Researching buyer persona for Aspö Charter

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Abstract

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This thesis is commissioned by Aspö Charter, a boat charter operator in the Turku Archipelago. Their home harbour is on the island of Aspö. They operate the vessel M/s Amanda that can carry up 34 passengers. Their focus is on experience tourism, with a wish to give everyone the authentic archipelago experience.

The aim of this thesis was to identify the characteristics of their ideal customer and based on that create a buyer persona. The objectives are to gain knowledge on the important concepts of buyer personas, learning about the method needed to create them as well as doing research, in the form of interviews and a survey, in order to figure out the characteristics that define Aspö Charters ideal buyer persona.

The theoretical framework is based on two main themes, which are buyer personas and experience tourism. The theoretical framework presents the main concept of both themes, providing a good base of knowledge moving on to the methods and research part of the thesis.

The methods chapter presents the chosen research methods for the aim of this thesis. The chosen methods were 8 qualitative interviews conducted in a semi-structured format and then a survey in order to confirm the findings of the interviews. The interviews and the survey were conducted in the spring of 2021.

In the analysis chapter, not one but two buyer personas are found out - a corporate buyer persona and a leisure buyer persona. They are then presented by reflecting upon the theory.

To conclude the thesis, the process as well as the findings are reflected upon. Included are further research suggestions as well as points that have come up during the process.

Keywords
Buyer persona, boat charter, archipelago, experience tourism

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1 Introduction

After spending the past four summer seasons in a variety of archipelago destinations it has become clear to me how much undiscovered potential and opportunities there are for tourism in the Finnish archipelago.

The Turku Archipelago is one of the largest archipelagos in the world and consists of approximately 40 000 islands. A large part of it is only accessible via your own boat but areas such as the Parainen inner archipelago is quite accessible for tourists dependent on public infrastructure. The outer archipelago is however harder to access. Since it has year-round inhabitants, on islands such as Aspö, Nötö, Berghamn, Jurmo and Utö, they have a public ferry line free of charge. This is mainly meant for the inhabitants of the islands but anyone is free to use them, it is not marketed in any way though. The schedule is made to be practical for the locals, and not aimed for tourists. The island stops along its route are also few. This means that for tourists wanting to experience the outer archipelago without their own means of transport, options are few. This is where potential lies for boat operators and currently there are not many in the region except Aspö Charter, the commissioner of this thesis. The problem in this situation is connecting these tourists and the operator, the key here would be marketing targeted correctly. This brings us to the task of this thesis – who are these customers that would buy the services and what are their buyer characteristics, in other words, what is the right buyer persona for the services of Aspö Charter.

This thesis is important to the commissioner because tourism is one of the ways to keep the archipelago living. The current trend in demographics in the archipelago is that the number of inhabitants is decreasing. With traditional jobs, such as fishing, having disappeared it has become a lot harder to earn a living there and younger generations that move away to study often have to find jobs on the mainland. There are schools on some of the islands, but with decreasing numbers of children there is a risk of them closing and once they are closed they are not likely to be started again which will further decrease the number of inhabitants. Tourism has the possibility to breathe new life into the job market in the archipelago, and that would make it possible to live there and we would have a thriving archipelago society once again.

From the start of my studies I have aimed to work in archipelago tourism and I have done so for the past four summer seasons, this has given me valuable insight into the industry such as a good understanding of the customers and what their expectations and problems are. I have seen archipelago tourism from many different perspectives since having different jobs. My first job as a guide on Örö gave me close insight on customers wishes, expectations and experiences since I got to have many conversations with different customers during the guided tours. This showed the variety of customer groups that visit the archipelago and enlightened me on the characteristics of these groups. A lot of these visitors arrived via passenger boat as part of a travel package, so naturally I got to hear a lot about their experiences and thoughts of the trips. During the past summer season I worked for Visit Seili which gave me experience of the sales and marketing side of archipelago tourism. This gave me deeper insight into what customers are looking for and what their expectations are on for example service quality and price levels. A large part of the sales was done as B2B, which is an area I got to develop a lot. Prolonging the season is another issue I got to develop during my time there. Another part of my job on Visit Seili was creating an online identity for them on social media as well as doing their social media marketing. This made the concept of destination dna familiar to me since I had to look at the destination from the visitor's perspective. The marketing work also gave me insight on the different marketing channels and their characteristics. Lastly, during my summer working on Aspö in 2019 I gained crucial knowledge and got familiar with the region as well as the archipelago way of life, their traditions and the locals. This gives me important perspective when starting to work on this thesis since I have insight on "the destination dna" of the outer archipelago.

1.1 Aim and objectives of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to provide a buyer persona for the services of Aspö Charter. The research done will lay as a base for future marketing plans of the company and its products, this thesis will not include a marketing plan but some reflections will be discussed in the discussion part. The reason for this is that a marketing plan needs to be based on customer characteristics and their behaviour, and in order to gain this information research needs to be conducted. As a result of the research, one will have the needed information for the buyer persona which would not be possible to gain in any other way. This is why this is in its essence a research based thesis, even though it has nuances of a product thesis as well.

The objectives of this thesis is to gain knowledge on the important concepts for the buyer personas as well as learning about the method to create them. Another objective is to do research, by interviews and survey, in order to figure out the characteristics that define Aspö Charters ideal buyer persona.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

After this introduction the thesis begins with a thorough presentation of the commissioner. The presentation includes background information, what their product offering is at the moment, the challenges and problems they face as well as the way this thesis will help solve these problems and bring value. Next the theoretical framework will be presented, where the main theories and concepts are described. The central concepts of this thesis are experience tourism and buyer personas. The methods chapter is next after that and will present the methods used to research the customer characteristics and behaviours. Whereafter the results are presented. The end will be made up out of a conclusion and a discussion chapter, where the results are opened up and analysed to see if they meet the aims and expectations set. The thesis process and my own learning will also be reviewed in this chapter.

2 Presentation of the commissioner

Aspö Charter is a boat charter company operating off of the island Aspö in the Turku Archipelago. They are mainly focused on the outer archipelago region. Their standard departures are from Korpoström and Nauvo harbour and they travel to destinations such as Berghamn, Aspö, Björkö, Örö, Jurmo and Utö. The vessels they are operating are a Finnsh made 34 metres long water bus named M/s Amanda (image below) as well as a smaller vessel, M/s Afrodite. Both have indoor and outdoor seating, which makes it possible to experience the nature and the sea as closely as possible.

Image 1. The vessel M/s Amanda (Gröning 2020a.)

In the image below, M/s Amanda can be observed in her home harbour on the island of Aspö. As can be seen, it is also possible to visit the island via own boat, since there is a guest harbour.

Image 2. M/s Amanda in her home harbour on the island of Aspö. (Gröning 2020b.)

Aspö is located far in the outer archipelago, as one can see in the image below. Turku works as a reference point.

