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The prevailing state and the opportunities for international wellness tourism

Case: Spa Hotel Härmä

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Thesis abstract

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Title of thesis: The prevailing state of international wellness tourism at Spa Hotel Härmä and opportunities for its improvement

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The aim of this thesis was to study whether Spa Hotel Härmä, located in Kauhava, has opportunities for international wellness tourism. The target was to find out what opportunities and challenges the internationalisation of wellness tourism at Spa Hotel Härmä would involve. Another aim of this study was to try to define the current state of internationalisation at Spa Hotel Härmä.

This thesis utilises qualitative research methods, and the information collection method used was semi-structured interview. Interviews were done with employees working in higher positions at Spa Hotel Härmä. This way, it was possible to exploit their professional skills and work experience.

The research results revealed that the internationalisation of wellness tourism is possible at Spa Hotel Härmä if complete wellness tourism packages are created from the service supply and they are marketed to countries that are the easiest to reach. In terms of internationalisation, Sweden is the most important country for Spa Hotel Härmä, but there might be opportunities also regarding Norway and Russia. Closer cooperation with different organizations and committing the staff of Spa Hotel Härmä to internationalisation would improve the opportunities for internationalisation of Spa Hotel Härmä and of the entire area of Kauhava

The number of international customers in Spa Hotel Härmä is relatively small, and that segment mainly consists of other companies' guests, who have traveled from Sweden, Norway and Russia. The company has hardly invested in internationalisation, which is not included in the company's main targets at the moment. This thesis surveyed the opportunities and challenges of international wellness tourism at Spa Hotel Härmä and also regionally. If Spa Hotel Härmä wants to invest in international tourism later in the future, the company will be able to take advantage of the research results of this study.

Keywords: Spa Hotel Härmä, wellness tourism, internationality, internationalisation

SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

Opinnäytetyön tiivistelmä

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Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli tutkia, onko Kauhavalla sijaitsevalla Härmän Kylpylässä mahdollisuuksia kansainväliseen hyvinvointimatkailuun. Tavoitteena oli tutkia, millaisia mahdollisuuksia ja haasteita hyvinvointimatkailun kansainvälistämiseen Härmän Kylpylässä liittyy. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli myös pyrkiä määrittelemään Härmän Kylpylän tämänhetkinen kansainvälisyyden tilanne.

Opinnäytetyössä hyödynnettiin kvalitatiivista tutkimusmenetelmää ja tiedonkeruumenetelmänä käytettiin teemahaastattelua. Tutkimuksen haastattelut suoritettiin Härmän Kylpylän korkeimmissa asemissa toimiville työntekijöille. Näin pystyttiin hyödyntämään heidän ammattiosaamistaan ja työkokemustaan.

Tutkimuksen tuloksista selvisi, että hyvinvointimatkailun kansainvälistäminen on mahdollista Härmän Kylpylässä, jos palvelutarjonnasta muodostetaan hyvinvointimatkailun kokonaisuuksia ja ne markkinoidaan helpoiten saavutettaviin kohdemaihin. Ruotsi on Härmän Kylpylälle tärkein kohdema kansainvälistymisen suhteen, mutta mahdollisuuksia saattaisi olla myös Norjan ja Venäjän suhteen. Kansainvälistymisen mahdollisuuksia sekä Härmän Kylpylässä että koko Kauhavan alueella voidaan parantaa tiiviillä yhteistyöllä eri toimijoiden kanssa sekä sitouttamalla koko Härmän Kylpylän henkilökunta kansainvälistymiseen.

Kansainvälisten asiakkaiden kävijämäärä tällä hetkellä Härmän Kylpylässä on suhteellisen pieni, ja kyseinen segmentti koostuu pääosin muiden yritysten asiakkaista, jotka ovat tulleet Ruotsista, Norjasta ja Venäjältä. Yritys ei ole juurikaan panostanut kansainvälisyyteen, eikä se ole tällä hetkellä oleellinen tavoite Härmän Kylpylälle. Tämä opinnäytetyö kartoitti Härmän Kylpylän kansainvälisen hyvinvointimatkailun mahdollisuuksia ja haasteita sekä yrityskohtaisesti että alueellisesti. Mikäli kansainväliseen hyvinvointimatkailuun halutaan Härmän Kylpylässä panostaa enemmän tulevaisuudessa, voi yritys käyttää tämän tutkimuksen tuloksia hyväksi.

Avainsanat: Härmän Kylpylä, hyvinvointimatkailu, kansainvälisyys, kansainvälistäminen

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thesis abstract.....	2
Opinnäytetyön tiivistelmä.....	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
Terms and Abbreviations.....	6
Tables, Figures and Pictures	7
1 INTRODUCTION	8
1.1 Background of the thesis.....	8
1.2 The aim of the thesis.....	8
1.3 Structure of the thesis	10
2 WELLNESS TOURISM	11
2.1 Definition of wellness	11
2.2 Connection between health-care tourism and wellness tourism	13
3 WELLNESS TOURISM IN FINLAND	16
3.1 The basic study of the Finnish well-being and wellness tourism	16
3.2 The strategies for developing the Finnish wellness tourism	18
3.3 The program services of the wellness tourism in Finland.....	22
3.4 Customer segmentation of the Finnish wellness tourism	23
4 INTERNATIONALISATION OF A FINNISH TRAVEL COMPANY .	26
4.1 Product.....	26
4.2 Price.....	28
4.3 Place.....	30
4.4 Promotion.....	32
5 INTERNATIONALISATION OF SPA HOTEL HÄRMÄ.....	36
5.1 Spa Hotel Härmä.....	36
5.2 Research problem and research method.....	38
5.3 Information gathering method	41
5.3.1 Semi-structured interview	43
5.3.2 The interviewees.....	45

5.4 Collection of data	48
5.5 Analysis of data.....	49
5.6 Reliability and validity	52
6 RESEARCH RESULTS.....	55
6.1 Wellness tourism.....	55
6.2 Spa Hotel Härmä's wellness tourism products and services	59
6.3 Internationalisation	62
6.4 The opportunities of internationalisation in Spa Hotel Härmä	65
6.5 The challenges of internationalisation in Spa Hotel Härmä.....	68
6.6 The challenges and opportunities of Kauhava area	70
7 CONCLUSIONS.....	73
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	80
APPENDICES	84

Terms and Abbreviations

RAY	Raha-automaattiyhdistys (Finnish Slot Machine Association)
KELA	Kansaneläkelaitos (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland)
MEK	Matkailun Edistämiskeskus (The Finnish Tourist Board)
TYKY	Työkyvyn ylläpito (competence improving activities)
WHO	World Health Organization
PR	Public Relations
AIDA	Attention, Interest, Desire and Action
USP	Unique Selling Proposition

Tables, Figures and Pictures

Figure 1 Expanded wellness model	13
Figure 2 Categorisation of wellness tourism	15
Figure 3 Recommendable terms of the Finnish wellness components	17
Figure 4 The Lakeudelle.fi campaign	79

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the thesis

Health and well-being are essential subjects in today's society. Very often, it is said that the problems of modern-day people are related to such things as tiredness, obesity, stress, nervousness, high cholesterol levels and too salty or greasy food. Also the everyday working rhythm is too intense and life in its entirety is too hectic. Because of the busy lifestyle, people are longing for well-being, relaxation and balance in physical and mental well-being (Joppe 2003).

People's interest in health and well-being has grown all over the world due to better living conditions (Jänkälä 2014). This can clearly be seen especially in the wealthy societies, where the health and wellness services have developed into a profitable and diverse business as the total market value of the whole sector is estimated to be around two trillion-dollar order of magnitude globally. As a counterbalance of the hectic lifestyle, consumers want to take care of their well-being and promote everyday coping also while having a vacation. Moreover, as the aging of the population promotes the wellness trend strongly, both demand and supply in the wellness business are expected to continue strong growth.

Also in Finland the theme of wellness comes to the question as travel companies are developing and productising their services. As for internationalisation, the Finnish travel companies have a lot of potential towards foreign tourists as this segment also has the best growth potential (MEK 2014). As a tourist country, Finland is still quite unknown and, for that reason, active marketing becomes valuable; marketing is in most cases a Finnish travel company's biggest stumbling block when it comes to internationalisation.

1.2 The aim of the thesis

This thesis studies the prevailing state and the future opportunities for international wellness tourism in a case company located in Kauhava, a Finnish city in Southern

Ostrobothnia. The author chose Spa Hotel Härmä to be the target company of the study. The main focus of this study concentrates on finding out whether this company already has international travelers, is this company interested in developing as an international tourist attraction, what challenges there might be; what are those factors which are supporting or preventing Spa Hotel Härmä's opportunities for becoming international. Because Spa Hotel Härmä is specialised offering services related to wellness tourism, the author chose this field of travel as a supporting service of the study. The thesis studies international travel to this target company in the field of wellness tourism.

The author has determined what the thesis should study by defining the most important questions. The research problem of this thesis asks: **Is there an opportunity for Spa Hotel Härmä to become an international wellness tourism destination?** For solving out the research problem, the author defined two questions: *1) What kind of opportunities Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?* and *2) What kind of challenges Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?* This thesis uses the methods of qualitative research. The results of the study are concentrated on semi-structured interviews.

Because it is difficult for a spa hotel alone attract international travelers, the author also has to study what kinds of other attractive program services nearby are offered to the tourists. It is important to estimate and study whether Spa Hotel Härmä's place of domicile, Kauhava, has all the resources needed in international tourism. The writer of this thesis also studies whether there are cooperation projects supporting regional tourism and could these collaborations contribute international tourism in Kauhava and Spa Hotel Härmä.

This thesis concentrates on to the opportunities and challenges of international wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä. The research results of this study form from the opinions of the Spa Hotel Härmä's personnel. The aim of this thesis is not to discover how internationalisation should be done in Spa Hotel Härmä. The results of this thesis are based on a singular company and for that reason they may not apply to other travel companies in Finland. The results of this thesis can be useful to Spa Hotel Härmä in case that the company aims at international wellness tour-

ism in the future and in turns out to be necessary to evaluate the opportunities and challenges of international wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The first chapter of the thesis presents the background of the thesis and the aim of the thesis. *The second chapter* of the thesis includes theory concerning wellness tourism in general. *The third chapter* defines what are the main characteristics of the Finnish wellness tourism, what kind of elements does the Finnish wellness tourism supply form from, what are the strategies of Finnish wellness tourism and how the customer segmentation of the Finnish wellness tourism is like. *The fourth chapter* of the thesis briefly presents Visit Finland's guidebook for internationalisation in terms of 4P model. *The fifth chapter* concentrates on to the empirical part of the study. *The sixth chapter* presents the research results of the semi-structured interviews. *The eighth chapter* contains the author's conclusion about the research results.

2 WELLNESS TOURISM

Today people want to care for themselves. Searching for balance and harmony between the body, mind and soul has become an important goal (Joppe 2003). Wellness tourism is a growing form of travel everywhere around the world (MOT & MTI [Ref. 2 April 2014]). This way of travel promotes peoples' coping better in their busy everyday life in this fast-paced and complex world. Nevertheless, there are also other reasons for the increasing popularity in wellness tourism. The high demand is also a result from people having more leisure time and alongside, more money to spend. Also the aging of the population drives people using more wellness travel services.

2.1 Definition of wellness

In 1948, The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as follows (WHO 2003): "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." However, the word health has then diverse as in 1959, an American psychiatric Halbert L. Dunn introduced the concept of high-level wellness. In this concept Dunn (1961, 4–5) defines high-level wellness as "an integrated method of functioning which is oriented toward maximising the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where he is functioning." Dunn's theory is considered being the starting point of the complementation of the health term (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 42).

The word wellness is a combination of the words well-being and fitness (well-ness) (Nahrstedt 2004, 183–184). It means one's consideration towards the needs of the body, mind and soul. Today one's health can be determined as a dynamic process in which the main aim is to reach high-level wellness. The current understanding of wellness can be seen as an individual lifestyle which one follows. In this case, everyone is responsible for their own choices and lifestyle as it comes to reaching out for personal overall well-being. People have different methods to operate in a way that they can reach their personal highest level of wellness. The high-level well-

ness is strongly connected with those actions which are possible to control. These actions are such as exercising, eating, managing stress and experiencing the surrounding environment. Nevertheless, wellness can be seen as an extensive subject as it often depends on people's personal opinion of its meaning (Välikangas 2002). One's well-being or wellness is always strongly connected to the prevailing place, time and culture.

The expanded wellness model, established by Müller and Lanz-Kaufmann (2001), emphasises the importance of a person's individual responsibility for oneself. The middle of the circle in the model (see Figure 1) describes a person's responsibility for oneself. The circle after that shows the elements of the body, soul and mind (physical fitness, beauty care, nutrition, diet, rest, meditation, mental activity and learning). As independently taking care of these elements, one can promote his personal health and welfare. Finally, the outermost circle reflects those external factors which also have an effect on one's personal well-being; social contacts and environmental sensitivity have an important role as speaking of one's welfare. All in all, reaching a balance between the factors mentioned above is the main purpose in the Müller's and Lanz-Kaufmann's wellness-thinking.

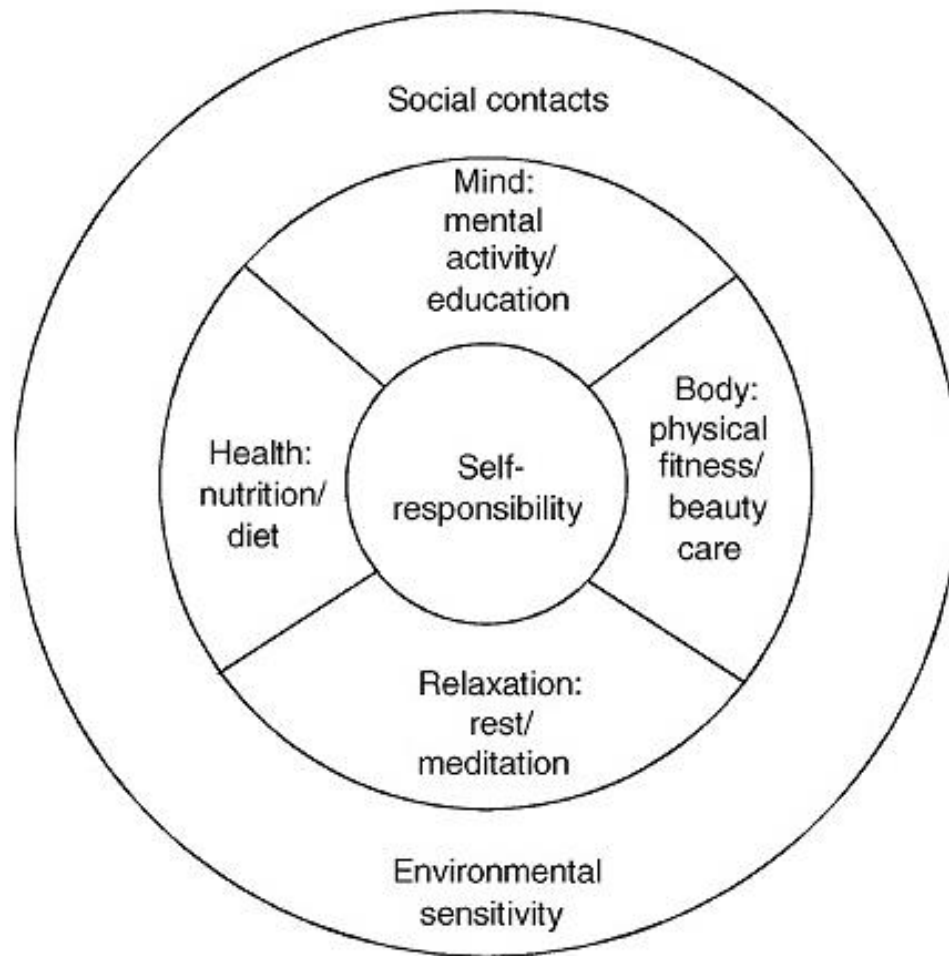


Figure 1 Expanded wellness model
(Müller & Lanz-Kaufmann 2001, 6).

