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Improving Tourism in Lapland in the Low Season

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Improving Tourism in Lapland in the Low Season

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The aim of this thesis is to develop ways that could improve tourism in Lapland in the low season. The author worked in co-operation with the safari company Safartica in Ylläs in Lapland. The company was used as a model for the analysis and development of ideas as a basis for this thesis.

The theoretical framework consists of introductions into tourism in Finland and especially Lapland. The study analyses the current trends of the region and how it is marketed to both domestic and foreign markets. Working with Safartica the author will explore the development of the business and the tourism segment the company operates in while suggesting new avenues for possible development that could be implemented in the low season.

The quantitative research method was used in the empirical part of the thesis and a questionnaire was conducted to the customers of Safartica in order to understand their motivating factors in visiting Lapland and if those factors would motivate them to visit in the low season. Using a SWOT analysis to evaluate the environment that Safartica operates in allows further understanding of the tourism industry in this region.

The findings from the research, SWOT analysis and a thorough investigation into the Lapland tourism industry allows the author to make viable suggestions of new areas of operation for Safartica to consider as a remedy for improving tourism in the low season.

The results from the research indicate that there is room for improvement during the low season with the cooperation from all those involved in the tourism industry in the local area. The author is able to indicate numerous areas where development is possible. One area for further research would be indigenous tourism, to understand if there would be any risks and if it is a viable option for development in Lapland.

Keywords: Lapland, Finland, Low season, Adventure tourism, Marketing

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1 Introduction

Lapland is a unique tourist destination and a well-known winter destination throughout the world, it is one of the largest tourist destinations in Finland. This thesis looks at Improving Tourism in Lapland in the Low Season in an effort to promote year round activity that could result in an increase in tourist activity, employment and business in the area throughout the year.

During this thesis the author will research Lapland as a tourist destination in Finland, assess what the key motivators are for people to visit the area in the high season and how these can be used to help to improve the flow of tourists during the low season. To understand what motivates the tourists the author will research the attractiveness of the area, its image to international visitors and how it is marketed. By defining the low season and highlighting times in the high season with low tourist activity we can see what areas can be improved.

Apart from research the author will also be using knowledge and information he has gained during a three month working period in Safartica Ylläs that took place during the winter of 2014 and 2015. During this time he was able to talk with employees and see how the company operates within Lapland. Learning about Lapland and the industry helped to bring more detailed information to this research by observing and experiencing the operations first hand. Lapland has always been an area of interest to the author and after experiencing the culture and nature through work experience he wanted to learn more about the area and help to improve the situation due to the difficulties of seasonality.

With the use of research into the customers and their needs along with analysis of the local environment and infrastructure, development suggestions can be made. The author will look at viable and realistic options that suit the needs of the customers and environment to create new unique products and services that could be introduced in order to improve tourism in the low season in Lapland.

2 Finland

Tourism in Finland has developed over the last couple of decades and has become one of the fastest growing industries in the country. The effects on the economic activity are large especially in areas of great tourist interest that include Helsinki, Lapland, Tampere and Turku. According to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO 2010) the international visitors increased by 7% generating 693 million euros, this number is predicted to increase to 1.8 billion international tourist by the year 2030. (Rahman 2014, 1.)

In 2013, the number of overnight stays by foreign tourists was almost 5.9 million which was 1.1% more than the year before. The largest markets for overnight stays came from Sweden and Russia, followed by Germany and the UK. Although 2013 saw little overall growth there was significant growth in Asian markets of 17.3%. These visitors came mostly from China which increased by 26.4% and Japan which increased by 16.4%. (Visit Finland 2015)

As Finland is in close proximity to Sweden and Norway they are its closest competitors in the international tourism market therefore Finland's strengths and weaknesses have always been made in comparison to these countries. Finland also shares a boarder to Russia and they account for the country's largest foreign customer group. From Russia, especially St. Petersburg, Finland is easy to reach both by train and road. Russia does not have connections with any other state that are as good or as quick. This puts Finland in a unique position. Finland has a number of areas that are considered attractive to tourists, these tourist centres offer a range of high quality services and focus on the development of leisure travel. Besides accommodation and restaurant services they offer a range of activities that include downhill skiing, cross country skiing and plenty of wellbeing and spa services all centred in the nature that Finland is famous for. (Finnish Tourism Strategy to 2020, 2011, 15-16.)

Finland does have its weaknesses, the following two areas are where Finland needs to improve in order to generate more international tourists. Firstly, apart from tourists travelling from Russia, Finland is seen to be dependent on air travel and air travel costs. On a European scale the price for tourism services are high and Finland is considered a high cost destination. When people are making their decision to travel price is a key factor. Secondly, Finland is unknown to many people and needs to increase its efforts in to improving the image of the country as a travel destination. This is done using the four C's: credible, contrast, creativity and clean, these will be discussed further when examining Finland's marketing strategy. (Finnish Tourism Strategy to 2020, 2011, 16-17.)

3 Lapland as a Tourist Destination

Lapland is an attractive tourist area in northern Finland and covers a total land area of 92665km². The population of Lapland is 183,748 which is 3.4% of Finland's total population. It is famous for its natural phenomena such as the northern lights and the summer's midnight sun, a pure and untouched landscape, and the home to 7000 indigenous Sami people with their herds of reindeer. (Lapland Nordic Visitor 2015)

Lappish culture is shared by neighbouring countries Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. Tourism has become the main source of income for these countries. In the 1990's tourism in Finnish Lapland directly employed 6000 people, now that number is over 10,000. The main markets for tourism in Lapland are from the UK, Germany, France and The Netherlands. Christmas has become the most famous time of the year to visit Lapland but in recent years summer tourism has shown positive growth. Lapland is looking to secure future growth and improving accessibility that will create tourism demand all year round in the region. The future growth will create fulltime jobs and also indirectly contribute to the development in other business areas. (Osmund & Sunday 2010, 35-36.)

The regional tourism development of Lapland has been revised throughout the last ten years but its strategy has always been to increase the amount of tourists in Lapland in terms of overnight stays, trade internationalisation, excellent organisations within the industry and expansion of major tourism areas. In 2007 the tourism strategy was revised to include the future growth, better accessibility and enhanced employment year round resulting in an increased livelihood for the people of Lapland. Meeting the national guidelines set by Finland's Tourism Strategy 2020 Lapland tourism is seeking growth in international markets and increasing all year round demand with the improvement of tourism products and services. (Rahman 2014, 19-20.)

The core values of the tourism strategy of Lapland are based on the following:

- **Authenticity:** To preserve the attractiveness of Lapland through unspoilt nature and the preservation of the Sami culture.
- **Customer Satisfaction and high quality:** The individual tourist is the focus of tourism services. Excellent service will add the final touch to a high standard of tourism products.
- **Innovation:** Lapland can be creative and produce innovative tourism packages, services and operation models.
- **Safety:** The area of Lapland is safe and clean.

- Respect for nature: Lapland's surroundings provide unforgettable settings and experiences. The tourism industry will adopt principles that ensure the social, ecological, and cultural development. This will allow future generations the opportunity to travel to and enjoy Lapland's nature. (Lapland Vitality for Life 2007, 4.)

Combining these core values with objectives and strategic goals will allow for the economic growth of the area. The tourism industry will grow and provide full time employment in Lapland, this will then indirectly contribute to other organisations and businesses allowing for balanced regional development. Lapland will become more accessible and travel cost will become more competitive resulting in the area becoming more attractive especially for international visitors. (Lapland Vitality for Life 2007, 5.)

As a tourism strategy has been formulated it has improved the development in the area over the last two decades on both a national and regional level. These strategies have fixed the guidelines for the destination, tourism organisations, hotels, bars, restaurants and recreational centres for properly executing and developing tourism in a regional area such as Lapland. Finland is a developed country and in many areas such as communications it is already functioning at a high level. Lapland is not a densely populated area and therefore does not have developed road network with only major roads and highways being supported by the government. The ski resorts are being continuously developed by extending ski areas and providing facilities to visitors, but during high periods such as Christmas and holidays these services and facilities can come under strain and in some cases are insufficient to meet the demand of visitors. (Rahman 2014, 43-44.)

When considering infrastructure, Finland is a large country and slightly remote from the rest of Europe. For it to succeed in the tourism industry it is vital that there are good connections for tourists. Roads must be developed and improved in order to make accessibility to more remote areas easier, the operation of both railway and air traffic need to be improved as they play a key role in promoting tourism to Finland. Improving air traffic is essential when considering inbound tourists visiting Finland. When a new route is open it is not always profitable and the government could provide support in the way of marketing. This support from the government could allow for new business opportunities in the tourism industry, therefore creating new jobs and creating tax revenues. For example, a single charter plane carrying 180 passengers could result in 135,000 euros for Finland. (Finnish Tourism Strategy to 2020, 2011, 30-31.)

Lapland is a sparsely populated area which is affected by seasonality therefore as a result most people who are employed in the region do not live there all year round. This can result in taxes not being paid in the area which undermines the possibility of constructing the infrastructure the area needs and funding has to be found from other sources. Tourism businesses

can improve the situation by encouraging investment in the area which will improve transport connections, sanitary engineering, roads, enhancing energy efficiency and recreational areas. But most importantly, the maintenance and financing of trekking, snowmobile, cross country ski and snowshoe routes in the national parks as they are vital to the success of the local tourism businesses. (Finnish Tourism Strategy to 2020, 2011, 22.)

3.1 Tourism Trends in Lapland

In recent years one of the largest trends that has affected tourism in Finland is the recession and the current economic crisis which has impacted different areas of the globe and many industries. Finland has seen a decline in international visitors but now figures are on the rise and the recession is not expected to cause any permanent change in tourism demand. Environmental issues have become a rising trend and their effects are influencing the industry in different ways. Climate change is an uncertainty and the ecological impacts are still unclear, it has already affected tourist's attitudes and increased their environmental awareness. The tourism industry therefore has to adapt and take environmental issues into account when developing and marketing operations. One of Finland's strengths is its untouched and clean nature. Businesses and their activities need to take this under consideration while operating in these areas of natural beauty such as Lapland not to cause irreparable damage to the environment and Finland's image. (Lapland Vitality for Life 2007, 14.)

