastructure and environmental conditions shape the spatial distribution of visitors and regional attractiveness, especially in areas dominated by specialized forms of tourism, such as winter sports or cultural heritage (Herman et al., 2021a and b; Caciora et al., 2021). Tourist perceptions and mobility behaviour are essential in underpinning tourism management strategies (Herman et al., 2021c), and long-term trend analysis provides valuable insights into tourism flows and future development directions (Caciora et al., 2024). These findings provide a relevant conceptual and methodological framework for analysing coastal tourism dynamics, such as those observed in yacht tourism in the Tricity area.



Figure 1. Location map of the work area

The Tricity metropolitan area, comprising Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot, is located within the Pomeranian Voivodeship in northern Poland. Spanning a combined area of 414.81 square kilometers, these cities are situated along the southern coast of the Baltic Sea, at approximately 54°26'N latitude and 18°33'E longitude (Map 1). Their proximity and shared geographical features create a unified urban region with distinct

roles and contributions. As the largest and oldest city in the Tricity area, Gdańsk is the capital of the Pomeranian Voivodeship. Gdańsk's extensive port facilities have historically facilitated trade and cultural exchange between Northern and Western Europe. The Martwa Wisła (Dead Vistula), a significant branch of the Vistula River, connects the city to Poland's interior, reinforcing its role as a vital trade and logistics hub. Situated northwest of Gdańsk along the shores of Gdańsk Bay, Gdynia has evolved from a small fishing village into a modern port city. This transformation, particularly after Poland's independence in the early 20th century, positioned Gdynia as a centre for shipping, logistics, and industry. Its port, one of the largest on the Baltic Sea, complements Gdańsk's maritime infrastructure and supports regional economic activities, solidifying the Tricity's importance as a key economic zone. Positioned between Gdańsk to the southeast and Gdynia to the northwest, Sopot is a coastal town renowned for its tourism and leisure industries. Defined by sandy beaches and the Baltic Sea's scenic coastline, Sopot attracts domestic and international visitors. Its central location within the Tricity region and its proximity to natural attractions such as the Tricity Landscape Park enhance its appeal as a destination for recreation and cultural activities (Cieplińska & Jarosz, 2021).



Figure 2. Aerial view of the Gdynia Yacht Port - modern infrastructure and high density of boats (Source: <https://yachtstyle.co/country-profile-poland-2022/>)

Modern cities, as chaotic arenas where culture, identity, and symbols coexist and compete, also serve as fertile grounds for diverse lifestyles and cultural richness (Türkoğlu & Elmastaş, 2022). Similarly, the coastal cities of Gdańsk, Sopot, and Gdynia exemplify this dynamic through their yacht tourism. Each city, with its unique cultural and historical identity, contributes to a vibrant local economy shaped by the demands of the yachting industry. These urban spaces foster economic microzones centred around marinas and tourism and reflect the cultural diversity and modern lifestyles of yacht tourism.

This study aims to comparatively analyse the development of yacht tourism in the Tricity area (Gdynia, Gdańsk and Sopot) by examining the influence of natural geography and infrastructure on yachting activity, under the hypothesis that Gdynia, due to its sheltered natural harbor, will register the highest concentration of yachts; Gdańsk will present a moderate level due to river access; and Sopot, lacking natural advantages, will rely mainly on artificial facilities and recreational attractions.

Methodology

This study employed a comparative approach to analyse yacht tourism across the cities of Gdansk, Sopot, and Gdynia during three key periods: before the long weekend, during the long weekend, and after the long weekend. The primary focus was observing yacht numbers, categorising them into "with vessel" and "without vessel," and identifying movement and distribution patterns among the three cities. These observations served as the foundation for deriving statistical data.

To achieve this, data were systematically collected and analysed using statistical methods. These methods enabled the quantification of key variables and the identification of trends over time. The comparative approach was central to the study, as it facilitated the evaluation of differences and similarities in yacht activity between the three cities and across the specified periods. Visual tools such as maps, charts, and graphs were employed to enhance the clarity and interpretability of the data. By leveraging a combination of these techniques, the research aimed to offer meaningful insights into the dynamics of yacht tourism and its fluctuations in response to temporal and locational factors.

Results and discussions

A study assessed the distribution and characteristics of yachts in three locations: Sopot, Gdynia and Gdańsk, across three different periods before, during, and after a long weekend.

Table 1. The number of yachts in Gdansk, Sopot and Gdynia on the first research, second and third

Number of yachts	Gdansk			Sopot			Gdynia		
	Total	Without vessel	With vessel	Total	Without vessel	With vessel	Total	Without vessel	With vessel
25.04.2024	28	24	4	25	18	7	198	157	41
02.05.2024	50	40	10	39	28	11	204	136	68
09.05.2024	46	37	9	76	54	22	250	153	97

In Sopot, the first observation, conducted on April 25 (before the long weekend), recorded 25 yachts, seven of which were accompanied by vessels. The second observation, conducted on May 2 (during the long weekend), showed an increase to 39 yachts, 11 of which had vessels. The third observation, carried out on May 9 (after the long weekend), recorded a further increase to 76 yachts, with 22 accompanied by vessels (Table 1-2).