2.2 Connection between health-care tourism and wellness tourism

In the history, according to Nahrstedt (2004, 181–182), there are three stages which describe the development of the health culture based on leisure time. The first era was in 10 000 BC–500 AD when the European spa culture developed from sacred springs to Roman spas. The second era is from 500 AD till the end of the 20th century. At that time European leisure time concerning health and spa culture, democratised from bath places (Badestuben) to national and international spas. The third era describes the present way of thinking as the global European leisure time health culture is now strongly connected to wellness-thinking. This way of thinking understands a person's health as a complete well-being.

Health-care tourism is an old way of travel, whereas the quite recent term of wellness tourism has lately been added beside it (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 139). There has been a lot of confusion about these two terms as they are very often mixed with each other. The contents of health-care tourism and wellness tourism are partly overlapping concepts as them both are connected to sports, nature and culture tourism. Nevertheless, there are features that discriminate the wellness travel from health-care travel.

Health tourism generally can be seen as a traveler's way to take care of one's physical or mental health (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 139). It concentrates on to those activities which help maintaining or improving the person's state of health. During this kind of vacation, one takes part into different healing treatments and other services which are promoting or improving the health (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 39–40). Health tourism can be described as certain kind of main headline which divides in to two categories; medical or health-care tourism and well-being or wellness tourism (*see Figure 2*).

Medical or health-care travel concentrates on taking care of one's health (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 141). It can also mean a person's rehabilitation after an injury or illness. The most common places arranging these kinds of treatments in Finland have usually been health spas and rehabilitation facilities which alongside produce tourism services. In Finland, typical actors in this kind of field are social holiday organisations (e.g. Lomakotien liitto and Lomaliitto) and their owned spas or rehabilitation facilities as well as the associations for disabled people and their services. The money for health-oriented rehabilitation usually comes from public body. For example The Finland's Slot Machine Association (RAY) and The Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA) are financing medical and health-care travel. These travel products consist of the medical rehabilitation as well as the entertainment during the holiday.

Besides medical treatment, health-care tourism consists of work place health promotion (TYKY) (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 142). These projects and programs are arranged in the workplaces. The main aim in these kinds of programs is to promote employees' health in a way that they can stay longer in working life. As considering physical fitness, employees are guided how to improve muscle tone,

stamina, motor skills and sportive readiness whereas mental condition is taken care by learning how to relax, cope in life and adapt upcoming changes. Moreover, these programs contain learning how to do better cooperation and teamwork at workplaces but also demonstrate the significance of the interaction between the colleagues.

Wellness tourism is a wider concept in which the person's well-being is considered in a more comprehensive way (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 140). Different activities in travel as, for example, enjoying the peace of nature, physical exercise or taking treatments in spas, are all ways to reach for individual well-being. A person's well-being is always dependent on their individual needs and personal targets. For that reason, there are usually many alternative well-being program services to choose from.

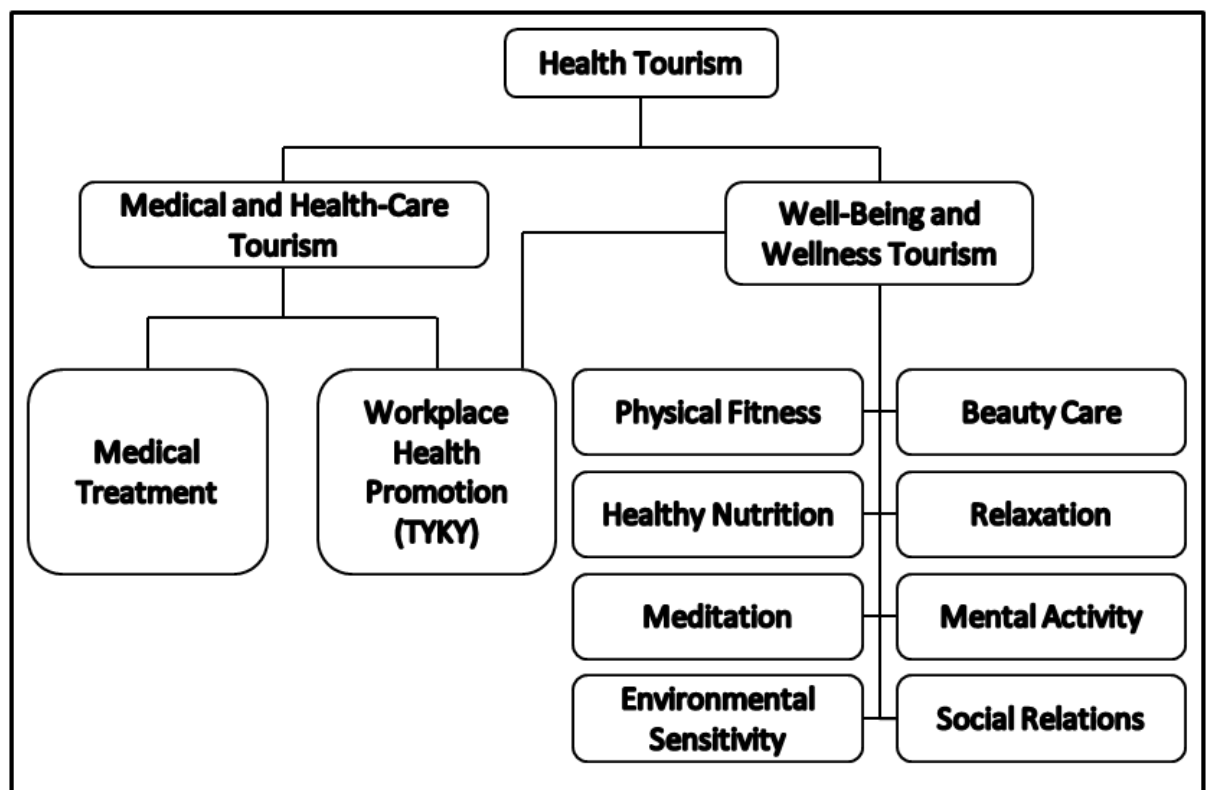


Figure 2 Categorisation of wellness tourism (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 69).

3 WELLNESS TOURISM IN FINLAND

When it comes to Finland's attraction in wellness travel, it is strongly in touch with the lakes and forests, sauna and natural peace (MEK [Ref. 2 April 2014]). The Finnish brand includes words such as purity, nature, well-being and high technology. The diversity of the Finnish nature can be seen as one of the most significant strengths when thinking about wellness travel. If Finland concentrates on the country's own natural wellness elements, it can separate itself from the international product supply and profile itself as a target country of wellness travel.

3.1 The basic study of the Finnish well-being and wellness tourism

In 2005, the Finnish tourist board (MEK) did a basic study concerning the Finnish well-being and wellness tourism and one part of this survey concentrated on the Finnish wellness tourism supply (MEK 2005). Altogether 96 companies containing 39 spas and 57 other companies such as sports institutions and companies offering sauna and relaxation-based services took part in this study. In the survey, the companies were asked to describe their service supply and to categorise their offered services to well-being products, wellness products, work place health promotion (TYKY) products and health-care tourism products.

Generally in Finland the terminology of the health and wellness tourism is not yet neither complete nor disambiguated whereas in the other countries different terms are used as meaning very often the same things as in Finland (MEK 2005). Although this was also clearly seen in the results of the survey, it was important to accomplish the study to help reaching a common understanding of the terminology of health and wellness tourism among Finland and other countries. As a result of this study of the Finnish well-being and wellness tourism, wellness components were divided into sports, beauty care, recreational treatments, natural treatments, nature care, water baths, sauna services and to quieting down.

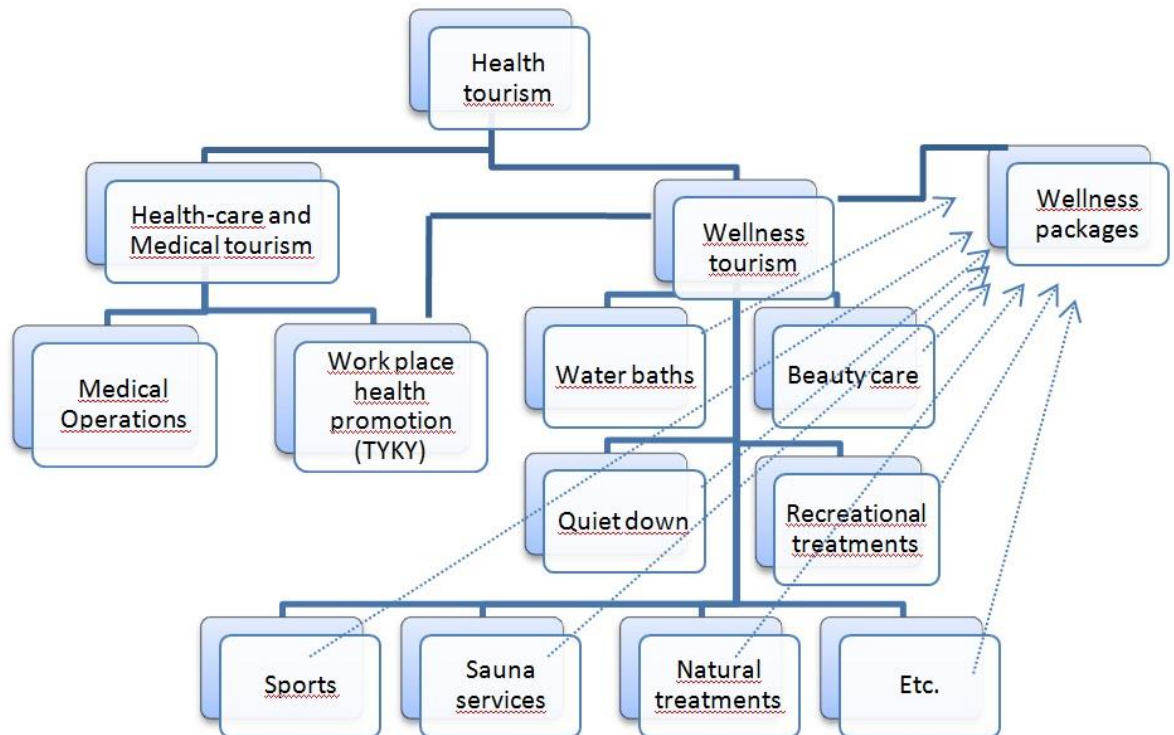


Figure 3 Recommendable terms of the Finnish wellness components (MEK 2005, 55).

Another study done in 2004, concentrated on the current state of the spa services in Finland (Riekkinen 2004). In this survey instead, wellness based services were categorised to beauty care services, treatment services, exercise services, rehabilitation services and water services (baths, etc.). As beauty care services, different kinds of cosmetology treatments such as facials, hand and foot cares as well as make-up services and hairdresser services were mentioned. The treatment service category includes different kinds of water baths, massages, clay treatments, peat treatments, cold and salt rooms and so-called soft treatments such as acupuncture, aromatherapy, shiatsu and zonal therapy. As opportunities to exercise the respondents mentioned outdoor activities; walking, jogging and skiing and activities in the gyms contained for example group exercise classes; gymnastic exercises, calming classes and all kinds of water exercises. Rehabilitation services were usually targeted for war veterans, customers having work-related diseases, customers taking part in to work place health promotion programs, and people having rehabilitation because of different kinds of diseases or disabilities. To the water services involved pool services such as swimming pools, hot tubes, cold- and hot-water pools, outdoor swimming pools and waterslides.

As a whole, in Finland, the supply of the service modules containing wellness components usually concentrates on different kinds of spas and spa hotels (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 150–153). Even though the offered wellness supply in the Finnish spas contains services concentrating on mental activeness and meditation, the majority of the supply is strongly focused on the well-being of the body via exercising, beauty care treatments, and relaxation. For that reason the problem might be that there are not enough services offered in the markets based on the well-being of the soul and mind.

3.2 The strategies for developing the Finnish wellness tourism

In January 2015, the ministry of employment and the economy in Finland draw up the roadmap for growth and renewal in Finnish tourism for 2015–2025 (TEM [Ref. 11 January 2016]). This strategy is planned to support the growth and regeneration of Finnish tourism and the main purpose is to make Finland the number-one tourist destination in Northern Europe by the year 2025. In the roadmap, wellness tourism is chosen to be one of the top themes as one of the targets is to turn Finland into a top country of wellness tourism. The ministry of employment and the economy offers several different measures to support the goals of the roadmap. The first strategic projects to start out are supporting growth and renewal between the years 2015–2018.

Also Visit Finland has together with its cooperation partners created a project called wellness tourism strategy to international markets 2014–2018 (Visit Finland 2014). It was prepared in the Finnish tourist board center (MEK) with the help of wide range of travel specialists. The main focus of the strategy is to reform the Finnish wellness tourism and to expand it to international markets. The wellness tourism strategy to international markets 2014–2018 describes the most important attractions Finland has in the global tourism market. Those attractions mentioned are such as nature, water, forests, wilderness areas and all the offered activities related to them. Those factors would apply to the wellness travel as customers are seeking for high-quality and comprehensive experience services which provide physical and mental satisfaction.

The Finnish tourism supply consists of attractions such as nature, wildlife observation, experiencing sauna, calming down and silence (Visit Finland 2014). On the other hand, as a counterweight to these, are Finnish cultural supply and different kinds of organised events. Tourists often travel to Finland to spend time and relax in cottages, rejuvenate in spas and for example to enjoy the environment in a hotel located in the middle of the nature. Furthermore, Finnish wellness tourism has a special feature as often outdoor exercising is strongly connected to it, and even though exercising is not so popular among the wellness tourist in other countries, for example some of the international wellness packages are marketing Nordic walking specifically as a Finnish product. The same applies as talking about the sauna experiencing as it can be seen one of the main contents of Finnish wellness tourism. Also travel companies abroad have already for years used the Finnish sauna as a selling point in their wellness tourism marketing.

When it comes to pure nature, silence or sauna, Finland has the best opportunities to provide those wellness products and services to the travelers (Jänkälä 2014). The Finnish inhabitants spend a lot of time outdoors and have not yet lost touch with the nature. Wandering in the woods, picking mushrooms and berries, using modern technology in the gyms and relaxing in sauna and afterwards it, they are all normal daily routines in Finland. For this reason, all these elements could be used building easy to buy and attractive wellness products to meet also the international demand. All in all, the main aim is to offer customers comprehensive good feeling both, in physically and mentally.

In the wellness tourism strategy to international markets 2014–2018, the project team categorised Finnish wellness tourism in to three different groups; health and fitness exercising, indulgence and Finrelax® (Visit Finland 2014).

Health and fitness exercising consists of things such as: nature and exercising (uphills and lows, walking in the swamps etc.), activities supporting better physical condition, Finnish sports equipment and measuring devices (e.g. well-being and sports technology), personal trainers, health-promoting programs and fitness tests (incl. competence improving activities). Finland is the only country where wellness products contain the habit of reaching good well-being via exercising (Visit Finland 2015). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that wellness tourist still differs

from an activity tourist as the main motive of the vacation is not taking part in to different kinds of activities but taking care of personal health and condition. In Finland, wellness tourism consists of light sport activities which are professionally instructed such as Nordic walking, backpacking, snowshoeing, walking, skiing, swimming, ice swimming and golf. In this product theme, customer often wants to get into better physical condition with the help of exercise machines and personal trainers. In Finland there are high-quality health and exercise products offered by e.g. the national sports institutes.

Indulgence category refers to Finnish beauty treatments, Finnish skin care products, excellence and quality, personal and professional service, clean and quiet treatment areas and promote of health and well-being (Visit Finland [Ref. 11 January 2016]). Indulgence products have high quality standards and they are often targeted to adult wellness travelers who visit spas (Visit Finland 2015). In spas, customers use wellness services such as for example facials, massages and herbal baths. In this product theme, personal, professional and high-quality services as well as high-standard operational environment are highlighted. In indulgence, product development is in a key position as it seems that the quality of the Finnish spas does not always meet the requirements of the international wellness tourists.

The third category, **Finrelax®**, is one of the three concepts prepared by the work group of Visit Finland (Visit Finland [Ref. 11 January 2016]). The project manager of this wellness tourism program is Kiti Häkkinen and as a project manager works Cené Ferjani. The Finrelax program is part of the roadmap for growth and renewal in Finnish tourism for 2015–2025 compiled by the ministry of employment and the economy. The main objective of the project is to make Finland the number one country in wellness tourism.

