

**NATURE-BASED TOURISM PRODUCT  
AND ITS DEVELOPMENT**

Case Safartica

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The primary aim of this thesis was to investigate the phenomenon of nature-based tourism in Finnish Lapland and to analyse what the possible ways of developing nature-based tourism products can be. The field of nature-based tourism grows rapidly, so does the number of researches about it. In this thesis an emphasis was made on the understanding of the overall subject of nature-based tourism, a significance of a cultural aspect in it as well as the role of tourist behaviour and motivation.

The qualitative research method was applied in the thesis. An analysis of literature material conducted the theoretical foundation of the thesis. It also gave a more profound understanding of the subject. The empirical research included a case study. Safartica, the destination management company operating in Finnish Lapland, was the commissioner for the research and the case of this study accordingly. The practical aim of the study was to analyse the tourism product of the commissioning company and to find ways for its development. The study was substantiated by an interview with the sales manager.

The findings indicated the complicity of determination of nature-based tourism, despite its incontestable role and significant share in the global tourism industry. Attention was given to the role of culture in developing a nature-based tourism product and the significance of understanding the tourist behaviour. In the case of Safartica, the tourism product was investigated and possible approaches for the development were established.

**Keywords** Nature-based, Tourism, Product development, Tourist behaviour, Motivation, Safari

## CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	1
1 INTRODUCTION .....	2
2 SCENE EXPOSITION .....	5
2.1 THE CONCEPT OF LAPLAND AND ITS GEOGRAPHY .....	5
2.2 TOURISM INDUSTRY IN LAPLAND .....	7
2.3 SERVICE PROVIDERS AND COMMISSIONER.....	11
3 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....	14
3.1 TOURIST PERSONALITY-CENTRIC VIEWPOINT ON TOURISM .....	14
3.1.1 <i>Concept of Tourist Motivation</i> .....	14
3.1.2 <i>Peculiarities of Tourist Behaviour</i> .....	16
3.1.3 <i>Tourist Segmentation</i> .....	19
3.2 PECULIARITIES OF NATURE-BASED TOURISM .....	22
3.2.1 <i>Complicacy of Determination of Nature-Based Tourism</i> .....	22
3.2.2 <i>Investigating Nature-Based Tourism</i> .....	23
3.2.3 <i>Demand for Nature Tourism</i> .....	25
3.3 ASPECT OF CULTURE .....	27
3.4 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT .....	28
3.5 ISSUE OF SUSTAINABILITY.....	32
4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH .....	34
4.1 RESEARCH METHOD AND PROCESS .....	34
4.2 INTERVIEW WITH COMMISSIONER .....	35
4.3 PRODUCT ANALYSIS.....	38
5 RESULTS.....	44
6 CONCLUSION.....	49
REFERENCES .....	51

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. MAP OF LAPLAND'S GENERALLY ACCEPTED TERRITORY (BRITANNICA 2010) .	5
FIGURE 2. TOURISM MAP OF LAPLAND (REGIONAL COUNCIL OF LAPLAND 2013).....	8
FIGURE 3. VISITOR ARRIVALS IN LAPLAND 2013 IN ALL ACCOMMODATION ESTABLISHMENTS (OFFICIAL STATISTICS OF FINLAND).....	9
FIGURE 4. MASLOW'S HIERARCHY MODEL (PAGE 2007, 72) .....	19
FIGURE 5. TOURIST BEHAVIOUR IN DECISION-MAKING CHAIN .....	21
FIGURE 6. PRODUCT LEVELS (KOTLER & KELLER 2011, 326) .....	30
FIGURE 7. SMITH'S TOURISM PRODUCT MODEL (SMITH 1994, 587) .....	31

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an astonishing subject to study. For researchers and field specialists tourism has become a source for so many investigations and publications, for the society – an integral part of life; and it might seem that a topic of tourism has already been entirely investigated. However, two essential factors together refute such misleading. Firstly, tourism being a very multidimensional topic includes an immense number of various subtopics, branches and related subjects. Secondly, tourism as an industry and as a subject of investigations never stays still: it grows, changes and develops in all the possible aspects. It turns out that tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and, furthermore, it grows and develops faster than other industries (Saxena 2008, 10–14). Uniting the aforementioned facts, it must necessarily follow that, despite numerous systematic studies and researches, tourism still does not lose topicality.

This thesis investigates one field of the multifarious subject of tourism, namely the theme of a nature-based tourism. More precisely it broaches the topic of nature-based tourism product development, in which the object of the study is Safartica, a destination management company in Finnish Lapland. Nature-based tourism provokes an interest of the author by the overall controversy of the phenomenon. On the one hand, it is nature that attracts tourists to visit many destinations. On the other hand, the importance of nature in the tourism field cannot be explicitly determined. Hence difficulties occur in defining nature-based tourism and its measurements, making it a very curious subject for theoretical researches. Along with this lies a practical constituent: as the case of the discussion in this thesis is a safari company located in Finnish Lapland, safari products and functioning of local companies are inseparably linked with the factor of nature. Thus the topic of the thesis excites an interest both from theoretical and practical matters.

As already broached above, the thesis presents the discussion of a phenomenon of a nature-based tourism product. It has to be evenly noted that the interest of tourists towards nature, natural phenomenon and the corresponding tourism products is a considerable proportion of the tourism

sector overall. Nature is among the key tourism icons of Finland. The demand for this tourism segment is rising, so the need for tourism product development increases as well. (Finnish Tourism Board 2012.) In areas like Lapland large number of similar products and services offered by various companies can be identified, and the competition is intense. However, at the same time the importance to develop products, innovate new ones and differentiate from competitors grows. (Schalber & Zehrer 2011, 14.) Thereby the investigation of this research aims to discover possible ways to develop and differentiate nature-based tourism products by considering the case of Safartica, a safari company in Finnish Lapland.

The following research questions were brought up for the thesis:

- What is nature-based tourism in Finnish Lapland?
- How to develop nature-based tourism products in Finnish Lapland (by the example of Safartica)?

In the thesis the importance of advantageous nature-based tourism product development is contemplated and various factors affecting the industry in the area are analysed. Several arguments for the necessity of product development are adduced, supported by different theories; and also possible ways for development of a nature-based tourism product are discussed. While discussing nature-based tourism attractions and nature-based tourism products, the focus is placed on three basic elements of any tourism attraction: environment, activities and experience.

At first sight it may seem that the research concepts of a nature-based tourism or product development are commonly prevalent and practically thoroughly analysed and discussed in a multitude of books, articles and documents. However, as a rule, they focus on one of the broader subjects like general product development or nature-based tourism, without considering nature-based tourism product development as a separate topic. Nowadays, with the growth of the demand for nature-oriented tourism (Fredman & Tyrvaïnen 2011, 5), rise of tourism and competition, in practice, it means a lot of work for a nature-oriented service providing company, in Lapland in particular, to contrive

a brand new product or to develop existing one; because becoming acquainted with the market, one may come to the conclusion that everything possible is already offered. On the other side, tourist attractions and service providers need to develop and diversify tourism products in order to keep the current consumer segment, attract new segments and maintain competitiveness (García-Rosell *et al.* 2013a, 30). It is no secret that tourists always seek for some unique, special and new products; and products that could be considered unique few years ago may now become basic. In the light of listed above reasons, the discussion of a topic of a nature-based tourism product development is more than relevant.

A qualitative method that was chosen for this research forms the structure of the thesis. Firstly case studies are given including the presentation of an area relevant to the case and tourism industry of it, followed by the description of the commissioner company. Next part includes theoretical research and consists of three topics: tourist motivation and segmentation, nature-based tourism and product development. Theoretical research serves as a ground for further empirical research, which in turn is based on an interview with the commissioner, work experience in the company and product analyses. The conclusion is given at the end of the paper.

## 2 SCENE EXPOSITION

### 2.1 The Concept of Lapland and Its Geography

There is no certain definition of what the territory of Lapland is. It is generally recognized as an area of Northern Europe predominantly stretching to the North from the Arctic Circle Line occupying four countries: Finland, Sweden, Russia and Norway (Finland's Strategy 2013, 8). More precisely Lapland is a cultural region taking its origin from the environment of indigenous Sami people, who settled down here, according to scientific findings, since the last century B.C. (Wråkberg & Granqvist 2014, 83). The territory of Lapland in the view of Sami has a total area of 388 000 km<sup>2</sup>, not including significant areas near the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia, but more to the south-west along the Norwegian coast. However, nowadays the territory of Lapland is commonly recognised as a larger area, stretching more to the south in its Finnish part and less to south-west in Norway and Sweden (see Figure 1). Finnish Lapland, in turn, corresponds to Lappi province, the northernmost province in Finland, extending south to the Gulf of Bothnia and bordering with the Northern Ostrobothnia region. (Ratcliffe 2005, 1–6.)



Figure 1. Map of Lapland's Generally Accepted Territory (Britannica 2010)



In numbers, Finnish Lapland has a territory of 100 367 km<sup>2</sup>, occupying 25% of total and 30% of land area of the whole country, and the population of only 183 000 inhabitants in year 2012, which is equal to 3.4% of the entire population of the country (Regional Council of Lapland 2013). More statistical information with extensive tables indicating the correlation between area and population can be seen in “Lapland in Figures 2012-2013” published by the Regional Council of Lapland. Nevertheless, the fact that the area is very sparsely populated governs life in the region, however, imparts certain charm to the place from a tourism point of view at the same time.

Without bias Lapland is often seen and considered as a place of pure nature. The unique environment and harsh climate is an imprescriptible constituent of the image of Lapland (Stewart, Draper & Johnston 2005, 383–384). Lapland has been proven to have the cleanest air, nature and provisions; and is considered as the cleanest European area (Regional Council of Lapland 2015). Undoubtedly this is a strong point of the tourism sector in the region. The key economic sectors of the region have a nature-related origin and include tourism, mining and the process industry such as steel industry and forestry (Heikka, Jokelainen & Teräs 2013, 15–19). With the corresponding sufficiency in natural resources a special emphasis is put on the issue of sustainability including the consideration of ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions. From a certain perspective it may seem that the whole life in Lapland move around nature, being to some extent essentially connected to it. (Lotvonen 2014, 7–8.)

Lapland is known for its forests, rivers and lakes, hills in the northern parts and well-known natural phenomena: northern lights in winter and the midnight sun in summertime. Moreover, the landscape changes dramatically within the year, making each season distinguish from another. The commonly known four seasons of the year could be presented as eight seasons in Lapland: departure of ice (spring), midnight sun (summer), harvest season and colourful time (autumn) and first snow, Christmas, frosty winter and crusty snow (all – winter) (Lapland 2014). Nature is a centre and a heart of Lapland with no doubt or exaggeration.

