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# **Yyteri as a destination for European tourists**

CASE: YYTERI HOTEL & SPA

DEGREE PROGRAMME IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM  
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<p>Attracting European tourists is a way to overcome the effects of seasonality in a coast &amp; archipelago destination in Finland. This thesis introduced Yyteri as a destination in regard to the surrounding nature and available activities. Further, a review of previously conducted consumer research was done by looking at visitor profiles designed by Visit Finland and assessing the results of a previous visitor survey.</p> <p>The research objective was to find out how Yyteri could become a more attractive destination for European tourists. This was achieved by identifying both the pull factors of coast &amp; archipelago destinations in Finland, and the type of experience that European tourists would like to take part in when travelling to Yyteri by answering the research questions proposed in the research task.</p> <p>The theoretical framework consisted of consumer behaviour in tourism, which included buyer behaviour influencing factors, tourist motivation as well as influence of destination characteristics. Moreover, tourism experiences in the form of experience realms and the experience pyramid model were introduced.</p> <p>Empirical data was gathered by using a qualitative research method in the form of theme interviews. Two employees of European tour operators were interviewed to gain insight about the motivations and values of European tourists that affected destination choice. Furthermore, interviews with a Finnish tourism expert knowledgeable about the Yyteri region and a guest that had been staying at the Yyteri Hotel &amp; Spa were carried out. A theory-guided content analysis method was used to analyse the data. As a result of the analysis process the three themes of nature, experiences and travel arrangements arose.</p> <p>The research indicated that the main attraction and most important pull factor for travelling to a coast &amp; archipelago destination in Finland was nature. Further, European tourists wanted to experience soft-adventure type activities while being surrounded by nature in Yyteri. Thus, the study concluded that highlighting the possibility to take part in experiences in nature in Yyteri was the key to attracting more European tourists to the destination.</p>		
<p>Keywords consumer behaviour in tourism, tourist motivation, tourism experiences, coast &amp; archipelago destination</p>		

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Yyteri is an outdoor destination on the coast of Western Finland, in the municipality of Pori. The area is most famous for its about six-kilometre-long beach, which was visited by three hundred thousand visitors in the summer of 2021 (Meritähti, 2021). However, the area offers more than just relaxation at the beach. The surrounding nature makes it a unique destination for those that wish to experience a variety of activities outdoors. Biking, horseback riding, birdwatching, and hiking are just a few of the things that Yyteri has to offer in terms of activities. (Visit Yyteri, 2022.)

The most popular month for visiting Yyteri is June, with visitor numbers declining in August partly due to less favourable weather conditions (Meritähti, 2021). Another factor that affects visitor numbers in Yyteri is the fact that most Finns have their summer vacation in June (Tilastokeskus, 2021) and are thus able to visit the coastal destination during that time. Seasonality is a problem that many coastal destinations struggle with (European Commission, 2016), and Yyteri is no exception.

Overcoming the effects of seasonality can be achieved by diversifying the tourism products and services offered and appealing to a wider range of customers (European Commission, 2016). Whereas June is the most popular vacation month for Finns, the month of August is generally equally popular in terms of night spent among European residents (Eurostat, 2019). Although the number of international visitors was steadily rising between 2015 and 2019 (Clausnitzer, 2021), further research is needed to accurately identify the pull factors of unique tourism destinations such as Yyteri to appeal to European travellers.

## 1.1 Research purpose and objectives

The purpose of this research is to identify what tourism experiences European travellers look for in a destination when planning their itinerary in Finland, and what the main pull factor of a destination are. To provide customers with experiences it is important to understand their motivations for choosing a travel destination. As the largest provider of accommodation services in the Yyteri area in 2022 (Yyteri Hotel & Spa, 2022), it is in the interest of Yyteri Hotel & Spa that the area has a sufficient variety of tourism products and services to offer to their customers. Thus, the objective of this thesis is to find out how Yyteri could become a destination that attracts more European travellers.

The research task is to seek answers to the following question: *what would motivate a European tourist to choose Yyteri as a destination as part of their itinerary in Finland?*

Assisting two sub question:

- What are the pull factors of a coast & archipelago destination in Finland?
- What kind of tourism experiences do European tourists want to take part in when travelling to a coast & archipelago destination in Finland?

## 1.2 Usability and delimitations

Through the research conducted in this study the author aims to identify what motivates Europeans to travel to the coast & archipelago region in Finland, and what pull factors affect the destination choice. Understanding the reasons why Europeans may want to travel to Yyteri and gaining a better idea about their values and desires can help tourism service providers in the region with making decisions about what tourism services or experiences to develop or improve. This can give the Yyteri region a competitive advantage for attracting more European tourists to the destination. Furthermore, the aim is to provide the commissioner with understanding of what the main attraction of a destination in the coast & archipelago region of Finland is for European travellers, so that they can make knowledgeable investments in the future for developing Yyteri to become an international destination.

The purpose of the study is not to research tourist motivations for choosing Finland as a destination, but rather to find out what factors within the offering of tourism services and products influence the decision to travel to Yyteri as part of a multiple-destination itinerary. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis the delimitation has been set to include only tourists that have already chosen Finland as the destination of their vacation. It is also not the aim of this research to identify which market segments within European travellers are more likely to choose Finland as a destination, which is why this thesis will discuss European tourists on a general level without further segmenting them into groups based on country of origin.

## 2 YYTERI

The author of this thesis completed their internship as part of their studies at the Yyteri Hotel & Spa in the summer of 2021. Following the internship, the author was still working at the hotel part time by the completion of this thesis. As the researcher had gained valuable information about not only the hotel but also the Yyteri region by working at the reception of the hotel, this thesis was commissioned by Yyteri Hotel & Spa to find out more about the travel motivators of European tourists.

### 2.1 Yyteri Hotel & Spa

Located right by the beach is the Yyteri Hotel & Spa that offers both accommodation and spa services. As of August 2022, there are 115 rooms available in the hotel. Two of the rooms are luxury suits; the Y-Suite on the sixth floor and the Panorama Suite on the seventh floor. Arriving to the hotel is easy by car or by taking a bus directly from the train station in Pori. (Yyteri Hotel & Spa, 2022.)

At the hotel there are 45- 50 workers employed during the summer months, consisting of both seasonal workers and permanent employees. Yyteri Hotel & Spa is not part of any chained-brand hotels, making it one of the largest privately owned hotels in Finland. (Yyteri Hotel & Spa, 2022.)

There are three restaurants on the premises of the hotel. The main restaurant Meriravintola, which is located on the second floor of the hotel, offers both à la carte dining and a buffet, and in the summer guests can dine outside on the terrace. On the beach is the Beach Restaurant Helmi, which offers fast food style options such as burgers, salads, and other finger foods. During sunny summer days the beach restaurant is very popular, as those only visiting the beach also frequently dine there. A new addition are Bistro Yvonne and Y-Bar on the sixth floor of the hotel, where guests can experience fine dining and drinks with a view overlooking the Bothnian Sea. The bistro has a changing menu according to the seasons and uses local ingredients in the preparation of the dishes. (Yyteri Hotel & Spa, 2022.)

The hotel also has multiple conference and meeting rooms, which can be rented for private events such as weddings or company parties. By negotiating with the sales staff customers can flexibly have events arranged according to their own needs, including catering at any of the restaurants, customised activities, and even live music. The private sauna facilities on the seventh floor offer the possibility for relaxation for groups of up to 25 persons. (Yyteri Hotel & Spa, 2022.)

The spa section of the hotel has multiple pools, including a fitness pool with a virtual fitness program, an outdoor pool that is accessible also in the winter, a pool area for smaller children and a jacuzzi. There are separate saunas for men and women, and the possibility to rent a private sauna next to the pools. Food and drinks can be ordered from the main restaurant and enjoyed by the pools. (Yyteri Hotel & Spa, 2022.)

## 2.2 Nature conservation in Yyteri

Stretching along the archipelago region from Merikarvia in the north all the way to Uusikaupunki in the south, the Bothnian Sea National Park is a nature conservation area that comprises approximately 160 km of the coast of Satakunta and Southwest Finland. 98 % of the area is water, and it also includes the waterfront near to the Yyteri beach. (Nationalparks, 2022.) National parks in Finland are kept as natural as possible in order to protect valuable natural sites. However, they are open to the public and visiting them is encouraged. (Ministry of Environment, 2022.)

The unique landscape in Yyteri is recognizable by the sandbanks along the shore, a highly endangered habitat of dune vegetation. The vegetation is resistant to harsh growing conditions such as wind, blowing sand and salt spray, but it is sensitive to trampling. Extending from Herrainpäivät to Preiviikinlahti, the majority of the sandbanks in Yyteri are protected by nature conservation legislation and they are part of the Natura 2000 area. (Pori, 2022.) The European Union aims to protect biodiversity and one way to achieve this is through the Natura 2000 network which protects habitats and endangered species. The Natura 2000 network is not a strict system of nature reserves where all human activities would be restricted, but rather it aims to work



together with people in order to ensure that sites are managed in a both ecologically and economically sustainable manner. (European Commission, 2022.) In addition to the endangered dune vegetation, the Yyteri area also has the most diverse breeding waterfowl population in the country (Ympäristö, 2020) which makes it a popular destination for bird-watching enthusiasts.

Not only is the Yyteri area part of nature conservation areas, but the destination wants to prove that it is strongly committed to sustainability in the long run. Yyteri was the first tourist destination in Finland to be awarded the Green Key environmental certificate for sustainable tourism. The Green Key destination is committed to raising environmental awareness among staff and customers, improving energy and water efficiency, and reducing the environmental impact of its operations. (Pori, 2019.) Globally Green Key is the leading eco-label certification in the hospitality industry, and it has so far been awarded to more than 3700 hotels and other establishments in 60 countries (Greenkey, 2022). So far, only three hotels have achieved the Green Key eco-label in Satakunta: Hotelli Raumanlinna in Rauma, Original Sokos Hotel Vaakuna in Pori, and Ahlströmin Ruukki in Noormarkku (Green Key, 2022).

Furthermore, Yyteri beach was awarded the first international Blue Flag certificate in Finland. The certificate was awarded in April of 2022, and the beaches that have received the award not only meet strict environmental, safety and accessibility criteria, but also commit to maintaining them (Visit Pori, 2022). In Finland, Yyteri is so far the only beach that has been awarded this certificate, but globally it is one of the most recognised voluntary awards for beaches, marinas, and sustainable boating tourism operators in the world (Blueflag, 2022). The awarded certificate is visible to visitors on the beach and can be recognized by a blue flag with blue waves on a white background.

### 2.3 Activities and services

The Yyteri region is perhaps most famous for its beautiful sandy beach, but the area also has a lot more to offer. In order to make it easier to choose from among the many activities and experiences available in the Yyteri region, Visit Pori (2022) has created four different traveller types. These profiles contain suggestions of activities and

places to visit during a trip to Yyteri, and they consist of Nature Lover, Family Adventure, Action Hero, and Hedonist.

For those that align themselves with the description of nature lover, Yyteri has a lot to offer. The majority of the Yyteri sandbanks are protected by nature conservation legislation and are part of the Natura 2000 area (Pori, 2022) but as long as travellers take care not to step onto the dunes which are sensitive to trampling there are many places to explore by foot. The area has more than 30 kilometres of various hiking trails, paths, and duckboards, with the opportunity to stop at one of the many observation towers for birdwatching (Visit Yyteri, 2022). For overnight visitors there are many different options for spending the night close to nature. Sleeping in a tent, renting a small cabin, or arriving by caravan is possible at the Yyteri Camping (2022) grounds. For bigger groups of travellers, the Yyteri Beach Holiday Resort (2022) offers cottages by the beach for up to 8 people.

Yyteri is also a good destination for families, as there are many activities that also children can take part in. Approximately 5 kilometres by car from the Yyteri Hotel & Spa is the Adventure Park Huikkee, which offers 11 different climbing tracks ranging from easy tracks suitable for children to more challenging tracks for those that already have some experience with climbing. At Huikkee it is also possible to rent a fat bike to ride on the many forest trails or on the beach, and in the summer the trampoline park by the Yyteri Hotel & Spa is open (Adventure Park Huikkee, 2022). Close to Yyteri Camping there is a stable where children can try out horseback riding (Yyterin Ratsastuskeskus, 2022) and of course the beach itself is suitable for children as the water is quite shallow (Visit Yyteri, 2022).