The ageing population of the world is growing and the elderly have more money and time to travel than before. The tourism industry needs to be prepared to provide services for this group of customers. They also need to be able to manage these distinct customer groups which will be separated by generations and different ways of life. This group will need different services so they cannot be handled as one market and the industry needs to be sensitive when recognising these new requirements. With the increased significance of the internet, consumers are finding new ways to compare services, prices and locations. Consumers are also arranging their trips independently, researching locations in advance and recommending locations to others. This leads to a transformation in the marketing, comparing and purchasing of tourism services and products. (Lapland Vitality for Life 2007, 15.)

2013 showed that incoming tourists to Finland continued to grow, as mentioned before, with visitors from Russia, the UK, Japan and China showing increases, whereas countries in the Mediterranean, such as Italy and Spain, decreased due to economic difficulties. Even though there were a number of setbacks with little overall growth 2013 was a record year and overnight stays from international visitors increased by 1.1%. (Finnish Tourist Board 2013, 4.)

When analysing flight statistics from the Civil Aviation Agency it is important to remember that the passenger volumes include figures for departing, arriving and transfer passengers. This means that domestic passengers can be counted twice, both at the point of departure

and at the destination. Using foreign charter passengers during the Christmas period is a very important indicator of development. For the past few years the number of Christmas tourists has been about 100,000 except for 2009 when it was about 80,000. Similar problems are encountered when looking at the data on registered accommodation. Establishments with fewer than 10 rooms, cottages and caravan parks are not included. It is estimated that only a third of the accommodation is registered as many people are choosing to stay in cabins when visiting Lapland. (Lappi 2011, 16-21.)

3.2 Sustainability in Lapland

The UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as “leading to management of all resources in such way that economic, social and aesthetic need can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems” The UNWTO draws a clear line between the similar concepts of sustainable tourism and ecotourism. The term ecotourism is a segment of the tourism industry while sustainability ideals should be applied to all areas of tourism activities, operations, establishments and projects. Finland’s environmental legislation acts as a guide to the minimum standards of environmental responsibility which all businesses operating in Finland have to apply. Environmental permits have to be acquired from the Finnish Government for all activities that have an environmental impact such as pollution of the air or water and the contamination of the soil. (Finnish Tourist Board 2011, 25-26.)

There are four categories when considering sustainable tourism, they are ecological, economic, political and socio cultural. Ecological sustainability is linked mostly to the destination and its environment as many destinations rely on their natural surroundings to attract visitors, for example the unique nature of Lapland. As some destinations have a more unique and fragile nature it is important that they build their own strategy for sustainable development. It is important that both local residents and tourism companies play a large role in sustaining the natural environments of the destinations, they must have a strategy for minimizing harm and incentivise the protection of the ecological surroundings. Economical sustainability is mostly based on the benefits that tourism brings to the local residents and is one of the rewards of ecological sustainability. Socio cultural sustainability concentrates on the happiness of local residents, with the local economy bringing securer employment with the possibility of larger salaries and more benefits, leading to happier local residents. Lastly, political sustainability gives the framework for other areas of sustainable tourism to build comprehensive strategy. (Tiainen 2013, 28.)

3.2.1 Nature tourism and Ecotourism

International tourism is a rapidly growing industry with a predicted growth of 4% per year. Some segments such as nature tourism are growing more rapidly with an estimate growth of

7-8% per year, becoming one of the fastest growing segments. Nature tourism can be described as tourism based on landscapes, ecosystems and natural features that include rivers, mountains, lakes, oceans and forests. There are several explanations for the rapid growth in nature tourism. From a supply perspective, nature and the natural are a large element of tourism marketing with nature becoming the playground for adventure and experience seeking tourists. On the demand side, people are becoming more environmental conscious with the increase in education, media attention and compassion for the natural environment. (Gössling 2005, 28-29.)

Nature is the most important reason tourists visit Lapland. The clean, uncrowded and quietness of the beautiful nature of Lapland are mentioned as the most important attractions in Lapland for both foreign and domestic visitors. The activities that these visitors participate in are also important. About 90% of domestic visitors come during the winter to cross-country ski or downhill ski. In the summer and autumn the important nature based activities such as hiking and fishing are what tourists visit for. Finnish Lapland is sparsely populated with little industrial areas and offers excellent opportunities in a market that is becoming increasingly more nature friendly. (Fotiou, Lundvall, Salonen, Sievänen & Suopajarvi 2003, 22.)

Finland adopts the 'Everyman's right' when it comes to the accessibility of natural areas such as national parks and nature reserves. Everyone has the unique opportunity to move freely and is granted safe access to the wild. Metsähallitus is a state owned enterprise that controls millions of hectares of state owned land and water where they maintain nature, huts and lean-tos, and hiking trails that are available free to all hikers. The national parks and nature centres are there to assist visitors by providing information and services in the region. Mushroom and berry picking are permitted, hunting and fishing are allowed in permitted areas with the relevant permits. (Hakkarainen 2010, 27.)

An important driving force in the future of nature tourism in Lapland is the available amenities and services. These attractions are often built on infrastructure that can have negative effects on the natural and cultural resources of tourism. The rapid growth of nature tourism increases the burden on the environment through the use of land, water and energy. The development of infrastructure, buildings and facilities produces more pollution and waste that could negatively impact nature. (Uusitalo 2007, 42.)

It has become difficult to distinguish ecotourism from nature tourism, sustainable tourism, wildlife tourism, adventure tourism and how it relates to other forms of tourism. In nature tourism the attraction and the enjoyment comes from nature and the natural environment. Ecotourism is a sub-segment of nature based tourism along with adventure tourism and wildlife tourism. What distinguishes ecotourism is the inclusion of an educational aspect or sustainable management. (Ikonen 2012, 9.)

Ecotourism is a more strict form of nature tourism where education and sustainability are used as components to create an ethical experience for the consumer. Ecotourism can be described as a more sustainable form of nature based tourism that primarily focuses on experiencing and learning about nature. It is managed to be low impact, non-consumptive and locally orientated. It typically takes place in natural areas and should contribute to the conservation and preservation of those areas. (Fotiou & et all 2003, 22-23.)

It can be predicted that ecotourism will see continued strong growth as it is seen as self-reinforcing, as people experience something new, exciting or scary they might create an interest to explore more powerful experiences. Ecotourism is generally small scale which helps to reduce the negative environmental and cultural impacts, this also guarantees unique experiences. As activities have little impact on the environment and are largely unproblematic from a cultural perspective a large share of nature tourism fulfils the criteria for ecotourism. We can now notice a trend in ecotourism as it is increasingly offered in a wide variety of locations and creates new products strategically marketed to create new markets. (Gössling 2005, 30-36.)

It is difficult to find the balance between nature and tourism when it comes to ecotourism in Lapland. There are too few tourists that understand the true meaning of ecotourism and this niche is too small to support the region. Eco-tourists such as hikers would spend less money in the area compared to tourists visiting restaurants and using local services. Even hiking has environmental impacts such as erosion and littering. Lapland's nature is very vulnerable and could reach its carrying capacity very quickly as it is the core reason tourists are visiting the area. Organisations and businesses in the Lapland tourism industry need to be more environmentally conscious with their products and services in order to maintain this pure nature that Lapland has built its reputation on. (Fotiou & et all 2003, 24.)

Generally there is a greater awareness of the environment and its issues that include pollution, deforestation and global warming. Governments and environmental organisations are taking these issues seriously at both a national and international level. People's interest in these issues has changed accordingly and they want to engage in nature or ecotourism and partake in activities that have a benefit to the local environment. Due to this increased awareness it has become easier to manage these protected areas as people understand the need for this action. To promote sustainable nature tourism it is important that there is a development in partnerships between tourism, environmental and community interests. These partnerships need to have a shared understanding in the processes and the benefits in producing sustainable nature tourism. (Bell, Probstl, Sievanen, Tuija, Simpson & Tyrvaainen 2007, 6, 32.)

3.2.2 Indigenous Tourism

The area of indigenous tourism is defined as the indigenous culture, traditions and heritage forming the basis for tourism development. Indigenous control is an important factor when considering indigenous tourism, these control factors include limiting tourists use and access when regarding time and place. These limitations will allow the indigenous people to retain some control over the development of tourism but to also develop sustainable tourism. (Pettersson 2005, 84-85.)

Sami people traditionally inhabit the northern areas of Norway, Sweden, Finland and a small part of Russia. This area has no exact borders. Many western tourists are looking for authentic experiences among the Sami people, their primary motivator for travel is authenticity with the possibility to develop a personal and semi-spiritual relationship. There is often difficulty when discussing tourism relating to “endangered cultures” such as the Sami. If the development of tourism causes discomfort amongst the Sami it could lead to problems but on the other hand attractions without some commercialisation would attract hardly any visitors. For this reason and because the Sami have assimilated into modern society visitors are often offered staged attractions. Even with the risks of tourism development many Sami are attracted to the idea of tourism, especially when it is becoming increasingly difficult to make a living from traditional methods such as reindeer herding. Sami people who have adjusted to the role of tourism are able to combine tourism with reindeer herding. This allows the Sami to spread information about the Sami and their culture to visitors. (Pettersson 2005, 80-81.)

Consumers are increasingly looking for new experiences and adventure outside of the ordinary products and services. Stories can help to improve the power of experience and can complete a service or product by giving it a deeper meaning and a more memorable experience. These stories can come from historic happenings or inspired by myths from the Arctic nature, local culture and finally the traditions and beliefs in Finnish Lapland. Being able to use these stories in tourism in a creative way while presented in a suitable place can lead to authentic experiences. Foreign visitors come to Lapland in order to experience new cultures. By being offered information and traditions based on cultural heritage can help create an experience that exceeds the customer’s expectations. (Autere 2014, 24-25.)