Nowadays the Arctic region and Lapland in particular is often seen as an area with big potential for different industries which attracts international notice. Lapland is not only a part of Finland, but also a member of the Barents Region and the Arctic Region; thus strategies, visions and goals of the bigger regions play an important role in development processes of Lapland. As stated in the Arctic Specialisation Programme and Finland's Strategy for the Arctic Region, one of the core priorities and directions for the development of Lapland is seen in Lapland's research and education expertise, tourism, transport and logistics, utilisation of natural resources, sustainability, safety and the environment, position of indigenous Sami people and cooperation on different levels. (Heikka & Teräs 2013, 10–16.)

## 2.2 Tourism Industry in Lapland

An issue of accessibility can be considered as one of the most important topics for any tourism destination. Being a link between the tourist from the origin area and the destination, transportation is an essential element for tourism without which a tourist would simply not be able to reach the destination. Well-developed transport and infrastructure with several alternatives facilitate the tourism trip and enable the tourist to travel to and within the destination. (Page 2007, 111–112.)

In general, Finnish Lapland has a well-developed transport infrastructure with railway connections, flight, coach and road connections and even a seaport in the south-west, as can be seen in Figure 2 (García-Rosell *et al.* 2013b, 15–17). The most easily accessible places are located in the southern part near Rovaniemi and Kemi. Rovaniemi is the capital of Finnish Lapland as well as its largest city with the population nearly 61 000 inhabitants for the year 2012 (Regional Council of Lapland 2013). The city that is often recognized as the official home of Santa Claus, being a regional, business and tourism centre of Lapland, is an important transport nodal point of Lapland. However, the transport situation is more difficult in other areas of the region: thus railways do not stretch to central and northern Lapland. Only few airlines have regular flights to Lappish airports and bus connections may be to a certain extent not

so comfortable for all travellers and also sometimes difficult to understand for foreigners. Road connections in turn stretch all around Lapland and are mainly kept in good conditions. Thus the general level of accessibility in the region is quite high, but still some development is needed especially for remote areas. (García-Rosell *et al.* 2013b, 15–17; Regional Council of Lapland 2015.)

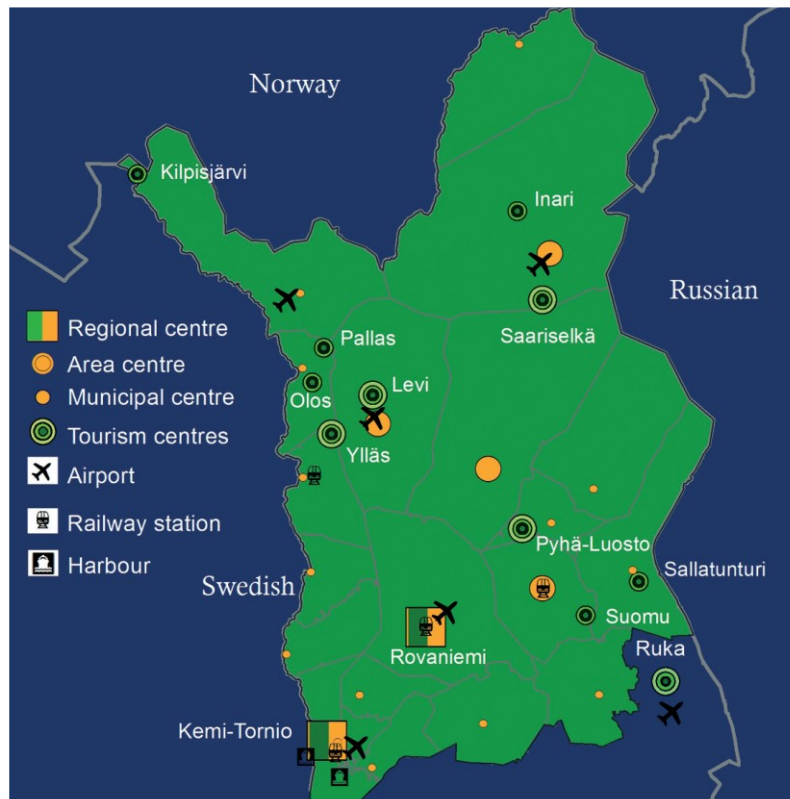


Figure 2. Tourism Map of Lapland (Regional Council of Lapland 2013)

In Finland tourism has been evenly growing and developing during the past few decades; an ample corroboration of such growth can be seen in different statistics as international tourists' arrivals or registered overnight stays (UNWTO 2014; Council of Lapland 2011, 11–14). In Finnish Lapland in particular, apart from the fact that tourism is actively developing, it has even become the most important economic sector of the region, providing a considerable proportion of jobs (Fredman & Tyrvainen 2011, 5). Tourism has been set as one of the dominant orientations for development and it continues to grow with new projects, investments and improvement of the overall well-being in the area (Heikka & Teräs 2013, 15–17).

Statistics for the past decade indicate a smooth but steady growth in the number of tourist arrivals in Lapland. In the light of this research, an accent is

put more on international tourists. According to Statistics Finland the amount of visitors in Lapland in the year 2013 reached 978 000, 405 000 of which came from abroad (numbers show visitor arrivals in all accommodation establishments). And the proportion of international tourists shows a tendency for growth. (Official Statistics of Finland.) Russian market, which is traditionally one of the largest segment of tourists both in Finland and Lapland (Wall 2014), has shown a slump in 2014 and beginning of 2015 (YLE 2015). The reason for that was the instability of the national Russian currency relative to euro. However, this gap was partly filled by the rise of visitors from Asia and Europe (Wall 2014). This demonstrates how the tourism sector is influenced by the number of global factors and may indicate changes from year to year.

As previously broached, in addition to the traditional four seasons of the year, eight seasons of nature recognized in Lapland constitute annual year in the area (Lapland 2014). However, it can be impartially noted that not all of these seasons attract and motivate tourists equally. Christmas time seems for tourists far more alluring and cherished than harvest season in the end of summer for instance. Analysing the statistical data a distribution of tourist arrivals by months corroborates a problem of seasonality as can be seen on Figure 3. Also as one of characteristics of tourism in the area appear a problem of erratic distribution of tourists within the area, with a focus on bigger and more developed resorts (Kohllechner-Autto 2011).

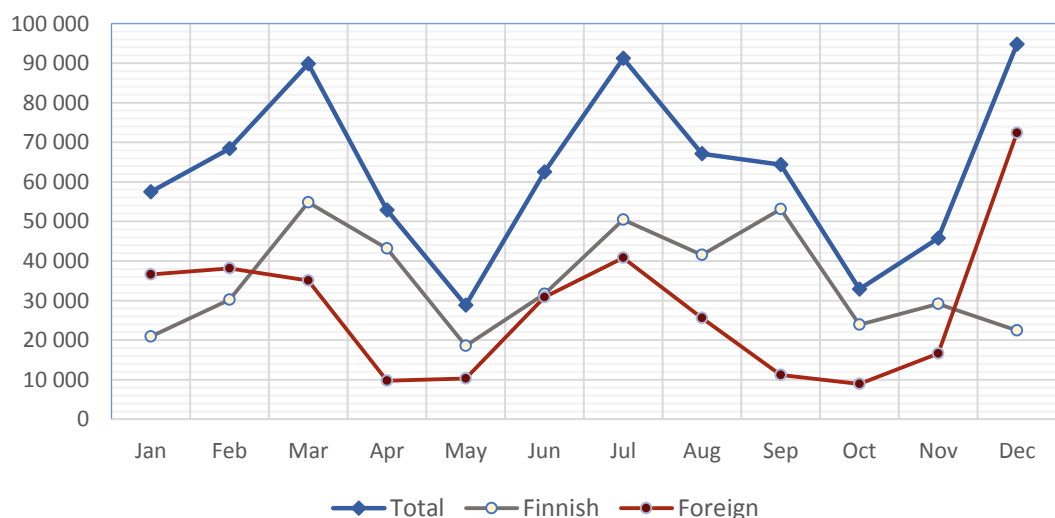


Figure 3. Visitor Arrivals in Lapland 2013 in All Accommodation Establishments (Official Statistics of Finland)

According to Figure 3, the overall peaks of the year occur in the middle of summer and in winter with a highest peak in December. Also the difference in domestic and international tourist arrivals is deduced. The growth of arrivals of Finnish tourists in February-March is connected with the skiing holidays in Finland. December is attractive because of Christmas and Christmas-oriented services as well as the availability of charter flights. A lot of factors form tourism seasons in the area, and even within the high seasons there are falls and raises; however, the general tendency indicates a special interest of international tourists towards the winter season from December till March. That way Lapland has a good international image with the brand continuing to enhance; and it is often conceived as a winter destination (Kohllechner-Autto 2011). Because tourism reaches its fullest prosperity in winter and other seasons are frequently not so popular for tourists, local tourism companies have to adjust their annual budget in accordance with it, making most of the yearly profit often in few months.

Talking about the development of tourism in Lapland, besides various projects and strategies in which Lapland is actively figuring, plenty of investments are being done. Several hotels, restaurants, tourist centres, shops and even some new ski and golf centres are appearing, different tourism companies are creating new projects and products. As an example can be considered a brand new contemporary Arctic Light Hotel with own restaurant in the centre of Rovaniemi opening its doors from 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2015 (Arctic Light Hotel 2015). As another supportive factor for the development of tourism, an education is to be viewed. Multidimensional Tourism Institute including Lapland Tourism College, the University of Lapland and the Lapland University of Applied Sciences not only prepares specialists and experts of the tourism industry, but creates a good research ground and development activities for the industry (Heikka *et al.* 2013, 16; Tammia 2012).

Nature-based tourism, which is a subject of this study, is part and parcel of the tourism field in the area of Lapland, since nature has been a central figure for tourism in the Nordic areas for decades. It must be evenly noted that the expansion of nature-based tourism as well as the demand for it is the most

rapidly growing sector of the global tourism industry, growing faster than the tourism sector overall. (Fredman & Tyrvaïnen 2011, 5–7; Pickering & Weaver 2003, 7.) Nature-oriented products and services is a separate big segment of tourism in Lapland with a number of safari companies and other service providers.

In general, it should be noted that the interest towards polar tourism including the Arctic region and Lapland has grown appreciably (Gelter 2011, 227–230). However, if the far-northern remote locations of the Arctic are hardly accessible and frequently too extreme for tourists, Lapland offers developed transportation, accommodations and the overall high level of tourism, at the same time providing a possibility to experience the Arctic. An image of the Arctic, with its globally enhanced and marketed environmental and cultural peculiarities (Karlsson & Smith 2013; García-Rosell *et al.* 2013b, 6–8, 21–23), along with advantages of the developed tourism destination provides Lapland with a great potential in terms of the tourism industry. Some positive results can already be seen, but the room for development is even larger.