Finrelax aims to regional development by supporting development of travel projects and helps to implement them (Visit Finland [Ref. 11 January 2016]). It also encourages travel resorts to collaboration and supports networking among different projects. It helps promoting product development with workshops, trainings and not only produces but also forwards travel companies the best tools which are already tested in practice. Nevertheless, Finrelax also supports companies' sales

by helping them to target their marketing better. The target countries of the Finrelax program are: Russia, Germany and Japan. The other followed wellness tourism markets are in Sweden, France, United Kingdom and China.

According to Visit Finland (2015), Finrelax consists of six different wellness attraction elements which are:

- The Finnish sauna and the sauna tradition
- Wellness cottage housing
- Clean water
- Forests and light activities in the nature
- Silence, space and light
- Locally produced, healthy food

Every tourist visiting Finland should be able to experience the sauna, no matter whether spending the time in countryside or in the cities (Visit Finland 2015). Moreover, for wellness tourist, sauna bathing is highly recommended as it's believed to have positive health implications. As spending time in the summer cottages, the wellness tourist can easily experience the basic elements of the Finnish wellness vacation; sauna, silence, the nature and clean water. At the cottage, the traveler can enjoy the peace of the nature and refresh oneself among different leisure time activities. Clean water is probably the most precious natural resource Finland has. The clean waters and beautiful landscapes of Finland relieve stress of the traveler but they also give an opportunity to different kind of water activities which can promote physical and mental well-being. Forests in turn, have always been an important place for Finnish people to recreate, exercise and empower. Furthermore, berries and mushrooms in the forests are an important element in wellness tourism as they are considered to be the Finnish power food. The peace of the Finnish nature and the silence of it, they both help one to break away from the hectic pace of everyday life and relieve stress. Besides, in this context, the word mindfulness appears as it is one of the key elements in wellness tourism. Lastly, Finrelax listed the food as an important element especially in wellness tourism as wellness traveler, during the vacation, often wants to take care of one's health and well-being by eating clean and locally produced healthy food. All in all,

in order for Finland to stand out from the international wellness supply and to profile as a target country of wellness tourism, the product supply must be concentrated on to the country's inherent wellness elements. Whether the product development and marketing of the Finnish wellness tourism is aiming at the international markets, companies must regenerate their products to be more wellness oriented and considerate the international traveler in all of their informationing.

3.3 The program services of the wellness tourism in Finland

Activities promoting the well-being of the traveler's body, soul and mind, form from a complete service module of the wellness tourism product which primarily implement the product's service concept (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 146–147). For example for those customers who travel because of work, travel companies' accommodation service products can also contain wellness modules. In this case the intention is to offer the customer an added value as the customer has an opportunity to relaxation during the staying. As the requirements of working life are increasing, customers who travel for work are now more willing to buy these kinds of additional services among the accommodation services. Generally this can clearly be seen in work place health promotion (TYKY) oriented vacations as these usually contain usage of wellness services.

On the other hand, wellness tourism can also contain program services from other tourism categories. According to Verhelä and Lackman (2003), the tourism program services can be categorised to six different groups: nature-based tourism, sports tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, culinary tourism (food and beverages) and wellness and health tourism. It is possible to develop a wellness tourism product from the many types of program services mentioned above (Suontausta & Tyni 2005, 148–149). For example, light exercising outdoor can be part of the wellness product as well as actively doing different kinds of sports activities. Even some of the adventure tourism based service programs can be connected to wellness tourism module. Products in adventure tourism are divided into four groups according to the level of difficulty; easy, normal, challenging and very challenging activities. Usually mentally and physically easy performances can be part

of the wellness product whereas combining for example snowmobile safari as a part of wellness product might be more difficult. Also cultural tourism has elements which can be connected to wellness tourism. For example, companies can offer their customers service modules such as a change to take part in doing arts or handcrafts to promote the customer's mental sharpness. Service modules of the culinary tourism in turn have a relevant meaning in the wellness product as healthy food is an important part of the vacation of the wellness traveler. On the whole, as planning the wellness tourism product and connecting different forms of service programs in to it, one must remember what the demands of the product's service concept are. For that reason, to a sports traveler offered service modules are planned and implemented differently than modules aimed at the wellness traveler.

3.4 Customer segmentation of the Finnish wellness tourism

The market segment is a certain section from the total market (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 74–75). The purpose of the segmentation is to divide the total markets in to smaller sections, because it is impossible for an individual company to reach all the possible customers. For this reason, travel companies also divide their markets in to different kinds of sections of which are cheaper and more efficient to reach out for. As criteria for these sections, travel companies can use for example geographical and demographical criteria or dividing segments in to work and holiday tourism and to individual and group tourism. Moreover, markets can be segmented according to the classification of the tourism demand; every market segment forms its own demand type with individual characteristics. Segmentation as a marketing strategy is based on to the needs of the customers and therefore travel companies try to search for those segments of customers who have the same needs. With this in mind, travel companies develop each segment products which address the needs of the customers, plan availability solutions for the products according to the purchasing patterns of the customers and also design and implement measures of the marketing communications in a way which helps to reach the target groups more efficiently.

In the planning and implementation of the practical marketing, markets are divided into several segments according to different criteria (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 75–76, 78). Segmentation is effective when every individual segment is clearly defined with chosen criteria. Through the chosen criteria segments are separated so clearly that the products can be differentiated suitable for each segment. The most traditional basis of segmentation travel companies use can be categorised as follows: socio-demographic factors (e.g. age, gender, life-cycle of the family, education, and profession), geographical factors, psychographic (e.g. personality and lifestyle) factors or factors related to behavior (e.g. values and needs). The basic idea of the segmentation is that with particular focus on different factors, a same product can be marketed to different target groups. Therefore, it is essential that each target group identifies the product and the products itself meets the criteria of the target group.

As thinking about the segmentation of the Finnish wellness tourism, must wellness traveler be identified (Health and Wellness Tourism - Global 2004, 21). One of the reasons why it has been difficult for the tourism industry to offer a precise picture of the wellness traveler is that there is large amount of wellness products and services available. However, it seems that a typical wellness traveler is a middle-aged person whose children are already adults and have become independent. This person usually has a higher level of education and better income than the average traveler. Wellness traveler also travels a lot and requires a good quality of the services and products. In this segment, traveler spends money on personal well-being as the common understanding is that only healthy body can meet the demands of the current working life. A typical wellness traveler enjoys life, pays for those services which promote health and takes full responsibility of the personal well-being. Nevertheless, besides taking care of the personal well-being, these consumers also want to enjoy while having a vacation, exercise, explore the local culture and actively plan their own staying.

All these characteristics mentioned above are usually very clearly seen among the European wellness travelers (Health and Wellness Tourism - Global 2004, 21). Generally, there are four different segments of the wellness tourists. The first segment is young travelers (20–24 years) with middle class incomes. This seg-

ment uses services based on fitness and wellness the most and it is predicted that the significance of these travelers in wellness tourism will grow. The second segment consists of the young families who have small children and the commonly spend their holidays in spas and water parks. At the start of the twenty first century, the portion of this segment was small but also the amount of these travelers is expected to grow in the future. The third segment includes travelers aged from 40 to 50 years using preventive treatment services and going to spas for relaxation. At the moment, the meaning of this segment is really important in wellness tourism as prevention of different illnesses is considered being significant. The fourth segment group forms from older generation aged from 50 to 60 years who use traditional medical treatment services. These travelers usually have longer staying in their destination, from two to three weeks as the treatments are usually planned for a longer staying. Also the meaning of this segment is considered being really important at the moment in wellness tourism.

4 INTERNATIONALISATION OF A FINNISH TRAVEL COMPANY

In 2014, Visit Finland published a tourism entrepreneur's guidebook for internationalisation (Visit Finland 2014). The aim of the book is to offer practical tools to those companies in the tourism industry which are already selling their products abroad or are considering starting doing so. The guidebook presents what kinds of choices there are as for internationalisation when it comes to the product, pricing and distribution channels. Moreover, there is information considering the electronic marketing methods. In this guidebook marketing is presented in the 4P model (MEK 2014). The 4P model was established by Jerome McCarthy in 1960, and it has four competitive tools: product, price, place and promotion. For the travel companies it is important to understand, that marketing is not only selling and advertising. Successful marketing requires exploiting the whole 4P model in which all the competitive tools have an impact on each other.

As a travel company is planning to start operating in international markets, there are some requirements towards the company (Visit Finland 2015). The company's marketing methods can be effective only if certain basic preconditions are fulfilled. For this reason Visit Finland has during the year 2015 established criteria for internationalisation to the travel companies. This guideline helps a travel company to estimate the preconditions of internationalisation and their possible fulfillment inside the organisation.

4.1 Product

A product which is selling well in the national markets can also have potential in international markets if the product description is adapted properly and experience of the travel is highlighted to be the most important thing (MEK 2014). Instead of marketing separate parts, travel companies should offer complete packages with all the elements: accommodation services, food services, program services and their produced experience. The travel package sold internationally should last at least for couple of days. On the other hand, all of the travel company's products are not necessarily suitable for international markets. For example some products

and services which are strongly connected to the regional dialect or humor would need knowledge of the Finnish language and culture.

Succeeding in international markets requires efficient product development (MEK 2014). The products must also be remodeled and editable whether the market or competition circumstances change or the customers and their needs change. It is important to remodel the products in a way they meet the needs of the customers and target markets. Also the distribution channels have their own demands when it comes to the content of the product and pricing of the product. In export markets, quality, experience and reliability are the key elements. After all, the products have a life cycle which defines whether the old product should be remodeled or new products be produced. Reasons to this can be the current market situation or changed demand. All in all, product development is always continuous work.

Marketing can only be effective if an individualised product is aimed at the chosen target group (MEK 2014). This means that the product must arouse interest among certain customers. In international tourism markets there are tour operators who are concentrated on different kinds of themes of travel (e.g. wellness, culture, and experience). Also customers can be segmented due to e.g. residence, travel motives, consumer habits and phase of life. If the travel company is trying to reach out for senior travelers, the products must have some special contents for the chosen target group. An accommodation package in spa hotel can be suitable for different target groups as the other additional services meet the demands of the target group. For example, for senior travelers, alongside with the accommodation service, the spa hotel can offer wellness services and different kinds of lectures targeted for elderly persons work.

Travel companies usually have different kinds of product types to offer their customers (MEK 2014). The most common product types are packaged holidays, on request-products or guaranteed departures and independent travel products. Packaged holidays include guided tours and visitations in different destinations. It can be a round trip or a trip in which a customer stays in a same place. These kinds of holidays can be bought from a tour operator who has pre-selected the travel destination for the customer. Travel companies can offer to the tour operators so called on request products. In this case the booking is confirmed separate-

ly as the order is verified. As for guaranteed departures, a travel company chooses for their product one or more dates of departure. As the tourist operators then offer the product to their customers, a suitable group is more likely to get together and the trip will be implemented. Offering these guaranteed departures is often a good way for companies to start operating in export markets. Lastly there are those travelers who books accommodation forehand, go on excursions and explore the area independently. These kinds of travelers usually seek for lots of experiences and activities. As for these travelers, it is important for companies to productise their supplementary services forehand. For example nature trails can be productised to be attractive if there is enough information available about them work.

According to MEK (2014), there are lots of tools and instruments for companies to do product development. MEK (The Finnish Tourist Board) has prepared product recommendations for different kinds of themes. Via these recommendations travel companies can estimate whether their product's standard of quality meets the needs of an international customer. For example wellness tourism has certain recommendations when it comes to internationalisation. Because Finland is still quite unknown tourist destination in international markets, it is important that those companies which are aiming at international markets take their products' quality requirements into consideration. In this case quality does not mean the high quality of for example accommodation services but rather means whether the given promises in the products' marketing are redeemed.

4.2 Price

Price setting is a very important competitive tool for a travel company as it helps to guide the trade, develop the business, to compete and be successful (MEK 2014). In the global price competition the keys to success are packaging of the products, reliable distribution channels, transparency and intelligibility. Price and benefit are the basis for all commercial activities. Also in tourism business companies are offering their customers products from which the customer benefits. Tourism products are very often experiences which form from interlinked services. For travel

companies this means many challenges starting from estimating what are valuable parts to the customer. Travel companies should not leave the price and the benefit to guesswork because it can make the customer uncertain as defining the value of the offered products. Instead, the travel company can actively reach out for success by presenting the product and its price in a way that the customer is encouraged to make a purchasing decision. Price is the only marketing tool which does not require pre-investments. By changing the prices of the products, companies can strongly improve their market share and turnover.

There are four typical pricing models used in tourism business which are: production cost plus margin-pricing, distribution channel-pricing, dynamic pricing and price leading (MEK 2014). The first one is the most used pricing model in the tourism business. Pricing is also an important part in marketing. For example in psychological pricing the product's price is set to 99 Euros instead of 100 Euros. In this way the customer perceives the price much more affordable. Additionally, a travel company can give a customer for example a quality guarantee. In this case the customer would get the money back whether the promised does not apply.

When using tour operators, they usually require commission from selling the products (MEK 2014). There are no ready standards concerning the commissions and for that reason the amount is agreed between a travel company and tour operator. At first, the travel company defines the lowest possible net price or amount of commission and if the tour operator accepts one of them, they draw up a contract. There are different things from which travel companies should make agreement about with tourist operators and other distribution channels. For example if there is a sales target and it is reached, travel companies can pay so called override-commission to the tour operator.

The ongoing market situation in most cases drives travel companies to unhealthy and short-sighted price competition (MEK 2014). However, in the long run, it is not the best strategy. Instead of price competition, travel companies should concentrate on for example packaging. All in all, the fastest and the easiest way to affect to the demand of the product is pricing. A travel company can increase the value of the product in a way that the price is more easily accepted by the customers or price the product actively to get the best profit possible from the target groups. In

the best case, these two methods complement each other. Branding is one way to increase the value of the product and it also improves the opportunities to do pricing in a way that selling the products would give a better profit. No matter how the products are sold, pricing is needed when selling and reasserting the company's position in the market. Pricing can be used as a tool of marketing in the price competition. It offers options for travel companies to wisely increase the company's turnover. The classical challenge is to discover a price which customers approve and which also makes a suitable profit. Finding a suitable price is a continuous process as after all, there is a price which can maximise the profit. The more the price differs from the ideal price, the more clearly the relative profit gets smaller.

4.3 Place

Cooperation in distribution means the collaboration of tour operators, travel agencies, online travel agencies and transport companies (MEK 2014). These kinds of co-operations are important as a travel company is aiming at internationalisation. As choosing the right distribution channels, companies can directly affect their sales, result and structure of the clientele. This can be seen most clearly in the sales as one channel sells well during the whole year as other channel's sales varies according to the season. Secondly, to the result of the travel company, channels affect via sales and commissions. Lastly, the clientele is selected by the channels which are often used. For example, those tour operators and travel agencies which are specified in wellness products, they usually have their own clientele. All in all, in internationalisation it is important to know different kinds of distribution channels and their working methods. International trade has been traditionally started in cooperation with tour operators. Nowadays, the first steps to the international distribution can be also taken through various online channels. Information about the target countries' distribution channels and their special characteristics travel companies can find from the web page of The Finnish Tourist Board.

The Internet has changed the distribution of tourism products enormously as there is now a wide range of new channels such as companies' own websites, online

travel agencies, booking sites, regional sites and special portals (MEK 2014). Especially online booking is becoming more and more popular. In some markets and for some segments Internet is already the most important distribution channel; a large proportion of young consumers have never bought a trip from traditional travel agency. Online booking is considered being easier than the traditional way of booking a trip from a travel agency. In online booking, consumers can compare different kinds of options and book the trip in peace at home. Nevertheless, consumers also very often tend to think that do-it-yourself-trips are cheaper than other trips booked from the agencies.

The transparency of online channels has an effect on international pricing (MEK 2014). Customers can now compare the prices in different channels. Nevertheless, also the distribution channels themselves do this kind of comparison. On the other hand, online distribution channels are also useful for travel companies as on the Internet offers can be quickly put on sale and via the online travel agencies the company's sales can easily be accelerated. The most popular international online distribution channels for Finnish travel companies are: Booking.com, Expedia/Hotels.com, eBookers.com, Lastminute.com, HRS.de and Hotel.de. The costs of the supply chain consist of commissions and of those expenses which come from booking systems and presentation of the products to the distribution channels.