In Gdynia, the first observation (April 25) identified 198 yachts in total, with 70 on the left side (11 accompanied by vessels) and 128 on the right side (30 accompanied by vessels). This resulted in a total of 41 yachts. The second observation (May 2)

recorded 204 yachts in total, with 94 on the left side (9 accompanied by vessels) and 110 on the right side (59 accompanied by vessels), resulting in a total of 68 yachts with vessels. The third observation (May 9) showed a significant increase to 250 yachts in total, with 90 on the left side (23 accompanied by vessels) and 160 on the right side (74 accompanied by vessels), summing up to 97 yachts with vessels (Table 1-2).

In Gdańsk, the first observation (April 25) recorded 28 yachts, 4 of which were accompanied by vessels. The second observation (May 2) showed an increase to 49 yachts, 10 of which had vessels. However, the third observation (May 9) recorded a slight decrease to 46 yachts, 9 of which were accompanied by vessels (Table 1-2).

Table 2. Total number of yachts in the cities on three dates

Date	Gdansk	Sopot	Gdynia
25.04.2024	28	25	198
02.05.2024	50	39	204
09.05.2024	46	76	250
Total	124	140	652

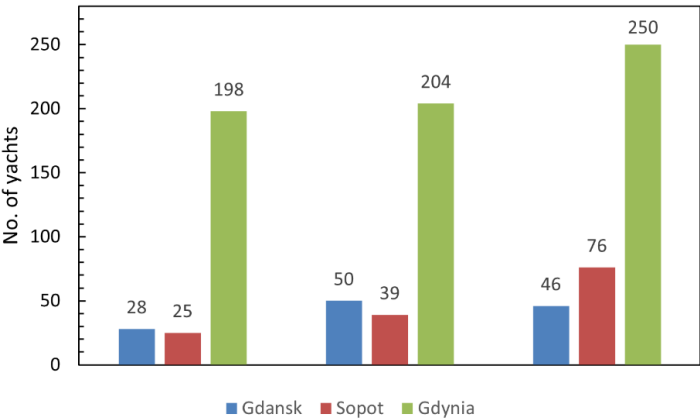


Figure 3. Comparison of the number of yachts in Gdańsk, Sopot and Gdynia before, during and after the long weekend

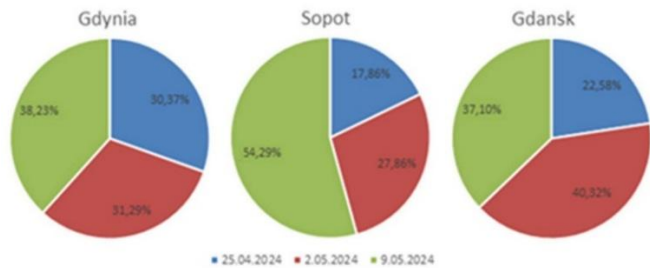


Figure 4. Percentage distribution of yachts observed in Gdynia, Sopot and Gdańsk at the three time points

Throughout the surveys, Gdansk accounted for 124 yachts, with 101 classified as "without a vessel" and 23 as "with a vessel." Sopot reported 140 yachts, comprising

100 "without a vessel" and 40 "with a vessel." Gdynia showed the largest number, with 652 yachts, including 446 "without a vessel" and 206 "with a vessel" (Table 1-2).

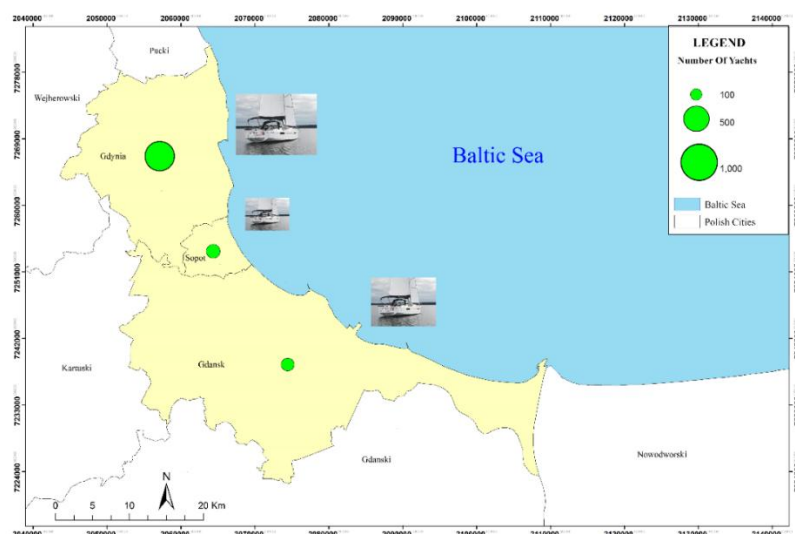


Figure 5. The number of yachts observed in Gdynia, Gdańsk and Sopot

When examining the coastal geographical features of the three cities, the prevailing wind direction in the north of Gdynia has enabled the formation of a coastal spit extending southeastward from the western part of the Gulf of Gdańsk. Based on the direction of the spit, the prevailing wind direction is NW-SE. The winds blowing from the Baltic Sea significantly impact the coastal shaping, or morphology, of the northern Polish coastline. These coasts are low-lying and shallow, with prominent depositional coastal forms (Komorowski, 2007; Kuliński & Kuliński, 2010).