There is a tourist demand for tourism involving Sami culture that may even grow in the future. Sami culture is fragile and tourism may jeopardise the indigenous culture and harm the environment in which the Sami live. It is important to remember that Sami tourism does face some challenges and with an increased research into the opportunities and risks they will be able to develop a flourishing and sustainable industry for both host and guest. (Pettersson 2005, 95-96.)

4 Development of Lapland as a Tourist Destination

There have been business strategies for the tourism industry in Finland since the 1990's. It is important to have these strategies in place in order to coordinate the development actions and projects. These strategies determine the vision and goals as well as securing sustainable growth in the largest tourist resorts and destinations. Tourism brings welfare and support to all areas in Lapland and directly impacts the economy with 595 million Euros annually. For these strategies to succeed there must be cooperation between the tourism resorts and the regional councils in areas of marketing, development and planning. (Luiro 2013, 3-4.)

The European Union has been promoting new programs that encourage innovation to create new opportunities in certain regions in order to improve services, one of these is the smart specialisation concept. The aim of smart specialisation is to assist regions to integrate their development efforts to create proposals that benefit all those involved. A specialisation strategy was designed by the Regional Council of Lapland to suit the Arctic region under the name 'Lapland - A Strong Arctic Expert'. (Lapland's Arctic Specialisation Programme 2013, 8-10.)

The Regional Council of Lapland has already been mentioned for its role in marketing but it is also an important organisation when considering the development of the area and the safeguarding of its interests. Its core responsibilities are to manage regional development and drafting regional development strategies and programs, planning development actions and implementing them and managing the funding of the programs. The Regional Council of Lapland has national and EU funds at its disposal, which have been granted for projects that promote Lapland and its decided objectives. (Regional Council of Lapland 2015)

The Regional Council is responsible for the planning and development of the area and has created the regional development plan 2030 which provides long-term development objectives and the strategies for achieving those objectives. These strategies include the investment into the tourism and travel sector as well as the natural resources and the energy industry. The tourism strategy is used to guide the development by defining the starting points and the focus areas. The overall objective of the strategy is to promote the growth of the tourism industry while supporting the development of tourist centres and areas. It will also increase the allocated public funding for development of tourism in the region. (Regional Council of Lapland 2015)

Seasonality can be defined as "a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, which may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as number of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment and admissions to attractions" (Butler 2001, 5). In order to combat seasonality Lapland needs a strong sum-

mer product that is attractive enough to increase the number of visitors in the summer months and can be sold to international markets. The impacts of seasonality are wide and it is far from sustainable. Land and nature can be strained heavily in one part of the year and left without use in the other part of the year. Tourism operations also have related impacts as they focus their services during the high season and that pattern needs to change in order to reduce the negative impacts. (Autere 2014, 29-31.)

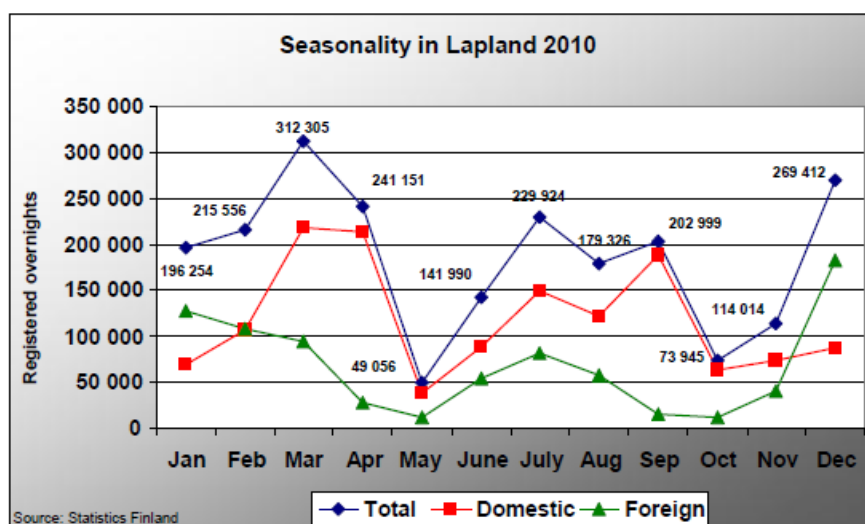


Figure 1: Seasonality in Lapland 2010 (Lappi 2011, 20)

Due to Finland's climate the tourism industry is controlled by seasonality, in figure 1 can be seen how Lapland suffers from seasonality. One particular time would be during the winter school holidays when demand for travel services exceeds supply. A solution for this would be to spread the holidays throughout February and March, therefore reducing the strain on the infrastructure and allow businesses to provide better customer service and experiences. This will benefit the businesses also as they will be able to have a more steady and manageable flow of tourists. (Finnish Tourism Strategy to 2020, 2011, 31.)

The tourism strategy of Lapland outlined a number of key factors in the development of all year round operation. The demand for tourism throughout the year will grow by creating new products that utilize the strengths of Lapland. The Finnish Tourism Strategy defines the main tourism areas as: snow and Christmas products, water related products, Finnish wellness products and special event products. These products all comply with the decided strengths of Lapland. When tourism organisations develop new products they will keep the customer in mind. (Lapland Vitality for Life 2007, 8.)

A major challenge when trying to generate all year round development and demand for Lapland tourism products is seeking growth in international markets. One of the most difficult problems to overcome is the poor accessibility of the region outside of the high seasons of

Christmas and the midwinter months. If international demand increased and became guaranteed all year round then accessibility would improve automatically. To ensure all year around demand from international markets then a strong approach towards sales and marketing needs to be taken. Marketing development will need the participation and cooperation from all organisations throughout the tourism industry in order to succeed. (Lapland Vitality for Life 2007, 10.)

4.1 Marketing and Branding

By reinforcing the image of Finland as a tourist destination to an international market it will increase Finland's brand and therefore make it a more attractive and popular destination for tourists. There are four C's that form the core of Finland's image as a tourist destination, Finland is Credible, it is a nation of positive Contrast and Creativity while also being Clean and fresh. (Lapland Vitality for Life 2007, 26-27.)

The Finnish Tourist Board was the responsible body for leading the coordination and strengthening of Finland's image as a tourist destination but now it is transitioning over to Finpro. Finpro is also the responsible organisation for managing major national projects, including Export Finland, Invest in Finland and Visit Finland which actively promotes Finnish tourism. Finpro is part of Team Finland. (Finpro 2015)

Finland's biggest competitors in tourism are Sweden, Norway and Austria. Sweden is Finland's biggest competitor and during 2009 it was the only Nordic country to show growth. Since the change in operating methods in the Finnish Tourist Board there has been a decrease in the allocations from public funds. Between 2008 and 2010 Finland cut the Finnish Tourist Board's budget by 34%. By comparison, Sweden and Norway did the complete opposite. They have been investing in their countries as tourist destinations. Sweden increased their tourism marketing budget by 36% between 2008 and 2010 and have been active with tourism marketing and development. If we consider these countries by their investment into Lapland we can see that Finland's Lapland will receive 1430 million Euros in investment before 2020, while Sweden will have 850 million Euros and Norway 516 million Euros in investments. This shows the efforts each country is making to improve development in Lapland. (Tiainen 2013, 16-17.)

A brand can be described as the associations that are held by the customer and add to the perceived value of a product or service. Once we understand the act of branding we can then discuss the more specific subject of destination branding. Destination branding is the decision to coordinate, improve and promote the image of a destination. This process is more than the basic promotion or marketing and includes the managing of an image and reputation of a destination by making a strategy that highlights its strengths and assets. It is important to acknowledge that destination branding is not only about tourism, it also consists of actors in social and economic fields in the global market. (Sivén 2010, 17-18.)

Brand image in terms of destination marketing is a concept that takes the observable reality into the world of perceptions, it uses the beliefs or associations the consumer has of a place and reinforces them. Culture, services, tourism, technology, education, people, initiatives and events produced by a country will also acquire a positive brand image that will in turn reflect on the country and could become its principal asset. The approach to building a brand image has to be consistent and coordinated with the information being useful, noticeable and relevant of ideas, products and policies that will help to continue to grow the reputation of the country or place. (Anholt 2010, 7-10.)

Lapland tourism marketing in Finland has been effective and displays high quality. The Lapland brand is known globally as it conveys the true values that characterise Lapland, these are: pure nature, rich culture, leisurely way of life and high quality services. Marketing efforts effectively use social media and the internet in order to build a Lapland brand and image. Marketing has been introduced in order to increase and strengthen the Lapland brand in the market with emphasis on foreign markets. An increase in the budget would allow Finland to have an active marketing presence which could increase the volume of inbound tourists. International events are a key method in increasing Finland's attractiveness and general awareness of the country. The lasting effects of major events are substantially longer than the events themselves. The participants of major events as well as smaller congresses, meetings and incentive trips have an impact on leisure travel flow. (Lapland Vitality for Life 2007, 5-27.)

In 2013 the Finnish Tourist Board carried out research into national brand marketing. The aim was to gain Finland more attention as an attractive destination with a specific target group. As tourists from Japan and China are increasing these countries were targeted using popular social media channels in those countries, such as Weibo, Weixin and Youku. The results were immediately noticeable. In 2012 I Wish I Was in Finland Facebook page had 140,000 followers, that number more than doubled by 2013 to 360,000. It now stands at 414,000. The same goes for other social media platforms such as Twitter, in 2012 OurFinland had 7,100 followers and by 2013 it was over 14,000. (Finnish Tourist Board 2013, 4.)

The Regional Council of Lapland has also launched a brand development project with the aim of creating a vision and brand image that reflects the diversity of the area. The vision uses common goals for the future and areas in which Lapland wants to stand out from other regions. They use five factors that they consider makes Lapland attractive:

- Rich in Nature: Lapland is rich in nature and it is a secondary home to many people.
- Arctic Magic: There is a magic in Lapland that cannot be described in words. It can only be experienced.