In the future Lapland is expected to continue growing and developing. In the vision for 2030 Lapland is seen as an attractive, successful northern region with almost 200 thousand inhabitants, recognised for its rich nature and culture and as a creative, internationally acknowledged region of growing investments (Regional Council of Lapland 2013). The focus for development is put on cultural, social and environmental sustainability, authenticity and international cooperation (Heikka *et al.* 2013, 12–13). Such goals would stimulate a wholesome economic growth, enhancement of the brand identity and image of Lapland, development of businesses including tourism, taking into consideration various stakeholders as well as the environment.

### 2.3 Service Providers and Commissioner

Various safari companies and other nature or culture oriented service providers in the field of tourism have some ambivalent traits. On the one hand offered by this segment services are part and parcel of the peak touristic

experiences and often comply with tourists' major motivation to travel. On the other hand this segment belongs to 'in the destination' service providers and can be ascribed to extended services which are not always planned in details before the trip, considering them supplementary. However, the status and the significance of such services in the most part depends on the tourist and his motivation (discussed more elaborately later in the document).

Howsoever debatable this tourism sector would be, nevertheless one is obvious: it is a crucial constituent of an existence and functionality of a tourist destination. In Lapland nature-based service segment is presented by a wide variety of safari companies. Only in Rovaniemi the number of safari companies exceed twenty. Some bigger companies like Lapland Safaris operate in several destinations, others are more focused on one exact location. Among the biggest companies offering multiple services from snowmobiling to Santa Claus visits (operating in Rovaniemi) can be named: Arctic Lifestyle, Lapland Safaris, Lapland Welcome, Safartica and Wild Nordic. Reindeer and husky farms like Huskypoint, Konttaniemi and Sieriporo reindeer farms offer rides and various extended services, but mostly attract customers via safari companies. (Rovaniemi Tourism and Marketing Ltd 2013.) In this case a safari company fulfils the duties of a small local travel agency and can be named as a destination management company (DMC); it performs as a connecting-link between a farm and a consumer, sometimes adding own services as snowmobiling or transfer. This chain works as a comprehensive whole and gives an ability for a tourist to purchase all the desired safaris and activities from one place and have them multifarious.

Safartica acts as a commissioner for this research and it is one of the nature-based service providing companies in Lapland. It is a full-service DMC company operating in Rovaniemi and Ylläs that offers all year round top quality safaris and land services as well as different variants of accommodation (Rovaniemi Tourism and Marketing Ltd 2013). Primarily its services may be divided into summer and winter safaris. In summer time tourists can experience rafting, picking berries, traditional sauna, visiting reindeer or husky farm. In winter time safaris are divided into weekly and extreme, in addition to these special activities like New Year parties are organised. Weekly safaris

include a wide range of snowmobile excursions, ice-fishing, husky and reindeer rides, snowshoeing, visits to Ranua zoo, Sampo icebreaker, ice-hotel and various picnics. By the extreme safaris are meant long overnight safaris, which require more skills from a client, done with snowmobiles or huskies. These can be: snowmobiling to Arctic Ocean or Luosto, overnight husky safari or overnight in Arctic Snow Hotel. (Safartica 2015.)

Accommodation facilities include deluxe chalets Ounasvaaran Lakituvat located on top of the hill in Rovaniemi, a hotel with 36 travellers' rooms and a traditional cabin Laulumaa in Ylläs, and wilderness cabin in Joutolampi nearby Rovaniemi. Depending on the type of accommodation different additional services as breakfast are offered. (Safartica 2015.)

The company generally works with three customer segments: individual clients, leisure and incentives (Martin 2015). Last two require cooperation with other companies and travel agencies. Individual customers are offered to join weekly safaris or any other from the list of ongoing and available services. The services and safaris for big groups are usually adapted in accordance with the requirements of the group and may differ from weekly safaris.

In the operation of Safartica an emphasis is put on safety and comfort of a client offering the highest quality services. With weekly safaris the company tries to keep small group sizes, provides tailor made services and helps with planning the whole trip starting from accommodation to dinner reservations and from activities to practical tips concerning the stay. Guides working in the company are professional, trained and familiar with the Lappish way of life, the customs, culture and guest' needs.



### 3 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

#### 3.1 Tourist Personality-Centric Viewpoint on Tourism

##### 3.1.1 Concept of Tourist Motivation

It is difficult to say when people started to travel; most likely, as soon as they learned how to walk and deliberately explore new for them territories. If we look back at the history, people have always been travelling: to find better lands for cultivation, to escape from enemies, to save themselves from climate changes, as a result of wars, to explore new trade routes and new lands or whatever else the reason was. Even though that steps were often inadvertent, apparently they were the farther foundation of a tourism. However, without going deep into the etymology of the term tourism, which first appeared in England only in 1811 (Martinez 2008, 549), and its history, in the modern sense, as travelling for pleasure (AHD 2000), tourism industry can be related to the name of Thomas Cook. It happened only in 1841, when he organised and advertised the first privately chartered excursion train, which was a success; and later on Thomas founded the first ever tourism agency. So, appreciably tourism started to take the form of mass pleasure trips only in the second half of 19th century, which can be considered as an origin of a modern tourism industry (Korstanje 2007, 102).

Today, less than two centenaries after the appearance of the first signs of tourism in terms of a mass industry, it is an incontestable fact that tourism is one of the largest as well as one of the most fast-growing industries in the world (Saxena 2008, 10–14.). Easy to conclude that the demand for tourism has been growing dramatically and still continues to grow. However, the question is what the tourism demand is and what a tourist motivation is; in other words: what does force tourists to travel? One important thing to be noticed is that tourism not only growths by size: with the number of tourists, hotels, restaurants, travel agencies etc. – but develops in all aspects: service quality, new types of travelling, new services, tourism products and destinations. Different factors cause changes in the tourism industry and needs for development: from climate changes and the environment to politics

and mass media – however, the direct cause can be seen in tourists' motivation and tourism demand (Page 2007, 71–72).

The comprehension of tourism goes far beyond its simple definition given by UNWTO as a compilation of activities of a person travelling to or staying in places outside his/her usual environment; for some it is a way to obtain new experiences, knowledge, cultural enrichment, for others it is a way to show their social status and financial security, or escape from daily routine, to restore their health, try their potential and boundaries or it can be even a manifestation of their concern for nature or some of global issues. At this point tourist motivation underlines tourism research and needs particular consideration.

In a simple way, tourist motivation serves as a need of an individual towards certain actions and activities that are expected to bring satisfaction (Mountinho 1987, 16). In other words, travel motivators are the inner urges initiating travel demand (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert & Wanhill 1993, 20). Such urges can be considered in the light of intrinsic and extrinsic approaches to motivation. Intrinsic approach refers to individual unique personality and a desire to satisfy internal needs for self-improvement and an aspiration for happiness. This approach is closely related with a concept of *eudaimonia*, a Greek philosophical term. Eudaimonia can be defined as a supreme goal of human's life that implicates a pursuit of happiness associated with the cultivation of an excellent or virtuous character rather than feelings (Cook 2013, 21). According to Armstrong (2003) this goal comprises an inner desire "to include but go beyond survival and good health, to achieve more than standards of comfort and well-being and instead to thrive on all the possibilities of existence". Another approach refers to extrinsic motivation. It comprises the broader factors that mould personal perceptions, attitudes and views. Among such factors can be the society or culture a person lives in, since they have an impact on person's outlook as well as views on tourism. In that way in order to obtain satisfaction an individual should understand his behaviour and what shapes his characteristics. (Page 2007, 69–71.)

Except for intrinsic and extrinsic approaches to motivation, the consideration of the notion of etic-emic approach to analyse tourist behaviour has a right to

be viewed. Etic and emic are two means to analyse and view same subject in two different ways, giving an opportunity to receive a stereoscopic comprehension (Franklin 2009). An emic approach considers the participants' perspective in order to understand how they see the world, what are their views and values (Pearce 2005, 2–3). That way in terms of tourism the emic approach examines the behaviour of a tourist from inside. In contrast the etic approach examines a person from outside, often by applying different classifications and models (Franklin 2009). Emic and etic viewpoints present different perspectives of the subject, therefore the consideration of both is so important.

One of the first and crucial step in any tourism analysis lies in understanding the nature of the tourist motivation. It turns out that tourist motivation is the vague subject that frequently comprises psychological and philosophical aspects, which nevertheless requires thorough consideration. In order to investigate and understand the nature of origin of the tourist behaviour and the aspect of motivation, these topics are to be analysed by applying multi approaches and by considering manifold subtopics.

### 3.1.2 Peculiarities of Tourist Behaviour

As it can already become clear from the previous subchapter, tourist behaviour and motivation play one of the key roles in tourism. An understanding of motives which forces tourists to travel and analyses of a tourist behaviour would give weighty answers concerning the field of tourism and its development. Even though the overall importance of investigating a subject of tourist motivation and behaviour is obvious, in this subchapter several concretized reasons for that are discussed.

First of all it is essential to determine for whom it is important; or who needs to analyse, consider and think of a tourist behaviour. An indeterminate subject of the tourist motivation and tourist behaviour, according to Pearce (2005, 6–8), turns to be an important matter for several groups. The first group which matters about the tourist behaviour refers to tourists themselves. Even though

this party does not often realize the significance of their behaviour and does not make researches to understand it; tourists are always concerned about their personal satisfaction and experiences. The next group is public sector management or people making decisions about tourists; their matter comprises managing factors and generation of community benefits. Third implies business matters; to this segment marketing, sales and management can be referred with a profit making bias. Apart from these three segments Pearce notes a possible occasional interest from media or even political interest. Besides the above-mentioned groups, analysts and researchers have a special concernment about tourist motivation and tourist behaviour, considering what decision-makers need and including the interests of the tourists themselves. (Pearce 2005. 6–8.)

It turns out that the subject of a tourist behaviour is constitutive for many parties; however, several difficulties may occur while investigating it. The first matter is that tourist behaviour and consumer behaviour differ from each other; hence, a tourist is to be considered the way different than a common consumer. If the consumer behaviour is generally focused on the choices of products and the satisfaction with products, tourist behaviour has extended phases around tourist activities. (Pearce 2005, 9–10.) There can be noted five stages of tourist behaviour deduced by Clawson and Knetsch (1966):

- An anticipation or pre-purchase stage
- Travel to the actual site
- An on-site experience
- A return travel component
- The extended recall and recollection stage

(Page 2007, 65)

Each of these stages imply a factor of an experience of being somewhere else than home. Moreover, in contrast to acquisition of any goods, tourism experience has a more fundamental impact in relation to self-actualization and psychological enrichment of a person. Thereby it distinguishes tourism from other products by its orientation to and correlation with the factor of motivation and psychology as a whole. (Page 2007, 65–66.)