Even though distribution channel cooperation is significant, nowadays it is often very important to also sell directly (MEK 2014). Buying must always be easy to the customer and many traveler rather books accommodation without any go-betweens. Attitudes towards direct selling divides the customers to two groups: others think that booking directly is cheaper than the other options whereas others tend to keep bookings via travel agencies as a safer way. Both ways, direct selling and distribution channel selling have their rights and wrongs; it is impossible to unequivocally define which way is better.

Every modern travel company's website should have some kind of booking system, contact form or instructions on how booking request can be done by e-mail or by phone (MEK 2014). Real time booking system saves time and money because in that way travel companies don't have to deal each inquiry separately. Moreover,

in this case companies don't have to pay commissions. Booking and getting further details must be as easy as possible to the customers. Even though most of the selling would happen via other distribution channels, it is vital that the company's own websites are in good shape because most of the customers will view the website no matter how they booked the trip.

4.4 Promotion

Marketing communications are very often perceived being the actual marketing even though there are many other competitive tools in marketing (MEK 2014). The operational environment of marketing changes all the time. Nevertheless, some basic principles continue to apply also in the future. In marketing communications it is important to define what information should be passed on to the customers, how it is done, why it is done and to whom it is passed on. These questions will remain significant no matter what are the tools and technical operational environment. From the terminology of marketing, travel companies should know at least these three models: unique selling proposition (USP), AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) and elevator pitch.

Unique selling proposition means a unique selling argument which shows the product's competitive advantage (MEK 2014). In other words it explains how the product differs from the competitors. USP tells the consumer what is unique in the product, service or the price and how they are different from the competitors; it clarifies to the customer why it is worthy to buy the company's product. Every travel company should define for itself this kind of selling argument and use it as a reference when planning the marketing. The second model, AIDA, comes from the words attention, interest, desire and action. It starts from catching the customer's interest. After that customer's interest is concentrated on the product's characteristics, benefits and advantages. Thirdly the company should convince that the customer wants the product and it necessary for the customer. Finally the company must lead the customer to act and buy the product. All in all, AIDA is a simple model of what should happen when the customer sees the company's commercial. However, the same model can be used in every form of marketing communica-

tions. Last model, the elevator pitch is a short and compact sales talk in which the speaker must tell about the product to the potential investor or customer in thirty seconds. The elevator pitch is helpful in all kinds of selling situations: at the fair, in meetings and in sudden encounters.

The travel company's marketing material also has an important role because in most cases, it is the first contact with the customer (MEK 2014). The idea of the marketing material is to offer the customer a certain image of the company and define the customer's expectations. Printed marketing material includes brochures (incl. company's own and regional), price lists, newsletters, weekly programs, menus, greetings in the hotel rooms, instructions and tips. As planning these kinds of marketing material, travel companies should always pay attention to the target group. Even though some things can be taken for granted to the Finnish tourists, some things may need clarification when it comes to the international travelers.

Advertising has already for a while been going through remarkable changes as the significance of the online channels is continuously growing (MEK 2014). Advertising on the Internet can be useful in many ways as producing of the commercials is nowadays cheaper and they can be targeted to the right target groups more precisely for example with the help of affiliate marketing. Because of the good reporting tools, the reach of banner advertising, search engine marketing and newsletter communication is increasingly easier to measure. These kinds of reporting tools tell the company how many has clicked the advertisement or opened the message. Even though the online advertising is increasing, direct selling and other advertising are still important methods. The most essential thing is to find a suitable combination of advertising tools which meet the needs of the travel company.

Taking care of the media relations and other communications are not only big companies' PR operations as a smaller travel company can also do PR operations and gain visibility in channels which would otherwise be out of their reach because of high advertising charges (MEK 2014). Communications requires orderliness and it is good to think beforehand what subjects the travel company wants to bring out during the year. If a travel company for example wants to put an article to a Dutch outdoor-magazine, can company write the article by itself or get help from PR offices or other professionals. As the article is ready, the company can offer it

straight to the magazine or ask advice from Visit Finland or from tour operator partner who operates in the target country.

Another ways to do promotion are fairs and sales events (MEK 2014). At fairs companies can create images of their company, do business and establish cooperative relationships with other companies. On the other hand, at fairs companies can find out what competitors do and get new ideas from them. Sales events are suitable when doing business to business marketing. Moreover, there are lots of sales events arranged around the world. For example Visit Finland has traditionally arranged sales events directed to the distribution channels. In these events there are usually lots of domestic and foreign operators who offer commercial services for meeting different distribution channels. Visit Finland also arranges workshops with different kinds of themes. Workshops are sales events where chosen groups of buyers and sellers meet each others. All in all, the main aim of these kinds of sales events is usually networking.

Internet has revolutionised business communications as it enables fact-finding, interaction and making business in one location (MEK 2014). At its best, a travel company's own website offers their customers information about the products and the supply, opportunity to interaction but also makes booking and payment of the trip possible. As planning the websites for international travelers, travel companies should carefully think what the layout and the content should be like. The Visit Finland's guidebook for internationalisation consists of several tips how to plan websites for international users.

Finally there is the social media which has revolutionised the Internet (MEK 2014). In social media, in key position is the content created by the users. There are different community services from which the most famous are Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram and some famous blogs. In social media users share travel experiences, upload pictures from the trips for friends and other contacts but also ask tips for good accommodation services and restaurants. For small and medium-sized enterprises the social media also offers a new way of taking care of customer relationships. For example Facebook is a good tool for travel companies to manage customer relationships and it also helps keeping contact with interest groups and keeps networking simple. In the Finnish tourism industry

the most important tools in social media for small and medium-sized enterprises are Facebook and YouTube.

Reaching customers and potential customers in means of traditional way of advertising is getting more and more complex (MEK 2014). At the same time travel companies have to reach out for those consumers who buy the products on the Internet using computer, smartphone or tablet and are networked in social media. For that reason travel companies have to be visible in all of those channels in which customers can find the company from. In other words, for reaching the customer, company has to be where the customer is. If the company succeeds, customer can share the personal good experiences in the networks. In the best case the customer becomes a regular customer and this relationship can at least partly be taken care of in the social media. Nevertheless, being visible in the social media also affects on search engine listings. For example those companies which are active in the social media are better found on Google search.

5 INTERNATIONALISATION OF SPA HOTEL HÄRMÄ

The main focus of the study is to discover whether Spa Hotel Härmä already has international customers and is there an opportunity for the company to become international wellness travel destination. The study also aims at discover what could be the target countries for marketing for Spa Hotel Härmä and what challenges there might be as aiming for internationalisation. The author wants to find out *what are the factors which are supporting or preventing Spa Hotel Härmä's opportunity for becoming an international tourist destination.*

5.1 Spa Hotel Härmä

Spa Hotel Härmä is a health resort located in South Ostrobothnia, in the city of Kauhava. The sales manager of the hotel, Pasi Vainio tells (2016) that it was opened for customers in 1984 and the main operations in the beginning were concentrated on rehabilitation of the war veterans. Today Spa Hotel Härmä is the biggest rehabilitation centre for working population in western Finland. The spa implements social vacations and operates as a bellwether in improving the well-being of the working population. All in all, the hotel operates in four main sectors which are: rehabilitation operations, improvement in well-being at work, wellness services and hotel, restaurant, recreation and leisure time activities. In 2015, the turnover of the company was 13,8 million Euros and the occupancy rate of the hotel was approximately 82%.

The customer segments of Spa Hotel Härmä mainly consists of those customers who are ineligible for rehabilitation holidays offered by KELA, customers having rehabilitation preparation courses, customers having rehabilitation vacations offered by insurance companies and customers having partly supported holidays offered by different organisations such as Maaseudun Terveys- ja Lomahuolto ry, Solaris-lomat ry, Kotien puolesta keskusliitto ry, Svenska semesterförbundet i Finland r.f and Naiset yhdessä ry (Vainio 2016). Moreover, a big part of the customers consists of those who are having well-being at work oriented vacations and early rehabilitation directed holidays, holidays concentrating on renovation of the

persons' physical fitness and workplace health promotion oriented vacations. Lastly, there are those customers who pay for their selves: holidaymakers, businessmen, diners and customers who visit the spa for dance and restaurant services.

The hotel has altogether 155 hotel rooms including family rooms, suites and rooms which are suitable for disabled persons (Vainio 2016). Alongside with the accommodation services, Spa Hotel Härmä has several conference rooms, an auditorium for 105 people and leisure centre called Anssin Jussin Areena which is 1200 seated. Vainio (2016) tells that the latest expansion of the company was finished in 2012. The most remarkable changes were bigger swimming pool, for personal use bookable restaurant Banketti, playground for small children and the new wellness department where customers can enjoy different kinds of massages, baths and beauty treatments. The spa department of the hotel consists of a Finnish sauna, a Turkish sauna and so called "Hot stone sauna" which can also be booked for personal use with a banquette room. The spa has a 25-meter-long swimming pool for sports and physical exercising, a 17-meter-long swimming pool, a cold-water swimming pool and so called oasis swimming pool which has a modern whirlpool technology, a waterfall, and other massaging technologies. For the children, the spa has two warm watered swimming pools with a small water slide. Spa Hotel Härmä is specialised in promoting the well-being of its customers (Hemmottelu [Ref. 18 February 2016]). In the wellness department customers can enjoy a wide variety of well-being services such as different kinds of massages and various forms of baths. Customers are offered different kinds of cosmetic treatments such as facials, body care treatments, pedicures, manicures and also make-up, and hairdresser services.

Operating diverse leisure time activities is also one of Spa Hotel Härmä's main activities as various kinds of events and courses are arranged there (Liikunta ja vapaa-aika [Ref. 18 February 2016]). For example in Taitopaja, customers can not only attend to courses of arts and crafts but they can also buy materials and finished products from there (Tervetuloa Taitopajaan! [Ref. 18 February 2016]). The customers have many options to choose from when it comes to exercising (Liikuntahalli [Ref 18 February 2016]). Nearby Spa Hotel Härmä is a golf course where customers can not only play but also take courses to learn to play golf

(Härmä Golf [Ref. 18 February 2016]). In Anssin Jussin Areena it is possible to play badminton, volleyball, floor ball, table tennis and billiard or do other physical exercising as for example fitness boxing (Kuntoilu [Ref. 18 February 2016]). Moreover, in Anssin Jussin Areena customers can rent instruments for sports such as sticks used in Nordic Walking, frisbees, bats, sticks and balls for different games, heart rate monitors, snowshoes, kick sleds, kick bikes, gym sticks, mountain bikes and helmets, skis, canoes and life jackets and pedal cars (Anssin Jussin Areenan hinnasto [Ref. 18 February 2016]). Outside of the arena, it is also possible to play frisbeegolf (Luontoliikunta [Ref. 18 February 2016]). In Spa Hotel Härmä, customers can also take part in to different kinds of open air activities as there are several outdoor routes for e.g. biking, hiking and other exercising. Moreover, Anssin Jussin Areena also works as a venue for different kind of events such as concerts, expositions, meetings and exhibitions. Additionally, it can also be rented for different kinds of personal events (Tapahtumien paikka [Ref. 18 February 2016]).

5.2 Research problem and research method

The goal of this thesis is to find out of whether Spa Hotel Härmä has international customers and could it be possible for the company to become an international tourist resort. The research problem of this thesis is: **Is there an opportunity for Spa Hotel Härmä to become an international wellness tourism destination?** As for sub-research problems for solving out the actual research problem, the author defined two questions:

- 1) *What kind of opportunities Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?*
- 2) *What kind of challenges Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?*

Because of the nature of the research problem, it is important to choose the research method carefully. According to Kananen (2015, 67), the basic division of scientific approaches is based on two categories; qualitative and quantitative re-

search. After studying the research problem, the author of the thesis chose to use qualitative research method.

Qualitative research does not only help to understand the phenomenon but is also suitable research method when there is no information, theories or researches concerning the phenomenon (Kananen 2010, 41). Nevertheless, this research method is also suitable as the study concentrates on getting a deeper view of the issue. According to Kananen (2014, 16–17), qualitative research method aims to answer to the question: What is this about? It does not aim to generalise as quantitative research method does. Quantitative research method has a good understanding of the phenomenon as for example theories and different kinds of models. For that reason, quantitative research method always requires definition of the exact questions. As for qualitative research, there is only one big question: What is this phenomenon all about? It does not have detailed questions as quantitative research method has. Principal rule is that the less is known about the phenomenon, the more likely qualitative research method comes to the question. Creswell (2007, 38) defined the most typical characteristics for qualitative research methods as follows:

- The research takes place in its natural environment.
- The data is collected in interaction with the proper persons.
- The researcher operates as a collector of the data.
- The research material is collected from different kinds of sources.
- Analysis of the information data is inductive, recursive¹ and interactive
- The main attention is focused to the interviewees' perspectives, viewpoints and significances.
- The main idea is to get comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Qualitative research method is suitable in the following situations (Kananen 2014, 17):

1. There is no information, theories or researches about the phenomenon
2. Deeper view of the phenomenon is wanted

¹ Inductive means from practice to theory and recursive means reversible (Kananen 2014, 17).

3. New theories and hypotheses are created
4. Triangulation² is used
5. A good description of the phenomenon is wanted

Qualitative research method is based on words and sentences whereas quantitative research method is based on numbers (Kananen 2014, 18). Moreover, it does not aim to same kind of generalisations as quantitative research method does; the focus in qualitative research method is on concentrated on describing, understanding and giving an interpretation of the phenomenon. In other words, qualitative research method aims to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

In quantitative research method the research process is rectilinear (Kananen 2014, 18–19). In qualitative research process the analysing of the data is cyclical and does not have strict rules of interpretation. Analysis of the data is not the last stage in qualitative research as the whole research process consists of analysing in different stages as for example guiding the research process and information gathering. In qualitative research, the analysis of the gathered data defines when there is enough information collected. For that reason it is impossible in advance to define how much and what information or data should be collected. There must always be so much information collected that the research problem is solved and the researcher understands the phenomenon.

In quantitative research, for a start, the researcher defines a hypothesis (Kananen 2014, 19–20). During the research, the main aim is to discover whether the hypothesis holds true. In qualitative research in turn, new hypothesis are created all the time during the research. Qualitative research studies individual cases as quantitative research studies a number of cases. In qualitative research the main focus is to get as much information as possible from a singular case. In other words, the researcher deals with the case thoroughly in depth direction. That is also one of the reasons why the research results can't be generalised. The researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research when it comes to the information gathering and analysing process. In this case there is a direct contact be-

² Triangulation means a multi-method research frame in which different kinds of approaches, information gathering and analytical methods are used. For example some parts of the qualitative research can contain quantitative information gathering methods (Kananen 2014, 17).

tween the researcher and the studied target. The researcher goes to the field to interview (e.g. semi-structured interviews) or observe. In quantitative research those instruments are usually enquires. Qualitative research is very often descriptive. It means that the researcher is interested in the processes, meanings and understanding of the phenomenon with help of words, texts and pictures. The research methods also affect to the results of the study. Moreover, the logic of the qualitative reasoning is very often inductive which means a way to make sense of things by making specific observations and then drawing broad conclusions based on those observations.

This method was chosen after studying the research problem and its nature. The author assumes that qualitative research method gives a possibility to get a deeper picture of the opportunities for Spa Hotel Härmä becoming of international wellness tourism destination. Since the target of the study is a single case company, the results of the study can only be applied to the target company. Moreover, there are no previous studies existing concerning the internationalisation of wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä. The author thinks that there is a possibility to create new theories when it comes to the research problem. The main aim is to study the subject in its natural environment and collect information from the preselected target group as much and deeply as solving of the research problem requires.

5.3 Information gathering method

Case and development studies as well as action research are more commonly seen as research strategies rather than separate method-modules (Kananen 2015, 67). These methods do not have their own methodology because they exploit qualitative and quantitative researches. When it comes to case study, it is usually combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Still it is very often confused with qualitative research (Kananen 2015, 76). In case study, the main aim is to get in-depth and versatile understanding of the phenomenon and for that reason mixed methods are commonly used in the research. Qualitative and quantitative methodology methods are used for example in information gathering and analysis methods of a case study.