- Creative Madness: Positive originality that can be contagious.
- Open and Arctic: Lapland is an international meeting point without any borders and has created a culture of transparency.
- Consider it done: Lapland has bold ideas that go hand in hand with expertise in an international yet local environment. (Regional Council of Lapland 2015)

Raising the identity and profile of Lapland takes patience and is a long-term project that requires time. The common shared values of the industries and the local people create a strengthening future vision that requires work and support. A strong and positive reputation will make Lapland more attractive and promote the area both for international and national businesses and investments as well as attracting skilled workers to the region. At the same time a strong brand will strengthen the identity and increase the appreciation for Lapland both on a local and international level. The real change will come when companies, organisations and people carry out brand supportive actions, policies and services that reflect the brand through buildings, education, sports, science and art. (Regional Council of Lapland 2015)

4.2 Hotel Kakslauttanen: A Lappish Success Story

Hotel Kakslauttanen is located in Northern Lapland in the vicinity of the Urho Kekkonen national park and is only 35km from the Ivalo airport. The hotel owns forty log cabin, the world's largest smoke sauna, two Lappish tent restaurants and a snow restaurant. Hotel Kakslauttanen is also home to the famous Igloo Village that is often seen throughout articles of best places to stay. The Igloos have been developed using a specific glass that allows tourists to view the Northern Lights from their very own bed. They encompass both the imagery of Finland and the practical answer to tourist's demands. (Kakslauttanen 2015)

Jussi Eiramo is the man behind Hotel Kakslauttanen. He moved to the area in 1973 looking for a place to camp while on a fishing trip and thought to himself that he could start a business here. First he built eight cabins and a small cafeteria, business was difficult in the beginning as the area was not known as a tourist destination to international visitors. It was not until 1991 when Mr Eiramo packed up his car and went on a marketing trip throughout Europe. Now, 98% of the visitors to the hotel are foreigners as well as more than half of the employees. The area rose into the international spot light with the introduction of the igloo's and soon made its way into the National Geographic magazine. (Norwegian Magazine 2014, 63-68.)

Now with twenty glass Igloo's they have become the main motivator for people to visit the region. To lie under the sky and watch the Northern Lights from the comfort of their own bed. The hotel also offers a large range of the usual winter activities from husky rides to ice

breakers. In the summer the hotel still runs programs where you can enjoy the Finnish nature and the midnight sun. (Yu 2011, 14-15.)

The reason to mention Hotel Kakslauttanen is because a unique idea and product has been created and developed in Finland in order to increase the amount of tourists visiting the area. Jussi Eiramo has created a unique product that has changed the face of tourism in Lapland forever. Through the marketing and success of Hotel Kakslauttanen Lapland has inadvertently be thrust into the public eye and reached new markets that it had not before. Mr Eiramo has created a resort that answers tourist's demands while maintaining its Finnish identity, in an area of no previous tourist activity.

4.3 Commissioner: Safartica Ylläs

Safartica is a winter safari company that was founded in 2002 under the name Snow & River Adventures in Lapland and operated from Rovaniemi. During the first few years of operation the concentration was on forestry services, travel related services only accounted for 20% of the total revenue. The company's direction changed in 2006 with the introduction of a new business strategy. Of the 256,000 Euros in revenue made that year 50% came from the forestry services and 50% from tourist activities and services. Other noticeable years in the company's history are 2008 when Safartica was bought and the name was changed, then in 2013 Ylläs Adventures in Ylläs was acquired and incorporated under the Safartica name. 2014 saw 3.1 million euros in revenue made from both the Rovaniemi and Ylläs locations. (Pitämäki 2015)

As the Safartica office in Rovaniemi is located in the city centre, a large part of their business is to accommodate customers who 'walk in' with no previous booking. This customer segment is a large source of revenue for the company and is part of the company's strategy. Safartica's strategy until 2017 is to create business partnerships with their core customers and local partners to remain the leading walk in operator. With planned objectives and goals Safartica is looking to grow organically and establish core acquisitions and strategic partnerships in order to increase their own productivity. By finding incentive venues and have customers enjoying those experiences by 2017 will open a door to a new area of operation. Also they look to improve their accommodation and operate that as a separate business as well as make key partnerships. (Pitämäki 2015)

The differences in the size of the two locations can be seen by the revenue divide, Rovaniemi 71% and Ylläs 29%, as well as the amount of personnel. Safartica's personnel are affected by the seasonality of the business and there are only 16 permanent employees in the company, 12 in Rovaniemi and 4 in Ylläs. The business relies heavily on seasonal workers and trainees, during the winter season there are between 30-50 employees. Without the promise of year

round employment along with the fluctuation in the season and varied hours it is difficult to keep trained and experienced personnel from season to season. (Pitämäki 2015)

Safartica is considered a company that operates in the segment of adventure tourism along with the other safari companies in Lapland. There are numerous definitions for adventure tourism and it is considered a wide tourism segment with blurred boundaries. Adventure tourism is considered a niche segment and can be used to describe anything from a walk in the countryside to a trip into space. There are two common factors that are included in many of the definitions of adventure tourism, they are that those involved are participating in and making unique experiences within a nature based environment. One of the largest characteristics of adventure tourism is that the outcome is uncertain. Without a guaranteed conclusion to the experience it builds excitement and increases the interest of its participants. With the increase in uncertainty comes the increase in risk. Risk involves people exposing themselves to danger and the chance of injury, pain, or in extreme cases, death. To some participants this can be the appeal and what makes the experiences far more rewarding. (Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie & Pomfret 2011, 20-31.)

There are two ways to categorise adventure tourism, soft and hard adventures. Safartica would be considered as soft adventures as their customers are looking to escape from their everyday life and experience new environments and opportunities with the potential for excitement in a controlled environment. Hard adventures are activities that are high risk, require intense commitment and advanced skills. These activities would be physically and mentally challenging and demand previous experience. Soft adventure activities would appeal to a large proportion of people compared to hard adventure activities, those people could be virtually anyone with a thirst for adventure to individuals with a certain amount of experience. (Swarbrooke & et all 2011, 20-31.)

As the author worked for three months in Safartica Ylläs he will concentrate on this destination when making development suggestions as that is where he has gained his experience and information. Ylläs is a tourist destination in Lapland and belongs to the municipality of Kolari. Ylläs consists of two villages, Ylläsjärvi and Äkäslompolo that surround the Ylläs fell. The Ylläs fell is 718 meters high and one of the biggest skiing areas in Finland, it is also a very popular area for cross country skiing and other winter activities. In the summer Ylläs is a popular hiking destination. Looking at the most recent available statistics from 2011 there were 66,446 overnight stays during January and February of that year in Ylläs. Over half of the overnight stays were international visitors, coming mostly from the UK, Russia and The Netherlands. In January and February of 2011 Ylläs was the fifth most popular destination in Lapland. (Ylläsjärvi 2011, 12.)

From the author's observations he can see that a typical season in Ylläs begins in late November depending on the weather, when Finnish and Scandinavians start with their pre-season cross country skiing. December is filled with charter flights of families mostly from the UK organised by tour operators such as Magic of Lapland. These families come to Lapland anything from one day to a week and their primary reason is to visit Santa Claus. January is known as a period of low tourist activity as the weather is still dark and cold. The main nationality in early January is normally Russian but during the last season there was a decrease in Russian visitors. February is again a busy period as it is the school holidays in Europe, the area is dominated by Finnish visitors for downhill and cross country skiing rather than safaris and activities. During March and April the season is winding down and finishes after the last busy period of the Easter holidays.

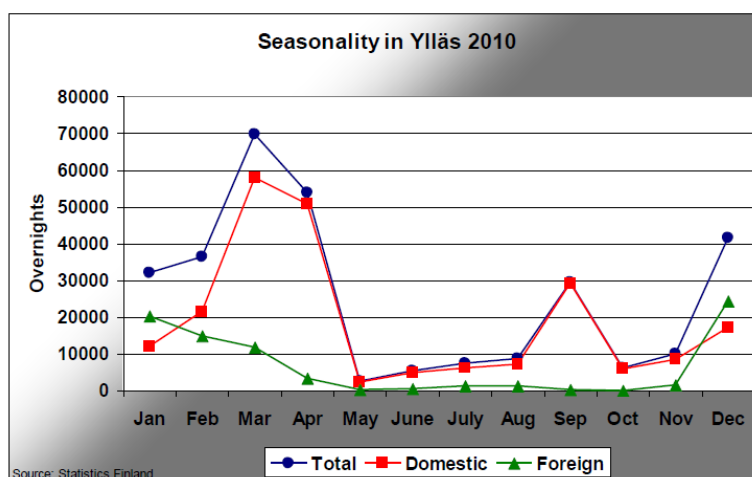


Figure 2: Seasonality in Ylläs 2010 (Lappi 2011, 63)

Taking 2010 as an example and looking at figure 2, it shows how the tourism flow over a year is for both foreign and domestic visitors in Ylläs, therefore comparisons can be made between fact and observation. This also allows evaluation of times that the author was not able to observe. The peak in foreign visitors comes in December when people are visiting for Christmas and especially to see Santa Claus, after this the amount of foreign visitors slowly declines as the season progresses. When comparing this to domestic visitors it indicates the opposite, December is also a time of domestic activity but it does not reach its peak until late February and early March when there are the school holidays and stays high until after Easter when there is a sharp decline as the season draws to a close. During the autumn the area only receives domestic visitors, the reason for this is most likely that domestic visitors are able to travel by car at times when flights and connections are not readily available for foreign visitors. It may also be that through Lapland's marketing it is not yet known as a summer destination to foreign visitors.

By looking at these statistics and observations the author is able to make comparisons about the area in times he was not present. It also shows that even during the high period there are times of low activity from both domestic and foreign visitors. Identifying these areas will allow the author to make educated decisions on where to make improvements and who their target market would be. Using this information the author will be able to make helpful suggestions and possible solutions to improving tourism in Ylläs during these periods of low activity.