For active travellers that want to do more than just dip their toes in the sand, the Surfcenter Yyteri on the beach offers windsurfing lessons and kite surfing courses. There is a large variety of rental equipment available, and on less windy days activities such as SUP boarding are very popular. (Surfcenter Yyteri, 2022.) The beach also has a volleyball field (Visit Yyteri, 2022) and two rentable padel fields (Padel Imperium, 2022). At a close proximity to the sea there is also a golf course, where players can enjoy the game in a unique landscape of beach dunes, pine forests and water hazards

(Yyteri Golf, 2022). In the winter cross-country skiing trails are made along the beach and the dunes are transformed into sledding hills (Visit Yyteri, 2022).

Although relaxing by enjoying the sun on the beach is a good way to spend a day in Yyteri, the area has more to offer for a hedonist in the pursuit of pleasure. The wellness centre at the Yyteri Spa & Hotel offers massages and other relaxing treatments (Yyterin Lumo, 2022), and a day trip to the idyllic rocky landscapes of Kallo or the charming small archipelago village of Reposaaari is a great way to calm a busy mind (Visit Yyteri, 2022). During the summer months it is possible to take a cruise on board of M/S Charlotta from Pori to Reposaaari (Porin Vesibussiristeilyt, 2022).

Traveling to Yyteri is also possible with pets. Although it is prohibited to take pets to the main beach, there is a beach especially meant for pets in the area where dogs are allowed to run freely and enjoy the sea (Visit Yyteri, 2022). While many of the accommodation options in Yyteri have limited availability of pet friendly places to stay, the pet care centre located by the Pori dog beach is a good option for those travellers that don't want to leave their pet at home (Yyterin Lemmikkihoitola, 2021).

### 3 CONSUMER RESEARCH REVIEW

In order to help Finnish tourism service providers to internationalize, develop, sell, and market travel products Visit Finland offers assistance to companies and organizations by providing insights to Finland's latest travel statistics and arranging workshops in for example developing sustainable practices (Business Finland, 2022). One of the tools available to tourism companies are the visitor profiles that they have created.

#### 3.1 Visitor profiles

Whereas the visitor profiles created by Visit Pori help visitors in aligning themselves and choosing accommodation, services, and activity providers that suit their needs, the visitor profiles by Visit Finland have been created to aid companies with targeting the correct market segments and better understanding their motivations. By choosing a visitor profile to focus on, tourism service providers can more effectively attract for example international tourists to the destination.

Visit Finland has created six different customer segments, divided into main target groups, and supporting target groups. The main target groups in Finland are activity enthusiasts, nature wonder hunters and nature explorers who want to experience local nature. Supporting target groups are authentic lifestyle seekers, comfort seekers and city breakers. All six segments share either a primary or secondary interest in nature and a passion for experiences. (Visit Finland, 2018, p. 78.)

*Activity Enthusiasts* want to experience outdoor activities and sports. They are curious to try new and slightly more unusual sports and physical activities. They want to experience nature and beautiful landscapes through activities. The motive for travelling can be summed up as an active holiday in nature. (Visit Finland, 2018, p. 78.) In Yyteri such activities might be surfing, climbing or trail biking.

*Nature Wonder Hunters* travel for once-in-a-lifetime experiences and unique nature experiences. For them, the most important thing is to see the wonders of nature up close, to immortalise them and to share photos of their experiences. This segment is most attracted by nature-related phenomena, such as the northern lights. (Visit Finland, 2018, p. 78.)

*Nature Explorers'* travel motive is to seek the peace and quiet of the nature and recharge their batteries. They are a more nature-focused segment compared to the previous two. This group of travellers is particularly interested in forests and lakes, wilderness reefs, mushroom and berry picking, seascapes, islands, and national parks. They prefer activities where they can explore the surrounding nature according to their own pace. (Visit Finland, 2018, p. 78.)

*Authentic Lifestyle Seekers* want to discover as much as possible about the local way of life and blend in with the locals and avoid "tourist traps". They want to experience what it would be like to live in the destination, and they participate in the local way of life. This segment is interested in food culture, sauna culture, and local customs. (Visit Finland, 2018, p. 78.)

*Comfort Seekers* travel to promote their overall well-being and make time for themselves. Those belonging to this traveller segment are prepared to invest in more expensive and special accommodation, exclusive activities, wellness services, and fine-dining experiences. (Visit Finland, 2018, p. 78.)

*City Breakers* are most interested in urban experiences and sightseeing. This urban tourist segment is interested in urban and food culture, city features and attractions, museums and design areas, shopping, and events. (Visit Finland, 2018, p. 78.) This segment does not align well with Yyteri, as it is not an urban destination.

### 3.2 Visitor survey

A visitor survey was done in 2018 by interviewing foreign tourists departing Finland, and the aim of the study was to collect information about their travel habits.

Furthermore, it provided information on the profiles of the tourists. Interviewees taken part in the survey were randomly selected at border posts and asked questions about the length of their stay, where they stayed during their trip, the reason for coming to Finland, how often they visited Finland, and what they did in Finland. Overall, a total of 18,359 foreign travellers were included in the study. (Business Finland & Visit Finland, 2019, p. 7.)

This survey provided valuable data on the behaviour and motivations of travellers in Finland. For the purpose of this thesis the most interesting data was regarding the main attractions that made travellers choose Finland as their destination, as illustrated in Figure 1 below. For 59 % of all respondents Finnish nature was the main attraction and the reason for holiday destination choice. Adjusted to only taking into account the survey participants that came from a European country the result was 65 %. (Business Finland & Visit Finland, 2019, p. 16.)

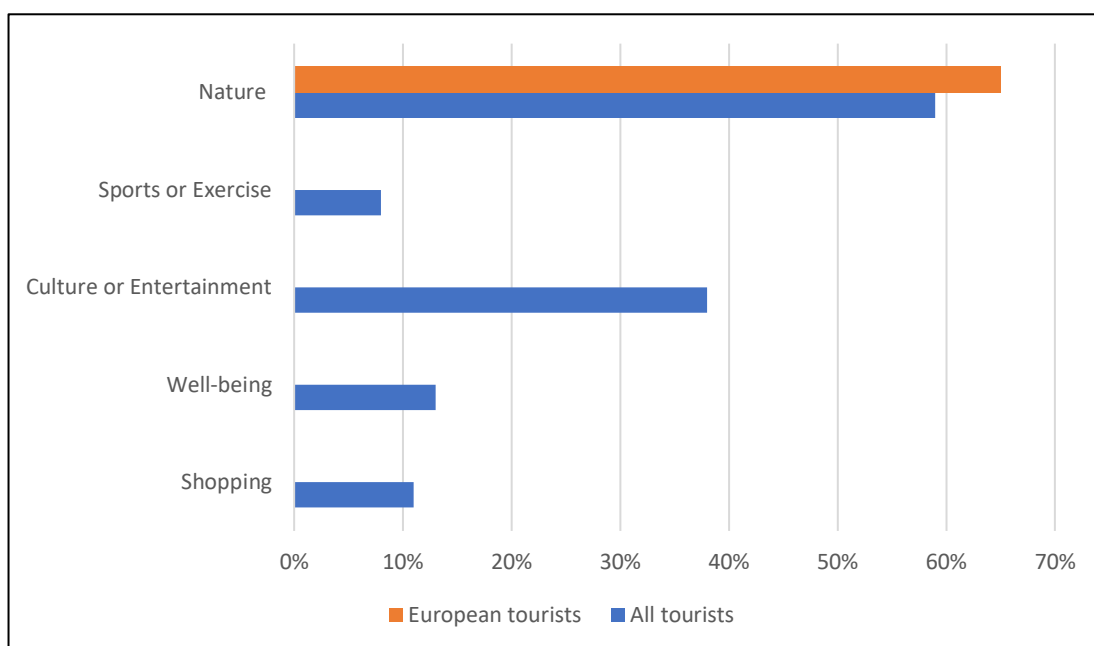


Figure 1. Main attractions in Finland for holidaymakers (Business Finland & Visit Finland, 2019, p. 16.)

Visitor surveys such as this provide tourism service providers with valuable insight into the travel motivations of tourists. However, they cannot always be used to generalize specific demographics as needs, wants, and values differ from person to person based on a number of factors. The complexity of consumer behaviour in tourism will be discussed in the next chapter through review of theoretical literature.

## 4 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN TOURISM

The social, cultural, and economic phenomenon involving the movement of people to countries or other places outside of their usual environments for personal or professional reasons can be defined as tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2008). Creating and retaining satisfied, profitable customers is the purpose of a business (Kotler, Bowen, Makens & Baloglu, 2017, p. 16), and this statement is also true for the tourism industry. Compared to many other consumer products or services however, tourism consists of a collection of both tangible and intangible elements that seek to fulfil the needs and wants of a consumer (Decrop, 2006, p. 21). Understanding consumer behaviour and the contributing factors to why people engage in tourism is essential to the economic success of businesses in the tourism industry (Page, 2011, p. 75).

Consumer behaviour in tourism is complex because it involves multiple decisions concerning various elements in the decision-making process when planning an itinerary. Prior to the arrival to the destination the tourist has already made several decisions, while others are not made until the arrival. The decisions a tourist makes involve both planned and impulse purchases, so it cannot be assumed that a travel decision is always thoroughly planned beforehand. (Cohen, Prayag & Moital, 2013, p. 880.)

Moreover, compared to other consumer markets the process of decision-making in tourism is more often a joint affair, as most tourists travel with family, friends, or others. Accommodation, services or even the duration of the trip are often discussed within the social circle before arriving at a joint conclusion. Family and friends affect the decision-making process of tourists planning a vacation more greatly than information available through a tour operator or internet sites. (Bronner & Hoog, 2011, p. 129.) Destination choice therefor becomes a social activity of problem solving where the task is to find a destination that caters to the needs of each individual, providing them with activities that they wish to partake in.

Generally, consumer behaviour is referred to as the process of selecting, purchasing, and using a service to satisfy the needs and wants of a consumer (Juvan, Gomezelj Omerzel & Uran Maravic 2017, p. 24). There are differences between consumer and tourist behaviour, and it is among other factors apparent in the timeframe. A tourist activity has multiple extended phases, with the planning stage of a trip taking up a considerably larger amount of time than for an average consumer purchasing activity (Pearce, 2005, p. 12.) Vacations may be planned years ahead, while many other consumer purchases such as for example buying groceries do not require the same effort for preparations.

Along with this prolonged process, the high competitiveness through increased globalization in the tourism industry makes gaining an advantage in the market difficult without the knowledge of how and why customers behave the way they do (Kotler et al. 2017, p. 118). One way to gain a better understanding of buyer behaviour in tourism is to deconstruct it into parts as Middleton, Fyall and Morgan (2009) have done through the use of the stimulus-response model as illustrated in Figure 2. Stimuli, processing, and response are the three main components in this model with the tourist as the buyer situated in the centre.