Another distinguishing factor refers to expectations. In case of purchasing of any goods, no matter how big and expensive they are, expectations are usually well-defined (Pearce 2005, 11); it gives a possibility for application of commonly used expectation-satisfaction or need-satisfaction approaches (Gelter 2011, 230). Whereas the expectations of tourists are far more complicated and less specified. One of the reasons for a complicity of the tourist expectations is that a tourism product comprises manifold elements affecting tourist experience and satisfaction. As an example a comparison of purchasing a snowmobile and a snowmobile safari can be considered. A consumer buying a snowmobile would expect certain technical characteristics from it. While purchasing a snowmobile trip, a tourist would not expect specifications of a machine, but focus more on the emotional ground and possible experiences. Even in case of purchasing a small safari there are several elements on which an expectation is based, for instance it can be: environment, guide, other tourists and activity itself. Another difficulty is that tourist expectations have more psychological grounds and are arisen through the prism of understanding personal character. From the above-mentioned statements it follows that various approaches focused on a regular consumer are not always applicable to the consideration of tourists and have at least to be amended and supplemented.

At this point it would be sequentially to mention the commonly known Maslow's hierarchy of needs model (Figure 4), which is often correlated with an idea of motivation (Page 2007, 72). The matter is that this model is not ideal conformably to the classification of tourist motivation. Tourist needs and motivations consequently are often not hierarchical; some needs may occur inconsistently or simultaneously and not in compliance with the model. Thus, for instance social or self-actualization needs can sometimes play the dominant role in motivations and pull basic needs down. Nevertheless, it does not make hierarchy model totally unfit, but asks for its very cautious application.

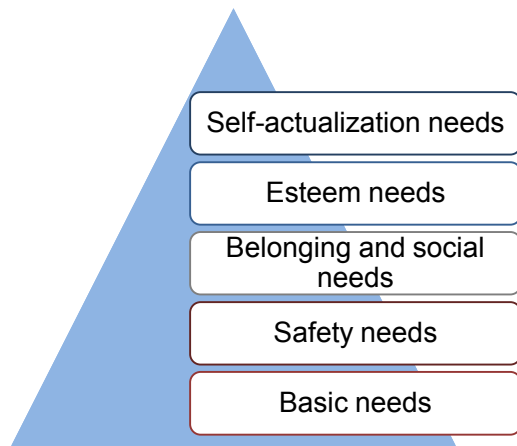


Figure 4. Maslow's Hierarchy Model (Page 2007, 72)

Tourist behaviour is a complicated subject not only because of its dissimilitude with an ordinary consumer behaviour, but also the difficult correlation between expectations and satisfaction. An interesting fact was adduced by Alain de Botton, who noted that tourists often confine themselves to the material understanding of happiness. They assume that the better the surroundings are, the happier they will be. However, happiness is an unpredictable phenomenon and it does not always appear when we expect it to. (de Botton 2004.) For example a person planning a trip to a fabulous tropic island can imagine a wonderful surroundings, high-class services and a comfortable bungalow with all the possible facilities and he instantly imagines himself happy there. However, once he travels there and receives all he has been dreaming of, it can happen so that he does not realize himself cheerful. This again refers to the factor of a complex constitution of a human being, its emotions and psychology. The problem is that a tourist not only has to imagine a product, but also to put himself into it.

### 3.1.3 Tourist Segmentation

The first step in tourism development or research lies in understanding the nature of the fundamental element of a tourism as a whole – tourists. According to the discussed above reasons, the consideration of tourists and their behaviour as a single whole means too extensive studies that are in addition of confined comprehension. By that reason in each case a particular segment of tourists has to be extracted to be subsequently investigated. Tourism

development processes, which are for example marketing or product development, always require a segmentation of the market and development for the immediate market (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan 2010, 4). A well-defined target market, or a group of customers that the business has decided to aim its efforts and products, lies in the ground of a successful development strategy (Scribd Inc 2013). Some principles and ways to segment the market are discussed below in this chapter.

Firstly, based on the previously considered concepts and peculiarities of a tourist behaviour, the model of a tourist behaviour in decision-making was drawn (Figure 5) to illustrate and understand the relationship between manifold components participating in tourists' choice making. The chain shows how needs, intrinsic, extrinsic and economic factors influence tourists' goals and choice of the trip. Motivation in this chart plays a central role in the formation of goals and expectations, while it is based on tourist personal character (intrinsic factor), tourist needs and factors from outside (extrinsic). Frequently a little emphasis is put on a very important stage of recollection and comprehension of experiences gained during the holiday. After all it is the stage where experiences transform into personal feelings and knowledge, and furthermore may generate changes in personal character or needs. Certainly this model does not show all the possible factors and correlations, but emphasises on the role of motivation, and interlinks experiences with personal character; that way completing the circuit.

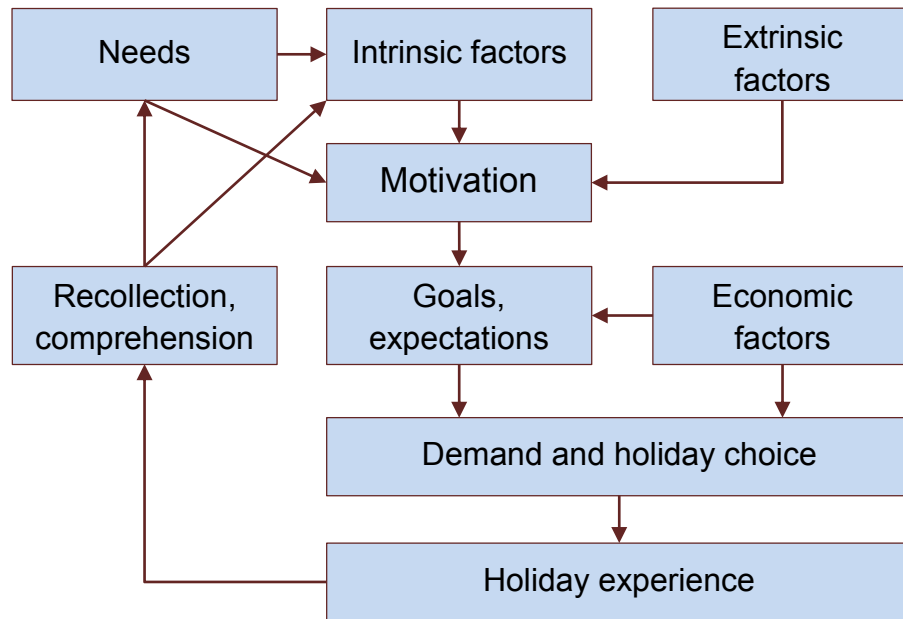


Figure 5. Tourist Behaviour in Decision-Making Chain

Segmentation implies dividing tourists into different groups or clusters, where consumers are as homogeneous as possible, but same time differ from other clusters (Müller & Hamm 2014). Different factors become a source and a base for ascribing tourists to one or another cluster. One of the possible approaches is demographic segmentation that uses a statistical data to determine the potential of tourists coming to a destination (Page 2007, 79). In this approach the determinant factor can be: age, sex, income, nationality or employment – mostly it refers to extrinsic and economic factors. However, in the industry of tourism demographic approach may appear insufficient, in this case a need for segmenting tourists by some more sophisticated factors arises.

Looking at the illustrated above model, tourist goals and their decisions in many respects are depended on tourist needs and intrinsic factors. Thus actualisation of psychographic segmentation, which is focused on consumer behaviour, increases (Page 2007, 81). Tourists in that way may be segmented by the mean of their motivation, needs, values and personal views. This approach is more abstract, but sometimes serves as a mainframe classification due to the strong relation of a tourism towards behavioural aspects of customers.



Once the segmentation is done, selected clusters become a subject of a profound analysis. Groups of potential and targeted customers are investigated in order to determine their peculiarities in terms of tourism: to define what their preferences, values and views are. It would further substantiate the organisation of the tourism processes and the development of a superior product oriented towards the specific target segment.

### 3.2 Peculiarities of Nature-Based Tourism

#### 3.2.1 Complicacy of Determination of Nature-Based Tourism

When the subject of a tourist motivation and behaviour is discussed, characteristics of a concrete tourism field can be considered; in this thesis it is a nature-based tourism. The importance of nature for the majority of tourism destinations is obvious; for some locations like Lapland it can be evenly named as a key motive power of tourism, being the main direct or indirect motivator for tourists. However, in spite of the unconditionally high role of nature as an attracting factor, the role of it in the tourism industry itself lacks distinctness in a manner. At what extent does tourism attraction or product have to implicate nature in order to be considered as nature-based tourism? Inasmuch as other factors like culture are often equally represented or even dominating. The matter is that tourism as a multidimensional industry can hardly focus on one aspect like nature without implicating others. Yet there is no certain definition of nature-based tourism or any concrete means to specify it; and frequently it is only elaborated in different ways. Most researchers associate such tourism with leisure activities taking place in nature areas, where the central components are the visitor and experiences of, or in, nature (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2011, 8–9). The complicacy of determination and definition of nature-based tourism is discussed more elaborately further in this chapter.

As the first troublesome task lays in defying nature-based tourism, it will be the starting point of the discussion. First of all, nature-based tourism has not to be mixed up with ecotourism or green tourism, inasmuch as they are not the same. Ecotourism, for instance, refers to traveling to fragile, pristine, and

usually protected areas, implicating engagement of tourists and minimization of influence on natural and socio-cultural environment (Honey 1999; Machnik 2013, 78). Whereas nature-based tourism corresponds to a broader category of tourism, in which ecotourism can only be seen as one of its forms. In contrast to ecotourism, which requires certain tourists' attitude towards nature, knowledge and a way how ecotourism should be conducted (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2011, 8), nature-based tourism does not require concrete tourist behavior and has only to imply a factor of nature.

Nature often appears as a magnetic factor for tourists and one of the primary elements in formation of basic expectations. However, at the same time not all tourists are doing nature-oriented activities in a destination, even if they were primarily attracted by nature. Hence it is problematic to determine the borders of this tourism sector. What is more, this vagueness with the term also causes difficulties in gathering statistical information and measurements: the processes that require clear definition of nature-based tourism. One of the possible definitions keeps the focus on activities tourists do on holidays that require engagement with nature and usually including an overnight stay (Silvennoinen & Tyrväinen 2001). One of the disadvantage of this determination lies in a difficulty of distinguishing tourists from outdoor recreationists. Another issue notes that entrepreneurs and many businesses involved in nature-based tourism are often not classified as a separate category. Also it is hardly possible to appraise the complete economic consequences of nature-based tourism, since most of the calculations base on transportation, accommodation and restaurant services without considering them as a part of nature tourism. (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2011, 7–8.) Yet there is still no definiteness in the concept of nature-based tourism, whereas the need for that is undoubtedly critical.