4.3.1 Activities

Safartica offers a wide range of winter activities that meets the needs of their customers. These activities are based around three core activities; they are snowmobile, husky and reindeer safaris. They also offer other activities that take in the more natural and traditional aspects of Lapland; these include snowshoeing, forest skiing and cross country skiing. Ylläs also has location unique activities such as ice floating. Customers usually buy their activities as part of a themed package. These packages will include an activity each day either at night or during the day depending on the customer's choices. Many choose to have their activities at night as they hope to experience the northern lights. Safartica Ylläs is also able to accommodate walk in customers who are staying in cabins or cottages in the area for activities and rentals though, compared to Safartica Rovaniemi, it is harder for them to access these customers. (Safartica 2015)

Lapland Classic is a Safartica's primary activity during the summer and takes place predominantly in August. It is a 126km walk through the Ylläs-Pallas national park where visitors can see the beautiful nature of Lapland. The route begins in the south end of the national park in the village of Äkäslompolo and ends in the north in the Sami village of Hetta. The hike is guided by national park guides who will teach visitors about the nature and culture of Lapland. The hike includes accommodation, food, transfers and guides all in one package. (Lapland Classic 2015)

Lapland Classic is described on the Safartica website as "The third biggest national park in Finland, Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park, hosts majestic fells, wilderness forests, swamps and sandy shores of wilderness lakes and ponds. Experience yourself the Pallastunturit fell area which is considered the national view of Lappish Finland, breathe the purest air in Europe and get to know the agriculture and reindeer herding livelihoods of Lapland. Celebrate with us the 80th birthday year of the legendary Pallas-Hetta hiking route!" (Lapland Classic 2015)

This year Lapland Classic will be expanding, there will now be three walks of varying difficulty instead of just one. This will help reduce costs and be more manageable from a logistical point of view. The participants are mostly Finnish with a few international visitors. This is

Safartica's primary activity during the summer months as it is difficult to motivate visitors during this time of year. In order to make activities viable from a business point of view they need to be sure of participant numbers, as renting summer equipment and other activities that have been tried in previous years has not stimulated enough business during the summer months. (Jehan 2015)

4.3.2 Lapland Safaris

There are many safari companies in Lapland but the largest and closest competitor to Safartica in terms of development is Lapland Safaris. Lapland Safaris began in 1982 in Rovaniemi when two friends wanted to share the beauty of Lapland with others by snowmobile. The idea was to create memorable adventures in the wilderness nature of Lapland. The market welcomed the new concept and Lapland Safaris began to grow in reputation. In 2008 Arctic Safaris was bought and their expertise in the industry was added to a growing company. Today Lapland Safaris has 50 permanent employees and 450 during the winter season in nine destinations, each with its own characteristics and activities. They answer the needs of their customers by organising full programs that are founded on Lapland's unique nature and culture. (Lapland Safaris 2015)

Lapland Safaris aims to observe the principles of sustainable development and scales all their activities according to the tolerance of the local surroundings and natural environment. They teach their guests to respect nature. They try to be environmentally friendly with their equipment and 80% of their snowmobiles have 4-stroke engines which are better for the environment as they have lower fuel consumption and produce fewer emissions. Lapland Safaris is the only tourism company to be involved in the eSled project which is developing 100% electrical snowmobiles. Lappish nature and culture are very important to the success of the company and play a vital role for them to build stories, programs and experiences around. (Lapland Safaris 2015)

A new addition to Lapland Safaris is Arctic Incentives. Arctic Incentives is a leader in the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events) industry in Scandinavia and creates inspiration and new experiences for companies all over the world. Arctic Incentives offers programs throughout northern Finland, especially in Rovaniemi and Saariselkä. Arctic Incentives was founded when Lapland Safaris and Arctic Safaris were merged, they have over 25 years of experience in managing incentive programs and serve over 1500 participants annually. Arctic Incentives works closely with a network of local partners and suppliers in order to offer all the services needed, including their own activity program, accommodation, venues and full catering services. (Osmund & Sunday 2010, 31-32.)

In conclusion, Lapland Safaris has over 30 years of experience and is a well-established company in the tourism industry in Lapland. Operating in a number of locations all over Lapland

they can offer an authentic Lappish experience. With key acquisitions, strong co-operations and partnerships they are able to deliver a full range of services that meets the needs of any visitor to the area. It is difficult not to make comparisons between Lapland Safaris and Safartica but there are also differences. Lapland Safaris accommodates a large amount of tourists and that is one of Safartica's strengths, as their business strategy is to keep group sizes small in order to provide the best Lapland experience for their customers.

5 Research Methods and Conduction

Research can have numerous definitions and uses but is essentially about discovery. A useful definition would be that research is a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover new information and reach new understanding. The meaning of research is to establish facts that are used to reach a conclusion. A new understanding and knowledge of data is important when staying a breast with the related topic. Research is a complex process and it starts with identifying an area of research, selecting a specific topic, deciding on a research strategy and method, collecting data, then finally, presenting the findings and deriving information. (Rajasekar, Philominathan & Chinnathambi 2013, 2.)

In order to carry out a successful empirical research it is essential that the correct target group is selected and the right research method was chosen. The method of research is usually chosen after the research problem and the goal of the study are decided. The research problem is generally a question that the study aims to find an answer to by finding out the reasons behind certain behaviour. The question that led this study was what would motivate people to visit Lapland in the low season? (Aliaga and Gunderson 2010, 1-3.)

To understand the motivating factors behind visitor's reasons to travel to Lapland a questionnaire was created (see appendix 1). The questionnaire was distributed to the customers of Safartica and visitors to Lapland. The purpose of this questionnaire was to find out what would motivate people to visit Finnish Lapland in the low season. A series of questions were designed in order to find out the factors that were the most important when people were making their travel choices. After analysing the tourism flow in Ylläs over the year the author concluded that the low season would include the summer months of July, August and September but also the winter months of January, March and April as there is also a decrease in visitors at this time and that could also be improved.

5.1 Quantitative Method

A quantitative method of research was decided upon for this thesis. This type of research method was used as the author wanted to receive figures and mathematical data that could

be analysed showing clear results and preferences of people's opinions and choices. With these results the author would be able to draw clear conclusions which he could then use as a basis for his recommendations into improving tourism in the low season. By forming the questions into a self-administered questionnaire the author was able to reach the decided target group of Safartica customers. Quantitative methods of research are particularly useful to the tourism industry as they allow forecasting of activities. The tourism industry relies heavily on forecasting in order to understand the demand of its tourists. (Jha 2008, 47-48.)

Surveys or questionnaires are the most commonly used method of collecting the data, this is because a large amount of information can be gathered about the target groups impressions, opinions and attitudes. It is important to gather as much information as possible related to the chosen topic but at the same time the questionnaire needs to be concise and compact in order to receive the highest amount of possible answers. The longer the questionnaire, the less answers are received. (Flinck-Heino 2009, 15.)

In research the amount of people selected is considered as a population. For this research the customers of Safartica Ylläs form the population. Sampling is the method used to find the required participants for a piece of research. In order to acquire a fair representation of the population sampling needs to be randomly applied. It is more important to have fair representation of your population than a large population. Using this method the author was able to receive the most replies as possible related to his research. (Hague, Hague & Morgan 2013, 91.)

By using a Likert scale in certain questions the participants attitudes were measured. The scale consisted of five preferences, 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) with 3 (no opinion) included if the participant felt neither negatively or positively about the factor. By using this scaling technique the author would be able to receive the participant's attitudes on numerous factors that would provide numerical results. (Hague & et all 2013, 111-112.)

5.2 Data Collection and Analysis

When implementing a research there are many ways to collect the data which include surveys and questionnaires as well as interviews and observations. Surveys and questionnaires are the most efficient ways to collect large amounts of data and are able to measure the opinions, attitudes, qualities or behaviour of the participants. Timing is very important when distributing a questionnaire in order to receive a high response rate. (Helin 2014, 31.)

Before targeting the sample audience the questionnaire had to be tested. The reason for testing is to make sure the respondents understand the questionnaire and can answer them meaningfully. It will also prove if the questions asked are addressing the objectives of the study. Also at this time the questionnaire can be tested for errors. By testing the questionnaire first

it will make the final answers from the sample audience more reliable and valid. (Brace 2013, 191-192.)

The questionnaire was distributed during the month of March to customers who were predominantly staying at Safartica's partner hotel but also to customers who were staying in cabins but using Safartica's services. Out of the 66 questionnaires that were distributed 56 were returned with 2 being deemed too incomplete and therefore not used, 54 completed questionnaires were used to construct the following results.

5.3 Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are two important elements when carrying out a successful research. In short, validity means that the questionnaire measures the factors that it is supposed to measure, if a research is invalid it becomes useless. For a research to be reliable it means the researcher is able to receive the same consistent results on several different occasions over a period of time. (Brace 2013, 191-193.)

During research casual errors can appear and they are difficult to avoid. Errors can occur when the participant misunderstands a question or that it is worded in a way that misleads the participant. This can lead to the participant giving the 'wrong' answer. Other errors can occur when the environment of the participant affects their answers. For example, whether a customer of Safartica has had a positive or negative experience may influence the way in which they answer the questionnaire. (Sreejesh, Mohapatra & Anusree 2013, 119-120.)

The research carried out by the author can be considered reliable as there were similarities in the answers from the participants. Clear motivating factors were apparent once the results were analysed and these will assist the author in making informative decisions when considering development ideas. The questionnaire was presented to people that the author knew were customers of Safartica and any customer during the time of questioning was able to answer the questionnaire. As the questionnaire reached the target group of Safartica customers and was randomly applied to allow for a fair representation of the population this research can also be considered valid.

6 Results

The empirical research used in this thesis set out to identify the motivating factors that would encourage people to visit Lapland in the low season. The idea was to understand what products and services visitors were looking for and to determine what areas were worth development in order to attract visitors to Lapland in the low season. Once the questionnaire was

asked the results were collated and compiled so they could be analysed. With the use of graphs the data is easier to summarise and more understandable to the observer.

6.1 Motivation to Visit Lapland

The first two questions directly dealt with what would motivate the participants to visit Lapland in the low season. By allowing them to rate each factor on a scale from 1 (disagree) to 5 (agree) the author would be able to see how positively or negatively they felt about that motivating factor.

