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Destination brand of Satakunta

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this thesis was to examine the destination brand of Satakunta from the perspective of tourists. This was done to offer a new perspective for tourism development in the area. The commissioner of this thesis was the Center for Tourism Business Development.

The theory of this thesis consisted of destination branding, defining unique selling points and attractions of Satakunta region, and going through characteristics of Satakunta as a destination. The theory acted as a basis for the research.

Mixed methods research was used in the thesis in a form of a questionnaire which was available to attendants of SuomiAreena 2023 event in both paper- and electronical form. The questionnaire was conducted in Finnish. The answers were collected at the SuomiAreena event from 27.-30.6.2023. The questionnaire consisted of respondent's background information, satisfaction to services and attractions, familiarity and emotional connections, personal images, and development suggestions regarding Satakunta as a destination. The answers were analyzed based on respondent's living region to find differences in their responses.

In the responses, a positive image of Satakunta as a destination was highlighted and it was already a familiar destination for many. Respondents were also mostly pleased with the attractions and services of Satakunta. The question regarding emotional connections had the most dispersion among respondents. Key development points from respondent's point of view dealt with marketing, more diverse events and services, and utilization of the coastal environment of Satakunta.

Keywords: Destination brand, Brand image, Satakunta

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1 INTRODUCTION

Business Finland has developed a branding centred to Coast and Archipelago region of Finland, which consists of a much broader region than Satakunta alone. It includes the coastal area of whole Finland, all the way from Kotka and Turku to Pori and Vaasa all the way up north Oulu. (Visit Finland, n.d.-a) In 2019, this region received 5,8 million overnight visitors and saw an increase of 5,9 per cent compared to 2018 and of these visitors 1,1 million were foreign tourists (Business Finland & Visit Finland, 2019). This goes to show that the region has seen growth and has potential in attracting even more visitors.

However, since the coastal and archipelago region signifies a large geographical area, it is clear that there are some regional differences that have not been able to be considered in detail in this generalisation made by Visit Finland. This is why the topic of this thesis is centred around the tourism brand of Satakunta and its development. The thesis explores the destination brand of Satakunta and aims to gain knowledge of push and pull factors the area currently has. Besides being a coastal destination, Satakunta has also a lot of areas in the countryside filled with various attractions and tourism services. For this reason, it would be beneficial to do research regarding the branding of Satakunta as its own region.

2 COMMISSIONER AND RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 Commissioner of the thesis

The commissioner of this thesis is the Center for Tourism Business Development which operates at the Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK). SAMK offers higher education on the west coast of Finland and offered 40 different trainings in 2022, 29 in Finnish and 11 in English. They have over 500 partner companies and over 200 international partner universities. (Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, n.d.)

Center for Tourism Business Development's main target group is small tourism businesses operating in the Satakunta region. In their activities they take into consideration the needs of these businesses and encourage the industry towards sustainable and profitable business. Through the Center for Tourism Business Development, businesses can get support and knowledge for developing their business through which they can improve their skills. In addition, the businesses get opportunities to create and expand on their networks and find new cooperation partners. Versatile projects are in a central role of their activities and are meant to further develop the tourism industry of the area. They collaborate with many different tourism stakeholders, for example, learning institutions and associations. (Center for Tourism Business Development, n.d.)

2.2 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this research is to examine the destination brand of Satakunta region as well as to find out the unique selling points of the area. The main objective is to learn about who are the tourists traveling to Satakunta and how could the destination be developed further to better accommodate to their needs. This kind of research has not been systematically conducted and it would give the businesses operating in the region a clearer picture on the potential target groups. In addition to how to reach them better and develop

marketing tactics that are suitable for the target customers as well as figuring out what are the unique selling points of Satakunta.

For the commissioner of this thesis, the research would give them valuable insight regarding the tourists' images about Satakunta as a destination. This could be later utilized in other projects and development of tourism in Satakunta. The topic will be explored through the main research question, and sub-questions, written below.

- How can the Satakunta region develop its destination brand?
 - What is the destination brand and unique selling points of Satakunta?
 - What are the main target groups visiting Satakunta?
 - Which factors are in need of further development?

2.3 Delimitations and usability

Defining the destination brand of Satakunta will be helpful in the development of the tourism industry in the area. As mentioned before, this type of research has not recently been conducted and it would be helpful for the commissioner who is a significant actor in developing the tourism in Satakunta region. Therefore, the research would be topical and helpful in seeing Satakunta as a travel destination from the customers' perspective.

The quantitative data collection, in this, collecting questionnaire answers, was conducted in the Suomi Areena event and respondents consisted of the participants of that specific event. The answers were collected at the Center for Tourism Business Development's booth at Kansalaistori during 27.-30.6.2023. Some key things that might be affecting the respondents' answers are, the feel of rush, and if the respondents are truly motivated to answer the questions. By answering the questionnaire, respondents had an opportunity to win a gift card to a local tourism business. The questionnaire was conducted in Finnish and directed more towards domestic tourists.

3 DESTINATION BRAND

3.1 Defining brand of a destination

One way of defining destination branding takes into account both the external image of the destination and the internal identity of a destination and the entity these aspects form together. The brand and image of a destination can be investigated from either viewpoint of supply or demand. The brand of a destination is a simplified view of the destination which consists of tourists' reflections of the mental images the place in question awakens. In addition, it highlights the competitive advantages the place has. (Edelheim & Ilola, 2017, pp. 137-138.) Cano Guervos et al. (2020), remind that when studying the consumer behaviour in destination branding, it is important to remember that consumers' decisions can be influenced by multiple factors, including outside influence from friends, family, and other tourists who live in the same area.

Brand identity on the other hand implies on the vision how a certain destination should be seen in the markets. The values and culture of the destination are seen as the foundation of destination brand identity. Because of the different stakeholders a destination has, also the brand identity is a product of interaction and co-operation. (Edelheim & Ilola, 2017, pp. 137-138.)

3.2 Destination image

Destination image is an important aspect of destination competitiveness as it has an influence on the tourists' decision making. The destination image is formed through the tourist's expectations and beliefs, knowledge, and assumptions about the destination. These can be related to the tangible destination attributes, or they can be symbolic. Destination image can be said to have three different phases. First, the organic destination image which refers to the image a tourist has about the destination without being influenced by advertising or other marketing of the destination. In addition to the previous, second phase, the induced image, includes the marketing efforts and messages that

have reached the tourist and piqued their interest to visit the destination. The final phase, complex destination image, can be used when the tourist is already experienced with the destination in question. (Dixit, 2020, pp. 160-161.) Destination image can be different for each individual and it can be affected by friends, advertising, or social media. However, it is not the same as a destination brand. The destination image that the tourists have can be enhanced or changed with marketing strategies. (Lohmann & Panosso Netto, 2017, p. 211-212.)