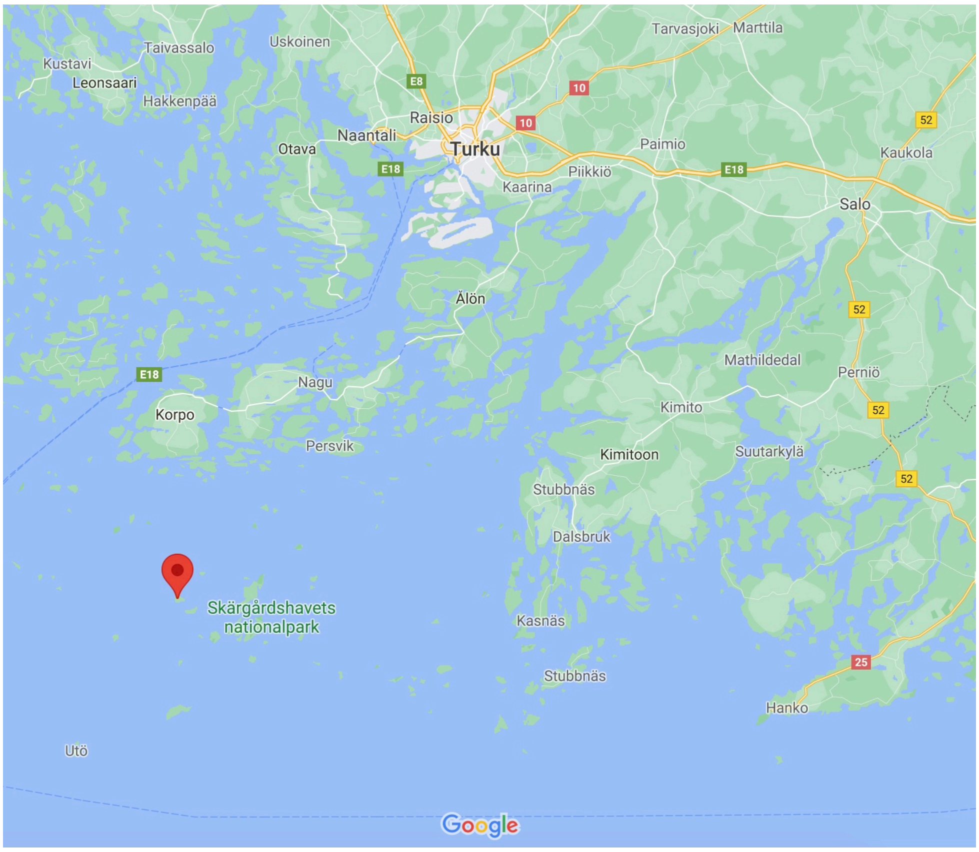

Image 3. The location of Aspö in relation to Turku. (Google 2021)

The owner and skipper on Aspö Charter is Tore Johansson. Tore's roots are on Aspö and when he was a young boy he dreamed of living there one day. Now he has lived on the island for over 30 years. The archipelago way of life is unique with its traditions of music, fishing and seafaring. He always thought that he wanted to show this culture to people from elsewhere and that is how the idea of Aspö Charter came around and he purchased the waterbus M/s Amanda in 2016.

Being a local, Tore has a lot of knowledge of the sea, the islands and their stories, the traditions, the people of the region as well as the flora and fauna. This gives for a unique insight into the archipelago life, its traditions, its stories and its people. During the trips aboard M/s Amanda he tells stories about the places that they pass, locals, the nature and general life in the archipelago. This is a very appreciated aspect of his trips.

For further information on the commissioner and their services, one can look to their website www.aspocharter.com and their webshop www.aspocharter.vilkasstore.com

2.1 Current product offering

Aspö Charter offers two kind of trips. Ones where you buy individual tickets and ones that are meant to be booked by a group. Tailormade trips are a possibility for group bookings. Currently they offer three trips for individual passengers, they are "A day in the outer archipelago", "A day on Aspö" and "A big tour of the outer archipelago". All of the tours are set to depart from Korpoström on the island of Korppoo but can also be arranged to depart from Nauvo. (Aspö Charter 2020)

The first trip, "A day in the outer archipelago", visits the unique island of Björkö. The island is part of the Archipelago National Park and has a unique natural feature – being an island it is surrounded by the sea but it has a big freshwater lake. After the stop on Björkö the trip continues to Aspö where salmon soup is served in a traditional red boathouse. The price of this trip is 70 euros per person. (Aspö Charter 2020)

The second trip "A day on Aspö" lets you spend the whole day on Aspö and you are free to spend your time the way you want. There is a beautiful white chapel on the island and a 1,5km long nature trail. For lunch salmon soup is served in the boat house for this trip as well. The price was not available on the website. (Aspö Charter 2020)

The final option "A big tour of the outer archipelago" takes passengers from Korpoström to the fortress island of Örö in the Kemiönsaari region. Travel time is approximately 3 hours.

On Örö, passengers will get a guided tour of the island consisting of the islands history first as a Russian fortress and then as a Finnish military island as well as information on flora and fauna. This guided tour is guided by a local guide. Afterwards they will have time to enjoy lunch and some freetime. Time spent on the island is 3,5 hours. The price of this trip is 90 euros per person, guided tour is included. Lunch is excluded. (Aspö Charter 2020)

Groups have the possibility to choose between ready-made trips and having a trip tailor-made, tailor-made trips can include seal safaris, birthday trips, wedding transports, a conference or an island hopping tour, to name a few. For group trips there is a minimum of 10 passengers required, the maximum group size is 34 people. With a second, smaller boat the maximum passenger number can be 45 people. Groups can also order just transportation services. (Aspö Charter 2020)

Ready-made trips for groups include a concert trip with songs by Lasse Mårtensson sung by Katriina Kerppola and Jussi Miilunpalo accompanied by accordion. It is an experience trip where nature and music meet. The trip departs from Korpoström from where it continues to the islands of Brunskär, Aspö and Borstö. Each destination has certain songs, some of them connected to the island in question – like Aspövalsen ("The Aspö Waltz") that was written for Aspö. Group size is 15-30 people and the price of this trip is 125 euros per participant. (Aspö Charter 2020)

"A day on Kökar" is another group trip. On this trip, passengers will get to travel to and spend the day on Kökar located in the Ahvenanmaa archipelago. The passengers can spend their time freely. Possible activities include renting a bike, visiting the chapel, visiting the village and having lunch. (Aspö Charter 2020)

"Churches in the outer archipelago" is a third option for groups. This trip includes a visit to Aspö, Nötö and then Vänö/Jurmo/Utö. There are beautiful traditional churches/chapels on all these islands and visitors will get a guided tour. On Aspö they will get to listen to live traditional accordion music. This trip also departs from Korpoström and costs 125 euros. Guided tours, lunch and coffee are included in the price. Group size is 10-30 people. (Aspö Charter 2020)

Besides the trips mentioned above, they have offered scheduled traffic leaving from Korpoström to the islands of the outer archipelago. The minimum of people for this is 10. This has not been an ongoing activity due to challenges in getting enough passengers, issues such as this will be discussed in the following chapter. (Aspö Charter 2020)

The trips included in this product offering fall in the category of experience tourism, which is one of the major trends within tourism at the time being.