The author assumes that the necessary information concerning the research problem can be collected by using the data collection method of qualitative research. However, if it occurs that is no change to get enough information with data collection method of qualitative research, the author can also use methods of data collection of quantitative research. All in all, the main aim is to get as much information as possible.

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009, 71–73), the most common ways to collect data in qualitative research include interview, enquiry, observing and information based on different kinds of documents. It is possible to use these methods separately, in parallel or rolled in to one according to the research problem and research recourses. The idea of interview and enquiry is simple; when one is willing to know what that other one thinks or why one does act in a way one does, the most reasonable way to find out is to ask from this person. An interview is typically done face to face whereas enquiry is a method in which the respondents answer via a questionnaire in a supervised situation or at their home.

For this thesis, the author chose interview as a way to collect information. Interview is suitable for different kinds of studies in which it is possible to be directly in linguistic interaction with the interviewee (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 34). In this way it is also possible to bring out the motives behind the answers of the respondents. When it comes to benefits, an interview is also flexible; the interviewer has an opportunity to repeat the question, correct possible misunderstandings clarify the wording and have a conversation with the interviewee (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 73–74). Another thing which makes interview flexible is that the interviewer has a chance to change the order of the questions if needed. Nevertheless, interviewees do not usually think that interviews are quizzes. The main aim for the interviewer is to get as much information as possible and for that reason it is recommend that the interviewees are given a chance to see the questions beforehand. For that reason, when it comes to a successful interview, it would be good to let the interviewees explore the questions, themes or at least the subject of the interview. As for interview, Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000, 35) think that it also has disadvantages. In the first place, it is often very time consuming way to collect information. During interview it might also occur that the interviewer only concentrates on to those an-

swers which are perceived being the right ones by the interviewer. However, interview gives the researcher an opportunity to clarify and deepen the collected answers.

The author assumed that interviews of Spa Hotel Härmä's personnel will give a good image of the employees' views towards the company's internationalisation. The author of the thesis has told about the study and the subject beforehand to the interviewees and also asked if there is a possibility to do interviews later. Before the interviews, the author also sends by e-mail information about the subjects of the interviews.

5.3.1 Semi-structured interview

Research interviews differ from each other according to structuring (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 43). Structuring defines how fixed the questions are and how much the interviewer parses the situation of questioning. Hirsjärvi and Hurme divide the types of the interview to unstructured interview, semi-structured interview, focused interview, in-depth interview and qualitative interview. In English, semi-structured interview and focused interview usually mean the same thing. Kananen (2015, 144–145) defines that the forms of the interviews can vary from completely free conversations to strict and pre-planned questions which are asked in the same order from pre-selected group. Kananen divides interviews roughly in to three groups: unstructured interview, semi-structured interview and structured interview. According to Kananen, structured interviews such as enquiries do not really belong to the methods of qualitative research because they have really strict and pre-defined questions. Instead, open interviews and semi-structured or focused interviews which belong to unstructured interviews, are more likely being used in qualitative research.

Open interview means that there is open discussion about some topic whereas semi-structured interview means that the researcher has pre-defined those themes from which to discuss about (Kananen 2015, 145). In semi-structured interview the way of the discussion is free, but the researcher wants to ensure the thematic entity of the discussion. In semi-structured interview the main idea is to find significant

answers concerning the main aim of the research and the research problem (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 75). Basically the pre-selected themes are based on to the theoretical framework of the study, in other words, to that information which is already known about the phenomenon. The semi-structured interview is the most used form of interviews in qualitative research method (Kananen 2015, 145).

The author chose semi-structured interview to be used as a form of data collection in the thesis. Hirsjärvi and Hurme consider (2000, 48) that the benefit of the semi-structured interview is that there is no particular context in which the interview is bound to. Nevertheless, it does not define how deeply the issue should be addressed. Semi-structured interview proceeds depending on certain themes without being bound to detailed questions. It is assumed that semi-structured interview is suitable when all of the interviewee's experiences, beliefs, thoughts and feelings are considered being important.

This form was chosen to use in the thesis because the author wanted to freely discuss about the certain themes to get more in-depth results. Moreover, the author wanted to use certain themes during the interviews, because the researcher is inexperienced when it comes to interviewing. Without certain themes, a completely free conversation might not give significant answers concerning the research problem of the thesis. Semi-structured interview was also chosen, because most of the interviewees were busy and the author thought that this was the most time-saving way to do the interviews. With certain themes it is also possible for the author to ask further questions in case the interviewee is unfamiliar about the subject. The subject gives the interviewees an opportunity to an open conversation which is guided by a certain theme.

The author defined six different themes for solving the research problem. Alongside with the themes, the author defined some supportive questions in case that the interviewees do not know what to tell about some certain theme. The themes of the semi-structured interviews can be found in *appendix 1*. The author defined the themes of the semi-structured interviews as follows:

A) Wellness tourism – What thoughts do you have concerning wellness tourism?

- B) Wellness tourism products and services in Spa Hotel Härmä** – What kind of wellness tourism products and services Spa Hotel Härmä has in your opinion?
- C) Internationalisation** – What kind of thoughts you have concerning internationalisation in Spa Hotel Härmä?
- D) The opportunities of internationalisation** – In your opinion, what kind of opportunities Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?
- E) The challenges of internationalisation** – In your opinion, what kind of challenges Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?
- F) The challenges and opportunities of Spa Hotel Härmä's place of domicile (Kauhava)** – In your opinion, what kind of challenges and opportunities Kauhava has when it comes to international tourism?

5.3.2 The interviewees

The semi-structured interview can be implemented for individuals or groups (Kananen 2015, 148–149). Both of these methods have their own benefits and disadvantages. In individual interview the target of the interview is one person as in group interview there are several persons to be interviewed at the same time. In case that there are several individuals to be interviewed separately, the amount of the work of the researcher increases. In group interview, there are less time needed during the interview but on the other hand, the pressure of the group can have influence towards the given answers. In this case the interviewer should make sure that all of the beliefs and thoughts would be equally taken into consideration. This can be extremely challenging in case that the interviewees have different positions in a company for example. As for individual interview, it might be possible to collect more specific but also more reliable information.

The author of the thesis chose individual interviews because of different reasons. Firstly, the author assumed that because the interviewees had different working positions in Spa Härmä, in group interviews there might be a risk that the interviewees are trying to aim towards same kind of results of the answers. In this case it could be possible that a deep understanding about different themes could not be reached. The writer of the thesis thought that it was extremely important that each interviewee could take their own time as thinking about the themes of the interview. The author thinks that it is possible to get deeper information about different themes when interviewing individually. Lastly, because the interviewees are really busy, it would be almost impossible to arrange a group interview. All in all, the author assumes that individual interviews are the most reasonable way to get information concerning the research problem.

The interviewees must be chosen carefully (Kananen 2015, 145–146). This means that the subject from which are discussed about, must somehow concern the interviewee. In case that there are no suitable persons, the researcher must choose those who know the most about the phenomenon. Even though in qualitative research it is impossible to beforehand define the number of the interviewees, in some cases, there are only few people who are familiar with the subject matter. According to Kananen (2008 34–35), there are no exact rules existing concerning the number of the interviewees as in qualitative research, quality is considered being more important.

The interviews of this study were done to three employees of Spa Hotel Härmä. The employees were chosen due to their higher position in the company. Another important criteria was their experience of working in the company and good knowledge, not only concerning the products and services but also customer segments of Spa Hotel Härmä. The author assumed that these employees had the most information when it comes to the defined themes. Due to the fact that the author did not know the personnel well enough, these employees were chosen to the interviews with help of the Manager of Spa Hotel Härmä (Pasi Vainio). All of the interviewees operated in different departments of Spa Hotel Härmä. The author believed that this would help to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. In case the author would not have get enough information concerning the

research problem, there was always possibility to do more interviews later on. However, it was clear that as discussing with the third interviewee, the answers started to overlap. The personnel of Spa Hotel Härmä were chose to the interviews as follows:

Pasi Vainio works as a hotel and spa manager in Spa Hotel Härmä. He has worked for seven years in that position.

So my title is hotel and spa manager and my work covers all of the company's sales and marketing as well as hotel business, spa business, indulgence treatment services, Taitopaja-workshop activities, conference activities and recreation programs. Trade, sales and marketing as a whole, they all pass through my hands. (Vainio, 2016)

AnnaLeena Hietamäki works as a restaurant manager in Spa Hotel Härmä. She was worked in Spa Hotel Härmä since 1988 but as a restaurant manager, she started during the year 2004.

My title is restaurant operation manager and I am in charge of this restaurant which includes the kitchen, the dining room, the coffee shop in this same building and another coffee shop located in Anssin Jussin Areena. I am responsible for all the activities of the restaurant...The financial issues and then I have these personnel-related matters of this restaurant...Then there is comprehensive responsibility for the development of all of the activities. Marketing, productising, product development and personnel and resource allocation and for everything which belongs to this. And then I still have these events and music...organising, planning and participation of the implementations. (Hietamäki, 2016)

Juhani Lautamaja works as a sales representative in sales and marketing department. He has worked in Spa Hotel Härmä for thirty-three years.

Well, at the moment I work in sales service so I am a sales representative, sales and marketing. Sometimes I go to trade fairs. My days are fulfilled, so you could say that, especially pensioner group tours, they are my main target groups...My daily job is answering incoming phone calls. Then there is going through the e-mail messages of the sales service department and dealing with our advertising agency. (Lautamaja, 2016)

5.4 Collection of data

The author reached two of the interviewees by phone and made agreements of the interviews. One of the interviewees was reached by email and also the agreement of the date of the interview was done with this interviewee by email. All of the interviewees were told why they were chosen to the interviews. Before the agreements of the interviews, the author had approached all the interviewees by email and told them about the thesis and its subject. In this email the interviewees were told that the author would, later on, ask them to take part in individual interviews. After the dates of the interviews were agreed, the author sent the themes of the interviews to each interviewee by email. The interviewees were told that they did not have to think about the themes beforehand because the author would help them with questions during the interview. This would help in case the interviewees did not know what to say about some certain theme.

The interviewees were also told that it is possible to hide their names or classify their given information as secret if needed. Also after the interviews the author asked whether there was something that they said which should be classified as secret. However, all of the interviewees thought that there was no reason why their names could not be shown in the thesis. Moreover, all of them believed that there were no sensitive issues in the given information, because there were no business secrets revealed during the interviews. The author also asked the interviewees if it was possible to record the conversations. All of the interviewees agreed to this.

All of the interviews were performed in April in 2016. First interview was done by telephone, because the manager of Spa Hotel Härmä, Pasi Vainio, was so busy that it would have been impossible for him to arrange time for a personal meeting. The tape of the interview with him lasted approximately one hour. The second interview was done with AnnaLeena Hietamäki, in Spa Hotel Härmä's restaurant. The conversation with her took one and a half hours. The last interview with Juhani Lautamaja was done in Spa Hotel Härmä's conference room. The interview with him lasted approximately one hour.

In each interview, before the conversation about the themes was started, the author put the recorder on and tried to make the interviewees but also herself re-

laxed. The interviewees were told that this was not a quiz and the author simply wanted to hear about their own personal thoughts, ideas and opinions about each theme. The interviewees were told that there were no right or wrong answers existing concerning the asked questions. The author discussed about all of the six themes with each interviewee in the same order. However, some of the interviewees needed further questions to help their answering and it also helped the author to maintain the subject of the discussion. The interviews were kept in Finnish so that it was easier for the interviewees to answer. Otherwise, if the interviews would have been kept in English, it might have been impossible to reach completely relaxed atmosphere.

5.5 Analysis of data

There are usually lots of collected data when it comes to semi-structures interviews (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 135). The deeper the dialog between the interviewer and interviewee is, the richer the collected material becomes. Usually there is no need to analyse all of the collected data. Also in many cases the collected data includes some useless information which can not even be exploited. The method how to analyse the data should be considered at the same time as collecting the data. It is too late to think about the method of analysing the data if the interviews have already been done. On the whole, the preselected analysing method can be used as a guideline when planning and transcribing the interviews.

According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000, 136), in qualitative research, there are several ways to analyse the collected information. In most guides it is presented that the common way is to analyse the material at the same time with collection, interpretation and narrative reporting of the data. However, many researchers have different opinions when it comes to the fact how separate activities categorisation, analysis and interpretation of the data are considered being. The analysing of the interview material can be done at least in three ways. In the first one, the data is transcribed and straight after that researcher moves to analysing, relying more or less to his own intuition. In the second analysing method, the data is transcribed and encoded and after that the researcher moves forward to the analysis

of the data. In the third method, transcribing and encoding are combined and researcher moves on to the analysing of the collected data. According to Kananen (2014, 99–100), there are five stages in qualitative research when it comes to finding the right interpretation and solution methods:

1. The researcher collects the data which concerns the research problem with different kinds of data collection methods as observation, semi-structured interviews, interviews, audio-visual methods and documents.
2. The collected data, which can be in many forms, is transcribed. This means that the data format is changed in to one form which usually is a text format, for example voice recordings are transcribes to text formats.
3. The researcher studies the transcribed text format from the perspective of the research problem and research questions. After that the researcher collects those those parts of the text which can be connected to the research problem. Those text entities are then marked with certain description. This is called encoding. These codes are used describing the content.
4. After the encoding follows classification. In this stage the researcher concentrates on finding what codes or expressions form their own groups. This group is given a name. Also in this stage it is important to keep in mind the actual research problem and the research questions.
5. After the analysis of the data, there is usually another stage of information gathering. In this way it is possible to complete the analysis or find answers to new questions which came up during analysing the earlier data. All in all, solving the research problem defines how many times information gathering must be performed.

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009, 93) encoding according to themes is basically similar to encoding but it underlines what has been said about each theme. All in all, it is about dividing and regrouping the data according to different subject

matters. In this way it is possible to compare whether certain themes appear in the data. If the information gathering method has been semi-structured interviews, it is easy to divide the data as the themes of the interviews itself work as outline of the data.

The basic method of analysis in qualitative research is content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 91). Even though content analysis is generally seen as a single method, it is also considered working as a theoretical framework which can be connected to different kinds of analysis methods. All in all, basically all of the analysis methods in qualitative research are based on to content analysis. In content analysis, the collected data is processed in a way that it is possible to find a solution to the actual research problem (Kananen 2015, 171). The content analysis can be categorised in to three groups. The first two groups are data-driven and theory-based classification. The third group is a combination of these two classifications. In data-driven classification, interpretation is based on the data. In this case, the coding of the data is done inductively which means going from specific single cases to a general statement (Kananen 2015, 174). In theory-based classification, interpretation is based on existing theories. Theory-based classification uses deductive reasoning which means using different kinds of theories or models when making specific conclusions.

In this thesis, the author chose to use data-driven classification. The data-driven classification was chose because the writer of the thesis assumed, that there are no exact theories existing which could be used when estimating the opportunities of international wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä. There are theories which explain how the internationalisation could be done in travel companies, but when it comes to the opportunities of internationalisation in a singular company, the best way to analyse the opportunities is to analyse the collected data and find those themes which describe the opportunities and challenges of internationalisation.

As mentioned earlier, the writer of the thesis used semi-structured interviews. The discussions between the interviewer and interviewees were recorded with mobile phone's voice recorder application. The author wanted to transcribe the collected data to a text form immediately after the interviews or as soon as it was possible, at latest during the next few days. In this way it was more easier to check whether

there were some themes missing and needed to be interviewed again. The data was changed to a text format as such as it was in the recordings. The author removed those parts from the text which were unnecessary. Moreover, the texts needed to be translated in English to help the analysing process. In this thesis the data was encoded according to the themes used in the interviews. There was no need for further classification, because there were only three interviewees and the collected data was rather restricted. The author used the themes of the interviews to classify the research results. After that, the research results were divided in to two groups:

- 1) What kind of opportunities Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?
- 2) What kind of challenges Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?