Destination image can be measured using either structured- or unstructured techniques, which both have their own advantages. Using structured techniques means giving respondents a ready-made list of attributes to choose from or to rate based on their perceived destination image. With this, the research is more manageable, and the data is easier to analyse. Unstructured techniques on the other hand, give respondents more freedom as they can describe the destination image with their own words. This minimizes the possible bias researchers may have and gives an opportunity for more unique characteristics the destination is perceived to have to be noticed. (Wang & Pizam, 2011, p. 134.)

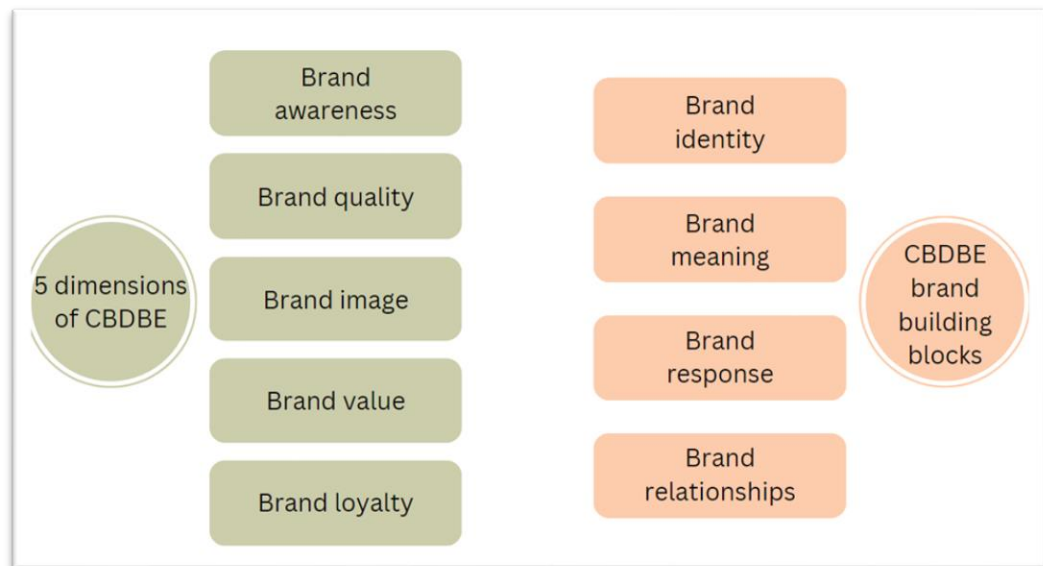
3.3 Consumer-based destination brand equity

Consumer-based destination brand equity (CBDBE) is a tool destination marketers can use in measuring how the destination brand is seen by tourists. This is done by measuring how marketing impacts on what tourists remember about the brand. (Cano Guervos et al., 2020.) It is a multidimensional tool that examines consumer brand awareness, loyalty, the assessment of value, brand quality, and the image of a brand (Cano Guervos et al., 2020; Chekalina et al., 2018). Chekalina et al. (2018), add that according to studies made, it is a reliable tool in identifying both consumer perception of destination brand as well as areas of improvement. However, the multidimensional nature of destinations must be taken into account, since measuring consumer-based destination brand equity is more complex than with tangible goods.

CBDBE can be measured using empirical research methods such as interviews, survey, or observations. It aims to gather evidence to answer the research questions or hypothesis of the research. In some previous studies, the Likert scale questionnaire has been used as a form of data collection for CBDBE. (Castañeda-García et al., 2020.) In this thesis, especially for the questionnaire, measuring the consumer-based destination brand equity would be a good approach since it seems to truly examine the tourists' personal views in a broad scale. This is why this tool was used as a basis for creating the themes and questions of the questionnaire and acted as a theoretical guideline during that process.

In regard of CBDBE, it is useful to utilize the personality of a destination as a base of brand building since it helps to realize how tourists view the destination, and therefore help creating unique identity to the destination in question. It is also vital to examine tourists' motivations because it has a significant effect on tourists' destination selection. (Cano Guervos et al., 2020.)

Many studies that measure CBDBE use five different dimensions including, brand awareness, brand quality, brand image, brand value, and brand loyalty (Cano Guervos et al., 2020). For brand development, these dimensions can be divided into four different brand building blocks which are brand identity, brand meaning, brand response, and brand relationships (Chekalina et al., 2018). These CBDBE modelling stages (Picture 1) will next be looked at in more depth, as well as consider actions that entrepreneurs of a destination should take in building a brand.



Picture 1. Dimensions and brand building blocks of CBDBE (Cano Guervos et al., 2020; Chekalina et al., 2018)

When looking at the brand building from consumer-based destination brand equity perspective, the first stage is brand identity. In this context, it refers to the tourist's awareness of the destination brand and how strongly it is present in the mind of the target markets. (Cano Guervos et al., 2020; Chekalina et al., 2018.) This typically is defined as tourists' capability of remembering characteristics of the destination. These characteristics can be recalled for example, from advertisements and marketing, previous knowledge of the destination, or previous own experiences of the destination. (Chekalina et al., 2018.)

Brand meaning can be said to be a combination of brand image and brand quality. The brand image means the associations tourists have with a certain destination and what kind of feelings and impressions they have towards the destination. Whereas brand quality refers to the performance of the service tourists receive and how it is aligned with their expectations and other competing services. (Cano Guervos et al., 2020; Chekalina et al., 2018.) Resources that are commonly measured to explore brand image and quality include for example, accommodation, nature, events, history and culture, and infrastructure (Chekalina et al., 2018).

Brand response deals with perceived brand value. This usually is interpreted as what kind of benefits the customers gain in relation to the overall costs. (Cano Guervos et al., 2020.) Chekalina et al, (2018) add that it is a price-based way to measure brand value. Lastly, the building block of brand relationships involves brand loyalty, meaning the attachment the customers have with a certain brand. Being able to create customer loyalty is a key achievement in brand management. (Cano Guervos et al., 2020). This is because brand loyalty can translate into customers being comfortable with paying a premium price, re-visiting and spreading positive word of mouth to others (Chekalina et al., 2020).

3.4 Building the brand

For a destination to become a brand, it requires companies and actors of the area to come into a consensus about what kind of mental images they want the tourists to associate with a destination. Once this is figured out, the next step is to agree on how it is visualized and communicated in the marketing to the target audience. For destination marketing and brand to be successful, it is important to know who the customers are. In tourism marketing, and specifically tourism consumer marketing, companies aim to understand the behaviour of consumers and their values so that they can utilize this information in their marketing strategy and communications. Brand researchers take interest in tourists' mental images and the ways they can have an influence on them. (Edelheim & Iloa, 2017, pp. 134-136.)