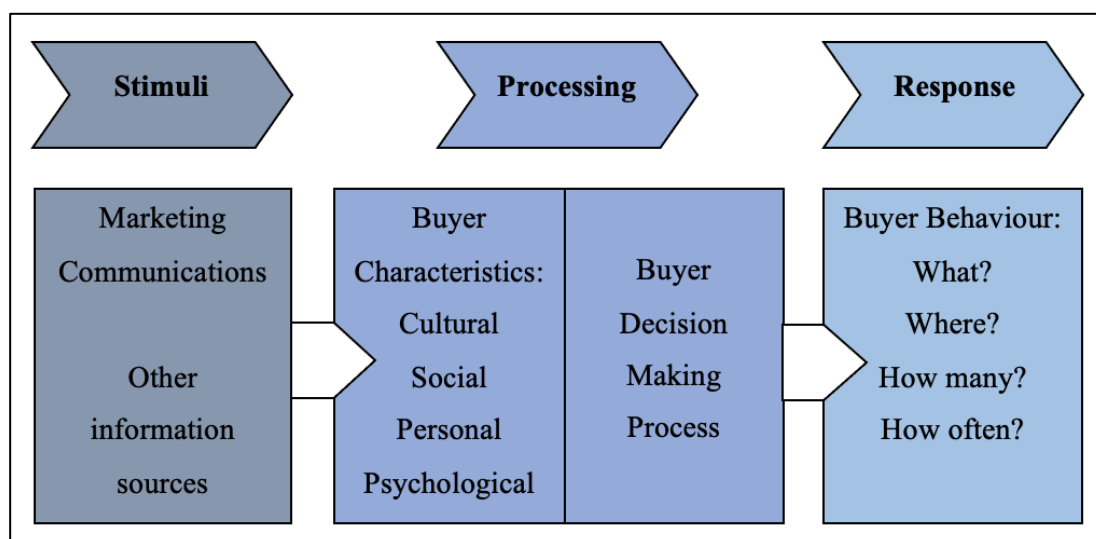


Figure 2. Model of buyer behaviour (Middleton et al. 2009, p. 78)

The model describes how external environment creates stimuli that the tourist absorbs information from, in order to form an image of the tourism product or service available. External stimuli may come from marketing materials, conversations with friends and



family, or other sources such as the news or social media. Social, personal, and psychological factors of the buyer then influence the processing of this information, and a decision is formed as a response. The result is a particular set of choices formed by the buyer through this process. (Middleton et al. 2009, 78.) For a tourism consumer, this may be for example where to travel, which means to travel by and when to travel.

Understanding how stimuli is transformed into a response in the minds of the consumer is important for tourism destinations. The individual characteristics of a buyer affect the decision-making process, which in turn influences the outcome. (Kotler et al. 2017, p. 118.) A large number of research done in the field of tourism is focused on the decision-making process and the affecting traveller specific characteristics. The interrelated and multidimensional structure of variables consisting of psychological, sociological, anthropological, and economical factors seeks to explain the dynamic nature of consumer behaviour in tourism. (Kozak & Kozak, 2016, p. 1.)

The following subchapters of this thesis will examine the factors that influence the behaviour of a buyer, before taking a closer look at tourism motivation which according to Sharpley (2006, p. 25) plays an important role in tourism behaviour as it acts as a catalyst for stimulating tourism demand.

#### 4.1 Factors influencing buyer behaviour

Both Kotler et al. (2017, p. 118) and Middleton et al. (Middleton et al. 2009, p. 90.) describe the mind of a consumer as a black box, underlining the difficulty of understanding the process from stimuli to response. According to Kotler et al. (2017, p. 118) the purchase decisions made by a consumer are strongly influenced by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors that should be considered by tourism service providers. These factors are further introduced and illustrated in Figure 3 on the next page.

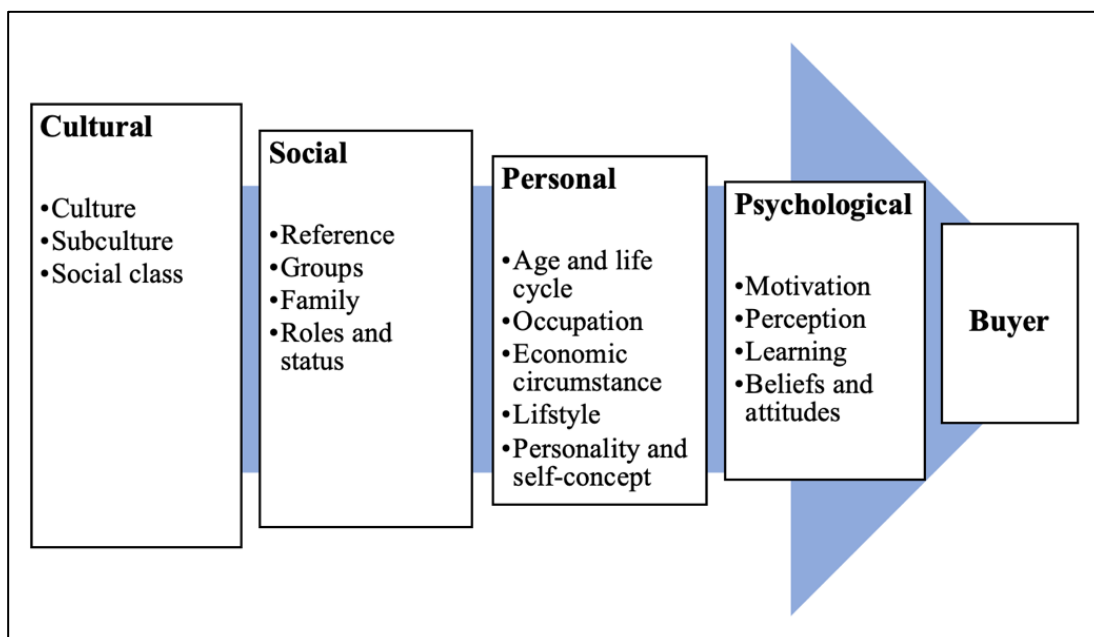


Figure 3. Factors influencing buyer behaviour (Kotler et al. 2017, p. 118)

Cultural factors include the shared attitudes, values and behaviour of a social group or community (Middleton et al. 2009, 82). Social actions and productive activity are influenced by the adopted culture of an individual, and thus it also influences the travel behaviour of a consumer. Subcultures are smaller groups within a community that typically conform to a lot of the norms set by the dominant culture but also have their own set of deviating norms that affect their behaviour. (Decrop, 2006, p. 12.)

Social class refers to structure within a society whose members share similar values, interests, and behaviours (Kotler et al. 2017, p. 118) Understanding the cultural differences of travellers is especially important when wanting to attract tourists from another country or region.

Social factors include opinions, trends and innovations that affect consumer behaviour, and they originate from friends, family, or other influential members of a social group that the tourist belongs to or aspires to belong to (Middleton et al. 2009, p. 82). Recently the influence that online social networks have on consumers has increased (Kotler et al. 2017, p. 121), emphasizing the need for a strong online presence from tourism destinations to appeal to potential guests.

Personal factors include psychographic profile or personality traits of an individual, as well as economic circumstances and other personal constraints that affect buying behaviour (Middleton et al. 2009, p. 81). How much money and time a tourist can devote to traveling is dependent on these factors, and while tourism service providers are not able to influence them, they should nonetheless be taken into consideration. The individual personality traits of a traveller characterize what type of environmental stimuli they respond well to, and what type of destinations they prefer (Decrop, 2006, p. 10).

Lastly, the buying behaviour of a consumer is influenced by four major psychological factors. Perception affects how a person experiences the world around them based on sensory information, while learning refers to the obtaining of new behavioural patterns through experience. As a result of these, people acquire beliefs and attitudes based on the information and experiences they have gathered. (Kotler et al. 2017, p. 125–126.) Middleton et al. (2008, p. 87) describe attitudes as the favourable or unfavourable feelings and thoughts people have about something. They are learned over time and can thus vary greatly between individual people, and a variety of sources affect how the attitudes of a person are formed. (Jansson-Boyd, 2010, p. 83.)

The fourth and final influencing psychological factor in the model illustrated by Kotler et al. (2017, p. 118) is motivation. It is a key variable in buyer behaviour, as it functions as a driving factor for humans to act on fulfilling their personal needs (Middleton et al. 2009, p. 80). Especially in the tourism industry it is important to understand the influence of motivation, where consumers not only purchase services or goods but also seek to have their expectations met (Kozak & Kozak, 2016, p. 18). As understanding the travel motivations of European tourists is the central theme in this thesis, motivation as psychological factor for tourist behaviour will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

#### 4.2 Tourist motivations

Although motivation may solely not be the largest variable affecting tourist behaviour, it is a critical variable and driving force and regarded as an important topic in research

conducted in the field of tourism because it relates to why people choose to travel (Woodside & Martin, 2007, p. 14). Middleton et al. (2009, p. 80) state that the continuous and largely unconscious process of feeling needs, wants, and goals within the mind of an individual are also responsible for creating travel motivations.

One of the most widely accepted theories used by researchers to understand human behaviour is Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs (Figure 4), which states that all human needs can be arranged into a hierarchy of five categories (Armstrong & Kotler, 2020, p. 163). Although the model was primarily created to provide an understanding of human behaviour and motivation in general, the wide scope of the theory enables it to be used in tourism as well. The hierarchy is built up with physiological needs at the bottom, followed by safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and finally self-actualization needs at the top (Cook, Hsu & Taylor, 2018, p. 56.)

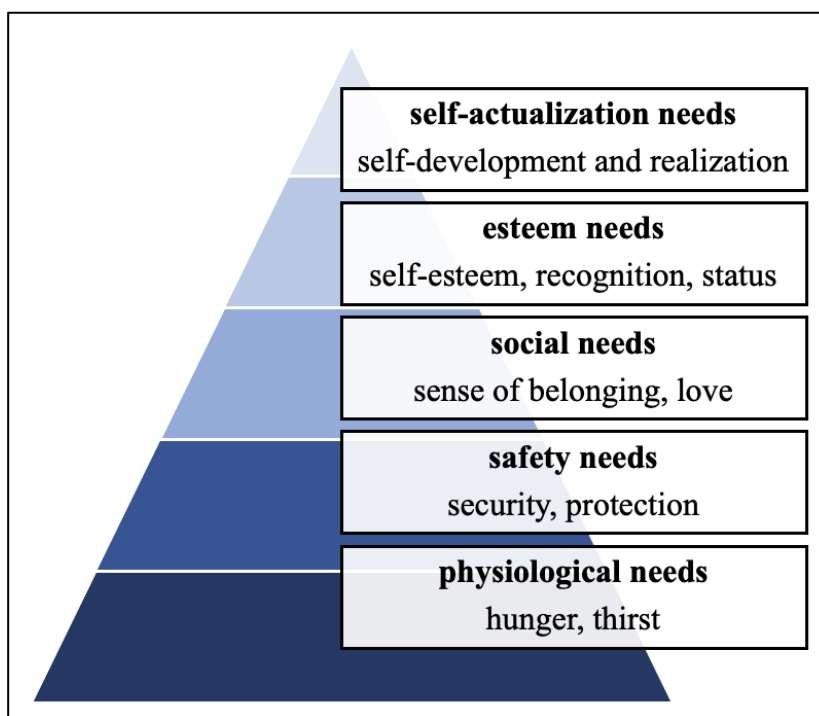


Figure 4. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Cook, Hsu & Taylor, 2018, p. 56)

Physiological needs are associated with basic human needs for water, food, clothing, lodging and sleep. Second is the need for safety, destinations attract visitors if they provide a sense of security and a secure environment. (Cook, Hsu, & Taylor, 2018, p. 56–57). Once these basic needs are satisfied, they are replaced as motivators by higher aspirations that reflect the social need for belonging, gaining status within a group as

a need for esteem, and finally the need for self-development or striving to fulfil the personal potential of an individual (Middleton et al. 2009, p. 80). These higher needs of self-realization are reflected by travellers through improving skills by participating in challenging activities or learning opportunities (Cook, Hsu, & Taylor, 2018, p. 58).

A theoretical model based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs that specifically considers the needs of tourists was designed by Pearce and Lee in 1988. The theoretical model, called the Travel Career Ladder (TCL), described travel motivation in relation to travel career levels through five different levels based on the needs for relaxation, safety, relationship, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs. As basic concept for this model was that the traveller progressed upwards on this career ladder as they gained more experience through travelling. It was later refined to become the Travel Career Pattern (TCP) model as seen in Figure 5 below, which puts more emphasis on the change of motivation patterns. (Pearce, 2005, p. 53–55.)