2.2 Challenges and problems

In order to understand the situation of Aspö Charter an interview was conducted with Tore Johansson, the 12th of October 2020 on the island of Aspö.

The Parainen municipality to which the Aspö archipelago belongs is a large area and according to Johansson the marketing efforts that the local tourism organization does are selective and is largely directed towards pre-known larger attractions such as the Archipelago Trail (Saariston Rengastie), Nagu and the island of Utö for example. Travel agencies and tourism information in the region are not looking for new destinations and activities, they are simply not realizing the potential of the area. There is little support from the municipality to smaller operators and companies in the area. This leaves responsibility to the companies themselves to market their region, their company and their services, which proves to be a challenge. (Johansson 2020)

Tore Johansson wants to market specifically this area of the archipelago through Aspö Charter. The area of focus would be Aspö, Bodö, Nötö and Björkö – the four pearls of the archipelago according to Johansson. Discussions and new ideas have been exchanged with some of the operators on these other islands, but this is in an early stage. The plan is a 2-3 day tour where the visitor would get to experience all of these islands with accommodation offered on Aspö and Bodö, food is available on all of the islands. Transportation would happen via Aspö Charter.

The following islands of Jurmo and Utö are an area for themselves, they are the two furthest islands of the archipelago and are still some distance away from Aspö. Utö is also very different to this area, it is a slightly larger community and they have completely different facilities for tourism – a hotel and other larger accommodation buildings. They are also a well known place already. Due to this and the distance from Aspö, they are commonly excluded from the operational area.

The challenge in marketing is how to market this area separately from the others and separately from Parainen. How should the area be marketed? What should the information and marketing efforts look like? How do you market it without big investments due to a small budget? Magazines are the traditional way but they are expensive and it is difficult to measure the impact they have. An example of these magazines is Örö Kompass.

Small operators such as Aspö Charter easily “drowns” among bigger actors and companies. How should they differentiate themselves and make them stand out of the crowd?

One of the main challenges is to find the right target customers and how to market to them. What should the marketing efforts look like, what products do they want, what “marketing voice” should be used and what channels are the ones where you reach them? How to strengthen Aspö Charters own communication and reinforce their place on the market? What would be the right way to channel marketing, so that the focus is locally? These questions should be answered, in order to be able to create a marketing plan. This is again where the importance of the buyer persona can be observed.

Keeping the archipelago way of living alive is important to Johansson, and he sees this as not only a temporary activity. He wants to make it possible to live there through tourism services. The outer archipelago region is a difficult area to have business pay off due to the long distances, prices need to be high enough to cover transportation costs. Trips in the inner archipelago can be a lot cheaper compared to this area, which means that customers do not always have an understanding towards the higher price level. One challenge is how to ”justify” these higher prices. Marketing these prices is also difficult. What makes more sense - marketing the trip prices as price per person or as a group price, both have their pros and cons. Price per person can usually stay consistent no matter the amount of passengers, but that means earnings are minimal with a small group. A group price guarantees a certain earning per trip but can be off-putting to smaller groups. A group inquiry is the easiest one to price since you can give them a group price, giving a per person price is difficult because if the group gets smaller you will not get the income you need after already promising a certain per person price.
If the group is larger than 20 people, the vessel needs a second crew member onboard which means that the expenses are higher. Groups of 12-15 people are the most common, but also the most challenging group size. It requires the use of the bigger vessel, M/s Amanda, which is more expensive to operate than the smaller one M/s Afrodite. This means that the price is higher for the trip, and that in turn might be a problem for a small group like that. Sometimes it is possible to operate with small groups at a smaller income, but in the long run this is not beneficial.

Doing boat charter is difficult for a couple of reasons. Operating the boat has many costs and it requires a certain amount of people for it to be profitable. However, if you have sold a trip and the minimum amount of passengers is filled you will drive the tour but will not be making a lot of profit. This thesis aims to find out the buyer persona for their customers, so that these passenger numbers could be increased in the future.

Operating in the outer archipelago means that you are far from the mainland, and for the passengers to get to the departure harbour they have to travel quite far. This is certainly a reason for the low numbers of passengers as well. Competition is another issue for a small company like this. Larger vessels can take more passengers which mean less costs per passenger and therefor they can have lower prices. As in any sort of tourism, sustainability is an important factor that creates some challenges.

2.3 Opportunities

According to Johansson during the interview the 12th of October, ”Saariston Rengastie” (The Archipelago Trail) is an opportunity for Aspö Charter. During one summer season the trail receives around 22 700 tourists where 4050 people were cyclists (Visit Parainen 2020a.) All of these tourists make their way through Korppoo during their tour of the trail, see figure below where the route is illustrated.

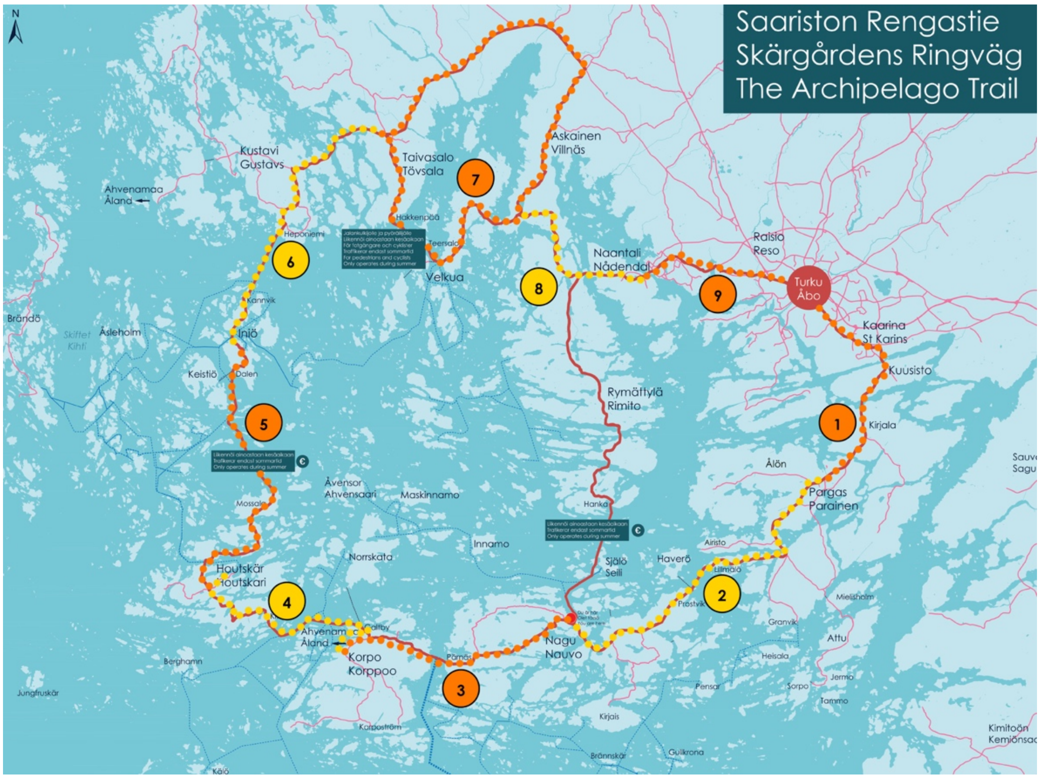

Figure 1. The Archipelago Trail route. (Visit Parainen 2020c.)