In destination marketing and branding, communication is in a central role. According to Castañeda-García et al. (2019), integrated marketing communication strategy is helpful to make sure that all messages from different channels the tourists receive are connected to each other and convey the same core message of the brand. This type of communication is especially important with tourism destinations as physical competitive advantage can be limited.

According to Chekalina et al. (2018), the main objectives of destination branding are to create competitive advantage over other destinations and by this

differentiating the destination, and offering tourists experiences that they find valuable and are willing to pay for. In addition, destinations want to create positive word of mouth, encourage repeat visiting, and attract more tourists.

3.5 Importance of destination branding

The importance of a destination brand is highlighted in areas where the number of tourists is lower. This makes co-operation among different companies of the region even more vital because tourists require many different types of service such as accommodation, entertainment, transportation, and restaurant services, typically offered by more than one operator. Because of this, co-operation can increase the destination's competitiveness by making the tourists' experience more diverse and enabling bigger resources to be used for example, in marketing and innovation. Each individual business and their actions impact on the image and brand of the whole destination, in addition to their own business. (Edelheim & Ilola, 2017, p. 128.)

A destination brand can be said to be successful when many visitors are attracted because of value that cannot be found elsewhere in addition to a positive relationship with the destination. Successful destination brand is able to create emotional bonds between visitors and the destination. Strong and positive consumer-based brand equity can appear as high tourism revenues and a successful destination brand can also have a positive influence on other industries operating in the same area. (Wang & Pizam, 2011, p. 123.)

4 ATTRACTIONS AND UNIQUE SELLING POINTS IN CREATING A BRAND

4.1 Defining attractions and unique selling points

Tourism attractions can range from physical attractions such as buildings, museums, parks, monuments and so on, all the way to experiences attracting tourists to the destination. Such attractions could be for example, different types of events, food, and culture. Tourism attractions can be categorised in many ways. One way is to divide them into historical and cultural attractions, natural attractions, entertainment, and events. Categorising gives a good overview of the different tourism attractions the destination has but it is vital to have external perspective and consider which places the customers find interesting rather than thinking every resource is equal as a tourist attraction. (Edelheim & Ilola, 2017, pp. 53-54.)

A particular attraction can be so significant that on its own it attracts and motivates tourists to visit a destination for example, the Eiffel tower in Paris. Unique attractions on a country level, have an ability to attract international and domestic visitors easily on their own or together with other main attractions in an area. Whereas attractions that are less significant can still pique tourist's interest once they have travelled to the region to see other main attractions, or they can be popular attractions for the locals or tourists from nearby regions. (Lohmann & Panosso Netto, 2017, p. 232.) With the research done in this thesis, perspective of domestic tourists on the attractions, and their role in destination selection could be better understood and considered.

As Visit Finland has divided tourism areas in Finland to four different areas, it would be beneficial to investigate what are the unique selling points of the larger region, Coastal and archipelago Finland, in which Satakunta belongs to, are. In Visit Finland's Archipelago region pack (2019), they want to further brand the region with unique selling points such as lighthouses, island hopping and wooden towns. They have also examined the target market of the region and their background and found out that considering coastal Finland as a

destination is more likely for those over the age of 25, who have family. The consideration is also higher for people who value and seek for country holiday, cruises, and outdoor holidays. (Visit Finland, 2019.) Although this region consists of the whole coastal Finland and is generalised, it is still useful to compare and use as a reference point because of the geographical similarity between these places.

4.2 Influence on the destination brand

Instead of being a single product, tourism is comprised of multiple products and services which together create the tourist experience including both tangible and intangible aspects. By using these destination resources, tourists then evaluate the value of that experience. (Chekalina et al., 2018.)

Both attraction development and event management are a part of destination brand management. However, destination branding is not only based on promoting the tourist attractions but also taking care of and improving the surrounding infrastructure and preserving the environment, culture, and heritage. Without this, the visitors' needs might not be met, and it can have a negative effect on the tourist's experience about the destination or attractions. Then again, certain significant attractions or events might be needed in order to develop the brand effectively. (Wang & Pizam, 2011, pp. 116-117.)

5 SATAKUNTA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

5.1 Satakunta region

Satakunta is located in the west coast of Finland, and it consists of 16 municipalities. At the end of year 2022, there were 212,653 thousand people living in the Satakunta region. The biggest municipality of the region is Pori, and second biggest Rauma. (Satakuntaliitto, n.d.-a) The number of overnight stays in the Satakunta region in 2022 was 414,581. Of these overnight stays 367,406 were made by domestic tourists. (Visit Finland, n.d.-b)

As a destination, Satakunta is located relatively close to big growth centers and the travel distances between municipalities of Satakunta are short. However, especially with public transportation, in this, trains and busses, there is room for improvement. Strengths of Satakunta as a tourism destination include the good networks between tourism entrepreneurs and competencies especially in events management. Recent trend of nature tourism can also be seen as an advantage to the area. Satakunta especially attracts families and people living close to the region. There are also development possibilities regarding business travel because of the manufacturing industry in the area, as well as possibilities of utilizing the food culture because of wide range of food industry businesses. However, some of the weaknesses of Satakunta are that tourism is not seen as a significant business and the area is rather unknown. Many businesses in Satakunta are microbusinesses and they can have challenges in investing and taking risks. In addition, the tourism development is often centered around projects which creates a challenge in the continuity of ongoing development. (Satakuntaliitto, 2019, p. 6.)

5.2 Attractions and unique selling points of Satakunta

Satakunta is a diverse destination and has a lot to offer in addition of being a coastal destination. Although, Satakunta is located in a coastal environment, it also has a lot of land area in a more rural, countryside environment. Because

of this, there is a possibility to create competitive advantage utilizing the countryside environment and developing countryside experiences. Of course, there are also the well-known destinations that attract many visitors for example, Yyteri in Pori, and Old Rauma which is also a UNESCO world heritage site. (Satakuntaliitto, n.d.-b) There is also another UNESCO world heritage site located in Rauma called Sammallahdenmäki (Haaslahti & Leppäniemi, 2017, p. 8).

For those interested in history, Satakunta offers a wide variety of museums. For example, Satakunnan museo in Pori where they have a wide collection of historical culture, and archaeological pieces, whereas in Rauman merimuseo tourists can familiarize themselves with seafaring history, in Harjavalta museum and cultural center Emil Cedercreuz Museum combines art and historical culture. (Haaslahti & Leppäniemi, 2017, pp. 117-119.)

Countryside tourism in Satakunta has its own challenges for example issues regarding profitability and niche offering of quality products for customers. However, with Satakunta tourism objective and action plan created in 2012, the countryside tourism development has gotten back on track. Key development points identified were the nature and experience tourism, countryside tourism and locally produced food. For countryside tourism development to be successful close networks and co-operation between businesses and entrepreneurs are needed. (Renfors, 2014, pp. 13-14.)