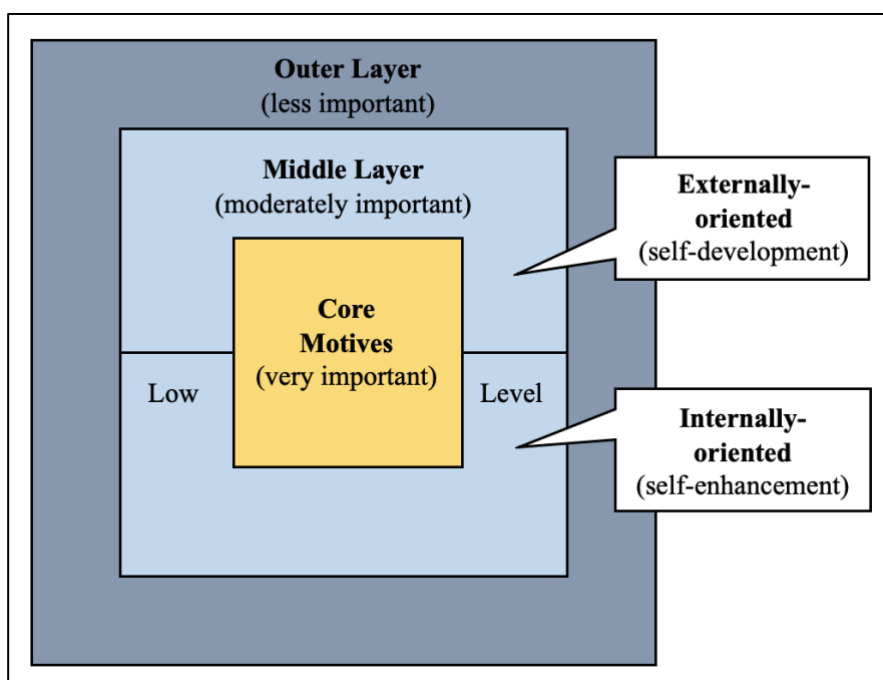


Figure 5. Travel Career Patterns (Cook, Hsu & Taylor, 2018, p. 59)

The TCP model is made up of three layers that illustrate different tourist motivations. At the centre of the model are the most important core motives such as novelty, escape from reality and strength of interpersonal relationships. The next layer consists of the moderately important travel motives that include both internal and external motives.

External motives are for example self-development such as involvement in the host community and seeking for nature, while internal motives are self-enhancement and can include of feelings such as belonging, romance, friendship, and autonomy. The outermost layer of the model is composed of the most common, stable, and less important travel motives such as nostalgia, isolation, and social status. (Cook, Hsu, & Taylor, 2018, p. 58–59.) This method of describing tourist motivations may prove to be more beneficial than linear approaches, since according to Middleton et al. (2009, p. 80) motivations are a dynamic process.

Another concept that is commonly used to explain motivations is the push and pull theory adapted to tourism by Dann in 1977, according to which there are several factors that motivate travellers to visit specific destinations and these factors can be categorized as either push or pull motivations (Cook, Hsu, & Taylor, 2018, p. 55). A set of socio-psychological factors push an individual to make a trip and pull factors in turn draw the tourist to a specific destination through the mental images of attributes held by an individual (Decrop, 2006, p. 79). This concept of push and pull motivations is illustrated below in Figure 6.

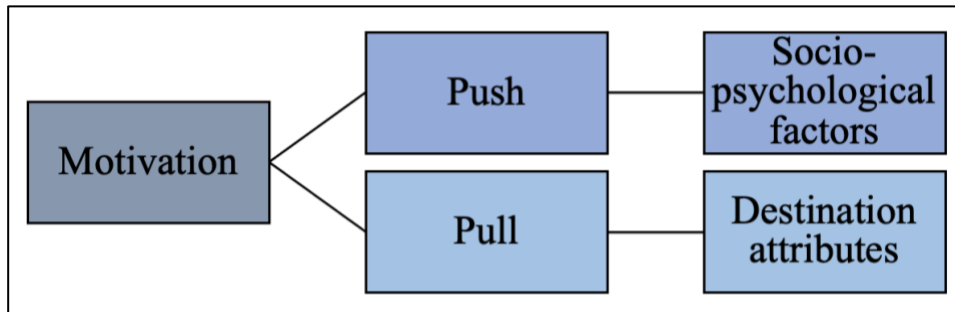


Figure 6. Dann's theory of push and pull motivations (Decrop, 2006, p. 79)

It can be said that the push motivation explains the desire for the journey itself, while the pull motivation explains that of the destination choice. Examples on push factors are a desire to escape from reality, perform a specific hobby, gain health benefits, or acquire new knowledge. Pull factors on the other hand are the attributes of a destination such as landscapes and nature, popular attractions, safety and security or shopping facilities. (Cook, Hsu, & Taylor, 2018, p. 56.) There is usually a connection between the push and pull motivations, and it is a combination of these that initiating the want to travel. The next section will focus on the attributes that influence tourist behaviour from a destination point of view.

### 4.3 Influence of destination characteristics

While tourism destination managers cannot always influence the internal motivations a tourist has to travel, they can make the destination more desirable by catering to the needs and wants of a tourist. Destination characteristics play a big part in the decision-making process of a consumer. Tourists make multiple financial and expenditure commitments when choosing a destination, and it is in the interest of the tourism service providers to understand what characteristics are desirable in the eyes of a consumer (Pearce, 2005, p. 86). In this subchapter a framework for categorizing a tourism destination will be introduced to further gain understanding in how the attributes or characteristics of a destination influence the travel motivations of a tourist.

According to Pearce (2005) a destination can be characterized by utilizing a framework of six system as can be seen in Table 1. Three of these systems are based on physical characteristics, whereas the remaining three have a more human and social face. This framework can be beneficial when attempting to classify what characteristics different groups of tourists value in their decision-making, because it organizes the destinations attributes into clearly distinguishable groups.

Table 1. Tourism destination characteristics (Pearce, 2005, p. 87)

Label	Emphasis	Characteristics and examples
Activities	Physical	Profiles: Relaxation, adventure, sports
Settings		Tourist zones
Facilities		Architecture, infrastructure, landscaping
Service	Social	Personnel, service quality
Hosts		Community, locals
Management		Marketing, branding

The first characteristics of the organizing systems can be labelled as activities. Both the commercial and public opportunities that are able to visitors are frequently listed when the questions of available activities in a tourism destination comes up. These activities can sometimes be profiled according to their type and intended market. (Pearce, 2005, p. 87–88.) For example, tourists that are wanting to experience nature can be offered with activities such as hiking or visiting natural preserve areas.

Additionally, activities can be profiled according to the physical resources they are available in, such as beaches or forests, and activities grouped in either format are often offered as packages to groups or day trip visitors (Pearce, 2005, p. 87–88).

Another way of systematically characterizing natural environments is to organize them into settings. Destination management organizations sometimes make use of this system, by for example defining certain areas as national parks, world heritage sites or wilderness areas. These settings are typically organized according to different kinds of tourists use, such as areas where camping or fire making is allowed, signed paths with different facilities marked along the route or areas with fragile vegetation or uncommon fauna. (Pearce, 2005, p. 88.) In destinations such as Ytteri where there are many different types of natural settings available this type of mapping can be beneficial, as a tourist may for example want to experience nature but be unwilling to venture into terrain that is difficult to traverse.

Facilities is the last approach with an emphasis on physical attributes of a tourism destination. Sometimes also called servicescapes in tourism literature, facilities pay particular attention to the physical comfort of the visitor. Architecture, surfaces, vegetation, sounds, and airflow are all characteristics of a facility that guests pay attention to when assessing their own physical comfort. (Pearce, 2005, p. 88–89.) For example, guest rooms, sanitary facilities, common spaces, restaurants, spa facilities and outdoor areas such as playgrounds can be categorized into this system.

Moving on to the characteristics with a social emphasis, service refers to the encounter situations that guest come into contact with. In a tourism destination this can include a vast number of different scenarios. The quality of the service, friendliness of staff, reliability of what was promised, service personnel competence, and responsiveness when solving possible problems are all different areas that can encompass the service characteristics of a destination from the tourist's point of view. (Pearce, 2005, p. 89.)

While many of these are intertwined with the other characteristics, the way in which a situation is dealt with by the staff is what emphasizes the social aspect of it. Adequate induction training and selecting the right people for the job is a large part of the service aspect and can ultimately make a big difference in guest satisfaction.



Not only the tourism businesses in a destination but also the host communities should be taken into account when characteristics are considered. How hosts welcome tourists and what perceptions they have on the impact of tourists on their community can also reflect how guests perceive a destination (Pearce, 2005, p. 89–90). While a tourism destination cannot affect how individual people of a population react to tourists, they can influence the attitudes of locals by educating them about the positives sides that for example increased tourism in a region can bring. Listening to multiple voices and representations of a community when making decisions that affect the whole destination can help in making the locals more welcoming towards tourists.

The final system characterizing a tourism destination is that of marketing and management. This system is closely linked to how tourists view the authenticity of a destination, as destination managers should strive to balance the potential economic profit and civic pride. Tourism can greatly influence a destination or region, and decisions made should also have the bests interest of the local community and surrounding nature in mind. Managerial, economic, and political forces that are constantly modifying a destination for tourists in mind also paint a picture of the degree of authenticity in a destination. (Pearce, 2005, p. 90–91.)

While pull factors in the form of destination characteristics do play an important part in the decision-making process of a tourist, it is most likely a combination of both push and pull factors that ultimately influence the final decision to travel to a specific destination. Neither push, nor pull factors can be said to be of more importance, as the motivations of tourists and the underlying reasons to travel are individualistic. (Sharpley & Stone, 2012, p. 114–115.)

## 5 TOURISM EXPERIENCES

At the centre of tourism consumption are tourism experiences. The search for unique and enriching experiences is a motivator for tourists to travel. Experiences can be described as a mental phenomenon, something that happens in the minds of people and is determined by external stimuli. Earlier motivational experiences, personal needs and strategies elaborate the mental awareness of an experience. (Dixit, 2020, p. 15.)

It can be said that memorability and uniqueness are requirements of an experience, but from a tourism perspective this is not always the case. Even experiences that are by themselves not unique or particularly memorable play a role in shaping the tourist experience. Ordinary activities such as relaxation can be classified as a tourist experience. However, some elements of the tourist experience should at least be different from a traveller's regular surroundings, such as the environment where the activity takes place. (Dixit, 2020, p. 20.) Ultimately a successful tourism experience can however not be guaranteed as experiences are subjective (Tarssanen & Kylänen, 2005, p. 4) in terms of memorability and uniqueness and these factors depend on the eye of the beholder; something that is completely ordinary to one person could be a special occurrence for someone else.

### 5.1 Experience realms

According to Pine and Gilmore (2011) experiences are as distinct from services as services are from goods. Experiences differentiate themselves from services in that they are customized, memorable, and immersive events that a company offers to a person. In these tailored experiences the staff are not only doing a task, but they are actively performing a role that becomes a part of the experience. Rather than being just a customer, the person taking part in this staged experience is regarded as a guest, where the goal is to not only entertain but also to engage them. This level of engagement can be measured in four different dimensions as can be seen in Figure 7.