The visitors of The Archipelago Trail is a possible market that has not been reached before, but Johansson sees the potential and is interested in how these people possibly could become customers. Cyclists on The Archipelago Trail bike through Korppoo. It would not be a big detour to cycle down to Korpoström and from there, spend a day out to sea with Aspö Charter.

Besides The Archipelago Trail, there is also The Small Archipelago trail, which is a shorter version of the original trail. Both of these however exclude the outer archipelago. Johansson sees potential in a new concept that would compliment the existing routes and would include the outer regions as well.

This thesis will provide highly valuable information on customer target groups and a buyer persona for their products. With competition likely to increase in the future, through the buyer personas they will have knowledge about their own niche corner of the market.

3 Buyer personas

Finding the right crowd for your marketing efforts and targeting the right customers is an important part of any company's activities but it is a challenging field with many factors to take into consideration. According to Revella in 2015, we not only need to know who buys our services but we need to know why. What makes them make the buying decision? This is where we need buyer personas. According to Adlin & Pruitt in 2006, buyer personas "...are fictitious, specific, concrete representations of target users" (Adlin & Pruitt 2006, 11; Revella 2015, intro, 24).

Why is it important to define the ideal customer in such detail? Tanni and Keronen suggested in 2018 that the purpose for marketing can be observed through the FIGA-model. It is easier to be visible to a small group, they *Find* your content. The easier it is for the customer to *Identify* to your content, the more they *Engage* with it. This engagement then oftentimes leads to *Action.* (Tanni & Keronen 2013, 118)

3.1 The history of buyer personas

A few different people have been the forerunners in creating buyer personas. In 1991 Geoffrey Moore defined the target customers according to the problems they needed to get solved, and his definitions visualized the ideal customers instead of a whole group. The characteristics he created included a personal profile and a job description, "a day in the life" before buying a certain product, a definition of the problem that the product is the solution to as well as "a day in the life" after the product have been bought. (Adlin & Pruitt 2006, 24)

In 1998, Art Weinstein introduced a strategic market definition that described a method of identifying and using market definitions in order to market and build strategy. The method consisted of three main steps which are 1. Identifying the relevant market, 2. Creating the defined market and 3. Specifying the target market. Step number 2 is what resembled creating a buyer persona, since it meant describing common characteristics. (Adlin & Pruitt 2006, 22-23)

Lynn Uppshaw presented her customer definition method in 1995. Her main concept was that the customer should be visualized as an individual instead of a group or segment. For the ideal customer two profiles were made. A descriptive profile where data describes the customer as seen by other people (ex. "woman, 37") and an individual profile which portrayed the customer as a person doing the buying decision (ex. "I am Lina and I need a vacation because.."). The profiles also consisted of a view on the daily life of the customer and an image. (Adlin & Pruitt 2006, 25.)

In 2002 Sheila Mello created a process of customer definition that consisted of figuring out a clear image of the customer through a set of questions like the following: what is the customer's life like, what challenges the customer and what motivates the customer. The statements gathered from these questions were then put together to gain a deeper understanding of being in the customers shoes. (Adlin & Pruitt 2006, 24)

Buyer personas can aid in defining the market and therefor make it easier to target the right market with the right information and value propositions. Market segmentation can be seen as the predecessor to buyer personas, but whereas market segments define groups of people the buyer personas also dive into the people's goals and needs. A customer's need is the most important aspect when defining a market, hence why buyer personas are such an important tool. The common sight on buyer personas is that it should be similar to "a day in the life of", this is however untrue. The valuable information is what values, experiences and events makes someone do a buying decision. The more detailed the buyer persona is, the easier it is to influence their decisions through the right content. (Revella 2015, intro, 24 ; Adlin & Pruitt, 2006. 24.; Kurvinen & Sipilä 2014, 16)

> *"Traditionally organizations, regardless of the industry they operate in, tend to use market segmentation schemes that are based on demographics and value information. In today's competitive markets, this approach is not sufficient. They also need to focus on their customers' needs, wants, attitudes, behaviors, preferences, and perceptions, and to analyze relevant data to identify the underlying segments." (Tsiptsis & Chroniapoulos 2010, ch 5).*

3.2 Consumer buying process

There is a lot of different aspects playing into a buying decision, especially for high consideration buys such as a trip. These decisions are not made very often and the decision process can be a long one, sometimes spanning even months. That is why the marketing between low- and high consideration buys should be completely different. The personas of low consideration buys oftentimes consist of demographic and psychographic details meanwhile high consideration buys consist of buyers stories about their purchase decisions and the information gathered from in-depth interviews. By gaining understanding of your customer's buying process, it is possible to affect their decisions. (Revella 2015, intro & p. 24, 114; Chaffey & Smith 2013, 184)

According to Kotler and Armstrong in 2017, the buying process always follows a similar pattern which steps are recognizing need, searching information, evaluating alternatives, making the decision to purchase as well as post-purchase behaviour. (Kotler & Armstrong 2017, 176)