Nature is a core attraction of Finland and diverse offering of forests and lake intrigue both international visitors and Finns to spend time in the nature. The value of nature is also appreciated in Satakunta, and it is known to have versatile natural attractions. Therefore, nature tourism could also be developed further in Satakunta. This could be done for example, by examining the pull factors it has, and developing more nature tourism business, to make it better known both nationally and internationally. (Renfors, 2015, pp. 6-7.)

There are three national parks located in the Satakunta area, Selkämeri in the coast which is one of the best-preserved coastal areas in Finland, Puurijärvi-

Isosuo which is a popular birdwatching place, and Kauhaneva-Pohjankangas (Haaslahti & Leppäniemi, 2017). In addition to these, there is also the Lauhavuori-Hämeen kangas geopark which got a UNESCO geopark title in 2020. Besides being located on the coast and near the ocean, there are also other bodies of water in the Satakunta area. For example, Pyhäjärvi in Säkylä which is the largest lake of South-west Finland, and Kokemäenjoki flowing across Satakunta. (Satakuntaliitto, n.d.-b)

Satakunta also has its own food culture which is also utilized in the tourism to some extent, for example with Terve ruoka -messut, held in Merikarvia. (Merikarvian kunta, n.d.) There are many local food producers in the area and Visit Satakunta has collected places where local food can be enjoyed to their websites in a form of a map. They say that by utilizing locally produced food, new opportunities for domestic tourism are created. (Visit Satakunta www-pages, n.d.)

There are also many events taking place in the Satakunta region year-round. Pori Jazz festival is one of the most popular events in Satakunta region and it is one of the oldest and notable music festivals in Europe. Another very popular event held in Pori is Suomi Areena event which attracts thousands of societal influencers and people interested in topical themes. (Haaslahti & Leppäniemi, 2017, pp. 98-99.) Other notable events are for example, Jämi Fly In & Airshow, which is an aviation event held yearly in the municipality of Jämi, and Rauma Lace Week that offers multiple different activities and exhibitions about lace as well as other program such as music and theatre shows (Satakuntaliitto, 2020).

6 MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

6.1 Mixed methods research

Mixed methods research means applying aspects of both quantitative as well as qualitative methods in the same research. Quantitative method collects numerical data and analyses it in a statistical way. It is a well standardised way of collecting data and therefore the questions should be carefully thought out to ensure that respondents understand them correctly. In qualitative research method the data is gathered from words and images instead of numbers. It explores the participants' meanings, and it can require the researcher to make clarifications to ensure that participants are understood correctly. (Saunders et al., 2019, pp. 178-181.)

Mixed research method is used to gain a broader view regarding the research problem and the weaknesses of one method can be balanced using the other. In the results, the data collected using the different methods should then be compared and the outcome discussed. (Veal, 2017, pp. 157-158.) For the Satakunta brand development thesis, mixed methods will be the most suitable because the research question and sub-questions as well as the aim of the thesis is to figure out how tourists and people living in the region see Satakunta. For this reason, open questions in the questionnaire will be a valuable addition to the multiple-choice questions. Therefore, the research is applying both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Aspects of quantitative research will be included in a form of questions using the 5-point Likert scale to measure respondents' opinions and views. The lowest number on the scale (1) means that respondents strongly disagree with the statement, whereas the highest (5) shows strong agreement. The survey questionnaire data is collected at Suomi Areena event where answers from people visiting the event could give their opinion and input on how they see Satakunta, as well as from people who live in the Satakunta region. This could help to

realize better which are the unique selling points that Satakunta has. For this reason, it has the potential to help developing the Satakunta destination brand.

A survey questionnaire is a typical way of collecting quantitative data. It is used when wanting to investigate answers of a large number of people. In a questionnaire all respondents are asked the same questions, in the same order. The researcher has to know the variables that they will measure and ensure that the questions asked in the questionnaire are understood in the same way among all respondents. Before starting to form the survey questions, it is important to know the theoretical background of the research and its divisions and definition of important terms, as well as to how to convert the terms into understandable questions that align with the terms. (Vilkka, 2021.)

6.2 Data collection

The data collection process started with coming up with the questions that the questionnaire has. This was done by the author first thinking about which questions would be beneficial in answering to the research questions that were set as well as utilizing the theoretical framework to be able to compare questionnaire results with the theory. The draft of the questionnaire was then sent to the contact person of the commissioner to get their opinion about the questions and figure out if they need to be changed or if something could be added. As a result, more questions in relation to visitors' familiarity and emotional connection with Satakunta were added. The questionnaire was first intended to be carried out using only Google Forms, but accommodating to the wishes of the commissioner paper versions of the questionnaire were also made. The questionnaire was conducted in Finnish, and it was aimed to be filled by people who attended the SuomiAreena event.

Before the questionnaire data collection, the questionnaire was carefully thought out as well as tested, to ensure that questions are easily understandable and that possible misconceptions could be avoided. The questionnaire had multiple-choice questions as well as open questions to allow further and

more detailed input from respondents. The content of the questionnaire consisted of background information, respondents' satisfaction to the attractions, services, and price/quality ratio of them, what could be developed, and respondents' own images, familiarity and emotional connection to Satakunta as a destination. (Appendix 1). The aim was to get at least 100 filled questionnaires.

6.3 Analysis and visualization of results

SuomiAreena event attracted almost 45 000 spectators in the four days (MTV Pressi, 30.6.2023). In total, the questionnaire was answered by 507 people. 56 responses were collected using Google Forms, and the rest, 451 answers were collected traditionally on paper. Once the data is collected it is important to go through the answers and remove any empty surveys (Vilkka, 2021). The quantitative data from the survey questionnaires on paper and from Google Forms were combined and analysed utilizing Microsoft Excel. The answers were inserted into the Excel document one by one and organized by the living region of respondents. This was done to help analyse and compare the data and find similarities or differences among the survey answers, especially between respondents living in Satakunta and respondents from other regions.

The analysing of quantitative data follows mathematical formulas, percentages and numbers. It is based on numerically describing the value of variables and changes in them. (Vilkka, 2021.) Therefore, visual representations of the results were made of every multiple-choice question that was asked. To analyse the open questions, couple of different approaches were used. For questions which had lower answer rate, the data was compiled and analysed by hand, whereas questions with a large number of answers were categorized by the help of ChatGPT. If ChatGPT was used to analyse the question, it will be clearly stated in the text. For ethical, and information security reasons, ChatGPT was only given a list of the written answers of an individual question without any personal information about respondents themselves being included.

7 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

7.1 Background information of respondents

Out of the 507 respondents, 74% were female and 21.5% male. One per cent were other and 3.5% did not disclose their gender. 74% of respondents were between the ages of 36-75 with approximately 25% being 66-75 years old making it the largest age group to answer the questionnaire (Figure 1).