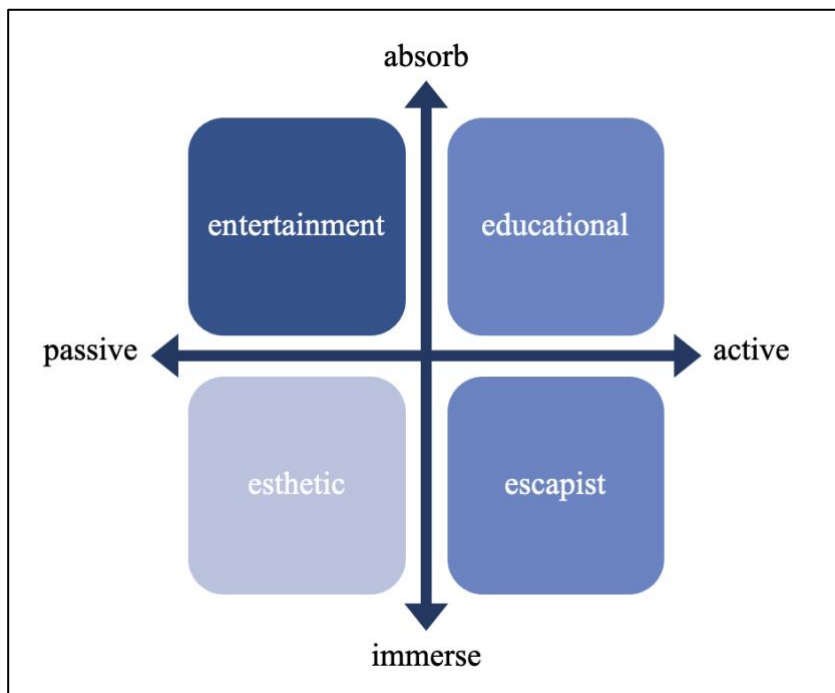


Figure 7. Experience realms (Pine & Gilmore, 2011, p. 46)

The first dimension in this experience realm model created by Pine and Gilmore in 1999 measures guest participation: ranging from passively taking part in the activity as a bystander without affecting the performance to actively shaping their own experience through participation. On the second axis the mental or physical participation is measured, in other words whether the experiences are absorbed by observing from a distance or if the guest is immersed into the activity by physically taking part. An experience is created by pairing these dimensions into four different realms consisting of entertainment, educational, esthetic and escapist.

Pine and Gilmore (2011) explain that by passively absorbing without getting immersed, such as listening to music or reading a book, the experience is mostly within the realm of entertainment. When the experience becomes more active and requires participation from the individual, such as for example a cooking class, the experience is educational in nature. In this scenario the learner absorbs the information from the teacher while actively participating. On the flip side is the escapist experience, in which the participant not only actively takes part but also is able to immerse themselves into the surrounding environment. Hiking trips and climbing adventures are examples of escapist experiences. Lastly is the esthetic experience, where the

individual is immersed but has little or no effect on the event unfolding before them. Bird watching could be an example of such an escapist experience.

Pine and Gilmore (2011) underline that while some experiences may fit neatly into a single one of these realms, the perfect experience is created when it contains elements of all of them and it is modifiable to fit the needs and wants of the guest within the two dimensions. This way, an experience becomes tailored and distinguishes itself from a ready-made package service, becoming more memorable and compelling in the eyes of the participant. Of course, the nature of the activity must be taken into account, as not all experiences are meant to be actively enjoyed. Especially with activities that are unfolding in nature should experience providers take care to not disturb wildlife or harm the environment. Successfully designing experiences for guests is one of the biggest challenges for tourism destinations.

## 5.2 Experience pyramid model

One of the tools that can aid in analysing and understanding the experience content in a tourism product is the experience pyramid. This framework was developed for the experience industry by Tarssanen and Kylänen in 2006 at the Lapland Centre of Expertise for the Experience Industry.

The model (Figure 8) represents an ideal experience where all the elements of the experience pyramid are accounted for. Service providers can use this framework to analyse their existing products and to identify elements that can be modified or further developed in order to design an experience that provides customers with a meaningful, positive, and memorable experience. By using this tool, the flaws and weaknesses of an experience are easily identifiable.

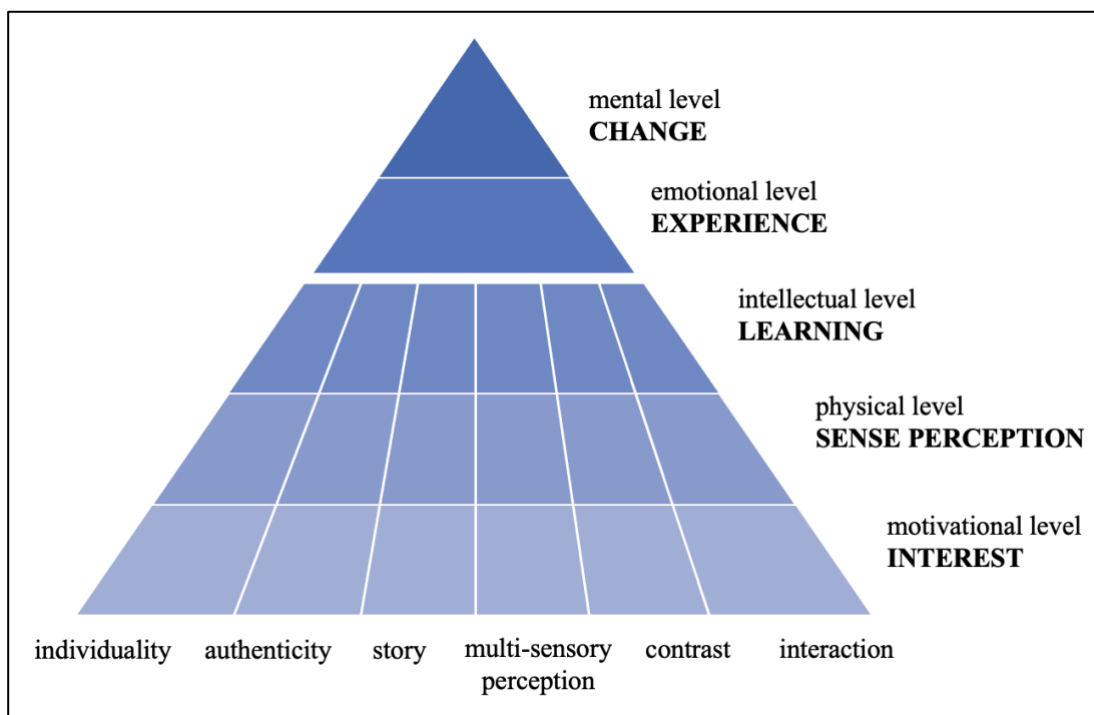


Figure 8. Experience Pyramid (Tarssanen, 2009, p.11)

The experience is analysed from two perspectives in the model: the product elements, and the levels of experience from the perspective of the guest. Although it is not possible to guarantee a meaningful experience for every guest, the likeliness increases by utilizing this concept and ensuring that the experience design includes all elements of the model. In order to be distinguishable from conventional tourism products an experience should contain individuality, authenticity, story, multi-sensory perception, contrast, and interaction. (Tarssanen, 2009, p.11–12.)

*Individuality* refers to the uniqueness of the product, whether or not a completely identical or similar product is already available elsewhere. The individuality of the product is reflected in that it is customer oriented, flexible, and it provides the opportunity for customization according to the needs and wants of the guest. On a basic level this means that there is flexibility in the activity so that each participant can fulfil their own preferences, for example in terms of challenge level and the information provided. The degree of individuality and customization of the product can be increased almost indefinitely, but usually the cost also increases in relation. The challenge is to design products with a basic concept that can be replicated and that are easy to personalize. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 11–12.) If a destination has characteristics

that are unique to the region or a country, incorporating them will increase the level of individuality in the experience.

*Authenticity* means the credibility of the product, meaning that it portrays the real way of life and culture of a region. A product is authentic if the customer perceives it as credible and genuine, as it is a matter of what each individual person perceives to be local. When designing a product, it should be based on the culture of the locals, so that they perceive it as a natural part of their own local identity. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 12–13.) This means that for example a northern destination should be careful in attempting to replicate southern European food culture without incorporating local ingredients or preparation methods.

*Story* is closely connected to the authenticity of the product. Social significance and content are added to the product through a credible and authentic story, tying together different elements of the product and giving the guest a reason to experience it. The story provides the guest with justification for how the activity is performed and in what order. Facts and fiction, such as local lore or old beliefs, are elements of a good story, engaging the guest on an emotional level. The audience should be taken into account when planning the story, in order to maximize the impact that it has on the guest. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 13–14.) Factors such as seasons should also be taken into account when telling the story; a tale about a record-breaking blizzard may not be as impactful on a hot summer day.

*Multi-sensory perception* means that all stimuli are carefully designed to reinforce the desired theme and support the appeal of the product. If there are too many sensory stimuli or they are distracting, the overall impression of the product may suffer. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 13–14.)

*Contrast* is the variation of the product from the perspective of the guest, meaning that the product should be different from what the guest experiences in everyday life. The guest should be able to experience something fresh, unfamiliar, and out of the ordinary. When creating contrast in a product the nationality and culture of the guest should be taken into account. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 14.) Trying to design a product with the perspective of the guest in mind can be challenging for service providers if they lack

general cultural understanding and experience working with people from outside of their own local environment.

*Interaction* refers to the communication that a guest has with a service provider, other participants as well as the product and its producers. Experiencing something together, as part of a community, a group, or a family is an essential part of interaction. Therefore it is important that guests taking part in the same excursion are at the very least introduced to each other for example. Experiencing something individually is possible, but through the sense of community that interaction brings a more memorable experience is created. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 14–15.)

The previous concepts represent the horizontal base level of the experience pyramid model through essential elements of a tourism product. A good tourism experience incorporates all elements into a product at each level. On the vertical axis the levels of experience as perceived by the guest are visualized, beginning from the conscious decision to take part in the experience and building up to an eventual change in perception of the experience as whole (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 15). At this stage of experience planning the ability of the service provider to put themselves into the shoes of the guest is underlined.

On the *motivation level*, the interest of the customer is aroused and expectations towards the product are created, for example through marketing and previous knowledge. Already at this stage as many of the product elements as possible should be met, and the marketing of the tourism experience should include all of these concepts in order to successfully reach and attract the target audience. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 15.)

Next is the *physical level*, where the product is experienced through senses. Physical sensations make the guest aware of where they are, what is happening and what they are doing. A good product provides a comfortable and safe experience, with the exception of activities where some level of physical discomfort is to be expected such as feeling tired after a good workout. The technical quality of the product is also measured at this product. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 15.) Taking into consideration the

physical fitness level of a guest and offering them a tailored experience through activities they can take part in is important to ensure guest satisfaction.

On the *intellectual level*, the guest will process and act on sensory stimuli from the environment, applying knowledge and forming opinions of the experience. The intellectual level contributes to the decision-making process of the guest, whether or not the experience was positive. A good product offers the customer an opportunity to learn something new, either consciously or unconsciously. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 16.) This element of the experience design requires service providers to make quick decisions: if guests seem uninterested or are already knowledgeable in the product then the activity should be replaced or omitted completely.

The very essence of the experience is experienced on the *emotional level*. The emotional reactions of individuals are difficult to predict and control, but if the basic elements of the experience levels have been taken into account so far, then a positive reaction is likely to be expected from the guest. A positive emotional response, such as happiness or the feeling of success, contributes to creating a meaningful and memorable experience. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 16.) As different people may have very individualistic ways of exhibiting their emotional response, utilizing for example a feedback form may be a good practice to gather information on how the experience could be further improved.

The final level of the experience pyramid model is the *mental level*. A personal experience of change may occur when the experience has provided the guest with a positive and powerful emotional response. This change can be visible through the individuals physical or mental state, or a change in their way of life and how they perceive the world around them. An individual may feel that they have positively developed as a person or changed the way in which they interact with people for the better. A personal change can also include starting a new hobby as the result of an experience. (Tarssanen, 2009, p. 16.) The ultimate goal of a service provider should be to offer guests an experience that reaches this mental level and satisfies all elements, in order to create a lasting and meaningful and positive impression that will have them returning to experience it once more, preferably with friends and family in tow.



### 5.3 Choosing experiences

As seen in the previous section, the creation process of turning a tourism service into an experience is a multifaceted undertaking that requires several elements and levels to be taken into account in order to be successful in the eyes of the participating guest. This process of designing and implementing various components makes it a time-consuming operation, that requires a vast array of knowledge not only from the producer but also the staff involved in executing the experience for the guest. Finding individuals with the required skillset and training them to be a part of the team is also easier said than done, especially in a seasonality-based industry such as tourism.

Two parties take part in process of choosing an experience: the supplier, which in this case is a tourism business, and the tourist, and the choices of these two parties do not always align with each other. Values, business models, competencies and budgeting restrictions are all factors for a tourism business that determine what experiences they are able to offer, and they try to satisfy the demands of a tourist within these margins. However, tourism service providers cannot be sure of the wants and needs of a tourist, and ultimately the experience is created within each individual guest through the mental stimuli created by the tourism service provider. (Jensen & Sundbo, 2020, p. 140.)