### 3.2.2 Investigating Nature-Based Tourism

Innateness of many multiple and equivocal terms is in the necessity of disintegration and consideration them by constituent parts for comprehending the initial phenomenon. The same method can be applied for examining

nature-based tourism. Most of the scholars define natural tourism as leisure activities taking place in nature areas, where two components: the visitor (imparting a factor of being away from home) and experiences – play the key role (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2011, 8). Experiences, in turn, as it was asserted by Valentine (1992), fall within one of three categories of relationship: experiences dependent on nature, experiences enhanced by nature and experiences in which nature has a subsidiary significance. In this approach a factor of nature serves different purposes, which determines the structure of tourism and requires different attention towards an aspect of nature from consumers.

Another approach that can be built on the doctrine of culture designation by Richards (1996, 24) segregates two means of defining nature-based tourism: *technical*, which refers to all movements of people to specific natural destinations outside their ordinary place of residence, and *conceptual*, denoting the movement of persons to natural destinations with an intention to fulfil needs of interaction with nature by participating in various nature-based activities. From the perspective of a tourist behaviour, same approach can specify two types of tourist motivation based on natural aspect. First type corresponds to a subsidiary role of nature in formatting tourist motivation. In this case a tourist may not have a need to be involved in any nature activities, and nature would mainly serve as an extrinsic factor to form expectations. Accordingly in the second type nature serves as a main formative factor of tourist motivation. Then tourists' goals directly implies activities based on nature, since nature in this case affects tourist motivation through intrinsic factors (tourist character) rather than extrinsic.

Broadly defined as representation of activities in different sectors aimed to satisfy the demand of tourists travelling to nature areas and desiring to obtain experiences of or in nature, nature-based tourism industry can be distributed into several categories. Classifications may in turn be conducted by the place, activity, form, motive or type (sustainable, organized or commercial). (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2011, 9.) This technique gives an opportunity to narrow a broad term of natural tourism and make it more quantitative as well as more

applicable for concrete analysis and development; inasmuch as with the diverse subject of nature-based tourism such processes are often ineffectual.

However, the segmentation of nature-based tourism can also be done by classifying tourists. Except for noted above two types of tourists differentiated by the role of nature in formatting their motivations, a segmentation offered by Strasdas (2006) distinguishes six categories of nature tourists. The first is *committed nature tourists*: it is relatively small segment of customers, who are not only admired by nature, but also attempt to do certain actions to conserve it. The second is *interested nature tourists*: concerned and interested about nature tourists, who are not deeply committed to it. Third refers to *casual nature tourists*, who are usually combining classic vocation with a visit to nature areas. Fourth is *nature tourists with specific cultural interests*: often imply similar types of tourists as the first two, but with a propensity to the cultural constituent (e.g. indigenous culture). The fifth corresponds to *sports or adventure tourists* and sixth involves *hunting and fishing tourists* – both consider nature as a ground for enjoyment certain activities. (Arnegger, Woltering & Job 2010.)

### 3.2.3 Demand for Nature Tourism

After elucidating a question of determination of nature-based tourism, few properties of it can be mentioned. Nature-based tourism in its broad meaning occupies a considerable proportion of the overall tourism industry that still continues to grow (Pickering & Weaver 2003, 7). One of the reasons for that lies in the rise of the tourist demand and the growth of interest towards new and uncommon activities (Machnik 2013, 75). What is more, in past decades the humanity has expanded the knowledge and consideration for environmental and ecological degradation as well as the role of people in it (Bell 2004). In this connection consumers started to show the propensity for more sustainable products, including tourism products (Wolf-Watz 2014, 5–7). Such changes in tourist demand approach gradually, however, it is clear that the factor of nature is becoming more and more significant for tourists. Besides, tourists often seek for new and unusual experiences that also influence the demand. Thus it is appropriate to mention here the term

*alternative tourism*, which refers to tourists trying to avoid popular mass-touristic destinations (Christou 2012). This term can also reveal the tendency of tourists' preference towards:

- Small-scale tourism and conducting activities in small groups
- Avoiding big touristic centres and places of accumulation of tourists (as well as frequent criticism of such areas)
- Objection to participate in mass organized trips and events
- Authenticity of activities and interaction with local community, nature and culture

(Machnik 2013, 80.)

Nature-based tourism satisfies the conditions of alternative tourists in many respects. Tourists inclined to natural tourism often deliberately or unconsciously desire to keep away from overcrowded touristic places and perceive more authentic experiences with a focus to the uniqueness of the environment. The paradox is that the best resources for that can be found in rural areas, which in turn are often less developed in terms of tourism (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2011, 8–9). That way most tourists seek for compromise destinations that are adapted for tourists' needs, but have maximum of advantages of rural areas such as the environment and authenticity. It turns out that the interest towards nature destinations and nature tourism is intense, but same time very few tourists are ready to sacrifice the modern amenities and high level of services.

Concluding the above said, notwithstanding the ambiguity of the phenomenon of nature-based tourism, more precisely difficulties of its determination, it is a huge international industry with environmental, economic and social significance at both local and global levels (Buckley 2003, 1). The whole question resolves itself into what to include in it and how to confine it. In the light of this research, nature-based tourism corresponds to the tourist activities and experiences in or of nature that occur during their visit to nature areas.

### 3.3 Aspect of Culture

The next point is that the nature-based tourism is not only about nature, but personal views, comprehensions and often interaction with other people. It means that culture is an essential part of nature tourism and hence a topic of it is to be individually discussed in this thesis. As a start point, it is essential to understand the phenomenon of culture and cultural tourism. Firstly, a universal definition to cultural tourism is presented, given by Melanie Smith (2009, 17) as “passive, active and interactive engagement with culture(s) and communities, whereby the visitor gains new experiences of an educational, creative and/or entertaining nature”. Already from the definition it is clear that cultural tourism can successfully co-exist with natural tourism, supplementing it. Without going deep into the fundamentals of the phenomenon of cultural tourism, a notion should be given that culture refers not only to arts and heritages, but also a way of life. To corroborate this position, the contemplation of Raymond Williams (1958, 2–3) is presented, stating that culture is both traditional and creative and it has both ordinary common meanings (way of life) and unique individual meanings (art and learning). It emphasises the relevance of culture to the topic of nature-based tourism, as natural tourism as a rule does not involve cultural heritages and arts, but is often deeply related with culture as a way of life.

As it was already broached above, in order to make broad subjects narrow and applicable for further profound researches and development processes analysts frequently resort to creating of various classifications and typologies. That way, according to Lew (1987), tourist attractions are to be considered as the key elements on which tourism is developed. Tourist attractions, from a certain perspective, in turn can be determined into one of two primary categories: nature-based attractions and cultural attractions. However, the majority of attractions, in accordance with this classification, may fall within either of these categories and often refers to recreational. (Arrowsmith 2003, 169.) A discrepancy of such consideration may be seen in multiplicity and indeterminacy of many attractions. Examples of it can be seen in Finnish Lapland with husky ride, which can be considered as an attraction that involves both nature and culture and can be equally determined to any of two

categories. That makes the application of this classification for such attractions more challenging and even unavailing. The matter is that in the case of nature-based tourist activities an aspect of culture has to be frequently considered together with an aspect of nature.

By another segmentation, that classifies cultural tourism attractions, there can be differentiated: heritage tourism, arts tourism, creative tourism, urban and rural tourism, indigenous tourism and experiential tourism (Smith 2009, 18–31). From this perspective, an attention to the last three should be attended, because these types of cultural tourism have more interdependencies with nature tourism. On the whole, it is difficult to ascertain what the dominant aspect for some tourist attractions is: cultural or natural. Like in the case of ice-fishing safaris: they are done in the nature, unique environment, but are also about the culture. In many tourist attractions nature and culture co-exist together and one loses its grandeur without another; hence it once again corroborates that they should be considered with equal notice.

Another question is to consider how culture can be viewed in the light of nature-based tourism. Tourist attractions on the whole consist of the three basic elements that are the motivating factors for tourists: the environment to observe, activities to participate in and experiences to remember (Lew 1987, 554). And if the environment clearly refers to nature, a factor of experiences as well as activities can be supplemented with an aspect of culture. As it was stated by Smith (2009), even in attractions focused exceptionally on nature, a tourism product can be greatly enhanced by the addition of a cultural element. To this statement it can be added that culture is everywhere indeed, the matter is that it is not always recognized.

### 3.4 Product Development

The main subject of the discussion in this thesis is nature-based tourism product. Some people may mistakenly consider that product is necessarily tangible, but in reality product is anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a need or want (Kotler & Keller 2011, 325). Moreover, in case of

tourism, product is more likely a service in the majority of cases. Product can be deservedly determined as the main differentiation criterion for enhancing competitive advantage. In order to be successful, a tourist attraction or destination has to differentiate from its potential competitors, it is a tourism product and its augmentation that plays the main role in it (Stickdorn & Zehrer 2009, 4–5). Since the whole tourism services are directed towards tourists and their personalities, a good product is not only about high quality, but a story behind it. A story, which would deeply involve, deeply connect and deeply affect tourists on intrinsic level. In the areas, where the competitiveness is really intense and various service providers offer single-type products, like in Lapland, it is of high importance to develop products and innovate new ones the way they would differentiate from competitors' ones and create the story behind. (Schalber & Zehrer 2011, 14.)

Any destination may be considered on the example of an approach of 6 A's. It states that a successful destination combines diverse services including: *Attraction* (previously mentioned), *Accessibility*, which refers to both transport to and in the destination, *Activities*, one of key elements responsible for the tourists' travel motives available within the destination, *Amenities* referring to services supporting convenient stay (accommodation, food services), *Available packages* (the availability of service bundles) and *Ancillary services*, daily services that are usually not associated with tourism (Edelheim, 2014; Stickdorn & Zehrer 2009, 4). Any of these services may be developed the way it would enhance a story behind and create something more than a service. A striking example of it can be seen in Air New Zealand, world-known for their marketing campaign with safety and commercial videos in the theme of Tolkien's works Lord of the Rings and Hobbit that has already become a part of the image and culture of the country (Clark 2013). However, it is a diversification of an activity and tourism product in the destination that plays the key role in keeping current consumer segment, attracting new segments and distinguishing from competitors (García-Rosell *et al.* 2013, 30).