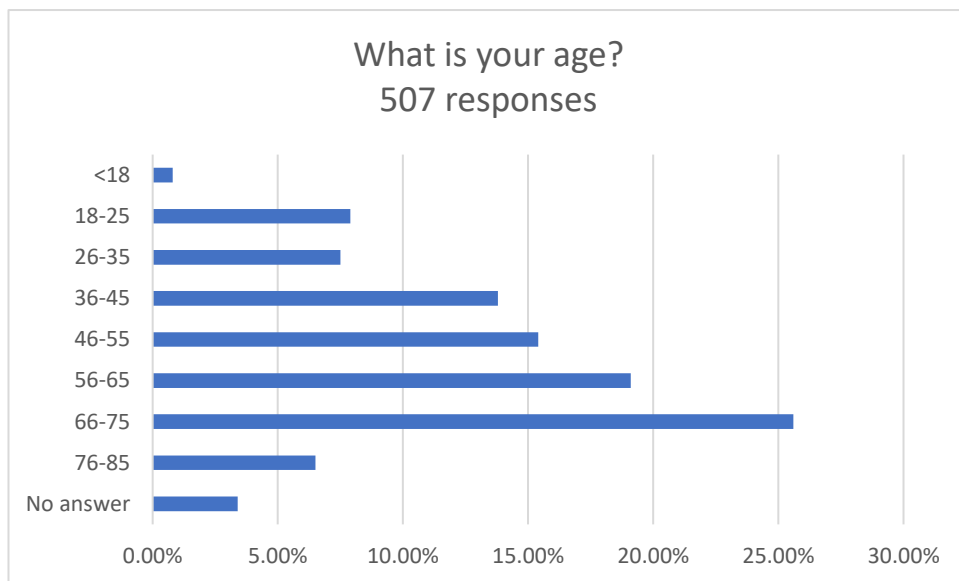


Figure 1. Age of respondents by number.

Most of the respondents, in this 76.3%, lived in the Satakunta region and 18.7% were from elsewhere in Finland. The remaining 4.9% did not disclose the region they live in. Most of the people living in other regions were from either Uusimaa 33.7%, Pirkanmaa 31.6%, or Varsinais-Suomi 16.9%. (Figure 2).

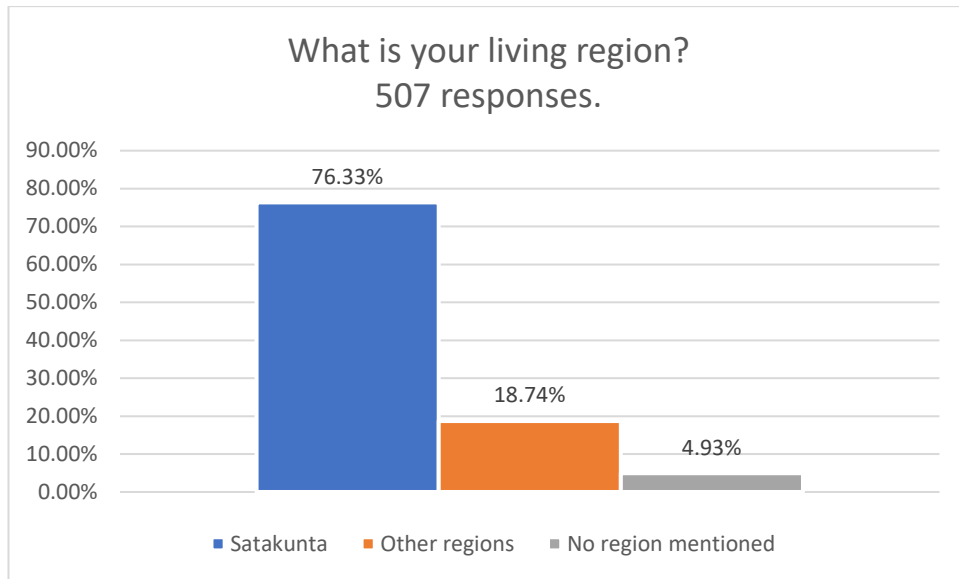


Figure 2. Respondents living region.

Because almost 20% of respondents were from other regions, some answers were studied using this as a differentiating factor. This was done to find out if the answers have noticeable differences between people who live in Satakunta and those who do not.

One of the questions was to answer how often respondents have visited Satakunta over the past two years. 90% of respondents living in Satakunta and 81% of respondents from other regions had visited few times or more. Some respondents clarified that they have not been able to travel as much in past years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents travelled with different travel companions, but mostly with their family or partner. Respondents from elsewhere in Finland were 7.1% more likely to travel alone.

The table below shows the respondents reasons behind choosing Satakunta as their travel destination. As the table clearly shows, there are differences between respondents from Satakunta and from other regions in Finland. This was a multiple-choice question, and respondents could pick as many choices as they pleased. The percentages show how many respondents from the whole group chose it as their answer. (Table 1).

Satakunta	Other regions
Nature/hiking 54%	Meeting family/friends 48.3%
Events 51.1%	Events 46.6%
Accessibility 41.6%	Nature/hiking 24.6%
Meeting family/friends 31.1%	Maritime qualities 21.2%
Maritime qualities 28.2%	Going to cottage 20.3%
Culture and history 27.6%	Accessibility 19.5%
Going to cottage 27.1%	Culture and history 15.3%
Shopping 24.7%	Business travel 14.4%
Cuisine 14.7%	Shopping 13.6%
Sports 14.7%	Wellbeing 5.9%
Wellbeing 13.4%	Cuisine 5.0%
World heritage sites 11.8%	Sports 5.0%
Business travel 7.1%	World heritage sites 1.7%

Table 1. Reasons for choosing Satakunta as a travel destination.

Reflecting back to the theory, it can be said that based on these answers Satakunta is chosen as a destination largely because of its qualities as a marine and nature destination, also emphasized in the theory. The importance of different events is also highlighted in the answers which again demonstrates that the region has competitive advantage with their event offering. As mentioned by Satakuntaliitto, there are also good possibilities to develop business tourism since 14.4% of tourists from elsewhere in Finland are at least partly travelling to Satakunta because of this. When it comes to food tourism on the other hand, it seems that locals appreciate the local cuisine more than other tourists.

7.2 Satisfaction of respondents

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction to services and their price-quality ratio as well as attractions. The satisfaction regarding services and attractions had minimal differences. On a scale of 1-5, attractions had 2.1%

percent more answers rated as 5 making the percentage 20.1% compared to services at 18.0%. However, in both questions over 75% rated these either as 5 or 4 making most respondents very satisfied with both attractions and services. (Figure 3).