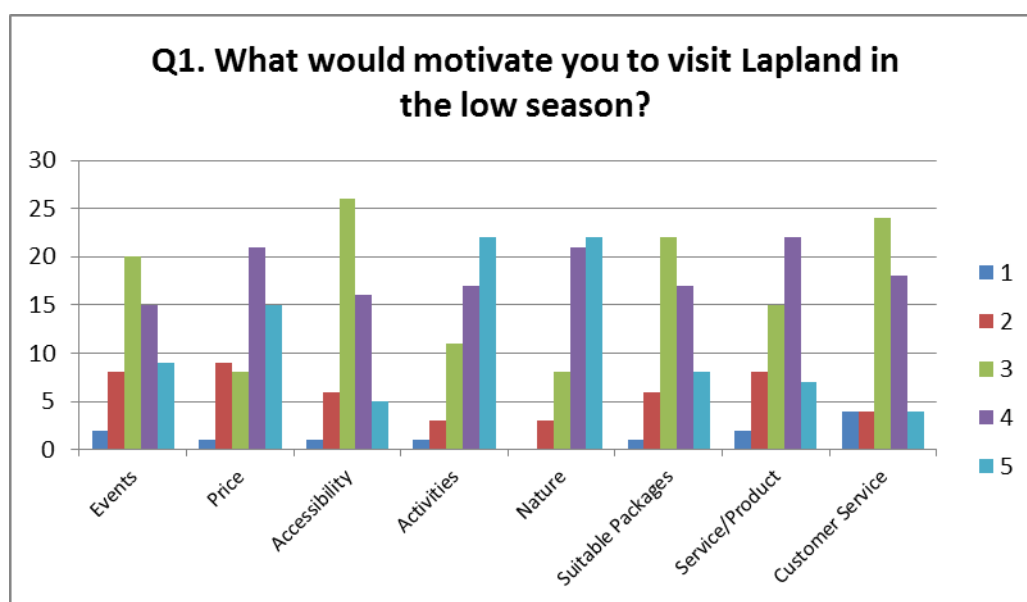


Figure 3: What would motivate you to visit Lapland in the low season?

When considering travel in the low season (figure 3) it became apparent that people would visit because of the Finnish nature and the activities that were offered but price would play an important factor in their choices. Nature is definitely one of Finland's strongest points and it is the image people have of the country. Suitable packages that are nature based that include hiking, adventure and tranquillity would be of interest when considering visiting in the low season. Creating a package or activities that are also family friendly will increase the amount of people coming to the area as the average family consists of four people.

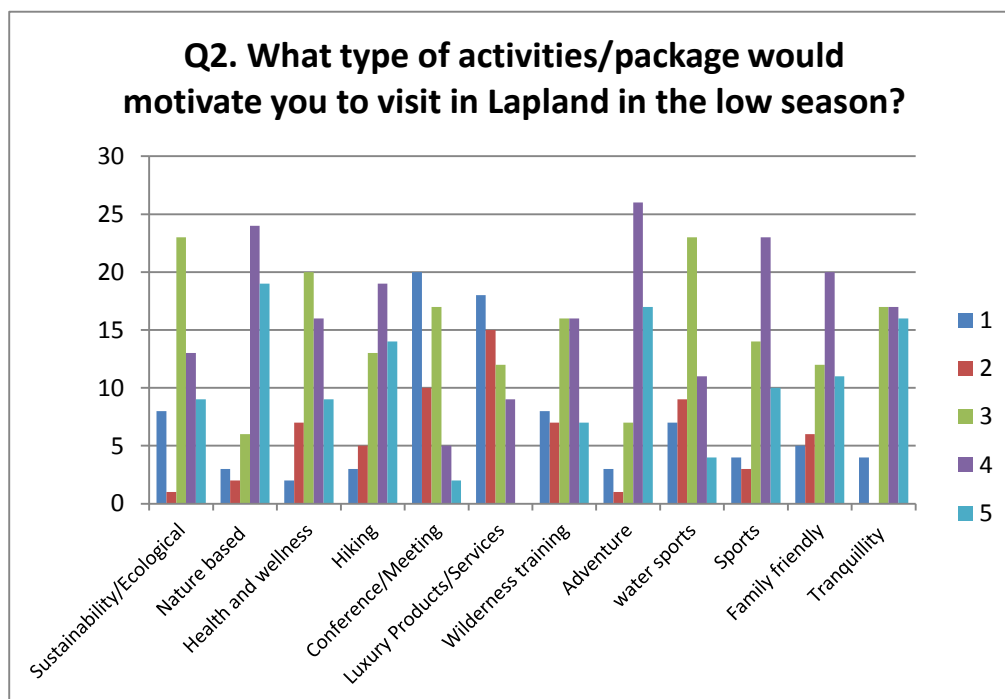


Figure 4: What type of activities/package would motivate you to visit Lapland in the low season?

The results of the questionnaire shown in figure 4 shows that visitors are interested in niche tourism with adventure, sports and wilderness training being popular choices. Conference facilities and services as well as luxury products/services were not a motivating factor when travelling to Lapland for the people that were targeted. There are two reasons I can see for this results. Firstly, the people asked were not business customers as Safartica does not cater to those needs at this time, therefore they were not looking for conference facilities. Secondly, due to the location, nationality and choice of hotel we can see that most of Safartica's customers are travelling on a more moderate budget and not looking for luxury products and services. This was surprising as Lapland is considered a luxury destination. It is worth mentioning that the hotel that Safartica partners with does not feature conference facilities or spa facilities and if those were a motivating factor when travelling the customer would look to other hotels. If this question was presented to customers of a hotel that has conference or spa facilities the answers may differ heavily.

6.2 Competitors

As mentioned earlier Finland's competitors are Norway and Sweden, especially when considering Lapland. The author felt that it was important to understand why customers chose to visit Finland when Sweden and Norway can also offer similar experiences in Lapland.

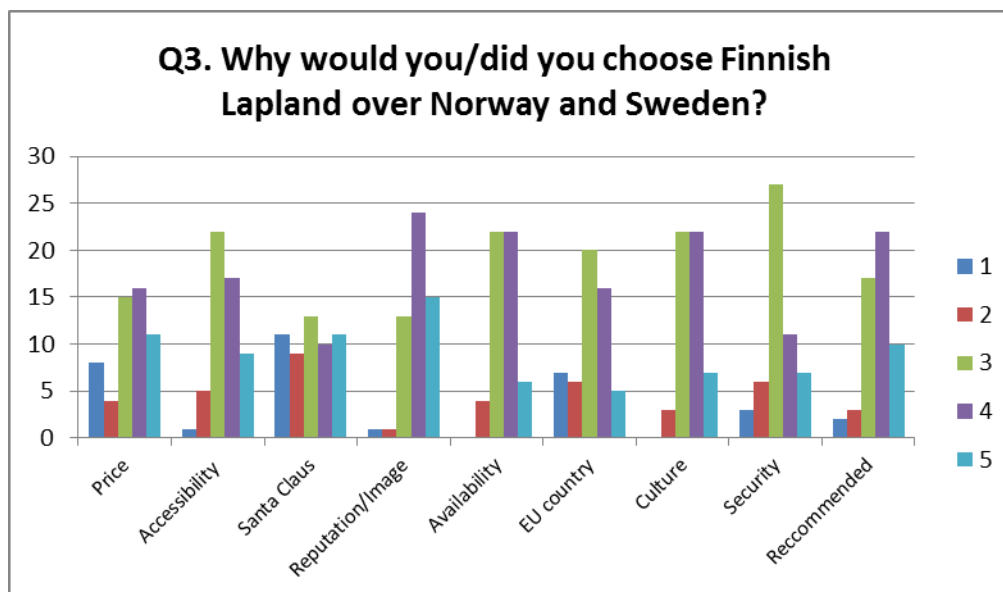


Figure 5: Why would you/did you choose Finnish Lapland over Norway and Sweden?

As many visitors to Finland are from Europe and they are part of the EU there are no difficulties with visa's or accessibility. When asked 'why did you choose Finnish Lapland over Norway and Sweden?' the most popular answer was because of Finland's strong reputation and image, next was because it was recommended. This question proved to be difficult for some participants to answer and the results in figure 5 show that the majority had no opinion about the subject as some may not have made any comparison between the three when making their travel choices.

There were some surprising results when asking 'why would you/did you choose Finnish Lapland over Norway and Sweden?' Finnish Lapland is considered the home of Santa Claus and many people come to the area especially to visit him. As the questionnaire was asked in March this was not a motivating factor, this is because the high period for Santa Claus visits in Ylläs is in December, whereas Rovaniemi has a Santa Claus Village that is open all year round. Also, the security of Finland as a travel destination only received a moderate response, the author was expecting it to be a high motivator as Finland is well known as a safe destination and that is one of the factors used in its marketing strategy.

6.3 When to Visit Lapland

Understanding at what time of year visitors would like to travel to Lapland would do two things. Firstly, it would tell us whether the destination was considered a winter or summer destination and if the destination marketing was effective. Secondly, it would hopefully indicate at what other times of the year visitors would like to visit Lapland if not in the winter.



Figure 6: What time of year would you like to visit Lapland?

Figure 6 shows that winter still remains the preferred time for people to visit Lapland with spring, summer and autumn all showing very similar results. Even though the idea behind this research is to improve tourism in Lapland in the low season the results show there is little interest in returning at these times of year proving that Lapland is perceived as a winter destination. This means the low season needs to be marketed and the image of Lapland as a summer destination is increased. People are interested in nature and tranquillity, Finland has these to offer during the low season.

6.4 Accessibility by Transportation

Accessibility can be an issue for foreign visitors as Finland and Lapland especially is dependent on air travel and its costs. For domestic visitors the area is more accessible as Lapland can easily be reached by car. It was important to understand how the customers perceive the region and what improvements to accessibility could be made to make Lapland a popular summer destination.