The decisions made by tourists can often be coincidental and situational, as the matter of having an experience is to a large degree a matter of decision and choice. Therefore, it is not possible for tourism businesses to foresee exactly how guests will react when facing a choice, they can only present them with options that they think will lead to an experience. Knowledge of guest interests and values and providing good service elements can ensure a closer match between the intended experience and the eventual realized outcome. (Jensen & Sundbo, 2020, p. 149.)

## 6 METHODOLOGY

Once the theoretically elaborated part of the thesis was concluded, interviews were conducted in order to gather empirical data. Research in tourism is often done by utilizing quantitative methods such as surveys, as numerical data provides researchers with information about for example the number of people engaging in leisure activities. However, a quantitative approach would require a large number of participants in order for the research to be considered reliable. (Veal, 2018, p. 42). As presented previously in this thesis, a large-scale visitor survey was performed by Visit Finland in 2018. Thus, the author of this thesis opted to use qualitative methods to gather the empirical data, in order to better understand the motivating factors of European tourists travelling particularly to the coast & archipelago region of Finland.

### 6.1 Research methods

The qualitative method is one of the primary research-approaches next to quantitative research, and the non-numeric data provided by this method supplies the researcher with rich and valuable information (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2014, p. 118) Although surveys have been conducted on the travel motivators of tourists visiting Finland, this data does not provide enough in-depth information on the topic of this thesis. As a destination Yyteri is rather unique and can therefore not be directly compared to other coast & archipelago tourism destinations in South-Western Finland.

Questionnaires are a good method of gathering large amounts of data, but the information gathered only reflects knowledge the researcher already has on the topic (Veal, 2018, p. 137) due to the static nature of the questions presented in a survey. Thus, new concepts and ideas may not arise. By applying qualitative methods, the research is connected to existing theory and can be based on previous research, but the process can uncover new ways of thinking and provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of the topic (Misoch, 2015, p. 25). When objective is to gain new knowledge it can be useful to carry out exploratory research by interviewing persons with expertise on the topic or by conducting in-depth individual interviews (Saunders,

Lewis & Thornhill, 2019, p. 186). Therefore, in order to acquire new knowledge and gather versatile information on the topic, qualitative research in the form of interviews was applied to this thesis.

As opposed to quantitative methods, the sample sizes in qualitative research methods are relatively small. Data is gathered from persons that are deemed to have the most valuable information on the research topic. (Veal, 2018, p. 25.) Typical features of qualitative research are the description of experiences, interpretations, perceptions, and views. Social relations are explored through qualitative methods by describing the reality as it was experienced by the respondents. (Adams, John, Khan, Hafiz & Raeside, 2014, p. 6.) Conducting interviews enabled gaining a better understanding of what would motivate European tourists to choose Yyteri as a destination, and what type of activities they wished to partake in.

In qualitative research methods empirical data is often gathered through semi-structured interviews, also called theme interviews. In the context of research, empirical means that the data is based on real world evidence as opposed to theoretical data that can be abstract ideas or purely analytical (Adams et al. 2014, p. 8). A theme interview does not proceed through precise, pre-formulated questions but rather themes are prepared in advance according to which the interview progresses, modifying the topic in a flexible manner as new information comes up (Adams et al. 2014, p. 143–145). Flexibility is the main benefit of interviews, as questions can be repeated and any misunderstandings can be cleared up instantly (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, section 3.1). This is especially important when the interviews are not performed in the native language of the participants.

Furthermore, due to being a more conversation-like situation, theme interviews are a good method of gathering research when not all themes are discussed to the same extent with all interviewees. Auxiliary questions or keywords can be prepared in advance to fuel the conversation (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006a) and they can be modified according to who is being interviewed. The order of the questions being asked can also be changed accordingly. For the purpose of this study theme interviews were chosen because the content and flow of the interviews may vary and thus having more flexibility to guide the interview is beneficial.

In order for the interview to be focused on specific themes, it is necessary to have knowledge about the research topic as the themes are selected from pre-existing theories, research, and literature. Moreover, the selection of interviewees should be approached with careful consideration, as research participants should be chosen based on who is most likely to have knowledge about the research topic. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006.) This highlights not only the importance of the knowledgeability on the theoretical framework part of the thesis, but also the ability to find interview respondents suitable for the study.

## 6.2 Research process

Four interviews were conducted to gather empirical data. One Finnish tourism specialist was chosen based on the knowledge and experience that they possess about Yyteri as a tourism destination. Additionally, two persons that were employed at European tour operators were interviewed, as they regularly worked with tourists travelling to Finland and thus had knowledge about the topic being researched. The last respondent was a guest that had been staying at the Yyteri Hotel & Spa. This was to ensure that the researcher could also gain information from the perspective of a consumer.

Apart from the person who had been staying as a guest at the hotel, the respondents were contacted by the author through email. The nature and purpose of the research was explained to the interviewees in good time beforehand. Basic information about the respondents can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Basic information of interviewed persons

Identifier	Country	Gender	Occupation	Other information
Ivan Tavazzi	Italy	Male	Chemical engineer	Guest at Yyteri Hotel & Spa
Maria Rasmussen	Finland	Female	Tourism specialist, Visit Pori	
Michelle Derksen	Netherlands	Female	Sales, Cape Tracks	Tour operator employee
Patricia Lawitschka	Germany	Female	Sales, Skandinavientrips	Tour operator employee

In order to assure that sufficient topical data was gathered during the interviews, two interview guides (Appendix 1 & Appendix 2) were prepared in advance. The first guide was utilized during the interview with Maria Rasmussen, tourism specialist. It was also used during the interviews with tour operator employees Michelle Derksen and Patricia Lawitschka. Since one of the interviewees was a guest that had been staying in Yyteri, a separate guide that contained slightly modified questions was prepared for the interview with Ivan Tavazzi.

These guides contained the themes that were to be covered during the interviews, as well as some auxiliary questions to aid the interviewer due to the complexity of the research topic. Interviewees were given space to speak, as the aim is to encourage them to speak freely about the themes at hand (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). The themes were chosen based on topicality of the subject being researched and they were based on existing theoretical literature.

The first theme included in the interview guide was based on travel motivations. By presenting this theme in the interview the aim of the researcher was to find out what the underlying motivations for choosing the Finnish coast & archipelago region as a destination were. As the main purpose of this thesis is to research the motivations of European tourists this theme was the most important one.

The focus of the second theme were the travellers values and the reasons for choosing a destination. Understanding the reasoning behind choosing a particular destination was the goal of this theme, as well as identifying pull factors that contributed to the destination choice. Furthermore, the objective of including this theme was to find out if the consumer respondent had travelled to Yyteri before, and what the reason for returning was.

Products and services were the third themes of the interview. Through this theme the researcher wanted to know what types of products and services travellers expect from a destination located in the coast & archipelago region of Finland. This theme included keywords such as accommodation type and -quality, as the researcher wanted to find out what level of accommodation European tourists expect.

Fourth was the theme of travel arrangements. Understanding the travel methods, duration of stay, and travel company was the purpose of presenting this theme in the interviews. This theme was of interest because these factors may impact the destination choice of travellers. Lastly, a question that aided in understanding the behaviour of travellers in regard to booking activities was included.

The last theme in the interview guide was the theme of experiences and activities, which was focused on what travellers like to do during their trip and what kinds of experiences they prefer. The researcher was also curious if European tourists preferred to partake in guided activities or if they liked doing them according to their own pace.

All of the interviews were conducted between September and November of 2022. One of the interviews was done face to face at the Yyteri Hotel & Spa as the respondent was a guest staying at the hotel. The remaining three interviews were done online in a video conference call. When asked if they would prefer to participate anonymously, all interviewees gave permission for their names to appear in the thesis. With the permission of the participants the interviews were recorded and transcribed, including the questions asked by the interviewer. Then, the data was analysed.

### 6.3 Content analysis

Content analysis is frequently used to analyse qualitative data. It focuses on what issues, topics, and themes the data tells us about. (Vuori, 2022). In the case of this thesis the data gained from the interviews provided a view into the researched phenomenon, and thus content analysis was used. During the analysis process, the material provided by the data is organised in a coherent and structured manner without losing the information it provides. Content analysis is based on the researcher's own interpretation and reasoning. So, the analysis proceeds from empirical data to concepts, and further interpretations made by the researcher that attempt to describe the phenomenon being studied (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, section 4.4.)

A theory-guided analysis method was used to analyse the data gained from the interviews. When utilizing this method theoretical concepts offer support, but the analysis is not strictly based on theory. Previous theory is recognisable in the analysis, but rather than to test a theory the purpose is to open new ways of thinking. At the beginning the analysis is data-based, but towards the end of the process theoretical framework will be included. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, section 4.2.) This method was chosen because it granted the researcher freedom to explore new information within the data, while using theory as a guide to look for certain concepts that were integral to the topic of the thesis.

After thoroughly familiarising themselves with the gathered data by reading through the transcribed interviews multiple times, the analysis process began by coding the data. This was done by color-coding interesting passages. These passages can vary widely in scope, from single expressions to long phrases (Vuori, 2022). According to Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2018, section 4.1) the coding process acts as a way of structuring information relevant to the topic being studied. Furthermore, they act as a way of visualising the text. Although the method of coding can freely be chosen by the researcher, it should be done systematically across all data sources meaning that the same points are sought. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, section 4.1).

After the coding process was complete, the concepts were categorized. To avoid getting lost in the details during the categorization process, general conclusions are drawn from the variation within the data by comparing them. Attention is paid to both the differences and similarities. (Vuori, 2022). Thereafter, the results were ready to be further analysed. This was done by selecting the themes most relevant to the topic of the thesis and identifying patterns and connections in the data. Research findings are then able to be summarized and finally, interpreted to draw a conclusion. (Schreier, 2014, p. 173.) The themes that emerged during the analysis process of the interview data are described in the next section.

## 7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 7.1 Analysis results

Through the process of analysing the data three central themes emerged: nature, experiences, and travel arrangements. The following figures illustrate and describe the results. Firstly, described is the theme nature, as it appeared the most frequently during the data analysis process. Figure 9 below portrays the nature theme along with the associated subcategories.

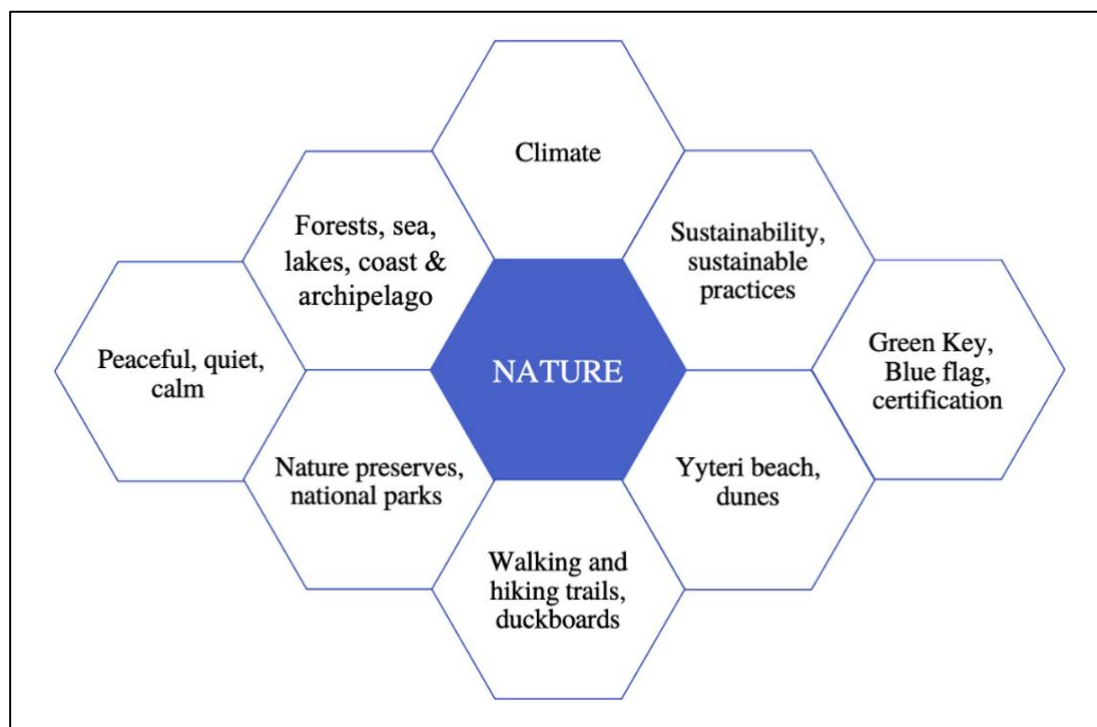


Figure 9. Analysis themes. Nature. (Carenius, 2022)

Nature was a theme that was brought up as an important factor during all interviews, and it was also the main motivation for choosing to travel to the Finnish coast & archipelago region. This aligns with the results of the visitor survey conducted by Visit Finland mentioned in chapter 3.2, where nature was stated to be the main attraction for a majority of visitors when travelling to Finland.