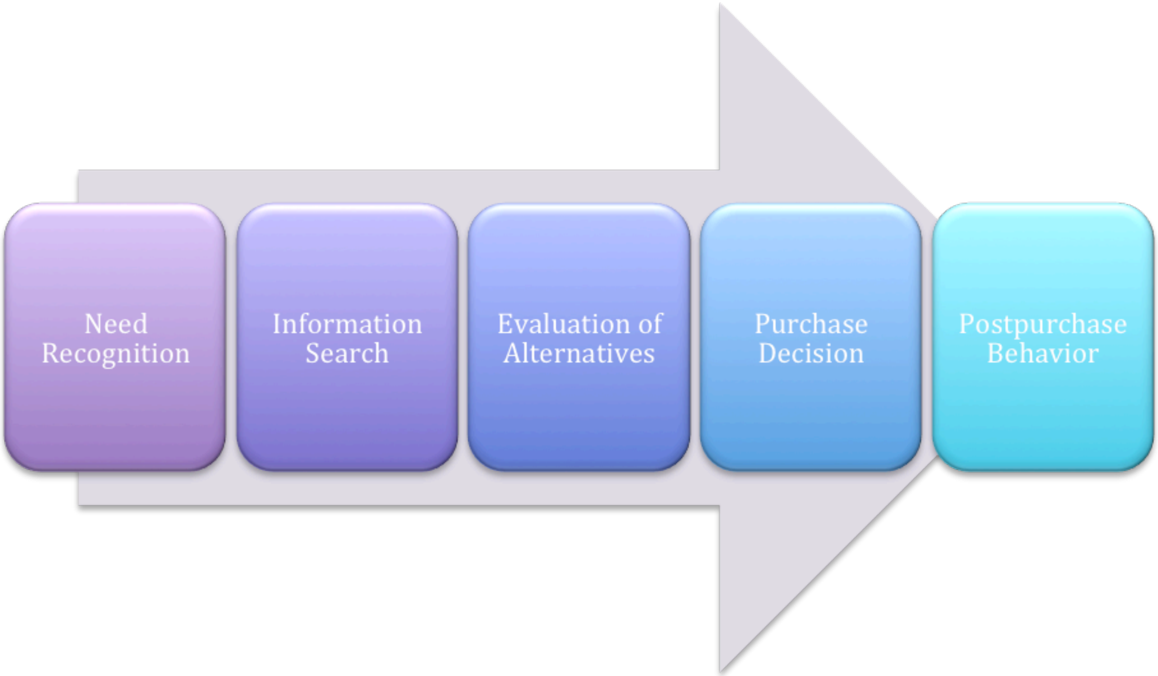

Figure 2. The buying process, according to Kotler and Armstrong. (Cox 2021)

The first step of the process, recognizing need, can be triggered by either internal or external stimuli. Internal stimulus means a physiological or biological need, an example could be stress or tiredness. Examples of external stimulus are stories, images and ads. (Kotler & Armstrong 2017, 176)

The second step is search of information. Information can be gathered from many sources such as personal, commercial, public and experiential. An example of a personal source can be a recommendation from a friend, a commercial source can be an ad or website, a public source can be social media and an experiential source can be examining the product for yourself. (Kotler & Armstrong 2017, 176)

The third step, evaluation, is where customers compare companies and their products/services. This step often includes calculations of cost and logical thinking. Sometimes the evaluation process is not very long and they might do a spontaneous purchase instead. (Kotler & Armstrong 2017, 177.)

The fourth step means making the decision. Meanwhile this is often the customers own decision situational factors and opinions might affect the decision. (Kotler & Armstrong 2017, 177.)

The fifth and final step consists of post-purchase behaviour. This is when the customer feels his expectations either unmet, satisfied or exceeded. Customers that are satisfied or even better, have had their expectations exceeded, are likely to talk positively about the company and recommend them to others. They also feel loyalty towards the company and are less likely to be interested in competing brands. (Kotler and Armstrong 2017, 178)

Customers of business-to-customer services are often relying on the reviews of their peers and digital connections when choosing between operators and the services that they offer. (Revella 2015, 5)

3.3 Creating buyer personas

There are many ways to go about creating buyer personas but according to Adele Revella, the most efficient way is conducting in-depth interviews with people that have been in a choosing position of services similar to yours. They have considered different solutions and rejected some of them, you want to know what made them choose one solution over the other since the decision that has been made is the one you want to be able to influence. That is why you need to hear, and understand, your customer’s story. (Revella 2015, 8-13)

In order to understand customers and be able to create a buyer persona, Revella has created a concept of “The Five Rings of Buyer Insights”, these will be presented below:

1. The Priority Initiative is the first ring and states the reasons that a person decides to make a purchase and why another person does not purchase, why they are content with how things are. This describes in detail what circumstances makes a person buy, which means that you will gain information on when the best opportunity to reach them is and who are the most likely people to have purchase your product (the buyer persona). This information should be used to affect the early stages of the buying decisions.

2. The second insight is the Success Factors that describes the results that the customer expects from purchasing your product, this means a scenario that will change after purchasing – the expected outcomes. The Success Factors answer

why the customer wants to buy a product.

3. The insight of Perceived Barriers states what prevents a customer from buying your product or that they might buy from your competitor instead. Barriers can be things like a bad previous experience with a similar purchase, bad reputation of your company etc. When you figure out the barriers you can work around them and prove to the customer why your product can fulfill their Priority Initiative and Success Factors.

4. The Buyers Journey illustrates the path your customers take when they decide to buy a certain product, compare competitors, eliminate options and finally buy a product. The journey will provide you with information on what influences the decisions and what influence affects which part of the journey.

5. The final one is Decision Criteria where you can receive information on what characteristics the buyer looks at when comparing the product between different providers. This way you will know what makes the scale tip in your direction, what is the crucial factor that makes them choose your product over a competitors. Decision Criteria can also be other parts of your company, for example great customer service can be one. The Decision Criteria answers what, as in what in my product is critical for the buying decision.
(Revella 2015, 25-27, 101-102)

The way to gain these insights are through interviews with actual buyers, that way you gain the real story of what your buyers want to hear, when they want to hear it and where they want to hear it. (Revella 2015, 27; Pulizzi 2014, 94-95; Kurvinen & Sipilä 2014, 103-104; Urban 2004, 25) This view on customer's needs and goals gives you power in marketing since you can communicate why your product is the right choice for them. (Revella 2015, 27)

According to Revella, thorough insight on your buyers will aid you in the following aspects of marketing:

1. Effective messaging. There is no such thing as effective messaging aimed at everyone, in order for marketing messages to be powerful they need to be aimed at a certain target group. You will need to know who the buyers are that need convincing and what characteristics of a product they appreciate the most. Timing is also part of effective marketing, through these insights you will know when the critical

decision happens in the buyers journey and that is when you will reach out to the customer. (p. 28)

2. High quality leads. Creating awareness only is not enough, one needs to make sure that their product is among the top contenders to be chosen. This is important because it is said that the customer is 60% through with their decision once they approach the provider directly. When you have insight on your customers you know where they go for information, what they are wondering and what they want to hear. (p. 28-29)

3. Ties to competitors. In high-consideration buys price is surprisingly rarely a critical factor, that is why it is important to gain deeper insight on how customers evaluate the value/price balance and what your competitors are doing to be perceived as the best.

4. Identifying the buyer type you need to reach and how to reach them. What outside influences affect their buying decision and what resources do they use to evaluate the options available? That is what you can affect. What marketing activities affect them positively?