The coastal spit and the water body to its south act as a barrier, breaking the impact of high waves from the open sea and creating a natural harbour. This feature makes Gdynia less affected by high waves thanks to the coastal spit.

Therefore, the sea and beaches are the most popular natural attractions in Gdynia. During the maritime tourism season, the average sunshine duration in Gdynia ranges from 228 to 236 hours, one of the highest among all coastal regions. Additionally, Gdynia and its water basins are characterised by the highest wind speeds in the area (m/s) and the most significant number of days with wind speeds exceeding 8 m/s. Such excellent wind conditions significantly contribute to the growth of maritime tourism and sailing activities (Atasoy et al., 2017b).

On the other hand, Gdańsk is more exposed to these high waves, as it lacks the natural wave-breaking effect provided by a coastal spit like the one in Gdynia. Therefore, it is less protected for small sea vessels, such as yachts, making it riskier for yachts to dock, with a higher chance of capsizing. For this reason, the number of yachts in Gdynia is higher, whereas it is lower in Gdańsk.

However, in Gdańsk, the Martwa Wisła River provides an outlet to the sea, which allows small vessels like yachts to operate. The city's location along this river ensures

that certain mooring areas are shielded from sea waves, providing a safe and protected zone for vessels of specific sizes to dock away from the impact of waves.

Additionally, the connection between the Gulf of Gdansk and the river network, along with the channels of Żuławy and the Great Masurian Lakes, supports the expansion of yachting activities in both the Gulf of Gdansk and the Masurian Lake region (Wendt & Wiskulski, 2017).

Conversely, Sopot does not have a natural harbour or a protected river system like Gdynia or Gdańsk. It only has artificial wave breakers and yacht shelters. Therefore, Sopot lacks the natural advantages that geography provides for yacht tourism. In Gdynia, the sea is calmer, allowing yachts to move freely, which is a positive outcome of forming the coastal spit.

As a result, Gdynia hosts a more developed yacht tourism industry and a significantly higher number of yachts than Gdańsk and Sopot. The natural coastal spit in Gdynia creates a calm and sheltered marine environment, ideal for yacht docking and operation. This geographical advantage protects yachts from high waves and offers favourable conditions for leisure and maritime activities. In contrast, Gdańsk, while benefiting from the Martwa Wisła River, cannot provide the same level of natural protection for yachts due to its greater exposure to open sea conditions. Similarly, Sopot relies solely on artificial wave breakers and lacks the inherent natural features that promote yacht tourism. Consequently, Gdynia stands out as the most favourable destination for yachts and yacht-related activities among the three cities, thanks to its naturally sheltered harbour and tranquil waters.

Conclusions

This study highlights the distinctive contributions of Gdynia, Gdańsk, and Sopot to Poland's yacht tourism sector, each influenced by their unique geographical and infrastructural features. Gdynia emerges as the leading hub for yacht tourism, driven by its naturally sheltered harbour, calm waters, and modern maritime facilities, offering optimal conditions for docking and yacht-related activities. Gdańsk, while lacking a natural spit, capitalises on the Martwa Wisła River to provide safe docking options for small and medium-sized vessels, sustaining its relevance as a cultural and logistical center. Conversely, Sopot relies on artificial structures such as wave breakers, limiting its capacity to compete with the natural advantages enjoyed by the other cities.

The comparative data analysis highlights Gdynia's dominance in yacht tourism, with higher numbers of yachts overall and those accompanied by vessels. This superiority stems from its advantageous maritime conditions and comprehensive infrastructure. In contrast, Gdańsk and Sopot primarily attract yachts through their cultural and leisure offerings rather than their geographical features.

By analysing patterns of yacht activity before, during, and after a long weekend, this study underscores the critical role of geography and infrastructure in shaping yacht tourism dynamics within the Tricity area. The findings advocate for continued investments in maritime infrastructure and strategic development to enhance Poland's growing reputation as a premier destination for yacht tourism in the Baltic Sea region.

Author contributions: Conceptualisation, J.A.W. and V.G.; methodology, S.R.V. and L.M.P.; formal analysis, Z.C.E. and S.R.V.; investigation, Z.C.E., S.R.V. and L.M.P.; writing - original draft preparation, Z.C.E., S.R.V. and L.M.P.; writing - review and editing, J.A.W. and V.G.; supervision, J.A.W. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Not applicable.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this paper may be obtained at the request of the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest

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