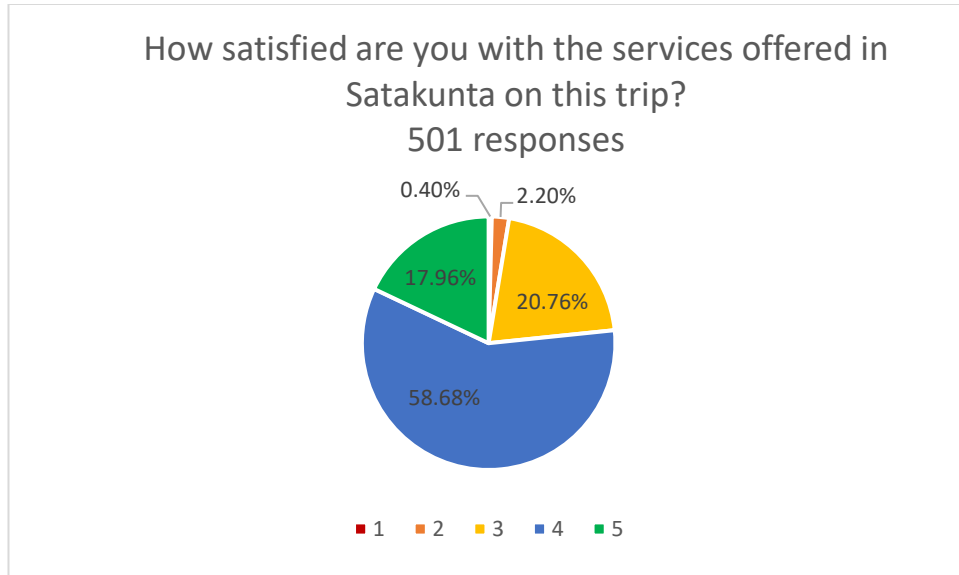


Figure 3. Visitor satisfaction to services of Satakunta.

The price-quality ratio had a little more contrast in the responses. Only 9.8% of respondents were very satisfied, whilst the majority of 86.7% answered 4 or 3. (Figure 4). This was also highlighted later in the open questions, as respondents wished for more affordable services and activities.

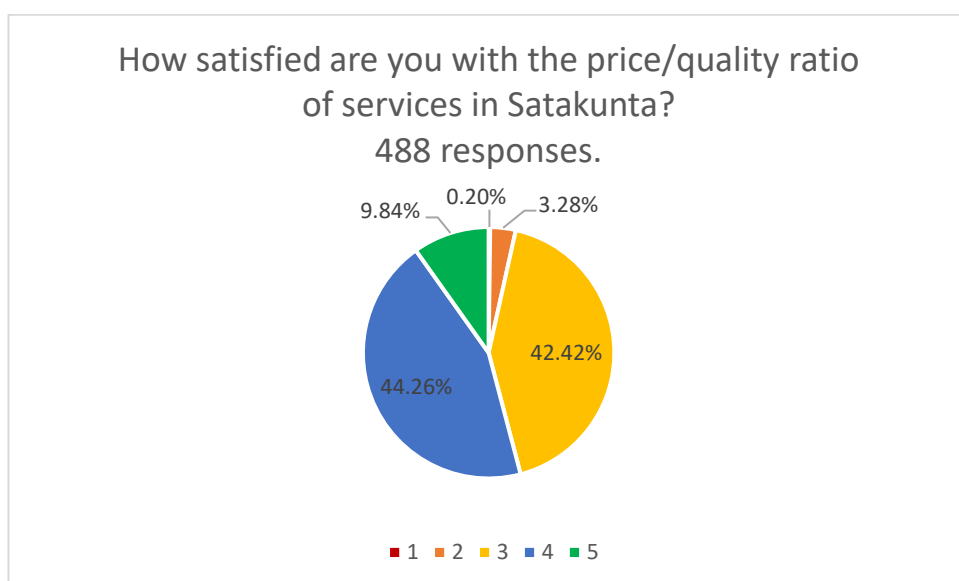


Figure 4. Satisfaction to price/quality ratio of Satakunta.

Lastly the questionnaire asked how likely the respondent is to recommend Satakunta as a travel destination to others, as well as how likely it is that the respondents themselves will visit again. Respondents who live in Satakunta were 15% more likely to recommend Satakunta to others, as 88% chose either 4 or 5 as the answer, compared to 73% of respondents from other regions choosing the same options. However, respondents from both groups were extremely likely to revisit Satakunta with over 90% answering 4 or 5. Based on theory, the results could indicate that a large number of respondents has formed at least some kind of brand loyalty towards Satakunta as a destination.

7.3 Respondents' familiarity with Satakunta

Overall, most of the respondents were already at least somewhat familiar with Satakunta as a travel destination. Nearly all respondents living in Satakunta were very familiar with Satakunta as 88.7% answered either 4 or 5 and only 2.4% 1 or 2. There was more dispersion with respondents from other regions as 15.2% stated that Satakunta was nearly unknown destination for them choosing 1 or 2 as their answer. These results also reflect on the following question about the emotional bond respondents have with Satakunta (Figure 5).

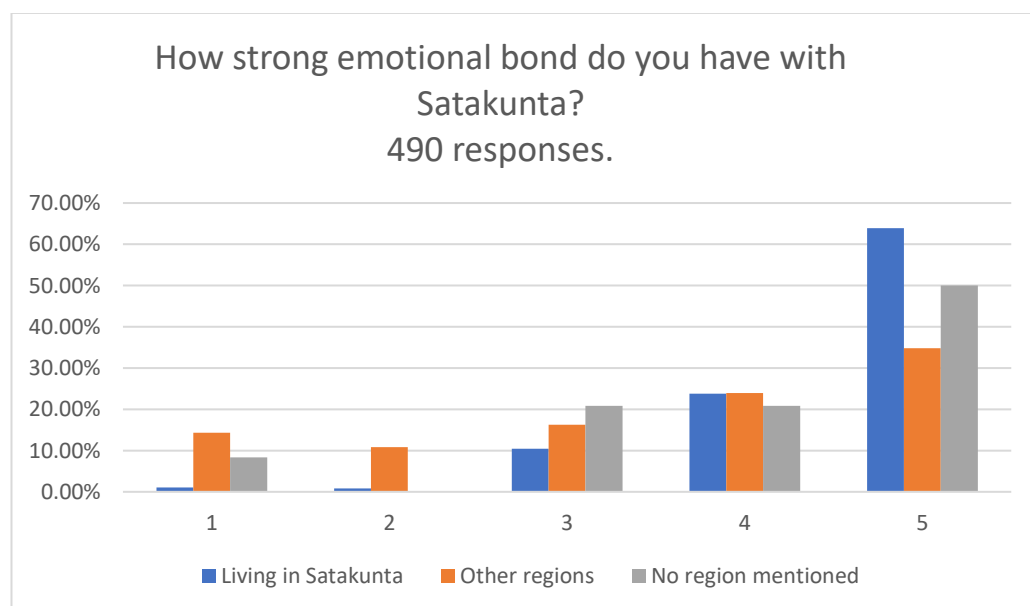


Figure 5. The visitors' emotional bond with Satakunta.