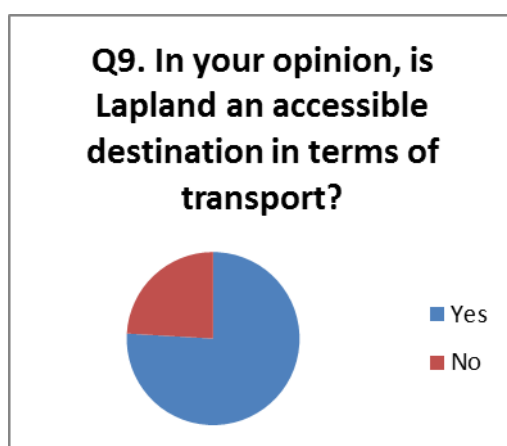


Figure 7: In your opinion, is Lapland an accessible destination in terms of transport?

The overall problem lies in the accessibility of the region. Even though visitors believe that the area is easy to reach as they have come at a time when regular and direct flights are easily available. During the low season it becomes a different story, only a handful of airlines fly to Kittilä airport and after April flights and connections are difficult to organise. Also, as the airline industry is fragile there can always be changes in the operators and their timetables.

6.5 Customer Demographic

Due to the time of the season in which the questionnaire was asked the customers were predominantly from The Netherlands and France. There were also Finnish people as they stay at the hotel but usually they are not using the activities provided by Safartica, they often chose cross country skiing and renting other equipment such as snowmobiles. Looking at the season as a whole there are mostly European visitors in the region as Lapland is generally marketed towards that audience and is more accessible for them.

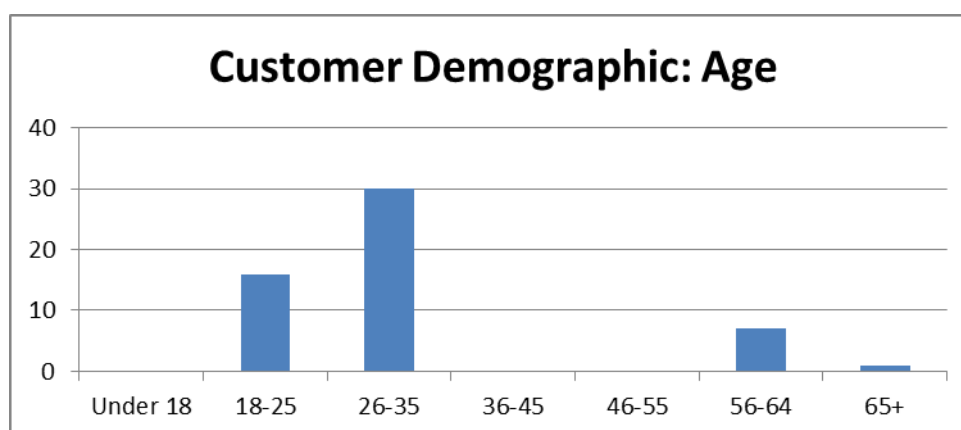


Figure 8: Customer Demographic: Age

As mentioned previously the age gap in tourists is becoming more noticeable and my research validated this. From figure 8 the age of the customers has a clear divide, most were between 18-35 with the rest of the customers being over 56. It is important for Safartica to notice this as older customers may not have the same physical ability as the younger customers and may find it difficult participating in some activities. There is definitely a noticeable absence of young families at this time of year in Ylläs as they are usually travelling to Lapland in December to meet Santa Claus.

When asked 'Where do you look to find reliable information when organising a trip?' the most common answer was the internet. With this information Safartica and those organisations responsible for the marketing of Lapland know where is best for them to advertise their services, products and information. The second most common answer was word of mouth, which is great as only two people said they would not recommend Lapland as a tourist destination to others.

7 SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is usually the first step in a more complex research and can provide information that helps synchronizing the company's resources with those of the environment in which it operates. SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Strengths and weaknesses are known as internal factors as they can be controlled in one way or another, whereas opportunities and threats are known as external factors as there is no control over them. Using a SWOT analysis on Safartica can be a useful guide to where improvements can be made, risks assessed and opportunities evaluated to allow for future growth. For the purpose of the SWOT analysis and to get more accurate and defined results the author will only be concentrating on Safartica Ylläs. (SWOT Analysis 2013, 6-8.)

After an interview with the operations manager in Safartica Ylläs the author has compiled a SWOT analysis of the factors that were considered as the most important to the future growth of the company in this location. It was important to only concentrate on one location as there may be different factors depending on that location. By using this approach Safartica will be able to define what operations will work in each location as one is very different from another. For example MICE tourism may work well in Rovaniemi but with the current infrastructure in Ylläs they are not able to develop that area of business at this stage.

7.1 Strengths

When Safartica acquired Ylläs Adventures the company had still been operating and they already had certain services and partnerships in place when Safartica started two years ago. This enabled Safartica to jump a few steps as they did not need to establish these local co-operations. Safartica has been established in Rovaniemi for over 10 years, they know the industry and have experience. This knowledge of the industry is vital when operating in a new area and within a competitive market. Safartica will be able to use their reputation, brand and trust that customers are familiar with in a new location. Ylläs as a location is excellent, the area is not overcrowded and the nature of Lapland is right on the doorstep. By keeping the group sizes for the safaris and activities small Safartica is able to preserve that and offer unique experiences to their customers. (Jehan 2015)

7.2 Weaknesses

The hotel that Safartica co-operates with and operates out of is slightly below the standard that guests are looking for, this means that customers could pick a higher level of accommodation leading to lost business as each hotel has its own co-operating safari company. With Safartica being new in the Ylläs area they are already slightly behind other operating safari

companies such as Lapland Safaris that offer a larger range of services to meet the diversity of their customer groups. As Ylläs is small it lacks the necessary infrastructure in order for Safartica to grow. MICE tourism is a large industry and without the venues and services Safartica cannot offer those packages and services to the customers with ease. The orientation of the village also makes it difficult to attract walk in customers. For Safartica Rovaniemi walk in customers is one of their largest sources of revenue and an area that Safartica wishes to excel in. (Jehan 2015)

7.3 Opportunities

The operations in Ylläs have just started and Safartica have time to expand and redefine their services. The development of eco-tourism, nature friendly tourism and adventure tourism will increase business by reaching new target markets. Having two different locations allows them to offer two similar but unique experiences under one brand. They will be able to expand each destination with its own characteristics and possibly target markets. For example, Rovaniemi would be city life in an Arctic environment where bars, restaurants and possibly conference services would be available, whereas Ylläs would focus on tranquillity and nature. As the two destinations are in fairly close proximity to each other customers would be able to experience a mixture of the two if desired.

7.4 Threats

The airline industry is very fragile and in recent years there have been many changes. As Safartica relies heavily on international customers and especially those on charter flights, any disruption in those could have massive effects on the business. Lapland Safaris is in cooperation with Lapland Hotels and they have recently taken over Saaga Hotel in Ylläs. Next year they will be operating out of Saaga Hotel, this will result in more competition for Safartica especially when considering walk in customers. It is difficult to attract visitors to Ylläs as there is not the infrastructure needed to accommodate large groups and many people will choose other regions such as Levi instead. (Jehan 2015)

7.5 Conclusion

By using a SWOT analysis the author is able to evaluate the local environment and suggest what areas of tourism Safartica could pursue in order to improve tourism in the low season. Along with the results from the questionnaire these suggestions can be developed to fit the needs and motivating factors of the visitors. With the analysis of the seasonality of the region these products and services could even be marketed to different customer demographics in order to attract more foreign or domestic visitors at certain times of the year.

8 Ideas for Development

By using the analysis of the results from the questionnaire and the SWOT analysis of the environment in which Safartica operates the author will now present suggestions and avenues in which Safartica could explore to develop tourism during the low season. It is important to remember that Lapland is a fragile environment and implementation should start slowly to allow sustainable growth in the region.

When developing a new product there are particular thought processes that the customer will have. First are their expectations, these are followed by the experiences that the customer will gain and the memories they will create. Expectations are built in advance from the customer's previous knowledge, recommendations and marketing. As all experiences are intangible everything is focused on creating positive memories. The core idea is to develop a product or service in such a way that it is attractive to the customer but they do not begin to expect more than can be delivered. A good way to evaluate the success is by how well the experiences matched or exceeded the expectations of the customer. (Autere 2014, 27.)

Finland is considered a modest country and a majority of tourism products and services are aimed at the middle market with only a few exceptions. There is only one hotel that meets luxury standards, the Hotel Kamp located in Helsinki. There is much room for improvement, especially in areas of great tourist interest such as Lapland. Many tourists are willing to pay more to experience what is unique and different about a destination. By creating tailor made experiences and excursions to learn about their destination they would achieve this. (Hallott 2013, 2.)

Lapland is considered a luxury destination as it can provide a unique experience in a beautiful environment. What differentiates it is the activities and experiences that are not available elsewhere. The already high cost in the region of its services and products make Lapland a luxury destination especially amongst visitors from the UK and Southern Europe. Still, luxury services over all need to be improve although Lapland will never be able to compete with other destinations such as New York or Dubai. Lapland will be able to use the natural resources of the region to create a new, unique and exciting experience then create new products or services such as the famous Kakslauttanen Igloos that have been mentioned, or improve the existing ones. Because Lapland is not a mass tourist destination with manageable and stable annual visitor numbers hospitality providers are able to be more flexible with their products or services. (Hallott 2013, 54-73.)

Safartica does offer tailor made luxury packages when asked but is not necessarily a segment they are focused on or marketing to. The area of Ylläs does not have a wide range of luxury services but there is enough to create a package that meets the needs of the luxury tourist.

As the demand for luxury services and products increases, new ones will emerge and Safartica can begin to offer a larger range to suit the needs of the market and their target audience. Similar problems also exist when considering business tourism. Safartica has the activities available to offer as incentives but the infrastructure for business tourism is limited and could only accommodate the basic needs of this niche market.

Business tourism can be defined as all work related tourism, for example when tourists travel to attend meetings, incentives, conferences and events (MICE). Business tourism has a large effect on all tourism services and there is less concern with the price as the company covers all the costs. It is important that everything goes well and the participants experience a positive, pleasant and organised business trip. This will encourage them to return with their families or organise their own conference in the same destination. Generally speaking, business tourists tend to spend more money in the destination than leisure tourists but business tourism brings other benefits. For example, meetings and events in any capacity can increase the exposure of the destination and can have a positive impact on leisure tourism in the region. (Kauppinen 2012, 2-4.)