5.6 Reliability and validity

In every study, also in the thesis, the researcher has to verify that the research results are valid reliable (Kananen 2014, 145–146). This reliability can not be reached without orderliness and putting one's mind to the quality control. In scientific work, the reliability is estimated with help of different kinds of reliability concepts. These reliability concepts can be seen as certain kinds of indicators which help to estimate how trustworthy the research results are. In qualitative research, the trustworthy assessment relies to the assessment of the researcher whereas in quantitative research, there are certain ways to calculate the reliability. In qualitative research, general indicators for assessment of the trustworthiness are reliability and validity (Kananen 2014, 147). Reliability means the stability or repeatability of the research results. In this case, if the research was done again, the research results would be the same. Validity means that the researcher has studied the right things. In other words, it refers to the planning of the study, to the research frame of the study but also partly to the fact that the analysis of the data is done right. Reliability rather refers to the implementation of the study.

The reliability criteria in qualitative research differs from the criteria of quantitative research (Kananen 2014, 150–151). In qualitative research, the researcher decides who is studied, what is asked, what is not asked and how the collected data is analysed and interpreted. One should always take reliability analysis into consideration already when planning the study. All in all, the most important thing in reliability analysis is a sufficient amount of documentation. Moreover, the choices should always be explained.

According to Kananen (2014, 151), one way to measure the reliability of the study is to let the interviewees to verify the researcher's interpretation from the interviews and the research results. In this way is possible to say, in terms of the interviewees, that the results of the study are reliable. On the other hand, it is also possible that the interviewees do not confirm the conclusions of the study. It might be that the researcher has misinterpreted the interview material or the interviewees have changed their minds or they remember things from the interview situation differently. One reason is also that the interviewees do not want to bring their opinions into the open.

The author of this thesis verified the research results and the conclusion by showing them to the interviewees. This was the simplest way to analyse the reliability of the study because there were only three interviewees and they were rather easy to reach by email after the interviews. The research results and the conclusion were sent to the interviewees by email. It turned out that all of the interviewees approved the research results and conclusion of this thesis. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the interviewees did not think that any part of the results should be classified as secret. The interviewees also accepted that their names are shown in the thesis.

The credibility of the study improves if there is a sufficient amount of documentation (Kananen 2014, 153). Adequate documentation makes it possible for the reader to review the researcher's methods which were used as defining the research results. Overall, all of the methods including information gathering, analysing and interpretation, should be presented and reasoned in the study. This makes it possible for the reader to evaluate the methods and the whole study. The docu-

mentation requires that the researcher studies what kind of methods can be used as solving a certain research problem.

In this thesis the author had to study what kind of research methods can be used as solving out whether the Spa Hotel Härmä has opportunities for international wellness tourism. For that reason, the empirical part of the work was made very carefully and every method which was used in the thesis is explained. The aim was to describe each choice in a way that the reader has the possibility to evaluate the progress of the study. The empirical part of this thesis can be found in *chapter 5*.

According to Kananen (2014, 153), the saturation of the collected data can be seen as a way to evaluate the reliability of the work. Saturation means that at some point of the thesis, the research results of the study start to repeat themselves. Usually it is not possible that a single observation unit would be enough. It is important to collect data as long as there is new information available. In qualitative research, saturation point is reached when for example in an interview, the answers start to repeat themselves and the interviewees do not give any new information to the researcher.

The saturation in this thesis was reached during the third interview. It was possible to see already after the second interview that there could be similarity found between the given information of the two interviewees. After the third interview it was clear for the author that there was no need for any new interviews. However, as the author mentioned earlier, it was always possible to find new interviewees from the personnel of Spa Hotel Härmä to interview if it would have been necessary for solving out the research problem.

6 RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter concentrates on finding the answer to the research problem: *Is there an opportunity for Spa Hotel Härmä to become an international wellness tourism destination?* The research results of this chapter are analysed from the semi-structured interviews. The research results are categorised in terms of the themes of the interviews. After presenting the results of the themes, the author separates the results in the *chapter 7* along these two questions: 1) *What kind of opportunities Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?* and 2) *What kind of challenges Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?*

6.1 Wellness tourism

Wellness tourism. The first theme of the interviews concerned wellness tourism generally. The interviewer wanted to know what kind of thoughts the interviewees had when it comes to wellness tourism generally. The main aim was to find out how familiar the interviewees were with wellness tourism.

The most significant observation that the interviewer did, was that all of the interviewees thought that wellness tourism consists of many kinds of program services: “Wellness tourism as a concept is quite extensive, because many experience personal well-being in different ways (Vainio, 2016).” As the author assumed, all of the interviewees mentioned spa, beauty and other treatments but they also connected wellness tourism to many other service programs. Alongside with the indulgence services, the interviewees mentioned things as activities, healthy and tasty food, mental well-being and entertainment and leisure-time activities. The interviewees thought that the experience of wellness is always personal: “Whether it is dog sledding, pool gymnastics, whatever, as long as the customer gets the personal good experience to push forward in everyday life (Vainio 2016).”

“What I think that wellness tourism is, it is meaningful and active doing. When you are on your holiday, you seek for proper activities and you can do healthy choices in terms of food... And then there are of course wellness-related treatments or indulgence treatments, baths or

massages, cosmetological services or whatever which produce good feeling and relaxation... And the core of all this are activities, breaking away from the daily grind and relaxation. Fun things to do but also some physical activities. It consists of many different areas. (Hietamäki, 2016)

Things that naturally belong to it are exercising, indulgence treatments, good food, entertainment and leisure-time activities. Wellness can consist of one of these things or then there has to be all of these elements involved. (Vainio, 2016)

It is possible to connect many kinds of things in to it. For example here in Spa Hotel Härmä we have the kind of food that...there is the source of well-being. Food is good and healthy... And then there is this physical well-being. We always aim to guide our customers to better feeling and well-being, but then there is also the mental wellness. One should also feel that now I have a light feeling and from here I can comfortably move forward in life. It leaves a good feeling. (Lautamaja, 2016)

Wellness traveler. As the interviewees were asked what kind of person is a wellness traveler, Annaleena Hietamäki's answer was very specific: "I think that it is a person living busy and work filled years...not necessarily a person with small children, let's say from 35 to 50 year old person, actively in the working life, self-caring... Both men and women (Hietamäki, 2016)."

Juhani Lautamaja sees that there are younger and older wellness travelers and they seek for different kinds of things for their vacation. He thinks that in terms of wellness tourism, younger travelers who visit Spa Hotel Härmä, have different kinds of expectations than for example those pensioners who visit there. All in all, Lautamaja adds that no matter how old or young the customer is, all the requirements should be answered: "These persons who are retired. They have totally different kind of understanding about wellness tourism... Pensioners seek for peace and quiet, good food, opportunities to exercise outdoors...there are still those who have never left their home for a week (Lautamaja, 2016)."

Finally Lautamaja estimates that today people require more and all the services should be tailor-made to each customer separately.

Also Pasi Vainio thinks that wellness tourism covers every customer regardless of the customer's age or what the situation of one's life is. He thinks that wellness

traveler is a family with small children but it is also a pensioner: ...life situations are different (Vainio, 2016)...” However, Vainio underlines how important customer segments pensioners are in wellness tourism business today: “Seniors today, they are quite wealthy, they have time, they are willing to invest in themselves and their own well-being (Vainio, 2016)...”

Finnish wellness tourism elements. The interviewees were asked what they thought that could be elements of the Finnish wellness tourism. The interviewees mentioned elements such as: purity, nature, peace and quietness, sauna, food specialists, personal trainers and sports technology.

Pasi Vainio thinks that Finland’s attraction elements in wellness tourism are still pure nature, peace and quietness and sauna. “These things are much talked about in Finland but I am not quite sure if these things can be exported to foreign countries (Vainio, 2016).” Vainio estimates that especially sauna is one of the key elements in Finnish wellness tourism and it could help to take the process forward to other European countries.

Juhani Lautamaja thinks that sauna no longer works as a key element in Finnish wellness tourism: “...everybody already knows that it is Swedish after all. We do not admit it, but the Swedish have been able to market it better than we have (Lautamaja, 2016).” Lautamaja estimates that Finland can not necessarily compete with its spa solutions because they might have more diverse range of spas in other European countries. However, Lautamaja thinks that the most important element in Finland, in wellness tourism, could be the Finnish nature: “For foreigners, it is the Finnish nature of course, in winter one should get out on the ice (Lautamaja, 2016).”

As for Finnish wellness tourism elements, AnnaLeena Hietamäki mentions purity and freshness. She also thinks that nature is one of the key elements in Finnish wellness tourism. Hietamäki assumes that Finland is one of the top countries when it comes to exercising and knowledge about right nutrition. She tells that in Finland it is a trend and people are increasingly paying attention to their own physical well-being. In her words people in Finland are interested in “*healthy things*” and that is one of the reason why fitness has become so popular in Finland. “Here in Finland,

we have well-developed methods and techniques, sports equipment and all of these kinds of things...Self-caring is brought up in Finland

...we have a lot of gymnasiums and it does tell a lot that all of these personal trainers, their amount has increased and Finland certainly is one of the top countries when it comes to knowledge about right nutrition. We even have dieticians in hospitals! (Hietamäki, 2016).” Finally Hietamäki describes how the elements of the Finnish wellness tourism can be seen in Spa Hotel Härmä: “Customers are for example advised to choose healthier choices when it comes to food and also instructed how they can take better care of their personal well-being by exercising (Hietamäki, 2016).”

Visit Finland’s wellness strategy for international markets 2014–2018. The interviewees were asked whether they had heard before about Visit Finland’s wellness strategy to international markets 2014–2018 project. Vainio and Hietamäki were in some way familiar with the project whereas Lautamaja had not heard about it before.

Yes. I have heard about it. And I do not want to sound pessimistic but... It is a great strategy and it will be done again between the years 2019 and 2022. As I said, it is great on paper, absolutely, however in my experience, the paper is left to gather dust on the shelf after all, unfortunately. This project is nicely taken forward, but unfortunately the practice is directed to a different direction. I hope that I am wrong, but I seriously doubt this, I am afraid. (Vainio, 2016)

Yes, I have heard about that term, but I am not very familiar with it when it comes to the fact what this project includes, but good point, good idea. Because we all should take better care of ourselves and not leave the responsibility to the society. You can always improve your own quality of life and contribute how you experience this life in every way. (Hietamäki, 2016)

The interviewer was interested to hear more about Vainio’s opinion about the Visit Finland’s project because it seemed that he was somewhat more familiar with the ongoing project. Vainio was asked what in his opinion, should be done differently in case that the project would turn out to be more successful.

Overall, it very much depends on the targets themselves, what they do. What they do for internationalisation and wellness tourism. Of

course financing is always an important issue. If it would be possible to receive funding from MEK, in that case it would be possible to get more constructive and better results. Anyway, I can not tell directly what measures should be taken but at the moment it unfortunately seems like we are taking the same footsteps as before. I sound pessimistic but I am a bit of a realist. (Vainio, 2016)

6.2 Spa Hotel Härmä's wellness tourism products and services

Wellness tourism products and services in Spa Hotel Härmä. The second theme of the interviews concerned Spa Hotel Härmä's wellness tourism products and services. The interviewees were asked what kind of wellness products and services Spa Hotel Härmä has in their opinion. All of the interviewees thought that their wellness supply consist of many different things, not only their wellness department. Alongside with the wellness departments, the interviewees mentioned for example exercising services, restaurant services, entertainment and leisure-time services. The interviewees thought that Spa Hotel Härmä's wellness service module is a combination of different kinds of products which help to contribute the customers' overall well-being. Moreover, all of the interviewees thought that a person's comprehensive wellness is based on both, mental and physical well-being.

Pasi Vainio repeats that wellness tourism is "many things at the same (Vainio, 2016)". Vainio firstly lists Spa Hotel Härmä's indulgence treatments: bath treatments, massages, and cosmetological treatments. "These all relate to one's personal well-being (Vainio, 2016)." Vainio continues pointing out that the modern working life today is really hectic and people have to concentrate on several things at the same time. "We have this place called Taitopaja. In Taitopaja you can for example make necklaces, press texts or images on canvas, felt or make decorations. It sounds a bit silly but usually our customers love this because it gives them a chance to focus on one thing at a time. You are able to block the whole rest of the world. At that point you are alone with your own thoughts and you will become more relaxed because you forget the noise and fuss around you (Vainio, 2016)." Vainio tells that Spa Hotel Härmä's spa also helps their customers to improve their personal well-being: "A couple of years ago our spa department was extended. We have now a full-length swimming pool where you can truly go swimming. Of

course we have these hydro-massaging waterfalls and these kinds of things which give relaxing and indulgent feeling. Finnish and Turkish sauna and so called Hot stone sauna. Somebody gets the kicks from them (Vainio, 2016).”

Vainio highlights how important role Spa Hotel Härmä’s exercising services have when it comes to the well-being of the customers. He tells that the selection of exercise services is wide and there are approximately 20 employees working as physical education instructors and physiotherapists. All in all, the sports module in Spa Hotel Härmä includes around 50–60 different types of exercising. “We have this sportshall which has space for three volleyball courts...there is a gym and 50 meters long indoor track so in winter you can go for example roller skating (Vainio, 2016).” In connection with the sports services, Vainio tells that there are several kinds of tests available for the customers: fitness tests, body composition measurements, muscle tests and bicycle tests. With the help of these tests, the customers immediately get the feedback about their physical fitness. Vainio accentuates that even though physical fitness is not traditionally seen as a part of wellness tourism, it is now strongly connected in to it. The hotel and spa manager, Pasi Vainio also thinks that mental well-being is important as talking about wellness tourism: “We have social workers, psychologists, doctors, occupational therapists and nutritionists. In our building, we have incredibly strong professional know-how (Vainio, 2016).”

As for wellness tourism services, Vainio also mentions Spa Hotel Härmä’s entertainment and leisure-time activities because “Some think that entertainment is wellness (Vainio, 2016).” Lastly Vainio tells why the food offered to the customers in Spa Hotel Härmä belongs to the wellness category: “...this local food, it is an important thing for some of our customers. Tasty and healthy food, it is in its own way, a big part of well-being. (Vainio, 2016).”

Juhani Lautamaja also mentions the treatment services which are available for the customers in the wellness department. Lautamaja thinks that the most important wellness tourism product in Spa Hotel Härmä is the food offered in the restaurant: “The quality of the food offered to the customers plays in a big role. No matter how good your other services are...if the quality of the food in the restaurant is not good or it is not tasty, the customer is not left with a good feeling (Lautamaja,

2016).” Thirdly Juhani Lautamaja lists activities in Anssin Jussin Areena and most importantly Härmä Golf: “Playing golf is a source of well-being (Lautamaja, 2016).”

AnnaLeena Hietamäki thinks that the most important wellness element is Spa Hotel Härmä is the healthy and tasty food. Also if the customer has special requests or allergies, it must be taken into account: “In restaurant services we always try to listen to the customers’ requests. It is part of his well-being, getting the food that pleases him (Hietamäki, 2016).” Hietamäki considers that the local food offered in the restaurant is also one of the wellness products. As much as it is possible, the restaurant aims to offer their customers food which is prepared from Finnish raw materials: “Of course it depends on the season what raw materials it is possible to get from nearby...still all the meat, dairy products and eggs that we use are Finnish (Hietamäki, 2016).” Secondly Hietamäki thinks that Spa Hotel Härmä’s wide range of exercising services is one of the wellness elements offered to the customers. She continues telling how the supply of the sports services varies from light to heavy physical activities: “We have something for everyone, from side to side (Hietamäki, 2016).” Thirdly Hietamäki lists Spa Hotel Härmä’s wellness department: “We have this amazing wellness department where are our massage therapists and cosmetologists. This is the place where our customers get relaxed during different kinds of treatments from pedicures to eyelash dyeing... That is luxury (Hietamäki, 2016).”

The interviewer was interested in knowing whether the products and services in Spa Hotel Härmä were consciously concentrated on wellness tourism. The author went deeper into the discussion with Lautamaja and Vainio.

Of course! Customers who come here are always aiming for personal well-being...however, the customers always seek well-being from different starting points. I think that today people want more activities during their vacation. We have the possibility to offer them those activities. (Lautamaja, 2016)

Yes, it is definitely like this. At the moment, in our building, it is very well seen among those customers who are here for well-being at work rehabilitation. These are big issues for us. Nowadays we have a situation in which companies want to invest in their employees... Companies have learned to appreciate their workers. (Vainio, 2016)

6.3 Internationalisation

Internationalisation. The third theme of the interviews was internationalisation. The main aim was to find out what kind of thoughts the interviewees had towards internationalisation in general. Lautamaja and Vainio started analysing whether internationalisation would be possible in Spa Hotel Härmä whereas Hietämäki had more general approach towards the subject matter. The author asked the interviewees their general thoughts about internationalisation.