As a part of the questionnaire, respondents named which municipalities of Satakunta they knew. The question was answered by 179 respondents from Satakunta and 64 from other regions. Pori was the most known municipality, named by 70.5% living in Satakunta and 84.4% from other regions. Other well-known municipalities for respondents living outside of Satakunta were Ulvila and Rauma, both named by over half of the respondents. In addition to the already mentioned municipalities, respondents from Satakunta knew also well Nakkila, Kokemäki, Harjavalta, Kankaanpää and Eurajoki, with over 50% naming them. The least known municipalities for both groups of respondents were Säkyli and Jämijärvi. The most known attractions or tourist destinations of Satakunta according to respondents were Yyteri, Reposaari, Kirjurinluoto, Old Rauma and Leineperi ironworks. Respondents from Satakunta mentioned also Koivuniemen Herra, Juseliuksen mausoleum, Kallo, Cedercreuz museum, and Sammallahdenmäki.

7.4 Respondents' images of Satakunta

Tied to previous question, the attractions that awakened most positive emotions in respondents were the same as the most known destinations. In addition, Pori Jazz, SuomiAreena, and nature attractions in general were answered by couple respondents. These questions about Satakunta's attractions got many different answers besides the most popular ones and over 80 different attractions, events, and places were mentioned. However, no generalisation can be made from these other answers since only a couple of people mentioned them. This could be explained by the attractions being more unknown to most respondents.

To find out what kind of images respondents have about Satakunta, they were asked to write out words that in their opinion best describe Satakunta. The question had 266 responses, and below the most mentioned words are gathered as a word cloud. With 26 mentions, sea was the most popular word to describe Satakunta that the respondents used. Other words seen in the Figure

6 were mentioned between 22-5 times. The font size in each word increases to correspond to the number of times the word was mentioned. (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Respondents' most mentioned words to describe Satakunta.

Based on Figure 6, it can be said that respondents view Satakunta as a destination with a lot of versatility describing it versatile, interesting, and as a place offering a lot to see. However, natural resources of the region clearly stand out in the answers with words such as sea, maritime and nature being mentioned plenty of times. This goes hand in hand with the theory as Satakunta has great potential in utilizing the trend of nature tourism with the physical nature and already existing services as well as developing them further. One interesting outcome seen in Figure 6 is that words such as “unique” and especially “bear” have made their way to the list. One could be confused about what does a word like bear do on this list and why does it come to mind when thinking about words associated with Satakunta. The reason behind this can be found in the

marketing of the city of Pori, in which bear is in a visible role. To find these words in the respondents' answers can be interpreted as them having internalised parts of the brand identity that city of Pori has visioned.

Respondents were also asked to describe Satakunta using only one word. This time, rather than highlighting attributes that Satakunta has, respondents' personal feelings towards Satakunta stood out. The five most mentioned words of people from Satakunta were, versatile, beautiful, home, best, and good. As for other regions they were, beautiful, home, warm, good, and maritime. The two questions were very similar and therefore the answers were also partly the same. It can also be seen that people living in Satakunta find it more versatile where as people from elsewhere rather highlighted the warm and welcomed feeling and maritime atmosphere of Satakunta.

7.5 Respondents' development ideas and additional comments

The respondents were asked what kind of services they would like to see more, and some central themes were identified among the responses by the help of using ChatGPT. The respondents hoped to see more events and activities targeted especially for teenagers and young adults, and activities, camping sites and parks for families with children. They also wished for better restaurants, cafés, public transportation and accommodation services by improving accessibility and developing innovative services. For example, by having more unique accommodation, and on the other hand, more affordable options. Regarding nature tourism, more nature trails, cycling routes, fishing possibilities and better utilization of different bodies of water was suggested. Finally, respondents found it important to appreciate the cultural heritage that Satakunta has, and it could be utilized by enriching culture services for example by art, music and wellbeing events.

From ready made options in the question, where do you see room for improvement, more diverse services was also the most popular option. Because of it being a response in multiple different questions throughout the questionnaire,

it can be concluded that diverse and unique services are something that brings a lot of value to visitors. The option with second most answers was accessibility, again proving that visitors strongly feel that improvements to public transportation should be made.

At the end of the questionnaire the respondents had an opportunity to freely add any other comments they had about the topic. There were 26 comments and from these, two main themes were discovered. Firstly, the importance of the coastal environment of Satakunta was highlighted. The respondents wished that it could be utilized even more in the future and that the accessibility as well as overall development of coastal destinations and attractions could be improved. The second theme which also gathered the most comments related to marketing of Satakunta. Whereas people from other parts of Finland highlighted that Satakunta should improve its global marketing, locals from Satakunta thought more generally that it would be important to let everyone know about the different attractions that Satakunta has to offer. Based on these comments, many respondents thought that Satakunta is underestimating its attractions and that those should be visibly brought out with courage and that there is no need to be shy. Relating to this, respondents also wished that there could be guided tours from one attraction to the other including for example natural attractions and world heritage sites.

8 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

8.1 Conclusions

The results align well with the theory about Satakunta as a destination. It can be concluded that the region and key stakeholders know the competitive advantages and unique selling points of Satakunta well. The development points that were highlighted in the theory by Satakuntaliitto also showed in the questionnaire results, with hopes for better accessibility, and diversity in the services. Tourists constantly seek better and more unique services, especially considering the respondents of this research as they are already familiar with Satakunta and seeking new experiences.

The overall brand image of Satakunta seems to be perceived positively both by people living in Satakunta and people from other parts of Finland as well. Keeping in mind that the participants were already somewhat familiar with Satakunta. Satakunta as a brand is doing good with making emotional connections with people living there. Based on the questionnaire results, they associate themselves with the brand and consider similar aspects as Satakunta's competitive advantages.

The next step for the brand of Satakunta would be to find ways to connect with people on a more national, and even international level. This could be achieved by listening to the suggestions received in these questionnaire results, and through other channels. Couple of development points could be, utilizing the full potential of the physical landscapes Satakunta has to offer, and being brave with marketing, including different attractions from Satakunta in their national campaigns. The challenges with Satakunta not being recognised as a potential tourist destination should be somehow overcome as there is great potential for attracting tourists especially with the competitive advantages. In addition, based on the research results, Satakunta already has attracted many domestic tourists who are very likely to revisit in the future. The problem raised in the theory, of not having enough funds and relying mainly on short-term

projects, should be tackled since the development of tourism in Satakunta is limited without having many resources to utilize.