The process of creating a story and elevating the value of the product is complicated, and is conducted on different levels. A marketing model of five product levels (Figure 6) presented by Philip Kotler (2011, 326) clearly



illustrates how a product obtains more customer value with each stage in this hierarchy chain. The first and the fundamental level is the *core benefit*: it is the actual service a customer is buying. In case of snowmobile safari a tourist is buying a snowmobile drive. At the second level the core benefit turns into a *basic product*. That way a tourist is buying a rent of a snowmobile and services of a guide. The next level is an *expected product*: a number of features and characteristics a tourist expects from a product. A tourist may expect a snowmobile to be modern, guide to be polite and ride to be fun. The next, fourth level corresponds to an *augmented product*: a product that exceeds customer expectations. At this level a story behind the product and additional values start to play the key role. The fifth level is a *potential product*: it embraces all possible augmentations and transformations a product may face in the future. At this level new ways to satisfy customers and distinguish product are discovered.

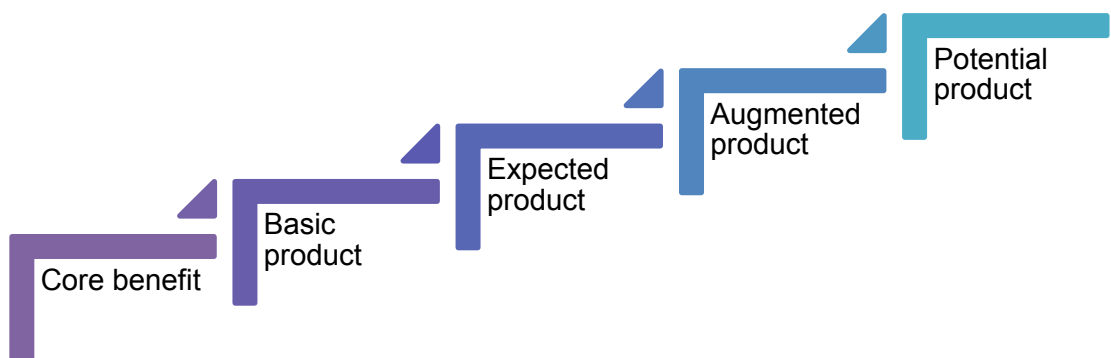


Figure 6. Product Levels (Kotler & Keller 2011, 326)

These five levels are to be considered sequentially. Once the level is analysed in the light of the exact product and achieved, the next level can start being considered. It is essential to comprehend that an investigation of tourism product development as well as each product level of this model requires an extensive research behind. Product development is only a part of a complex system of comprehensive and coherent processes that should not be conducted in isolation. Product development is a part of a continuum process which also includes market research and marketing. (UNWTO & ETC 2011, 1.) Even though the focus of this thesis is the development of the core product, it must be remembered that the functioning of a company consists of both

primary and support services. The identification and the development of ways for creating more customer value is essential for any activity of a company; this process is called the Value Chain. (Kotler & Keller 2009.)

If the Product Model of Philip Kotler is founded more on the correlation of expectation-satisfaction of a customer, Stephen Smith (1994, 586–591) offers a model in which the tourism product is divided into five elements, directed from the core to the shell. This model (Figure 7) is also interesting for its acknowledgement of the role of tourist experiences, but also indicates which elements yield to be empirically measured. The five elements of this model progress from the core to the shell in the correlation with declining the ability for measurements and management control and increasing tourist involvement and intangibility. (Smith 1994, 586–587.)

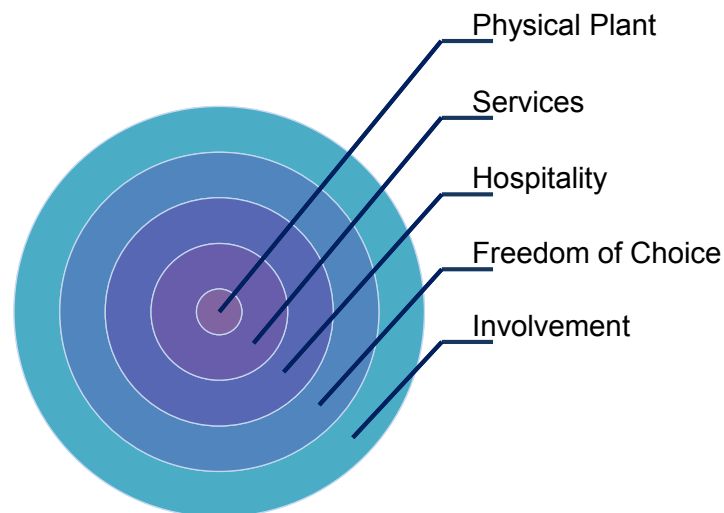


Figure 7. Smith's Tourism Product Model (Smith 1994, 587)

Each of the five elements is the subject of an extensive body of literature in its own right, so here the model is only briefly described. As it is shown in the Figure 7, the first element is *Physical Plant*, it is the core of the tourism product and refers to a natural site, facilities, or even weather; in other words it is something physical tourists want to see. The next element is *Service*. The physical plant requires certain services as a connecting-link with tourists. It is the service which makes a physical plant work. The deeper consideration of the service brings us to the next element, which is *Hospitality*. It is not simply the good service quality, but “something extra”. Whereas service is a

performance of the task, hospitality is the way and style the task is conducted. It is more subjective and less measurable, but it has more significant influence on the tourist experience. *Freedom of choice* is the next element, which refers to the range of options a customer has to make experiences be satisfactory. However, it is not only about choices, but also the potential for pleasant surprises and spontaneity. *Involvement* completes the list of elements and it is about certain degree of participation of a tourist in the delivery of services. The combination of the four previous elements is the base for the successful customer involvement. Involvement does not necessarily has to be a physical participation, but more the sense of engagement. The success in combining all of the five elements is a keystone to a high-quality and satisfying product. (Smith 1994, 586-593.)

These two models indicates that a product development is a complex process which entails the consideration of a product by several components and the following development of them. A successful tourism product has to match the lifestyle of the specific target market (Kotler, Armstrong, Wong & Saunders 2008, 414-416), correspond to the requests and expectations of the target market on all levels and carry the additional customer value. The failure in any element of the tourism product adversely affect the overall quality and ability to bring the precious experiences. On the contrary, the progress in the synthesis of tourism product's elements leads to the success.

### 3.5 Issue of Sustainability

While considering any tourism product development, an issue of sustainability and stakeholders is to be discussed elaborately, and especially it concerns nature-based tourism. By that reason this subchapter briefly broaches a subject of sustainability and its importance in relation to the topic of the thesis. The reality is that sustainability and sustainable tourism is not a distinct or special form of tourism, but the way (or the attitude) tourism processes are to be conducted (UNWTO 2011). Any tourism field or destination can be seen as a net of different stakeholders. Stakeholder is any group or individual, who can affect, or is affected by the achievement of organization's objectives.

Sustainability can be described as a responsible attitude towards these stakeholders as well as the environment and economy. The responsibility can in turn be divided into economic, legal and ethical. An approach, stating that everything what is not forbidden is allowed, does not correspond to the principles of sustainability. In the case of tourism product development an attention and responsibility have to be devoted towards the environmental, social and economic issues. (Wandwi 2014.)

A concept of a multi-stakeholder approach plays an essential role in the sustainable development, emphasising on communication, social interaction, common solution-finding, equity and equitable representation of the major stakeholders (Stakeholder Forum 2003). Involvement and collaboration with as much stakeholders as possible is crucial in everyday operations of a tourism company and even more while doing any kind of development processes (Wandwi 2014). Such approach to tourism development preserves the environment, avoids negative attitude from stakeholders and creates a satisfactory foundation for the development and functioning of an organisation. The consideration of an issue of sustainability undoubtedly takes time and resources, but results in benefits to all the parties.

## 4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

### 4.1 Research Method and Process

The question of deciding the methodology came into existence after the theme of this thesis and the research questions had been set. Topics of nature-based tourism and product development are thoroughly investigated in tourism literature. Although nature-based tourism product development is rarely considered as a comprehensive whole, no necessity was seen in analysing it as a new phenomenon. At the same time the research serves certain practical goals of the commissioner company. That way, reasoning from the availability of theoretical data, the desire to acquire a deep understanding of the subject along with the experience of the author in the field, goals of the research and research questions, preference has been given to the qualitative research method. Besides the theoretical foundation of this thesis, the research is in a greater degree relied on the author's experience and his perception of the topic; and as any qualitative research can be to some extent subjective.

Safartica, the commissioner company of the research process, possesses quantitative data, based on the sales measurements and customer feedback surveys. The managerial department of the organisation analyses this data after each season and draws conclusions for the next year, that way conducting a small-scale quantitative research. However, the need for the qualitative research suggested itself. As stated by Merriam (2009, 13), qualitative research concentrates on 'understanding the meaning people have constructed, in other words, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world'. This method focuses on *how* and *why* questions and helps to show the human side of the subject (Walcerz 2015). In the case of nature-based tourism product development such method emphasises more the tourists' behaviour and its analyses rather than statistical data; and this is what is essential for the comprehensive development process.

The qualitative research method produces a more comprehensive information that deepen the whole understanding of the subject (Key 1997). As a rule, it is

grounded on observations, considerations and interactions of the researcher in the field (Jones 2012), thus being time-consuming. The author of this thesis gained a two-season work experience in the commissioning company as a nature guide, working immediately with the clients. That way the involvement in the operations of the organisation and a good level of interaction with customers were reached. Hence, it created the necessary ground for the qualitative research.

Theoretical research, the author's experience in the field and an interview with the sales manager of the commissioner were fundamental resources of information. The first stage of the research consisted of the theoretical literature review. The empirical research process contains an interview and is followed by the product analyses. The qualitative data is complex, often without clear structure and consists of messy records (Richards 2005, 34–42). At the same time this method leads to a deeper understanding from a wider perspective, which allows to achieve the desired goals of the research.

#### 4.2 Interview with Commissioner

One of the resources for gathering the qualitative data in this thesis was an implementation of the interview. The author was a member of the commissioner company, working for Safartica as a guide, consequently the structure of the organisation and its peculiarities were familiar. Moreover, the author had the connection with clients and accordingly the source for consideration the tourists' behaviour and viewpoints. Consequently the aim of the interview was to learn the managerial standpoint and processes happening above the daily operations. Besides short everyday conversations with managers, one in-depth interview was conducted with the sales manager of Safartica. For the interview the author looked for a person working with sales and marketing, with the knowledge of customer feedback and situation with current operations; this governed the decision to conduct an unstructured open interview with the sales manager Aurele Martin.

The goal of the open interview was to discover the situation with weekly safaris, current development projects and processes, customer segments and feedback on safaris received by the sales department. So the only guideline for the interviewing process was to discuss the mentioned above issues. Notes were taken during the discussion and all the main subjects were epitomized on paper.