For us internationalisation means Sweden. Period. After that comes Norway. Customers coming from other countries are basically random hits. The truth is that we have less than hour journey to the harbour of Vaasa and there is a boat going from Vaasa to Umea every day. It is ridiculously easy to come to us from Sweden. On the other hand, people can travel to us via Haparanda and Tornio by bus or by car. And what comes to Norwegian, our price level for them is like Estonia to us. We are still a low-priced country for Norwegian. I think that the Russian travelers are at the moment exploring Eastern Finland and they are, one step at a time, coming closer to us. Anyway, I have not really done marketing efforts to Russia. It would require a good plan and a great investment of money. Only the idea of getting Russian customers is not enough. (Vainio, 2016)

I think it is an unavoidable reality that it is coming. We are living more and more in a global society where people are moving. I consider that it is a welcome and a good thing and for some companies it is a prerequisite for their existence. (Hietämäki, 2016)

If I think about internationalisation in terms of Spa Hotel Härmä, I do not consider it as an important issue at the moment. If it would be possible to get every Finnish visit us, even it would demand a lot of work from us. We would get by with that quite well. (Lautamaja, 2016)

Lautamaja admits that there are Swedish customers visiting Spa Hotel Härmä and he thinks that internationalisation for them means services in Swedish. Still Lautamaja points out that internationalisation is not the main point for Spa Hotel Härmä at the moment. One reason for this is that there are no decent airports nearby and he does not believe that anybody would travel especially to Härmä by train. Lautamaja thinks that the situation would be totally different if there was a common target to market for example “*ostrobothnian atmosphere*” abroad. In this case there would be several travel companies aiming for the same target: “It is

impossible for a single travel company. This should be seen as an unity. Fairy tales and stories and programmatic services in which you have the possibility to visit different places instead of staying in one place (Lautamaja, 2016).”

The author asked from Vainio and Hietamäki about their opinion whether companies should aim towards internationalisation. Both of them thought that at least at some level travel companies should consider internationalisation.

Yes. And regionally we have been trying to do so. I have myself done campaigning to Sweden, mainly to Umea and the area nearby it. Moreover, we are collaborating with Powerpark, Ähtäri zoo and Wasaline at least at some level. We have common brochures and advertisements and things like that. With these kinds of things we have tried to drive the plans forward specifically in Sweden. (Vainio, 2016)

Well, basically, in this situation, yes, at some level at least. Whatever it means for a single company. The competition in business life is increasing all the time and companies have to stay switched-on instead of becoming stagnant. We can not live like in North Korea. People are moving across the borders all the time. (Hietamäki, 2016)

Foreign travelers in Spa Hotel Härmä. The interviewer wanted to know whether the interviewees had earlier experience regarding foreign tourists in Spa Hotel Härmä. For that reason the author asked the interviewees if they had witnessed internationalism in Spa Hotel Härmä before. The author of the thesis also wanted to know whether the internationalism in the company had changed during the past years. In the interviews it turned out that there was not so much internationalism at the moment in Spa Hotel Härmä but they have had some Swedish, Norwegian and Russian customers. The author also found out that Spa Hotel Härmä had not really done marketing efforts to other countries. Most of the foreign customers visiting the company are guests of other companies located in Härmä.

Juhani Lautamaja sees that there have not really been foreign travelers in Spa Hotel Härmä for so far. Lautamaja explains that he does not really know would it be possible or not to get customers from abroad to visit Spa Hotel Härmä. The interviewee thinks that the company’s marketing has not been aimed to other countries than Finland before. “Well, we do not really have foreign customers at the moment. However, sometimes some travelers from Sweden visit us. Also few

occasional travelers from Norway have found their way to us. Let us say that the Russian travelers have not yet discovered us (Lautamaja, 2016).”

The interviewer was interested in hearing more about the occasional foreign customers and asked Lautamaja to tell more about them.

We have had Norwegian and Swedish customers, but during the past ten years, the amount has decreased. We also have had war veterans from Estonia. Our international customers, those who we have at the moment, they are basically guests of different companies. We have a lot of big companies here in Härmä and their guests visit us... However, that is business travel and has nothing do with wellness tourism. (Lautamaja, 2016)

Pasi Vainio tells that Spa Hotel Härmä is bilingual, because the languages used in the spa are Swedish and Finnish. All of the services, guides and brochures are available in both languages. Vainio adds that it would be possible to do all this also in English, but if the customers would require German, it would be impossible. What comes to the Russian language, some of the info brochures are translated in Russian. Also the company’s web page has been translated in Russian but it has not been published yet. Vainio continues telling that they have approximately 10–20 Russian travelers per a year and roughly half of them are business travelers.

AnnaLeena Hietämäki also thinks that for so far, there have not really been international customers in Spa Hotel Härmä: “Well, not so much at the moment. At the moment internationalism has not really been seen here. On the other hand, we have some foreign customers who are guests of other companies. They use our accommodation and restaurant services but not really our wellness services. Also some of the foreign customers of Powerpark visit us from time to time. Still, I do not think that it is very common (Hietämäki, 2016).”

Motivation towards internationalism. Lastly the interviewer asked whether the interviewees would have motivation to internationalise their company in case if it would be possible. The author find out that the interviewees were interested in internationalism and they would be motivated only if the strategic planning was done carefully and the target countries were chosen properly.

Yes, but only if the investments would be sensible. In my position it would be very difficult to make marketing profitable. Even successful marketing must be seen as an investment in the long run. All in all, I would still prefer Finnish customers. (Lautamaja, 2016)

A difficult question. Yes, but I would like to concentrate on Sweden only. Sweden is a market area which is close to us and it would be harder to reach for Germany, Poland and these types of countries. (Vainio, 2016)

As a company, yes. The whole organisation has to participate in the planning and implementation of the internationalisation. Internationalisation requires critical review and development of the productisation. The company's staff must be involved from the beginning. (Hietamäki, 2016)

6.4 The opportunities of internationalisation in Spa Hotel Härmä

Opportunities in international wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä. The fourth theme of the interviews was Spa Hotel Härmä's opportunities in international wellness tourism. The interviewees were asked what kind of opportunities Spa Hotel Härmä has in terms of international wellness tourism. Things that the interviewees brought up the most, were things such as nature, peace and quiet, sauna and purity.

I think there is always a chance to find those opportunities if it is seen necessary. Anyway, what we have here...Good terrain for hiking, we have a nice sand pit terrain nearby and lots of lean-to buildings. We really have beautiful nature around us, especially our wastes. These all could be productised and some of them already are. (Lautamaja, 2016)

I would still think that sauna, peace and quiet are the mainstays of internationalisation here in Hotel Spa Härmä. So, if an Asian traveler comes here, he is most likely not used to the things what we have in here: spaciousness and quietness. So, all in all, peace and quiet and the Finnish sauna. I think that for a foreign traveler it would be amazing that he can just walk out of the door and walk to the nearest forest. He does not have to travel there by metro, tram or car. You are all the time in front of the nature. (Vainio, 2016)

Our nature, quietness and peacefulness. Everything is fresh and clean: the air, the environment and our food. The food culture in Spa Hotel Härmä aims to tasty but also to healthier options. (Hietamäki, 2016).

Even though the interviewer asked the interviewees about the opportunities, all of the interviewees wanted to say that that the spa or the wellness department of Spa hotel Härmä would not necessarily have competitive advantages when it comes to international travel. Instead, the competitive advantages and opportunities of Spa Hotel Härmä could be found in the Finnish wellness elements.

Indulgence treatments for example in Japan are much more developed than here in Finland. I do not think that we could compete in that field. Instead, we could compete with well-being which comes from our peacefulness, quietness and cleanness of the environment. These are things which are close to the heart. After all, if you like, you can just walk out of the door and go clumping on the grass with your bare feet. In Japan, this is not necessarily possible. (Vainio, 2016)

In my opinion, there is a much wider range of spa solutions in other countries for the international travelers. We can not compete with those spa services that we have here in Finland or in Spa Hotel Härmä, at the moment at least. I would see that other countries in Europe have a long-term tradition and an stronger idea of spa culture. It might be that our spa does not measure up to their expectations. It is not enough that we have a swimming pool and some indulgence treatments. The spa culture there is different, at least when we go downward from Germany. Our opportunities in wellness tourism, in Spa Hotel Härmä, come from Finnish elements. (Lautamaja, 2016)

It is a fact that the spa culture in other countries is totally different. We are not exactly that much concentrated on entertainment in our spa services. I think that for example Russian travelers would require more high-quality in terms of spa services. During the expansion of our spa department, the basic idea was to give our customers more space in the swimming pools to do water running for example. As for our opportunities, I would consider other things. Our services are extensive and diverse. Perhaps we do not always see the forest from the trees. (Hietamäki, 2016)

Other things that the interviewees mentioned as for opportunities for Spa Hotel Härmä in terms of international wellness tourism were different kinds of events

arranged in the area of Southern Ostrobothnia, the Finnish culture and “charm of novelty”.

Of course if we think about the events arranged in the area of Southern Ostrobothnia, they could work as one way to get foreign customers to take rooms from us. (Lautamaja, 2016).

The Finnish culture might be interesting to foreign travelers. We could bring our culture more out and present them how we Finns are as people. We should always act as we truly are. (Hietämäki, 2016)

If we consider about the Russian travelers, Western Finland, in their point of view, is still quite unfamiliar area and for them it is a cool thing if someone from their circle of acquaintances has visited Southern Ostrobothnia or Härmä. Usually this person wants to tell about his experience to all of the people he knows and he describes it as follows: I just visited a place where no one has gone before. What we have here, is special to many foreigners. For example one guy from St. Petersburg took a picture of snow, because it was white. In St. Petersburg, it is brown or yellow. He also took picture of a magpie in a tree. There are no wild animals living in the city of St. Petersburg. These are important things which we can not even necessarily recognise. (Vainio, 2016)

The interviewees were asked what is the level of the language skills of the personnel in Spa Hotel Härmä. Pasi Vainio and Lautamaja thought that the personnel is quite skilled in terms of different languages. It turned out that Swedish is probably the most spoken foreign language in Spa Hotel Härmä. AnnaLeena Hietämäki thought that the personnel speaks different languages but those skills could always be more trained. This would guarantee that the foreign customers could be served better.

Finnish, Swedish and English works out just fine. Everything including indulgence treatments, exercising services and restaurant services can be served to the customers at least in Finnish and Swedish. (Vainio, 2016)

Our personnel does speak at least Swedish here. Nowadays we do not really have older employees here anymore and the younger employees are quite skilled with foreign languages. We have some turnover of workers and along this turnover, language skills improve also. I think today companies appreciate good language skills as they hire new employees. My strengths do not include good language skills.

What comes to my strengths, it is not a coincidence that my segments are the Finnish pensioners. (Lautamaja, 2016)

Our personnel can serve foreign customers in Swedish and in English but I also think that language skills in this building could always be more improved so that our foreign customers could be served better. (Hietamäki, 2016)

6.5 The challenges of internationalisation in Spa Hotel Härmä

The fifth theme of the interviews concerned **the challenges of internationalisation in Spa Hotel Härmä**. The author asked the interviewees what kinds of challenges there might be as thinking about international wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä. One challenge that the interviewees mentioned during the earlier theme, was the spa department and its services which could not probably stand out from other countries' supply. However, the author found out that it was rather difficult for the interviewees to see internationalisation in terms of wellness tourism as most of the answers concerned international tourism and its challenges in general.

Pasi Vainio thought that the challenges would be distances, means of communication, lack of investments including the time in which the results could be seen and unfamiliarity when it comes to the Spa Hotel Härmä and the area of Härmä. Juhani Lautamaja mentioned challenges such as unfamiliarity of the area, language skills and lack of investments. Lautamaja also sees it challenging that the investments put to marketing can be seen only after a long period of time. AnnaLeena Hietamäki considered that the facilities of the Spa Hotel Härmä are challenging.

The challenges of international tourism are surely distances, means of communication and of course the fact that we are quite unfamiliar tourist attraction and we are also quite unknown area. These are the most difficult things... If I had a bottomless money bag, there would be no problems. However, at the moment, we use most of the money to attract Finnish customers, because they are easier to reach out for. I could spend that same money really fast in foreign marketing and the results would not be seen even during one year. Money, familiarity and means of communication. These are the most critical issues. (Vainio, 2016)

It is a challenge that we are a singular spa. We should pick up different targets to attract foreign customers. Language skills can always be considered as challenges without forgetting the funding of course. In my opinion, it is, after all, quite hard to verify whether the euros spent in foreign marketing has been an investment that has paid back. (Lautamaja, 2016)

All in all, I think that the facilities of our hotel are quite challenging at the moment. (Hietamäki, 2016)

The interviewees were asked what kind of measures should be made to make international tourism more possible for Spa Hotel Härmä. Pasi Vainio thinks that the most important things include large investments and different kinds of collaborations with other companies. Juhani Lautamaja considers that online marketing could improve the possibilities for Spa Hotel Härmä to attract foreign customers. Lautamaja also thinks that there should be cooperation with other organisations to make international tourism possible. AnnaLeena Hietamäki mentions visibility of the services in Spa Hotel Härmä and nearby, networking with other travel companies and commitment of the employees.

Central Europe is interesting, but I still see that Sweden is much more important market area to us than Central Europe. If we would aim for Central Europe, it would require larger investments, even regionally. A single spa is not the reason why a traveler from Germany would come to Finland... There has to be the whole combination, the whole Southern-Ostrobothnia. There has to be the whole area of Härmä, Powerpark and Tuuri. There has to be all these things together so that we can show to that guy in Germany that we have a lot to give. (Vainio, 2016)

...It could be possible via online marketing. One has to be visible there and do active marketing in online at all times. I do not believe that person marketing would work for Sweden, Japan or China. I do not believe that it would lead to sales profits, the world is quite virtual these days. One should do something there that no one has done before... Also cooperations which form a coherent whole, including larger areas. In this way it might be to draw attention. The whole Southern-Ostrobothnia and its organisations should work together. (Lautamaja, 2016)

We should bring out more our offered services and also what the surrounding area has to offer to the foreign travelers. In my opinion, networking with other travel companies would be important for creating

synergy. We would also need a person for marketing work. A person with good language skills and who is able to travel a lot. Our employees would be required a strong understanding about service standards and a genuine willingness to serve a foreign customer. We can never be too good at this. (Hietämäki, 2016)

6.6 The challenges and opportunities of Kauhava area

What comes to the opportunities of international wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä, the author thought that it is important to study what kinds of external factors there are concerning the Spa Hotel Härmä's place of domicile. The sixth theme of the interviews concerned **the challenges and opportunities of the city of Kauhava**. The interviewees were free to describe what kind of things they could find in this subject matter. It turned out, that they were more able to find challenges than opportunities as describing the city of Kauhava in terms of international tourism. Moreover, also in this case, the interviewees rather described the opportunities in international tourism generally without adding wellness tourism beside it. As for challenges, the interviewees mentioned the low recognition of the area among the international travelers, lack of investments (e.g. money), low attraction level of the area and the possible negative attitudes towards foreign travelers.

Well, there is not much more than the challenges. In my point of view, there not so many opportunities at the moment in the area of Härmä. Those opportunities should be created from scratch as Jorma Lillbacka did. Of course, everything is possible, but one should have a lot of money... For some reason, at the moment we do not have enough attractiveness so that the airplanes would land in Vaasa instead of Helsinki, Inari or Rovaniemi. (Lautamaja, 2016)

The challenge of the area is its recognition among the international travelers. The second challenge is how to improve this recognition among these international travelers... We have a lot of work to do in this matter. For example the amusement park Powerpark. The amusement park Linnanmäki is known everywhere in Finland so even all of the people in Finland have not heard of Powerpark before. Even they have work to do with their level of recognition even though the last three years Powerpark has been the best entertainment center in Finland in a row. (Vainio, 2016)

As for challenge, maybe the attitudes towards international travelers. During the last autumn we had a large amount of refugees coming to Finland. I wonder if it might have caused opposition towards foreigners. I am afraid that foreigners are experienced as threats. (Hietamäki, 2016)

As for opportunities, the interviewees saw beautiful surroundings of the area of Kauhava, location “in the “middle of Finland” and opportunity of the area to offer many activities to international travelers.