Forests, sea, lakes, coast & archipelago, and the beach of Yyteri were mentioned as natural attractions that interested travellers, as well as national parks and nature



preserves. Travellers wanted to experience the peace and quiet of nature close by. The close proximity of hiking trails and duckboard routes in Yyteri was mentioned as a positive factor, as travellers wanted to venture out into the nature without having to travel any further. One interviewee, Ivan Tavazzi, mentioned that walking along the beach was also very enjoyable, as the sea scenery was something he appreciated.

The climate in Finland was also mentioned during several interviews. Although the weather is not always favourable, it was said that it is positive that the summers in Finland are not too hot. Even during the summer months travellers are able to enjoy nature and being outdoors, without feeling uncomfortably hot.

Lastly, the subcategory of sustainability and sustainable practices emerged. A respondent working for a tour operator, Patricia Lawitschka, described herself as an environmental activist and explained that sustainability was an important factor for choosing destinations to cooperate with. Environmental certificates such as Green Key or Blue flag were seen as positive, but sustainability should also be visible in practice. Maria Rasmussen, tourism specialist, pointed out that it was not enough that Yyteri as a destination had these certificates; companies in the region should also strive to acquire them.

However, interview data suggested that while sustainability was important for tour operators, it is not something that travellers bring up while acquiring about destinations in Finland. One respondent speculated that this might be because Finland is perceived to be an already environmentally friendly country, and therefore sustainable practices are seen as a given. It is up to the companies to validate these beliefs.

As portrayed in upcoming Figure 10, the theme of experiences was another theme that emerged from the interview data. Travellers want to experience both the cultural aspect of Finland, as well as take part in activities that happen in nature.

Finnish sauna came up multiple times during the interviews, with varying viewpoints being brought up. The authentic Finnish sauna as an experience was perceived to be attractive to travellers by the Finnish tourism specialist Maria Rasmussen. Ivan Tavazzi, the Italian guest, who had been staying in Yyteri told that he had enjoyed the

sauna a lot. On the other hand, Michelle Derksen from Netherlands said that it was not something her clients were particularly interested in. During the interview with the German tour operator employee, Patricia Lawitschka, the subject did not come up.

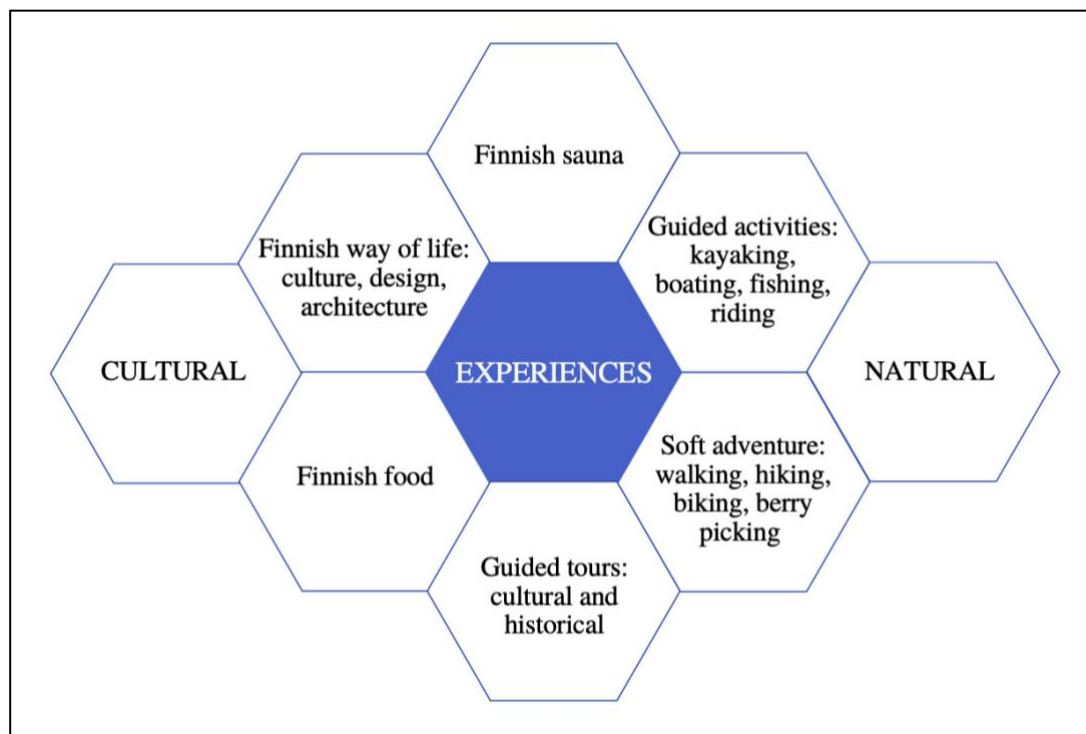


Figure 10. Analysis themes. Experiences. (Carenius, 2022)

Finnish food was also mentioned; travellers want to experience authentic Finnish tastes. Furthermore, it came up during the interview that the Finnish way of life was something travellers from the Netherlands wanted to experience; having heard that Finland was the happiest country in the world. Travellers were also interested in seeing Finnish design and architecture; especially traditional wooden houses were mentioned as compelling. If possible, travellers would like to take part in guided cultural- and historical tours.

As for the natural experiences, most respondents answered that soft-adventure type activities were preferred. Soft-adventure is a term to describe recreational activities that are not overly physically demanding and that are suitable for beginners (UNWTO, 2014, p. 12).

Activities in nature such as walking or hiking, biking, and berry- or mushroom picking were brought up as enjoyable experiences. Additionally, respondents mentioned that

travellers could also be interested in slightly more advanced activities such as kayaking, boating, fishing, or riding if a guide was present. Overall, however, the data suggested that travellers preferred to venture out into nature on their own without the presence of a guide.

The last theme that was present in the analysed data was that of travel arrangements, as presented in Figure 11 below. This theme includes information such as travel methods, duration of the stay, and hotel room preferences.

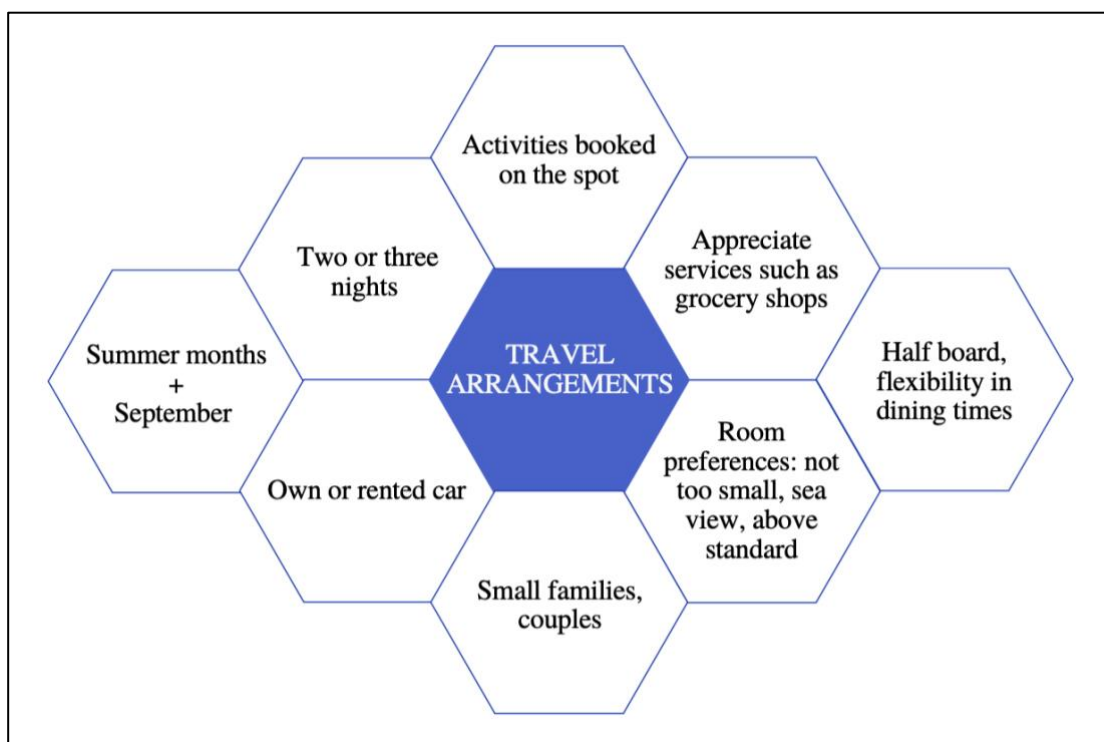


Figure 11. Analysis themes. Travel arrangements. (Carenius, 2022)

The interviews with the tour operator employees revealed that the most popular time to visit the coast & archipelago region in Finland was during the summer, but September and October were also mentioned as possible months to travel. Most clients opted to stay in one destination for two or three nights, some even for four nights. Clientele consisted mostly of couples and small families. Although they booked accommodation in advance, activities were almost exclusively booked on the spot at the destination. They travelled with their own car, or they rented a car once they arrived in Finland. Electric vehicle charging stations at Yyteri were seen as positive, and travellers would likely not be averse to paying a parking fee.

When asked about services that travellers would expect to find at a destination such as Yyteri, the possibility to buy groceries was mentioned. Ivan Tavazzi, who had stayed in Yyteri, said that it was good that there is a grocery store in the nearby village, but he would have appreciated being able to buy basic necessities at the hotel. Travellers from Germany and Netherlands were said to be accustomed to paying by card, so services such as an ATM were not needed.

Accommodation preferences were also enquired about during the interviews. Rooms should preferably not be too small in size; the Italian respondent who had been a guest at Yyteri Hotel & Spa described the rooms as spacious. He also mentioned that sea view from the room was something that was very important to him. Furthermore, three respondents said that travellers would be interested in booking rooms above standard. In addition to the factors mentioned, things that travellers pay attention in hotel rooms according to interview data are quality of mattresses and bedding, and the condition of bathrooms. Lastly on the topic of travel arrangements, it was mentioned during one of the interviews that travellers expect a higher standard from hotels than other accommodation types. When renting cottages, they are willing to oversee some missing attributes for the added convenience of a private space, but hotels should be sufficiently equipped and well-maintained.

The next section contains the conclusions that the researcher has reached based on the interpretation of the results gained through analysis of the interview data and comparison with theory presented in this thesis. Furthermore, it provides suggestions to how the themes that emerged during the research process can be utilized to make Yyteri a more attractive destination for European travellers planning an itinerary in the coast & archipelago region of Finland.

## 7.2 Discussion and suggestions

The main factor that affected destination choice for European travellers was nature. Not only was it the main attraction when travelling to Finland as was discussed in section 3.2 of this thesis, but it also played a major role in choosing destinations in the Finnish coast & archipelago region. Europeans want to travel to a destination where

they can feel at peace and relax while surrounded by nature. Although beautiful nature can be found almost anywhere in Finland, the beach in Yyteri is a unique asset that should not be neglected when examining travel motivations of European tourists. While not being the sole pull factor of Yyteri, it still contributes to making the region a one-of-a-kind destination in the coast & archipelago of Finland.