3.4 Understanding the push and pull factors of tourism

A good understanding of the push and pull factors within tourism enables a marketer to reach the right customer groups and segment the customers. Understanding the tourism motivation can help create better service and products, tourism satisfaction is linked to their motivation and the motivation needs to be understood in order for marketers to understand the buying process of the customers. Originally the theory of push and pull factors was introduced by Tolman in 1959, followed by Dann in 1977. Pull factors are what attract tourists to a certain destination, such as sunshine or the sea, push factors are what motivate the tourist to travel in the first place, reasons such as escape or nostalgia. So in other words the tourists are pushed by internal factors and pulled by external factors. These factors make for two separate decisions, often occurring at different times, firstly the decision one wants to travel and only later the decision on where. Push factors are the socio-psychological constructs of the tourist and their environment, meanwhile pull factors appear out of the attractiveness of a destination. Push answers why, pull answers where. According to Uysal and Hagan (1993) the push factors are commonly: the desire for escape, rest and relaxation, adventure, health or prestige. The pull factors are more tangible than that, they are things such as climate, culture, sights, recreational opportunities, facilities and so on. In the below figure the different factors are listed. (Uysal, Li & Sirakaya-Turk, 413 - 415) When the push and pull factors have been determined, the following step is to determine the commonality between the two. Once commonality is determined it is possible to segment customers accordingly which in turn can help develop product offerings that match the commonality. (Uysal, Li & Sirakaya-Turk, p. 429-430)

Table 15.1 Push and pull framework of tourism motivations

Origin	Destination
Push factors	Pull factors
Motivations	***Destination attributes and type of facilities***
Escape	Climate
Rest and Relaxation	History sights
Self-esteem	Scenic beauty
Prestige	Sunshine
Health and fitness	Beaches
Adventure	Snow
Social interaction	Cultural events
Benefits	Recreational opportunities
Interests	Benefit expectations
Socioeconomic and demographic factors	***Accessibility***
Age, gender, income, education, family life-cycle and size, race/ethnic group, occupation, second home ownership	***Maintenance factors situational factors*** (safety, security, seasonality)
Market knowledge	***Marketed image***
	Formed negative/positive destination images
	Quality of services
	Quality of facilities

Source: After Uysal and Hagan, (1993). Motivations of Pleasure Travel and Tourism In (Eds.), M. kahn, Olsen, M., and T.Var, *Encyclopedia of Hospitality and Tourism* (pp. 798–810). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Figure 3. Push and pull factors for tourism (Uysal, Li & Sirakaya-Turk 2009, 415)

4 Experience tourism

An experience consists of different phases - pre-experience, during and post-experience. (Gelter 2011) The pre-experience largely consists of creating an image of the experience at hand as well as building anticipation and expectation for it. (Ritchie & Ritchie 1998, 16 – 20). The post experience, in turn, is about recollection and remembering. (Multidimensional Tourism Institute 2015)

Meaningful experiences are different to traditional service since they are customized and often have a theme. The service provider needs to have the experience well-planned and built with elements that have been thought through, this in order for the customers to be able to create their own experiences. (Kylänen & Tarssanen 2007, 136-140)

According to Sharpley and Stone in Tourist Experience: Contemporary Perspectives (2010) “to consume tourism is to consume experiences”. They state that all tourist experiences are different and unique to any one person. The personal significance of tourism differs from person to person and is determined by their personality, background and local culture. (Sharpley & Stone 2010, 2-3)

According to O’Dell and Biling in 2005 one can differentiate between a tourist experience and tourism experience, a tourist experience can be basically any service that an operator provides such as accommodation or food. Tourism experience on the other hand is the act of being a tourist, it does not only include the combination of tourist experiences but also the meaning that the trip has to the tourist. This meaning is in relation to the tourists normal existence and the character of the destination. This meaning makes it possible for the tourism experience to bring deeper rewards to the tourist and hopefully fulfill the objectives the person had for the trip. To quote O’Dell and Biling, “the tourist experience is, in effect, the significance of engaging in tourism.” (O’Dell & Biling 2005, 3)

In the book Experiencescapes: Tourism, Culture and Economy, Tom O’Dell and Peter Billing (2005) state that there are a few factors that should be taken into consideration when thinking about experiences. Firstly, people’s social and cultural backgrounds play a big role in how experiences arise. This means that one product can create a multitude of different experiences, all depending on the travellers background and personal interests. (O’Dell & Billing 2005, 51) Considering this fact, one realizes that it might not be possible to have one product attract all customers.

Secondly, experiences consist of many layers. You have the activity itself, the environment it is happening in as well as the social meaning that lies within the experience. (O'Dell & Billing 2005, 51)

Thirdly, experiences are linked to a person's own existence. They are felt personally and is not visible to anyone else, therefor mood and feeling affect the experience. This creates a challenge to tourism providers since a person's internal feelings are difficult to affect. (O'Dell & Biling 2005, 52)

4.1 How a tourism experience emerges

The way that tourism experiences emerge has been explained in different ways by researchers. Below, six different approaches present in the book Experiencescapes: Tourism, Culture and Economy will be presented:

In the first approach they, Mannell and Iso-Ahola 1987, 314-337; McIntosh and Prentice1999, 589-612; Stamboulis and Skayannis 2003, 35-43 (in Lee & Shafer 2002, 290-310), concentrate on the cognitive psychology of the experience of a
tourist. In short, this deals with perceptions and what sort of an impact they have on the experiences. Waitt 2000, 835-862; Waller and Lea 1999, 110-129 (in Lee & Shafer 2002, 290-310). The expectations of a traveller affects the way they consume and experience a certain product.

The second approach states that tourism activity provides opportunities for the tourists to gain personal benefits such as boosting their mood, creating identity and learning new things. Prentice, Witt, and Hamer 1998, 1-24 (in Lee & Shafer 2002, 290-310)

The third approach put its focus on the state of mind as well as how deep the experiential engagement is. These studies focus on the "optimal experience" which according to them consists of the mental state tourists experience, states/feelings such as meaningful and special. Ellis, Morris and Voelkl 1994, 337-356; Walker, Hull and Roggenbuck 1998, 453-471. (in Lee & Shafer 2002, 290-310)

The fourth approach also focuses on mood, according to Cohen 1979, 179-201; Lengkeek 2001, 173- 184; Li 2000, 863-883 (in Lee & Shafer 2002, 290-310). Cohen (1979) presents an experience typology of five modes based on a variety of consumption styles such as escape from boredom, their search for meaning or their search for a different life-style.

In the fifth approach it is stated that tourism experiences happen in the space between local people and tourists, and focus is put on the relationship between them. Urry (1990) means that the way tourists experience a destination is when they notice all the things that are different to home and their own everyday life. Tourists do not have the full perspective of the destination the way the locals do which means that the experiences they have re flect their own backgrounds and their life back home. According to Hannabuss (1999) this gap in knowledge between tourists and locals mean that tourists only can get a vague experience of the authentic destination. Urry 1990; Hannabuss 1999, 295-302 (in Lee & Shafer 2002, 290-310)

In the sixth and final approach, the focus lies on the way and amount that tourists engage and interact with the tourism product. The idea here is that the environment and the characteristics of the product decide on how deep a level the tourists will interact with it. If the environment and the characteristics are well planned, the tourists will get a feeling that it has been personalized for them and will have a deeper impact on them. Pine & Gilmore 1999 (in Lee & Shafer 2002, 290-310).

An important part of the tourism experiences are the providers/operators/guides whom one can also call mediator. They have the ability to direct the tourists' attention as well as their interpretations of the sights since they are the ones who create the tourism products, tell them what to notice and how the product is intended to be consumed in order to create a deeper experience. Belk 1997; Cohen 1985, 5-29; Ooi 2002 (in Lee & Shafer 2002, 290-310) In other words, these mediators have the ability to impact tourism behaviour. O'Dell & Biling 2005, 55 & 68 (in Lee & Shafer 2002, 290-310).