We have a lot of industry in the area of Härmä. For that reason I see that there are lot of business travelers and other cooperation partners visiting this area... If I go to the details, we have a beautiful nature here, fresh and clean air and honest, sincere people who are never in a bad mood. (Lautamaja, 2016)

After all, I think that our location in the map of Finland is quite good. Roughly speaking, we are in the middle of Finland. We are near to the highways, I mean the highway 19 and we are at the crossroads which leads to Vaasa. We have good means of communication when you are travelling by a car. It takes only an hour to drive from here to Kokkola, Vaasa and Seinäjoki. There is only 300 kilometers from here to Tampere, Jyväskylä, Oulu and also to Umeå. So, in a way, our location is really good. Moreover, Powerpark is located in our neighborhood which is a quite nice thing also... As speaking of this campaign Lakeudelle.fi that we have at the moment, there are Veljekset Keskinen, Ähtäri zoo, Kuortane Sport Resort and The Dudesons activity park. In this area, we have a lot of activities to offer for children and grown-ups. Possibilities for shopping, zoological park, amusement park, spa, exercising opportunities, wellness, indulgence... We have a lot of things to offer. (Vainio, 2016)

The author wanted to know more about the Lakeudelle.fi project. Vainio was asked to tell more about the ongoing project.

This Lakeudelle.fi project concentrates mainly on to the Finnish travelers, but it will be translated to Swedish also... The companies which are working in this project are for example The Dudesons activity park, The Spa Hotel Härmä, amusement park Powerpark and Veljekset Keskinen. This is our second year that we are involved in this project. Etelä-Pohjanmaan matkailu Oy is the company which coordinates this campaign. (Vainio, 2016)

The interviewees were lastly asked what kind of things should be done in the area of Kauhava in order for making the opportunities better for international tourism.

The interviewees brought out things such as different kinds of cooperations and the history of Härmä and its people. The area of Härmä should be marketed to other countries carefully and the whole Southern-Ostrobothnia has to commit to this work. All in all, all of the interviewees thought that in general, the realisation of international tourism requires a lot of work.

There are many companies operating in a field of tourism in the area of Kauhava. We would be stronger together among the other companies. We would need flexible and inventive cooperations instead of self-interest. (Hietämäki, 2016)

The things which can be connected to a person who is originally from Härmä, the fierceness of the people who live here. We could somehow take the advantage of the history of this area. Via using these things it could be possible to get recognition to the area of Kauhava. Of course it requires persevering work. The base is ready but there is still a lot of undone work to do for all of us. After all, there are many tourist attractions, many targets really near to us. (Vainio, 2016)

The whole Southern-Ostrobothnia has to work in this together with different travel companies and other organisations. I think the area of Kauhava would sell itself to foreign countries with the same idea that the whole Finland is marketed to other countries: we have a great atmosphere here. (Lautamaja, 2016)

7 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter is to present the conclusions concerning the actual research problem: **Is there an opportunity for Spa Hotel Härmä to become an international wellness tourism destination?** The research results which were presented in the *chapter 6*, were categorised along of the themes of the semi-structured interviews. In this chapter, the author of the thesis has divided the research results of the themes along these two questions: *1) What kind of opportunities Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism? 2) What kind of challenges Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?*

In Spa Hotel Härmä, the interviewees were quite familiar with the wellness tourism theme. All of the interviewees thought that wellness tourism consists of different kinds of elements, because the feeling of well-being is always personal. Personal well-being forms from such things as for example exercising, good and healthy food, entertainment and leisure-time activities, spa services and indulgence treatments. The author thinks that it is quite surprising that the interviewees were able to find different kinds of elements connected to the wellness tourism, not only the spa services and indulgence treatments.

The interviewees were also asked what kind of elements the Finnish wellness supply includes. All in all, the interviewees brought out many of those elements which are also mentioned in the Visit Finland's Finrelax concept. The interviewees mentioned elements such as: purity and freshness, nature, peace and quietness, sauna, food specialists and healthy options in terms of food, personal trainers and sports technology. The elements in the Finrelax concept were: the Finnish Sauna and the sauna tradition, locally produced and healthy food, wellness cottage housing, clean water, forests and light activities in the nature, silence, peace and light.

The interviewees were able to describe what kind of person seeks for wellness services. Even though AnnaLeena Hietämäki gave a quite specific description concerning a wellness tourist, in general, the interviewees thought that there can be both, young and older customers seeking for personal well-being. One important customer segment that the interviewees mentioned, was the older genera-

tion which usage of wellness services is generally expected to grow worldwide. On the whole, the main point was that situations in life are different and it is strongly connected to the age of the traveler, what kinds of wellness services are wanted. Moreover, today the wellness travelers are more demanding and they expect more tailor-made and customised services which meet exactly their personal needs.

What comes to the wellness services in Spa Hotel Härmä, the interviewees mentioned things such as: spa, cosmetology and indulgence services, exercising services, restaurant services, entertainments and leisure-time services. With the help of these services, the interviewees thought that it is possible for their customers to aim for personal mental and physical well-being. All in all, Spa Hotel Härmä's wellness service module is a combination of different kinds of products which help to contribute the customers' overall well-being.

The author thought that is important to ask from the interviewees what kinds of thoughts they have concerning internationalisation in general. It turned out that at the moment, there are not so much international customers visiting Spa Hotel Härmä. The most of the foreign customers visiting there are from Sweden, Norway and Russia. Most of the foreign customers visiting the company are guests of other companies located in Härmä. These customers do not use the wellness services of the Spa Hotel Härmä. On the other hand, it was obvious that the company has not aimed that much for international markets and at some level, the interviewees also thought that it is not the main target at the moment. On the other hand, there are some campaigns targeted towards Sweden at the moment. One of the campaigns includes cooperation with e.g. Wasaline, Powerpark and Ähtäri zoo: "We have common brochures and advertisements and things like that (Vainio, 2016)." Sweden is probably the most important country when it comes to international tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä as Vaasa is quite near there is a boat going from Vaasa to Umea every day. Norway was seen an opportunity because the Finnish price level is still quite low for Norwegian people. As for the Russian travelers, one interviewee assumed that the area of Southern-Ostrobothnia is still quite unfamiliar area to them and they are presently exploring it. What comes to the other countries, it might be a problem that there are no decent airports nearby

and it is rather difficult to estimate whether anybody would travel especially to Härmä by train from Helsinki.

The writer of the thesis assumes that the interviewees were able to describe wellness tourism and its characteristics really well. The fact that the interviewees know what the wellness tourism consists of and what the main segments are and their needs in outline, it helps the Spa Hotel Härmä to plan and develop their wellness supply and reach for the right segment groups no matter if the customer is from Finland or from some other country. All in all, the interviewees would have motivation towards international tourism if the investments would be sensible, the whole organisation could be participating to the planning and implementation and there were right countries chosen to aim for. Whether the Spa Hotel Härmä would reach out for other, more distant countries, it would require a lot of planning and investments, not just the “great idea”. Nevertheless, in regards of international tourism, there should be several travel companies marketing the same “Ostrobothnian atmosphere”.

Internationalism was generally seen important because the competition in business life is increasing all the time and companies have to stay switched-on instead of becoming stagnant. Lastly, concerning the internationalisation, the interviewees were asked whether they had heard before about Visit Finland’s wellness strategy to international markets 2014–2018 project. Two of the interviewees had heard about it but only one interviewee was more familiar with the ongoing project. His opinion about the project was that it is generally a great project but the implementation does not correspond to the reality.

As it was important for solving out the research problem, the author wanted to divide the themes of the interviews to opportunities and challenges in terms of international wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä. As for opportunities in terms of Spa Hotel Härmä and its place of domicile, the author defined the following things from the research results:

Spa Hotel Härmä:

- Exercising services, physical activities from light to heavy
- Physical education instructors and physiotherapists

- Nutritionists
- Fitness tests, body composition measurements, muscle tests and bicycle tests
- Activities of Anssin Jussin Areena
- Entertainment and leisure-time activities
- Healthy, delicious and locally produced food
- The Finnish sauna and other sauna experiences
- Personal, customised service
- Spa, cosmetology and indulgence services

The city of Kauhava and the area of Härmä:

- Cleanness, freshness and purity
- Spaciousness
- Peacefulness and quietness
- Nature and beautiful surroundings; forests, sand pits and wastes
- Events arranged in the Southern-Ostrobothnia area
- Culture and the Finnish people
- The history of Härmä and the fierceness of the people living in Härmä
- Many options in terms of activities nearby (e.g. Härmä Golf, Powerpark, Ähtäri zoo and The Dudesons activity park)
- “The charm of novelty” when it comes to the area
- Location “in the middle of Finland”
- Good means of communication locally

As for challenges, in terms of Spa Hotel Härmä and its place of domicile, the author defined the following things from the research results:

Spa Hotel Härmä:

- Spa department and its services
- Lack of investments
- Lack of marketing to foreign countries
- Unfamiliarity concerning Spa Hotel Härmä among the foreign travelers
- Language skills
- Challenging facilities

- Lack of proper cooperations
- Long-term results in terms of international marketing
- Difficulty to aim for internationalisation as a single company

The city of Kauhava and the area of Härmä

- Distances
- Lack of decent airports
- Low attraction level of the Southern-Ostrobothnia area among the foreign travelers
- Unfamiliarity concerning the area of Kauhava and Härmä
- Possible negative attitudes toward foreign travelers

As thinking about international wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä, there are lots of opportunities in terms of the company itself and the area of Kauhava. However, in this study it turned out that at the moment there are only certain countries which would be sensible to reach out for. The most important country in terms of wellness tourism for Spa Hotel Härmä is Sweden. After that comes Norway and Russia. Sweden is a country that would be the easiest to reach out for because there are already campaigns towards the country and it is quite easy for the Swedish people to travel to Spa Hotel Härmä because of the daily shipping service between Vaasa and Umeå. The Lakeudelle.fi campaign and its destinations can be seen in the *figure 4*.

One problem which turned out is that the spa culture in other European countries is very developed and has a longer history than in Finland. The interviewees thought that Spa Hotel Härmä can not compete with other countries with its spa services. However, in terms of wellness tourism, it is important that Spa Hotel Härmä has that department included in their service supply. For that reason, the author put spa services to both categories: to opportunities and to challenges.

The most important things that would be needed in terms of international tourism, would be cooperations with other travel companies and organisations such as Ete-lä-Pohjanmaan matkailu Oy. The whole Southern-Ostrobothnia has to be involved as aiming for international tourism. The interviewees thought that there could be a common marketing idea which would be sold to foreign countries. It is certainly

impossible for a single company to reach out for international tourism and for that reason collaborations would be needed to aim for a common target. All in all, it can clearly be seen in the research results that personal well-being forms from different elements. With connecting different kinds of service modules to the wellness service supply, it is possible for Spa Hotel Härmä to reach out for countries such as Sweden, Norway and Russia. Internationalisation requires lots of investments and planning. Moreover, the results of international marketing can be usually seen only in the long term. What comes to international wellness tourism in Spa Hotel Härmä, all of the employees have to be committed to the internationalisation and serving foreign customers. Even though the level of the language skills of the personnel is quite good in terms of Swedish and English, these skills could always be more trained. This would make it possible to serve foreign customers better.

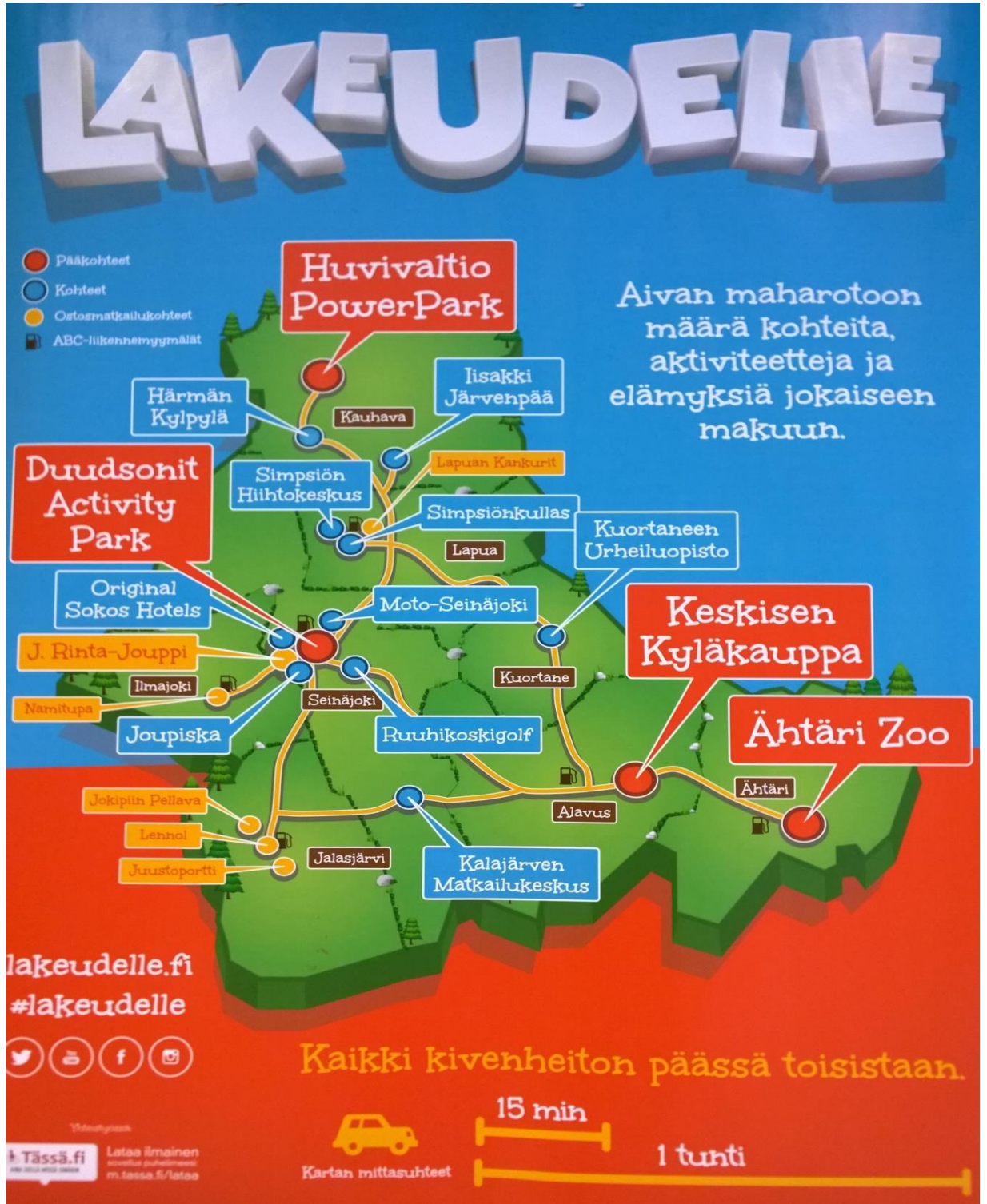


Figure 4 The Lakeudelle.fi campaign
(Picture taken by the author in Spa Hotel Härmä)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Themes of the semi-structured interviews

APPENDIX 1. Themes of the semi-instructed interviews

- A) Wellness tourism** – What thoughts do you have concerning wellness tourism?
- B) Wellness tourism products and services in Spa Hotel Härmä** – What kind of wellness tourism products and services Spa Hotel Härmä has in your opinion?
- C) Internationalisation** – What kind of thoughts you have concerning internationalisation in Spa Hotel Härmä?
- D) The opportunities of internationalisation** – In your opinion, what kind of opportunities Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?
- E) The challenges of internationalisation** – In your opinion, what kind of challenges Spa Hotel Härmä has when it comes to international wellness tourism?
- F) The challenges and opportunities of Spa Hotel Härmä's place of domicile (Kauhava)** – In your opinion, what kind of challenges and opportunities Kauhava has when it comes to international tourism?