In conclusion, the key stakeholders in developing tourism in Satakunta should continue their close working relationships with one another. If possible, they could combine their resources to tackle current problems and be able to continue development as well as keep up the already established customer relationships. This certainly requires a lot of commitment, planning and creating a shared strategy, but hopefully it will prove worthwhile.

8.2 Reliability and validity

For the theory of the thesis, topical and reliable literature and other sources were used to ensure up to date information and reliable theoretical basis for the analysis of research results. The theory part could have been more extensive in providing more in-depth information to the reader. For efficient time management reasons, going over the many questionnaire answers resulted in less time for extensive theory. On the other hand, the theory discusses the most vital information regarding the topic and gives a clear background for understanding the results.

The sampling of the thesis was successful and targeted the right group, this was ensured by collecting answers physically at the event. The questionnaire was answered by people who have already visited Satakunta and are currently there. This needs to be considered when looking at the results of this questionnaire, since people who have not been to Satakunta might have answered very differently. However, as for the aim of this thesis, it was important to target those who already visit Satakunta since they are the ones whose perspective was to be examined. With 507 respondents, the thesis can be considered fairly reliable, taking into account the target group it was meant for. A significant portion of respondents consisted of people over the age of 46, possibly due to the nature of the event the questionnaire was conducted at, and younger respondents were not as strongly represented. In addition, over 76% of

respondents were living in Satakunta region, which also contributes to the results, therefore some answers being examined separately. Although, careful consideration of the way questions were presented, some questions could have been even more thought out and better presented to avoid misinterpretation and possibility of guiding a respondent to a certain answer.

8.3 Development suggestions and reflection

Originally the thesis process was meant to include interviews with local entrepreneurs to gain knowledge of their perspectives regarding the thesis topic and research questions. However, this aspect was decided to be left out after the questionnaire data was collected. With 507 filled questionnaires, the research had more than a sufficient number of respondents on its own. In addition, the decision was made based on efficient time management as well as keeping the workload of the thesis manageable. That said, this would be an interesting perspective to explore and could possibly be used and researched in another thesis in the future.

The analysis of questionnaire answers could have been explored from many angles. It would have been interesting and perhaps also valuable to analyse the answers from the perspectives of who are the respondents travelling with, for example compare differences in answers between respondents travelling with family or alone. Nevertheless, analysing the data from geographical standpoint was successful and interesting contrasts were found.

It was fascinating to work with the topic and going through the results was tricky but also rewarding. I got to learn a lot especially about data collection and the analysis process which I have not previously done a lot or to this extent. I also learned that the way questions are presented is very important, as well as choosing the answer options. With the current knowledge I have acquired after this process, I would have done some things differently, but mistakes act as a valuable lesson. Overall, I am still pleased with the way the

thesis turned out. It sticks to the topic, is coherent and easily understandable, and hopefully also helpful for the commissioner.

8.4 Feedback from commissioner

Saila Valkeaniemi from the Center for Tourism Business Development commented as follows. The results of the analysis were interesting. The questionnaire got very comprehensive responses and the author has done a large task in analysing them. It was surprising how many of the respondents were local, because the expectation was that SuomiAreena event would reach people from other municipalities and regions. The thesis is a clear entity, and the analysis has been presented coherently. The collected data will be utilized in collaboration with the industry. Thank you to the author! (Valkeaniemi, 2024)

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

Satakunnan matkailubrändi- tutkimus

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää matkailijoiden mielikuvia Satakunnasta matkailukohteena. Tutkimus tehdään osana opinnäytetyötä. Vastaamalla tähän lomakkeeseen, annat luvan vastausten käsittelyyn ja analysointiin. Vastaukset käsitellään anonyymisti.

Sukupuoli

Nainen
Mies
Muu

Ikä

18-25 26-35
36-45 46-55
56-65 66-75
76-85

Asuinmaakunta:

Kuinka usein olet matkustanut Satakunnassa viimeisen 2 vuoden aikana?

Useasti Harvoin Muutaman kerran En ole matkustanut

Kenen kanssa olet yleensä matkustanut Satakunnassa?

Yksin Kumppanin Perheen
Ystävän Työkavereiden Harrastusporukalla Muu

Miksi olet valinnut Satakunnan matkakohteeksi? (Voit valita useamman vaihtoehdon.)

Saavutettavuus Mökkeily Shoppailu
Tapahtumat Työmatka Ruokakulttuuri
Luonto/Retkeily Perheen/ystävän tapaaminen Maailmanperintökohteet
Urheilu Kulttuuri ja historia
Merellisyys Hyvinvointi

Kuinka tyytyväinen olet Satakunnan palvelutarjontaan tällä matkalla?

Erittäin tyytymätön 1 2 3 4 5 Todella tyytyväinen

Millaisia palveluita toivoisit lisää?

Kuinka tyytyväinen olet Satakunnan nähtävyyksiin?

Erittäin tyytymätön 1 2 3 4 5 Todella tyytyväinen

Missä koet kehittämisen varaa?

Saavutettavuus Ympäristöystävällisyys/vastuullisuus Vieraanvaraisuus
Esteettömyys Monipuolisemmat palvelut Muu, mikä?

Kuinka tyytyväinen olet Satakunnan palveluiden hinta-laatusuhteeseen?

Erittäin tyytymätön 1 2 3 4 5 Todella tyytyväinen

Kuinka tuttu matkailukohde Satakunta on sinulle entuudestaan?

Tuntematon 1 2 3 4 5 Erittäin tuttu

Satakunnassa on 16 kuntaa, kuinka monta niistä osaat nimetä? _____

Mitä matkakohteita, nähtävyyksiä tai matkailuyrityksiä osaat nimetä Satakunnasta?

Kuinka vahva tunneyhteys sinulla on Satakuntaan?

Heikko 1 2 3 4 5 Erittäin vahva

Mitä matkakokemukset Satakunnassa ovat herättäneet sinussa positiivisia tunteita?

Kuvaile Satakuntaa yhdellä sanalla _____

Mitkä sanat kuvailevat mielestäsi parhaiten Satakuntaa?

Kuinka todennäköisesti suosittelisit muille Satakuntaa matkailukohteena omien kokemustesi perusteella?

En kovin todennäköisesti 1 2 3 4 5 Erittäin todennäköisesti

Kuinka todennäköisesti itse matkustat Satakuntaan tulevaisuudessa?

En kovin todennäköisesti 1 2 3 4 5 Erittäin todennäköisesti

Heräsikö sinulle muita ajatuksia aiheeseen liittyen? Tähän voit vapaasti lisätä vielä muuta kommentoitavaa. _____