4.2 The "attention economy"

A factor that highly impacts the tourism experience is attention, according to researchers there are four main attention characteristics that play a part in experiences: humans can only really pay attention to one thing at a time, our experience as well as our behaviour changes when our attention shifts, (Benjamin 1987; Polanyi 1962 in O'Dell & Biling 2005, 55-57) human attention is scarce (Benjamin 1987; Davenport and Beck 2001; Henderson 1999, 65-70; Polanyi 1962 in O'Dell & Biling 2005, 55-57) and finally, that there are many reasons to why a human pays attention to a certain thing.

“Attention economy” is a concept stated by Davenport and Beck (2001), the scarcity of human attention leads to a competition between operators where they all try to catch and hold a tourists attention. Push and pull factors, discussed earlier in this thesis, have an impact on the attention of tourists. A person’s push factors affect what sort of thing they focus on during their experience, depending on what their desired outcome of it is. Pull factors, the external factors, are also paid attention to and they can be something positive or they can be a possible distraction. Due to everyone being unique, considering psychological factors and one’s background, everyone pays attention to different things or they pay attention to the same thing but for different reasons. (O’Dell & Biling 2005, 55-57)

As mentioned, mediators (the operators) aid in directing the attention of tourists, trying to have them focus on certain things meanwhile ignoring other things they help tourists interpret a product. Since tourists often lack background knowledge on the destination, mediators help them consume it in the best way. Cohen (1985) calls mediators “cultural brokers”. (O’Dell & Biling 2005, 57)

Visual factors are one of the most important factors in catching attention, according to Urry 1990 (in O’Dell & Biling 2005, 56). Other researchers such as Graburn and Barthel-Bouchier (2001, 147-158), Moscardo (1996, 376-397), Prentice (2001), Perkins and Thorns (2001, 185-204) (in O’Dell & Biling 2005, 56) state that other ways to catch tourists attention are their five senses, giving them an intellectual challenge (Moscardo 1996, 376-397 (in O’Dell & Biling 2005, 56), making them use their imagination (Lengkeek 2001, 173-184; McIntosh and Prentice 1999, 589-612; Ooi 2002 (in O’Dell & Biling 2005, 56) and sparking their feeling of nostalgia (Rojek 1997 (in O’Dell & Biling 2005, 56). All these factors can create emotional experiences. (O’Dell & Biling 2005, 56)

5 Methods

This chapter presents the research methods used to reach the aim of the thesis - finding out the buyer persona for Aspö Charter's services.

Research can be divided into two main categories - qualitative and quantitative methods. The simplest way to make a distinction between the two is that quantitative research gathers numerical data such as statistics for example, meanwhile qualitative research gathers non-numerical data such as opinions. An example of a quantitative research method is a questionnaire, and an example of qualitative research is an interview. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 165)

5.1 Interview as a data collection method

This thesis falls under the category of qualitative research and for the aim of this thesis, creating buyer personas, qualitative interviews have been determined as the most beneficial method and will therefore be the method used. Qualitative interviews are commonly categorized in three, which will be presented below:

Structured interviews are based on a standardized set of questions, identical from interview to interview. This type of interview can be called quantitative interview, since they mainly collect quantifiable data. The questions in a structured interview should always be asked word for word the same way and even in the same voice, in order to have it be neutral and no possibility for bias. Structured interviews are documented in a questionnaire format. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 391)

In a semi-structured interview the interviewer has a number of themes already set and possibly some key questions. Semi-structured interviews can vary from interview to interview, the order of questions might change and some of them might not even be asked if the topic is already covered. Additional questions might be asked in order to get further into certain topics. Semi-structured interviews are documented via audio or note-taking. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 391)

An ustructured (open) interview has no set questions and is more about discussion and reflection. They are used to explore a specific topic in-depth. The idea is that the interviewee is free to talk about their experiences, events, opinions and so on – basically only determined by the topic of the interview. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 391)

Semi-structured and unstructured interviews are meant to understand not only questions like what and how, but also why. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 392)

For the aim of this thesis, a semi-structured interview structure will be used. There will be a scripted opening question followed by supporting questions based on the Five Rings of Buyer Insight, in order to gain as much genuine insight on the possible customers. Conducting a qualitative buyer persona interview should not be too strict. The point is to listen to the customers tell their story of a decision. This way one can capture the mindset and the thoughts of a customer making a decision. What triggers them to start the buying process, what are the push factors, why do they want to buy a product? The opening question is important to get right, it should trigger the interviewee to tell the story of their buying decision. It is important to start where the idea of a trip was born, and not from when they found your product. (Revella, 2015, 39 – 41, 79-80)

5.2 Survey

In order to confirm the findings of the qualitative interviews a survey was made. According to Revella (2015) this combination of interviews and then a survey provides more beneficial results compared to conducting only a large number of interviews. This way, the survey works to confirm what have been found out in the interviews. (Revella 2015, 98) The survey is also necessary in order to identify buyer demographics that are needed for the personas. The survey questions were created based on the material and results of the interviews, two language versions were created, Finnish and Swedish. The survey questions in English can be found in appendix 2.

5.3 Choosing the interviewees and target group for the survey

There are four alternatives for people to interview according to Revella (2015), they are: people who considered you and chose you, people who considered you and chose a competitior, people who considered you but decided to keep things as they were, people who never considered you and chose a competitor (went there directly). The group that can provide the most valuable information is the second one, those who chose a competitor. This gives valuable information on what they did right and what your company does wrong. (Revella 2015, 66-69)

People to be interviewed for this thesis are potential customers that have considered products like Aspö Charters before, previous customers of Aspö Charters products as well as people who have used similar services elsewhere, since it is not possible to interview those that chose a competitor in this case since there are no direct competitors. The amount of interviews to be made is 8 and the length will be about 30 minutes. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed, in order to be analysed to their full extent. The form of analysis will be presented in an upcoming chapter. After the analysis of the interviews, the main points were extracted and the survey was then be built upon these in order to confirm them.

The target group for the survey was chosen as people who visit the archipelago area and can be expected to have used charter services of some sort. The way of distribution and the channels for the survey will be presented in the results chapter 7.2.

5.4 Analysis

For the aim of the research of this thesis, a theory based analysis was chosen. Two other common analysis methods that exist are inductive and deductive analysis. To provide a base of knowledge, these two will be presented in short below:

An inductive analysis is based on empirical observation. The point here is to notice patterns and develop theories connected to them, this process happens at the end of the research process. (Dudovskiy 2021a.)
A deductive analysis is simply put the opposite of an inductive analysis. In this form of research, the hypotheses is created first based on theory and then it is put to the test. (Dudovskiy 2021b.)