Furthermore, the Green Key and Blue Flag certificates that the beach holds make it a sustainable destination choice, which research indicated was another important factor for destination choice of Europeans. The topic of sustainability and sustainable practices were especially decisive for tour operators, not only in terms of destination but also accommodation and service providers. Therefore, the author suggests that the Yyteri Hotel & Spa seek to be Green Key certified, in order to appeal to European travellers and tour operators that value sustainable practices.

The visitor profiles created by Visit Finland were presented in chapter 3.1 of this thesis. Main activities that according to research were attractive to European travellers were of the soft-adventure type, such as walking or hiking in nature. Based on this finding the visitor profile of *Nature Explorer* is the most suitable approach, so the development of soft-adventure activities that take place in nature should be focused on.

However, as discussed in chapter 5, creating tourism experiences is not simply a matter of providing activities or services to travellers. A number of elements factor into whether a tourist perceives something to have been an experience or not. Next to experiences in nature the topic of culture was apparent in the findings. Travellers want to experience authentic Finnish lifestyle, design, and architecture.

Reposaari was mentioned during one interview as a charming village. Travelling to Reposaari by public transport is currently a challenge. However, research indicated that Europeans favour travelling by car in the coast & archipelago region of Finland. This allows for more flexibility when planning day trips. Cooperation with locals and promoting Reposaari as a day trip destination could increase the overall attractiveness of the Yyteri region.

Lastly, the author deemed the topic of accommodation type to be of importance when discussing the factors of destination choice for European travellers. Destination characteristics such as hotel rooms can influence consumer behaviour, as presented in section 4.3. Although interviewees were not able to estimate how much the average European tourist was willing to spend on hotel accommodation, the data suggested that above standard rooms were favoured. The definition of “above standard” is also a subjective matter, as there is no real industry standard for what this means. Sea view and spaciousness were mentioned to be of high importance by the Italian guest that had stayed at Yyteri Hotel & Spa.

Further research is required in this area in order to confidently estimate the spending habits of European tourist. Interview findings showed that activities were preferably booked at the spot in the destination, but accommodation was usually booked in advance. Providing suitable options for tourists choosing hotels for their stay is a key factor for influencing destination choice.

As a conclusion of this section of the thesis, it should be said that tourist motivation is a complex topic like already discussed in section 4.2. Although the main attraction of nature could motivate European tourists to choose Yyteri as a destination as part of their itinerary in the coast & archipelago region of Finland, the answer is likely more complex as various factors influence destination choice. The quality of the research will be reflected upon in the next section.

## 8 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The assessment of reliability and validity represent key aspects of evaluating the quality of a study. As the quality is ultimately dependent on how research is approached, assessing the reliability and validity is an essential part of the research process and concerns both the methodology used in a study as well as the conclusions derived from the results. (Hiltunen, 2009, p. 2.) The quality of the research topic is further elevated through the significance it holds for the commissioner.

Although traditionally the mentioned concepts concern the measurements done in quantitative research, they can also be applied to qualitative research methods albeit through different interpretations of their meaning (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006b). When assessing validity in qualitative research, the focus is usually on how well the research design and used methods correspond to the phenomenon being studied. This requires the researcher to grasp the underlying needs of the research, in order to effectively choose methods according to the desired knowledge. Lack of validity would suggest that the empirical findings and the study itself are detached from what was originally intended. (Hiltunen, 2009, p. 3.) For the purpose of this study a profound knowledge of Yyteri as a tourism destination as well as understanding the needs of the commissioner was required in order to adequately accomplish the research task.

Selecting the correct individuals for interviews and asking the right questions ensures that relevant knowledge can be attained. (Hiltunen, 2009, p. 3.) This required thorough previous knowledge of the subject being researched, which was attained by review of relevant theoretical literature. Furthermore, the researchers ability to reflect established theories in the data gathering methods affects the validity of the research (Vilkka, 2021, chapter 7). Themes discussed during the interviews were based on existing theoretical concepts, ensuring that the purpose of the study was adhered to. Moreover, appropriate concepts, methods, and data were used to ensure the topicality and rigour of the study.

Reliability indicates how credibly a method measures the desired phenomenon, and to what extent the results can be reproduced when the research is repeated at a different point in time. Consistency is another indicator of reliability, when the same results can be achieved through the use of different methods or when research is conducted by different people. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2022, section 8.2.) In other words, the results of the study should be non-incident in order for the research to be considered reliable. As interview data gathered for the purpose of this thesis contained themes that emerged multiple times, it can be said that the results of the research were consistent.

The consistent application of methods further ensures a high degree of reliability (Hiltunen, 2009, p. 9). Although slightly different questions were asked during the interviews, an interview guide prepared beforehand ensured that the intended themes were discussed during all interviews. Questions should be unambiguous and understandable (Hiltunen, 2009, p. 11) as not to contribute to any personal bias of the researcher.

However, Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2022, section 8.2) also note that while the replicability of measured results is important in quantitative research, the aim of qualitative research is usually not to produce the same results as previously but to uncover new knowledge about the subject. Thorough documentation of research design and methods contribute to the replicability of a study as well as transparency (Vilkka, 2021, chapter 7), and although similar research can be done the results presented in this thesis are a reflection of specifically Yyteri as a destination. Thus, it cannot directly be used as a generalization of the travel motivators of European tourists in other destinations. Furthermore, the motivations of tourists differ from person to person and can change over time according to travel trends or other factors.

Lastly, the quality of research is directly related to whether the objective has been reached or not. A study should aim to meaningfully connect literature, research questions, and findings. The conclusions drawn as a result of the thesis findings will be discussed in the next chapter.



## 9 CONCLUSION

The main objective of this research was to find out how Yyteri could become a more attractive destination for European tourists. Therefore, the motivations, values and the main factors for destination choice were studied by conducting four theme interviews and analysing the gathered data to reach a conclusion. Additionally, this thesis sought to answer what the pull factors of a coast & archipelago destination in Finland are.

Research indicated that the main attraction and the most important pull factor for destination choice was nature. European tourists want to experience the peaceful and relaxing nature that Finnish coast & archipelago destinations can offer. Sustainable practices and nature conservation efforts were also seen as important pull factors. The possibility to experience authentic Finnish culture in Yyteri was seen as enticing. Lastly, providing accommodation options that suit the needs of European tourists is a key factor to influencing destination choice, above average rooms are preferred.

Findings of the research presented that European tourists want to experience soft-adventure type activities in Yyteri such as walking, hiking, or biking while surrounded by nature. Thus, the study concludes that by highlighting the pull factors identified as important in this research and further developing experiences that consist of activities incorporating nature will help to make Yyteri a more attractive destination for European tourists.

This thesis provided the commissioner Yyteri Hotel & Spa with a review of theoretical literature, which can act as a source for theoretical concepts that can be applied in the future when developing tourism in the destination. Further, it provided visualised insight into the motivations of European tourists through the three themes of nature, experiences, and travel arrangements that emerged from the analysis process of the research. Suggestions were made based on these themes that can help with making Yyteri a more internationally attractive destination. Lastly, by suggesting the visitor profile of *Nature Explorer* the destination can more accurately target the market segment most likely interested in visiting Yyteri.

## 9.1 Feedback

During the process of this thesis the author cooperated closely with the commissioner in order to meet their needs. Several meetings were arranged along the way to discuss the progress of the research. Once the thesis had been completed, a meeting was held where the author presented the findings and thereafter received feedback from the commissioner. Further research tasks were also agreed upon. Below is a translation of the feedback received via email from Janne Larisuo, hotel manager of Yyteri Hotel & Spa.

Thank you Susanna for the meeting and for your work in the form of a thesis. As we already discussed, this work answered all the questions that were agreed upon during the kick-off meeting. We will now incorporate this work into our internationalisation strategy and use it in cooperation with the planners as we develop the hotel expansion project further. Once again, thank you for your work. It was excellent!

## 9.2 Reflection

The process of writing this thesis was long, but it offered a great learning experience. Especially valuable was the opportunity to do research of significance for the commissioner, as it required the researcher to carefully assess the purpose of the study and choose research methods accordingly. The importance of understanding and further applying theoretical concepts to real life-situations was also highlighted when conducting research of practical use. Additionally, the research conducted during this thesis provided the researcher with a good basis of knowledge for pursuing further educational goals. Efficiently finding reliable sources and applying critical, reflective thinking are skills that grow over time. Time management of a large project was also a valuable experience. Lastly, the guidance provided by the thesis supervisor was greatly appreciated.

The author considers that the research done for this thesis was conducted using reliable, thorough methods and following research ethics. Analysis of the data was

approached without any previous bias, and findings were presented in a transparent manner. Thus, the validity of this research can be considered to be of a high degree. A suggestion for a possible future research task regarding this topic would be to design a tailored experience package for Yyteri that take the findings presented in this thesis into account. To achieve this, research on the spending habits of European tourists travelling to specifically the coast & archipelago region in Finland is required. Although existing research takes into the nationality of the travellers, spending habits and spending targets are not divided according to the destination in Finland that was travelled to. Different types of activities are also not accounted for in depth. A study on the spending habits of European tourists travelling to Yyteri could be beneficial for pinpointing what kind of experiences they would most likely be willing to spend money on. Furthermore, the research of this thesis treated European tourists as a homogeneous group for practical reasons but to efficiently target the right segment of customers the nationality of those most likely to visit Yyteri must be researched.

Thus, continuation of the research work was agreed upon with the commissioner of this thesis to find the drivers of pricing and marketing, including the range of accommodation spending and the income level of potential customers. Furthermore, performing market segmentation to find out which European countries to include in the first marketing package according to return of investment.

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### Interview Guide

Tour operator employee, tourism specialist

The purpose of my thesis is to identify what pull factors and motivators affect the destination choice of Europeans that have chosen to travel to the coast & archipelago region in Finland. With my research I am going to interview Finnish tourism experts, as well as European tourism agencies that provide tours to Finland. Hopefully this will give tourism service providers in Yyteri more insight to what motivates European tourists, and thus what services or products should be improved or developed in order to attract more European travellers to the region.

#### **Theme 1: Travel Motivation**

- What motivates travellers to choose the coast & archipelago region of Finland as a destination for their holiday?

#### **Theme 2: Values and reasons for destination choice**

- What do travellers find important about a coast & archipelago destination in Finland?
- Have any of your clients travelled to Yyteri before?
  - If yes, did you receive any feedback about their trip to Yyteri?

#### **Theme 3: Products and services**

- What services would travellers expect from a holiday destination in the Finnish coast & archipelago region?  
(Accommodation type and quality)

#### **Theme 4: Travel arrangements**

- Do travellers travel alone or with someone?
- By what means do they travel?
- How many nights do travellers usually stay at a destination in the coast & archipelago region?

#### **Theme 5: Experiences and activities**

- What types of activities do travellers usually prefer?
- Do travellers prefer guided activities, or do they like to partake in activities independently?

### Interview Guide

#### Guest

This interview is a part of the research done for my thesis commissioned by Yyteri Hotel & Spa. The purpose of my thesis is to find out what factors influence the destination choice, and thus how Yyteri could become a more attractive destination for European tourists. This will give tourism service providers in Yyteri knowledge about what services or products should be improved or developed.

#### **Theme 1: Travel Motivation**

- What motivated you to choose Yyteri as a destination?
- Have you travelled to Yyteri before?
- If yes, what made you want to visit again?

#### **Theme 2: Values and reasons for destination choice**

- What do you find important about a coast & archipelago destination in Finland?

#### **Theme 3: Products and services**

- What services did you appreciate in Yyteri?
- Are there any services you are missing?
- What do you think about the rooms in the hotel?

#### **Theme 4: Travel arrangements**

- Are you travelling alone for this trip?
- How many nights are you staying in Yyteri?
- How are you travelling?

#### **Theme 5: Experiences and activities**

- What activities have you done during this trip?
- Are there any activities or experiences you wish you could have taken part in here in Yyteri?