An important issue when considering business tourism is its activity throughout the year. Lapland is affected by high and low seasons, business tourism could be developed as a remedy for seasonality and therefore could increase business during these times as business tourism does not follow the seasonal norms. Business trips can be taken throughout the year even though there are still peak seasons. Research by Statistics Finland showed that the peak seasons in domestic business and conference tourism during 2011 were October, November and May, also January and April were busy months. By increasing business during these months permanent and year round jobs will become available. (Kauppinen 2012, 12.)

The peak seasons in Lapland in business tourism (October, November, January, April and May) are periods of time when Safartica experiences low tourist activity. Safartica could market both business tourism and luxury tourism during these times when availability is better suited to accommodate larger groups with more specific needs. It is important that the package should include all the elements required to deliver a successful and memorable experience to their customers. These packages should also include unique activities that add extra value and stand out to the customers. Safartica could then create new brands under the company name that focus on these niche markets and specialise in those areas. By making key acquisitions in these areas they would be able to take larger steps forward as well as gaining valuable knowledge and experience that are essential to delivering the excellent service that these niche markets expect.

These areas and tourism segments could also be explored during the summer once activities have been developed and created to offer their visitors. These packages should be designed

so that they is a balance between activity and nature. They should focus on the image, reputation and strong characteristics of Lapland as a tourist destination. These packages should be versatile, easy to modify and adapt to other niche markets such as wilderness or winter survival packages for the more adventurous visitors. Safartica currently operates within the area of soft adventure tourism but they could start exploring hard adventure and develop products that would suit that niche market.

Ylläs could become the summer adventure tourism destination in Lapland by developing unique products and services that motivate visitors to the area in the low season. Safartica could create unique summer experiences and activities in close proximity to each other that are centred around the natural environment of Lapland. An example of this is Center Parcs, a Dutch company that came to the UK in 1987. It offers exceptional short break experiences in a natural forest location throughout the UK and across Europe. They aim to bring families closer together and back to nature with high quality accommodation, a range of outstanding facilities and more than 200 indoor and outdoor activities that are all set within a protected and enhanced woodland environment. (Center Parcs 2015)

A similar model adopted in Ylläs encompassing the strengths of Lapland and its nature would enable visitors and especially families to experience Lapland in a way that suits their needs throughout the year. Safartica has a majority of these services in place already, for example accommodation, and those that need to be developed could also be used during the winter season, for example indoor activities such as rock climbing or swimming.

The difficulty with promoting new activities during the low season is that it does not feature the natural phenomena that Lapland has become famous for, the aurora borealis or as they are also known the northern lights . The northern lights have become one of the motivating factors for people to travel to Lapland during the winter. In the low season Lapland could be marketed as the land of the midnight sun. This time of year is already very common in Finnish culture when people make their way to their summer cabin to enjoy the tranquillity of the Finnish nature. The continuous light could be a huge advantage to the tourism industry as it allows activities to take place at unconventional times (Autere 2014, 24-25). These activities could be marketed to foreign markets using the phrase the midnight sun, for example 'A walk in the midnight sun' or 'Canoeing under the midnight sun' creating a unique product that only Lapland could offer.

During the summer months the Sami people are busy with day to day living that would be interesting to those travelling to Lapland to enjoy different cultures and new experiences. Sami reindeer herders could offer a 'home stay' where customers would be able to experience the Sami lifestyle including reindeer herding, berry and mushroom picking, and making handicrafts. This would enable visitors to enjoy a unique and genuine experience, learning from a

different culture through a hands-on approach in the beauty of Lapland's nature. With the use of traditional stories and myths the experience will be made more authentic.

When operating in new times of the year it is difficult to be sure of participant numbers. Safartica could therefore organise large scale events or festivals that would interest both foreign and domestic visitors. People interested in music, arts, culture and sports are more willing to travel further distances to experience something new. Events can create the perception that an area is good to visit and provides the entertainment visitors are looking for. Events and festivals could be difficult for Safartica to organise alone so they could create partnerships with other organisations in order to share the management and responsibility. (Hussain 2012, 5-7.)

There are many risks when considering improving tourism activity during the low season and businesses will be very cautious when considering new avenues. New ideas need to be introduced gradually to allow for sustainable development of the area, but also giving time for the related services to improve. For Safartica to succeed in new areas it relies on the development of other areas and organisations as well as the marketing of Lapland as a summer destination.

From the results, the analysis of the company and the region in which it operates there are two clear problems when attempting to improve tourism in the low season. Visitors have suggested that they would visit the area in the low season but if they consider Lapland to be a once in a lifetime destination would they really travel there a second time. These new experiences in the low season need to offer something that is equally, if not more, as attractive as those in the high season. There are people interested in visiting the region in the low season but are there sufficient numbers to build a reliable and sustaining business? Secondly, accessibility is a problem, this can be seen through the registered overnight stays of foreign visitors. Lapland does have unique and beautiful nature but if it is too difficult for visitors to access it they will find it somewhere else more easily accessible.

9 Conclusion

The key word for the success in improving tourism in Lapland in the low season is 'co-operation'. For the area to grow, local residents, organisations and businesses need to work together both in creating new services and products but also by improving the attractiveness of Lapland to international markets through marketing. With the development of unique products the tourist demand will increase and the area will become more accessible. Services and infrastructure will improve and year round employment will be available to local residents.

This study was conducted to find out the current situation of Lapland as a tourist destination and what improvements could be made or introduced in order to create and improve tourism in the low season. The author was able to present his thorough research into the area and how local businesses and organisations operate. Once an understanding of the area and how it is affected by seasonality was achieved, the author was able to research into the motivations and needs of the customers and if this could be applied to improving tourism in the low season.

Some difficulties were encountered while conducting the research which could be improved for the future. The results of the questionnaire may have been more reliable if customers would have been surveyed throughout the winter season as well as customers from other hotels and cabins in the local area. This would have allowed the author to reach different demographics. It was not necessary that the customers only belonged to Safartica as the author wanted to gather the general consensus of people visiting the area. The author made attempts to present questionnaires at another hotel but was not granted permission. He also tried to contact the Kittilä Airport in order to understand the difficulties in accessibility in the low season and what improvements were being made but received no answer.

In a time when environmental factors are motivating peoples travel choices Indigenous tourism has become a very attractive option for development. It is a very unique idea that could create memorable and authentic experiences for visitors. Educating people about Sami culture and how to respect nature will lead to a sustainable future in tourism in Lapland. Further research could include the development of indigenous tourism in Lapland and if it is a viable option for tourism in the low season.

The making of this thesis was a large project for the author, with the help of academic learning and work experience in the tourism industry he was able to gather resources and information that would shape his research. With a personal interest in improving tourism in the low season the author hopes to encourage all year round employment for the local residents of Lapland.

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Appendixes



Improving Tourism Business in the Low Season in Lapland In co-operation with Safartica

This questionnaire is part of a bachelor of hospitality management thesis for Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The goal of the thesis is to explore what motivates people to visit Lapland in the low season. The aim of the research is to develop products during these times.

Please bear in mind when answering the questions that the low season in Lapland is the summer months but also during the winter months of January, March, April. Thank you for taking part!

1. What would motivate you to visit Lapland in the low season?

Circle the most suitable regarding each statement

(1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5= strongly Agree)

Events	1	2	3	4	5
Price	1	2	3	4	5
Accessibility	1	2	3	4	5
Activities	1	2	3	4	5
Nature	1	2	3	4	5
Suitable Package	1	2	3	4	5
Services or products	1	2	3	4	5
Customer service	1	2	3	4	5
Other (Please state)	_____				

2. What type of activities/package would motivate you to visit Lapland in the low season?

Circle the most suitable regarding each statement

(1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5= strongly Agree)

Sustainability/ecological	1	2	3	4	5
Nature based	1	2	3	4	5
Health and wellness	1	2	3	4	5
Hiking	1	2	3	4	5
Conference/meeting	1	2	3	4	5
Luxury products/services	1	2	3	4	5
Wilderness training	1	2	3	4	5
Adventure	1	2	3	4	5
Water sports	1	2	3	4	5
Sports	1	2	3	4	5
Family friendly	1	2	3	4	5
Tranquillity	1	2	3	4	5
Other (Please state)	_____				

3. Why would you/did you choose Finnish Lapland over Norway and Sweden?

Circle the most suitable regarding each statement

(1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5= strongly Agree)

Price	1	2	3	4	5
Accessibility	1	2	3	4	5
Santa Claus	1	2	3	4	5
Reputation/image	1	2	3	4	5
Availability	1	2	3	4	5
EU country	1	2	3	4	5
Culture	1	2	3	4	5
Security	1	2	3	4	5
Recommended	1	2	3	4	5

Other (Please state) _____

4. What time of year would you like to visit Lapland?

- Winter Spring Summer Autumn All year round

5. Do you prefer to pay one all-inclusive price where activities, accommodation and food are included or to organise everything independently?

- All inclusive Independently

6. When considering your answer to question 5, why do you prefer that way?

- More freedom Get the best offer Convenient More availability
 Level of services Level of products Other (Please state) _____

7. What do you like to be included when booking a package holiday to Lapland?

- Accommodation Airport transfers Activities Transportation
 Conference facilities services Spa facilities and treatments Meals
 Other (Please state) _____

8. Do you consider Lapland a once in a lifetime destination?

- Yes No

Please state why _____

9. In your opinion, is Lapland an accessible destination in terms of transport?

- Yes No

Please state why _____

10. Would you recommend Lapland as a tourist destination to others?

- Yes No

11. Where do you look to find/search for reliable information when organising your trip?

- Internet Travel agency Newspaper/Magazines Blogs
 Radio/TV Social Media Word of Mouth

Other _____

12. Demographic information

- Age Under 18 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55
 56-64 65+

Gender Male Female Nationality _____

Who did you travel with? Group size _____

- Family Friends Partner Colleagues Alone

How did you travel?

- Package holiday Independently