The discussion started with specifying the customer segments Safartica works with. There can be differentiated three main consumer groups: individual customers, leisure groups and incentive groups. Leisure and incentive groups are connected with Safartica via travel agencies or other companies. For such a segment products are often adapted according to the needs and wants of each particular group. For example, some customers arriving from Asian countries do not have international driving licences and have a right to drive snowmobiles only on the river. That way, if such group asks for a snowmobile safari, possibly with the visit to a reindeer or husky farm, it will be planned the way using farms accessible by the river and avoiding official tracks. With these segments the company analyses the demand of the group, adapts the product and creates a specific offer; hence, the research does not concern this cluster.

Individual customers is another segment, which, in turn, can be divided into *FTI* (booking services before arrival) and *Walk-in* (asking for safaris on the spot at the front desk) customers. A wide range of weekly safaris as well as extreme safaris and organised events (described in Chapter 2) is primarily oriented towards this customer cluster. This segment is also the target group for the research. In terms of the research, the difficulty is that this customer group corresponds to an extensive segment of tourists: with different nationalities, cultures, income and marital status. By that reason the approach to psychographic segmentation (discussed in 3.1.3 Tourist Segmentation) is more applicable. Tourists, in that way, can be classified by the intrinsic factor of their behaviour, for example, a motivation. Most of tourists desire to experience and explore a natural environment and culture (Finnish Tourism Board 2012) and it is their common feature.

The next point of the discussion included managerial aspects of the company and its development. Issues of sustainability, cooperation-coopetition and profitability were central at that stage of the interview. Safartica is a destination management company and is a part of a cooperation network. As a DMC, the company has products that frequently consist of a complex network of services. That way the safari company has wider opportunities for a product offering by using services partly or fully conducted by other companies. It, however, increases the prime cost of a product for the company. The management of Safartica aims to expand and develop own production, particularly by building own reindeer and husky farms. Last year Safartica invested in the new reindeer farm 'Raitola'. By such investments in own production, the company gains more flexibility with operations and independence, which positively result in sustainability, and minimize expenses. Regarding the profitability of products, it was noted by Martin (2015), that the company considers profitability in the long-term vision. Sometimes the company can function at a loss in local safaris, thereby behaving in the interests of customers, but results in overall growth of profit.

An issue of sustainability is considered widely in the operations of Safartica. Safartica has an extensive net of stakeholders with whom the company maintains relations. The cooperation is close even with the competitors, that way coopetition is visible. During the season safari companies put effort to help each other, for instance, by sharing the equipment or labour force. The companies can sacrifice some economic profit and join together for reasons of the tourism image, societal or safety purposes.

Finally, after the consideration of general managerial aspects, the interview approached the question of product analysis. It was discussed which safaris are the most demanding and receive mostly positive feedback and which safaris are more problematic. The comprehensive analysis is presented later in the thesis, nevertheless among the best-selling safaris there were noted a two-hour husky safari, Arctic delight (visit to Santa Claus with lunch and a snowmobile ride to a reindeer farm) and a two-hour snowmobile safari. Among the problematic safaris Aurora Sky Drive (evening safari in pursuit of Northern Lights) stands out. Hence, it was discussed more elaborately. During the



discussion there emerged the indeterminate problem of the Northern Lights phenomenon. The matter is that for the nature companies it is difficult to build products around the inconstant and unpredictable phenomenon of the Aurora Borealis. On the other hand the Arctic Region, and Finnish Lapland in particular, widely uses this natural phenomenon in their marketing; and travel agencies do the same. Without the knowledge about it, tourists may obtain the false perception that the Northern Lights are visible all the time in the region. It attracts tourists to the destination and creates the demand for evening safaris, but often turns into disappointment once tourists confront the reality. That way the situation around the Northern Lights and related tourism products is very strained.

Overall, during the interview the most important aspects of the company's functioning were considered successfully. The author gathered the managerial viewpoint of the subject and obtained a more comprehensive ground for the qualitative research.

#### 4.3 Product Analysis

The practical goals of this thesis consist in the product development of a nature-based destination management company. Hence, it was decided to conduct a product analysis. The analysis is essential in order to determine strong and weak points of the product (McGriff 2015). In the weekly programme (safaris in Rovaniemi) there are over 15 positions including safaris organised by farms in full. However, this research focuses on products mainly or fully conducted by Safartica. The list of safaris with short descriptions and analyses of strengths and weaknesses is given in this chapter. As the number of products is rather large, at this stage a primitive form of SWOT analysis was considered as appropriate. The goal is rather to discover products that claim for the development than to conduct a comprehensive analysis of each product.

Before investigating each safari, the target group is considered. The weekly programme is oriented towards individual customers, who both book in

advance and on the spot. According to the author's experience and information gathered from Safartica, this segment of customers is very wide. Weekly safaris interests tourists of different age, nationality, gender and other demographical factors. However, as it was said, these customers are united by the motivation to experience the nature of Lapland, its culture and different activities. Each tourist may find an activity from the list of safaris which suits his/her interests and motivation best.

It is worth mentioning that the tourism product is not only an activity, it starts before that. If not to mention marketing processes, the customer starts experiencing the product when choosing and purchasing it. Services and hospitality at this stage are as important as during the activity. What is more, the connection and communication between the seller and the guide plays an important role. The sales person should be aware of all the details of safaris. While the guide has to know what the actually bought. After this stage each safari is a separate product and should be discussed individually.

The first safari to be presented is *Arctic Delight – Santa and his Reindeers*. This safari consists of two parts: a visit to Santa Claus Village with lunch and snowmobile safari to a reindeer farm (can be done as a separate safari). It is one of the most popular and demanding products, especially during December and January, when tourists desire to meet Santa Claus. The advantage of this safari is that tourists obtain manifold experiences in one safari. In particular they visit Santa Claus, have a chance to buy souvenirs, experience snowmobiling and visit a reindeer farm with all its constituents (ceremony, ride). Also, since it is a long safari, the lunch in Santa's village is included in the program. The price of 187€ can be seen as well-grounded, since it corresponds with the versatile and almost full-day safari. The timetable of the safari stays unchanged from the moment when snow conditions are good enough; this can be seen as a disadvantage to some extent. The matter is that in the peak of the Christmas season, the village is overcrowded with tourists, and there are long waiting lines: and everything in the village becomes time-consuming, in contrast to the spring time. A certain flexibility with the timetable, however, is gained by managing spare time. Nevertheless, an issue of time planning asks to be considered in this product.

*Snowmobiling along the husky trails* is a safari with the same contents as snowmobiling to the reindeer farm and the only difference is dogs or reindeer. It starts with the snowmobile drive to the farm, followed by the short husky sleigh ride, communication with dogs and stories about the farm. Both reindeer and husky safaris have a strong cultural aspect that significantly diversifies and enhances tourists' experiences. Customers can be absorbed in the peculiarity of farmers' lifestyle or the shaman ceremony. The weak point of these safaris is that their quality highly depends on the farm and services there, and cannot be fully operated by Safartica.

Another popular safari is *snowmobile adventure*. This two-hour snowmobile safari is ideal for people who want to experience snowmobiling without spending a lot of money and time. Routes highly depend on the snow conditions and drivers' skills. This is also a difficulty of the safari: tourists often have different skills and experience, and are ready to drive at different speeds, especially in big groups. The group drives at the speed the slowest one drives, but the guide also has to make sure everyone is satisfied.

Snowmobile safaris can also be supplemented with ice fishing and traditional lunch. In these safaris customers obtain not only the experience of driving snowmobiles, but also an authentic process of winter fishing, which is exotic for many tourists, and traditional Lappish soup cooked on fire. In this safari it is not the result (fish and lunch), which is important, but the process. Again the cultural aspect plays one of the key roles. The challenge for the company is to find a good venue with a fireplace and near a good spot for fishing. For reasons of sustainability it is not correct to ice fish with tourists in places popular among local people near the city. That way the safari company has a limited choice of routes and places to go.

Another, longer snowmobile safari includes a visit to the Arctic Snow Hotel. It can be evenly considered as a safari focused on experiencing the Arctic. It implies a longer (approximately 60 km) ride, a visit to the hotel and lunch in a traditional Finnish kota. The guide decides between three possible routes to the hotel, according to weather conditions. However, it is anyway important to

make sure clients feel comfortable with driving, since the track is long and may be bumpy or have some difficult wet spots on the river or lake.

Another option with snowmobiles is to go for *the full day snowmobile safari into the wilderness*. The safari lasts for 6 hours and implies a long ride with several short stops in beautiful nature and a longer stop for the lunch. This product provides more valuable driving experience and makes customers be deeper involved in the nature of Lapland than during shorter safaris. As with any other snowmobile safari a lot depends on the driving skills of the clients. Families (especially with children) and older persons are rarely ready to drive long distances, so the demand for this safari is rather limited.

Safartica also offers snowshoe safaris. It includes 2 hours of walking with snowshoes in a beautiful location with a break for hot drinks. Previously such tours were organised in evening times, in order to observe the Northern Lights. In such evening safaris tourists were primarily motivated by the natural phenomenon and snowshoeing by itself did not gain much interest. Now, when it is done in the daytime, the whole focus is on the snowshoeing; and people purposefully come to experience it, even though the number of such tourists is not so great. Depending on the weather conditions, for physically unprepared people such an activity can become more difficult than they expect.

Finally, there are two options of evening safaris. Lapland is known for the natural phenomenon of Northern Lights. Tourists desire to see them, for some people it is even the primary motivation to visit the region; so the demand for night safaris is high. Many tourists forget or simply do not know that this is an unpredictable phenomenon. For that reason safari companies avoid keeping the focus on the Northern Lights by adding some parallel activities in the safari. Thus, Safartica has an evening snowmobile safari that includes a ride and picnic. That way there is the basic activity in the safari, which is snowmobiling, but also tourists receive a chance to see Aurora Borealis and to listen to stories about it. However, there is still demand for evening safaris from people who does not want to do snowmobiling and are not ready to spend money without stint.

Therefore there is another evening safari, *Aurora Sky Drive*, which is fully about the Northern Lights. It is operated only when the weather is promising, and does not imply any extra activities, keeping the price low. However this safari receives negative feedback from both customers and guides. The reason is that the product is 'empty': if the Northern Lights do not appear or they are weak, there is nothing to do for customers. The guide has to speak for 3 hours, which is also problematic, especially if there is a language barrier. What is more, the safari does not require a lot of movement, and in cold weather people often freeze. If customers in addition do not see the Northern Lights, they become unsatisfied.

This safari can be analysed by the application of the Tourism Product Model of Smith (1994). The physical plant is the natural environment, the phenomenon of the Northern lights and weather. There is a hidden threat in the unpredictability of the weather and the natural phenomenon. So the environment has to be able to compensate it. Services are clearly insufficient in this safari. Among the services are: the ride to the nature area, conversing with customers and serving hot drinks. Some additional services have to be applied in order to make this element work properly. The next is hospitality; and it depends on the guide in many respects and the front desk (if the clients used its services). Generally, the feedback on customer service and the guides' attitude was positive, and the guides are experienced and professional; so this element can be assumed as good. The challenge in freedom of choice is the size of the group: the larger the group, the less freedom customers have. For example, in big groups if one person freezes and wants to return to the city, but all other clients are willing to stay on the spot longer, any decision will be against someone's wish. In general, once the safari is started, the freedom of choice is rather limited; however, the clients have to feel the opposite. Also the safari may be supplemented with a small surprise for customers, which would raise their spirits. And the final element, interaction is at the moment not as well implemented as it could be. The additional activities and services could enhance the element of involvement greatly.

All in all, most of the products do not encounter significant problems, except *Aurora Sky Drive*. This evening safari definitely lacks content and often

becomes a subject of negative feedback. The problem with the evening Aurora safari, in addition, is promoted by the unreasoned marketing of the region. Northern Lights are widely used in the marketing of Lapland on different levels. Along with the lack of knowledge about the natural phenomenon, emerges the unreasonable demand. Nevertheless, when there is a demand, safari companies try to make an appropriate offer. For that reason, instead of taking the unsuccessful product out of the programme, it is rather to be developed.

## 5 RESULTS

As it has been ascertained previously in this research, nature-based tourism is associated with leisure activities taking place in nature areas, where the central components are the visitor and experiences of, or in, nature (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2011, 8–9). Nature-based tourism in Finnish Lapland occupies the dominant proportion of the tourism sector overall (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2011, 5–7), a lot of services, activities and entire destinations are oriented towards, or implement a factor of, nature. Pure, unique nature of Lapland is clearly the strong side for the tourism (Luiro 2013, 30–35). It gives boundless possibilities for destinations in Lapland to create and develop nature-based tourism products. Consequently, Lapland is a place that can provide tourists with memorable and multifarious experiences and has a thorough ground for tourism.

Despite tourism in Lapland is predominantly associated with nature, an aspect of culture plays a no less significant role. If nature often serves as a motivation for tourists, culture enhances tourists' experiences, once they are in the destination. Tourism product can be greatly enhanced by the addition or emphasising of a cultural element (Smith 2009, 17–31). Culture can be seen everywhere around: starting from the culture of indigenous peoples to a special way of life of people living in Lapland and their attitude towards nature. Local people do not always recognise their way of life as a specific culture, they just live it. However, for tourists any peculiarities of life in the area can become significant, exotic and be seen as the representation of culture. Hence, the consideration of an aspect of culture is crucial in the field of tourism and tourism product development in Lapland.

In the research the importance of a tourist behaviour has been established and emphasised in terms of tourism product development. While discussing a tourism product and its development, the essential task lies in analysing and understanding the tourist behaviour and motivation. It is tourist motivation that forms the demand, and tourist behaviour that governs experiences. Generally, tourist motivation is divided into extrinsic and intrinsic (Page 2007, 69–71), and both the personality of a tourist and external factors mould the motivation. The

understanding of tourist motivation favours the improvement of the tourism product, and further enhances tourist experiences.

This thesis emphasises the importance for consideration of three aspects in nature-based tourism development: nature, tourist behaviour and motivation and the aspect of culture. Nature is the core of the nature-based tourism and an image that attracts tourists. Tourist motivation and behaviour is what forces tourists to travel and how they see things and obtain experiences. Culture is an important factor in the destination, sometimes being invisible, it adds the value to the product and enhances experiences. Grounding on the analysis of these factors, the developer will understand what are the natural resources for the product, what tourists desire, how to exceed tourists' expectations and create value to the product. A successful product is not the one that satisfies the needs and wants, but creates additional value and a story that originates a stage of recollection and comprehension.

The superficial analysis of Safartica's products, conducted in Rovaniemi, indicated that most of the products function well. They attract tourists, imply various valuable activities and evoke memorable experiences. Some safaris call for some adjustment in the timetable or some other corrections; however, in general most of the products are all-sufficient. However, an appreciable problem has been seen in the evening safari, named Aurora Sky Drive. Negative customer feedback, disapproving responses from guides and the words of the sales manager Aurele Martin corroborate such judgement. As it was analysed, the product clearly misses the content. At the moment it includes a short car/bus ride to the location with an open-space, which can be a lake or a hill, some stories by the guide, hot drinks and possibly a campfire. The duration of the safaris is three hours and most of the time is spent on waiting for the Northern Lights. The problems were found in several elements of the product, of which at least some can be improved.

Considering the subject more extensively, the problem goes deeper in the marketing of the Arctic region and Lapland. The natural phenomenon of the Northern Lights is fascinating and unique, with no doubt. This phenomenon is widely used in the marketing of the region and often inaccurately; images of it



easily attract the attention of potential tourists. What is more, such marketing works; the problem is that the Northern Lights are unpredictable and are not always visible. Not to mention that on images used for advertising Aurora Borealis usually look more spectacular than in real life (because of the higher photosensitivity of modern cameras in comparison with a human eye), this marketing creates a wrong perception that this is an everyday and commonplace phenomenon. In reality it depends on the aggregation of several factors, such as the solar activity, weather and darkness. It turns out that the emerged demand for Northern Lights safaris cannot be fully managed even theoretically, due to the peculiarities of nature.

The question of use of the Northern Lights phenomenon in marketing needs an individual investigation and is beyond the topic of this thesis. Anyway, since there is the demand for evening safaris, there should be an appropriate product that would respond to the demand. The current product relies on the Northern Lights too much, and is hardly able to compensate the possible absence of the phenomenon by some additional activity or value creation.

The rule, commonly applied in marketing, states that a product must be developed and marketed to a specific segmented market (Kotler *et al.* 2010, 4). In the case of the Northern Lights safari the task of deciding the target market becomes challenging. Customers demanding such a product are too diverse that hardly any common features may be specified; they come from different countries, have different cultures and attitudes. What unites them is an interest towards the natural phenomenon; it follows from this that nature motivates them, and these people are able to become inspired and delighted by the beauty of nature. At the same time it must be understood that in case the customers do not see the Northern Lights (due to the weather conditions), they will get disappointed about it. On the contrary, if they do see the lights, they will be at least satisfied on the general level. This primitive satisfaction-disappointment model is common in their tourist behaviour.

The aspect of nature is already central in this safari. What can be discussed is the spot for the safari. There is no constant place for the current programme, and it uses several locations that are around a 20 – 25 minute drive from the

city. One of the possible solutions can be seen in the arrangement of a new venue in the beautiful environment that can be a hill or a lake, keeping it no longer than in 45 minute drive from the city. Another option is to use several available spots and move from one place to another during one safari; but it predominantly depends on the content of the safari.

One more factor corresponds to guides conducting the whole process of the safari. With no doubt they are all experienced and have a good knowledge of the natural phenomenon of the Northern Lights and other subjects. However it could be reasonable to organise a lecture about the phenomenon or astronomy. That could enhance the knowledge of guides and provide them with interesting facts that would further be told to customers. Clients of this safari, in turn, cannot only be the observers, but also learners.

Finally there comes the aspect of culture. At the current state of the product, the aspect of culture is not significantly represented in the safari. It can be seen as a possibility to develop the product and enhance tourist experiences of it. The following question is how to apply the factor of culture in the product. Here comes a stage for creativity of the company. The author's experience shows that often simple activities (for local people), such as making a fire, provokes a lot of interest from tourists. So could be the additional activity: following the instructions of a guide start the fire in an open-space, or some other survival activity. The idea is to involve customers in the process and also to provide them with the knowledge. There is a number of exciting movies and television programmes that tell about the survival in extreme conditions. So creating a simple, but real-life version of it can be of great interest. That way culture refers more to the way of life and some survival aspects. Another option can be seen in presenting a local culture. The shaman seated near the fire and telling the stories or the future may also seem exciting for some customers. What is to be noted is that it has to be in a relaxed and free form, keeping in mind that these customers primarily come to see the Northern Lights. In that way culture plays a more supportive role, and moves to the foreground only when the possibilities to see the lights are low.

All in all, with the difficulty to segment a specific target market and the significance of the nature and weather conditions, the enhancement of the cultural element can be seen as a solution. Keeping it simple but entertaining, the resources for the product development are to be minimal. In the result the product will gain additional content, which was missing. Moreover, the cultural element would provoke more memorable and authentic experiences, which is generally the main goal of any tourism product.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The underlying aim of this thesis was to understand the phenomenon of nature-based tourism in Finnish Lapland and to investigate what the possible ways of developing nature-based tourism products are. The case of the study and the commissioner accordingly was a destination management company Safartica, operating in Finnish Lapland. The commissioner indicated an interest towards the research subject and the potential results. For the achievement of the above mentioned goals the qualitative research method was chosen. For the research the corresponding literature and other theory materials were studied. The empirical research was in turn grounded on the author's experience in the field and an interview with the sales manager of the commissioning organisation.

The results of the research broached the notion of a nature-based tourism as an interesting and multidimensional subject. It was elucidated that nature-based tourism is generally defined as leisure activities taking place in nature areas, where two components: the visitor and experiences – play the key role (Fredman & Tyrväinen 2011, 8). This form of tourism occupies a considerable proportion of the overall tourism industry and continues to grow. In Lapland, the area known for its vague and beautiful nature, this tourism sector plays an indispensable role from economic, social and cultural perspectives. The role of culture in the discussed tourism segment was ascertained to be significant, especially in enhancing tourist experiences. It should be noted that the tourist behaviour was considered with a special notice. The importance of the tourist motivation and various factors affecting it in the formation of a demand and tourist expectations was revealed. Also it was elucidated that the product consists of manifold correlated elements. Consequently, the development of a product and its success depend on the quality of each element.

From the practical perspective, an analysis of a product offering of the commissioning company indicated the imperfection of at least one product/safari. The further analysis revealed problems in several product elements. The author proposed several directions for the development of this product. Among the main proposals an enhancement of the cultural element

and customer involvement were named (more practical results are described in chapter 5 “Results” of this thesis). The results of the empirical research, however, are founded on the author’s comprehension of the subject and only presents some of possible ways for the development, which are not the express guidelines.

The researched literature gave a thorough theoretical ground for the research and an understanding of the investigated subject. Several theoretical conclusions were drawn upon the discussed topics. An interview with the sales manager provided the author with answers and additional information needed for the empirical research and the case study. A superficial analysis of safari products indicated the questionable one, which was further discussed based on the reviewed theory, an interview and the author’s experience in the field. The decision for conducting a qualitative research has proved to be defensible; the thesis brought a holistic view of the subject of nature-based tourism development by the theoretical part and more narrow empirical research endeavoured to respond the practical goals.

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