The analysis of the collected material was done as a theory based analysis based on the Five Rings of Buyer Insight created by Adele Revella in “Buyer Personas : How to Gain Insight into Your Customer’s Expectations, Align Your Marketing Strategies, and Win More Business”. The Five Rings of Buyer Insight were presented in chapter 3.1. and they will be used for analysis in order to gain the kind of insight that is most valuable for creating the buyer personas. This form of analysis could be classified as an inductive analysis, since it is common denominators that are observed in the interviews and survey, and the buyer persona works as the result of the research. In this case, the buyer persona represents the hypotheses.

The survey is based on the interview results and will work to confirm the findings of the interviews. That is why the survey will not be analysed per se, it will instead be compared to the interview results.

5.5 Validity and reliability

A review of the quality of research is a necessary part of every research process. Validity and reliability are concepts often associated with quantitative research, but they have their counterparts in qualitative research as well. In the case of qualitative research validity refers to integrity, application of methods as well as how well the findings reflect the data. Reliability, in turn, means consistency in the analytical procedures done. (Noble & Smith 2015, 34.)

Common critique against qualitative research is the fact that the analysis process lacks transparency and that the findings are subject to researcher bias since they are based on the interviewees personal opinions rather than facts. The review of validity and reliability is however just as important in qualitative research as in quantitative, even though it is not possible to be as precise. (Noble & Smith 2015, 34.)

In quantitative research, statistical methods are used in order to ensure validity and reliability meanwhile for qualitative research, methodological methods are used. These methods can include: accounting for possible personal biases, keeping records, keeping data interpretation consistent and as transparent as possible, representing different perspectives, describing the thought process during analysis as well as checking with the interviewee if the findings represent their statements. Keeping a specific “decision trail” where the researcher goes through a precise thought process when analysing means that another researcher should reach the same findings if going through the same steps. (Noble & Smith 2015, 34-35.)

For this thesis the risk during research mainly lay in the personal bias of the interviewer, the archipelago as a topic is something I am very passionate about and the island of Aspö is a second home to me – and that naturally means that the locals are close to me as well. In order to try and avoid the effect of bias during the research process, I tried to form the questions as neutral as possible and to avoid too many follow up questions since these can be easily prone to bias.

There are a few other validity and reliability issues that have or might have affected this research process. One situation that has been an overhanging issue is the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic – limiting research processes to online measures as well as affecting the whole thesis writing process in terms of time management, concentration and emotional stress. This has resulted in a lack of concentration and pauses in the process, which in turn has caused difficulty “picking up where I left off”. Since the thought process had been interrupted by the pause.

What comes to the research practicalities there are a few noteworthy things. All interviews were conducted in Swedish, after which they were translated to English according to best ability. There is however a possibility that nuances have changed in the translation process.

Finally, according to theory of Adelle Revella, it was recommended that one should interview someone that considered the commissioner but chose a competitor, this was not possible since the commissioner at the time being is the only charter provider in the outer archipelago region. Only smaller taxi boat companies exist in the same region, which are not direct competitors since the passenger capacity is much lower and the services mainly consist of transport from place A to place B, instead of trips.

6 Results of the research

In this chapter, the results from both the in-depth interviews and the confirming survey will be presented. After presenting these results, the next chapter will present the reader with the buyer personas for Aspö Charter through the analysis.

6.1 Interview results

In order to figure out the buyer personas, 8 interviews were conducted according to the recommendation in Adele Revellas method. The interviews were conducted between: 13. – 19.5.2021. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 2.

6 of the interviews were conducted online on the platforms Microsoft Teams and Zoom due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, these interviews were recorded using the platform's software and transcribed afterwards. Two interviews were conducted live, these were recorded using a smartphone and then transcribed. The interviews were done anonymously but some relevant background information was gathered; gender, age and what sort of services they had used. The interviewees were as follows:

A. Female, 54, charter trip and multiple taxi boat charters (ordered a trip for a group).
B. Female, 47, charter trip and taxi boat trips.
C. Female, 54, taken part in charter trips for leisure.
D. Female, 33, ordered a charter trip for her wedding guests.
E. Male, 57, the company he works at has used charter multiple times for clients/guests and staff training days.
F. Male, 57, the company that he works for had also used plenty of charter services for customers/clients and staff recreational trips.
G. Female, 22, considered a charter trip but chose not to buy.
H. Male, 31, took part in a chartered trip for leisure.

According to the findings of the buyer persona research, two ideal buyer personas were determined – one for corporate charter customers and one for leisure customers. The characteristics of these two personas were reflected on via the Five Rings of Buyer Insight as presented by Adele Revella:

Priority Initiative

Corporate charter: The reason a company wants to buy a charter trip is that they are planning to for example hold a recreational day or host guests/clients. They look to boat charter because they want to provide their staff/their guests with something different, a new experience. In the case of international guests, they want to show them what Finland and especially our unique archipelago looks like since they have nothing similar at home. Quote:

> *"Det här med skärgården känns självklart för många av oss, men för många är det exotiskt... Det har varit intressant för många (att delta på våra charter resor) – vi har haft gäster från Kina, USA, Thailand, Korea, Italien och Spanien bland annat. Det är en upplevelse för dem för de har aldrig sett något liknande."* Translation: *"The archipelago feels like a given for many of us, but to many it is exotic… It has been interesting for many (to partake in our charter trips) – we have had quests from China, USA, Thailand, Korea, Italy and Spain to name a few. It is an experience for them, they have never seen anything similar."* Interviewee E.

Leisure charter: The reason an individual decides to purchase a trip is that they have gotten visual inspiration (oftentimes online on social media) or heard someone talk about a place/an experience and they get the feeling that they want to see/experience it too. Commonly these individuals do not have their own boat, which makes buying a boat trip is their only means to visit certain destinations. The archipelago is however often familiar to them from before. Quote:

> *"Jag äger ingen sån båt att jag kunde ta mig ut till exempelvis Bengtskär, därför är det viktigt att det finns alternativ för såna som jag som inte har båt. Det att jag vill se skärgården kommer inifrån."* Translation. *"I do not own such a boat that I could go to for example Bengtskär independently, that is why it is important that there are options for people like me that do not have a boat. The wish to see the archipelago comes from within."* Interviewee C.

> *"När man har sin egen båt så blir det inte av att köpa charter, men jag har funderat på det. Att fara med en kaverigrupp skulle kräva att man beställer charter, då är nog idén att man vill se mer av skärgården. Har dock inte blivit av när man bor i skärgården själv."* Translation: *"When you have your own boat, you do not really end up buying charter, but I have thought about it.*

Going away with a group of friends would require charter, the idea here is to see more of the archipelago. This has just not happened yet, since I live in the archipelago already." Interviewee G.

Success Factors

Corporate charter: Corporate customers expect happy and content staff/guests/clients as the result of the archipelago experience that they have purchased. A good experience means the clients/guests are more likely to bond with the company and create a relationship that might lead to cooperation in the future. Quote:

> *"Det är trevligt att umgås i en annan miljö, och ha en gemensam upplevelse med gästerna."* Translation: *"It is nice to socialise in another environment, and to have an experience together with the guests."* Interviewee F.

Leisure charter: The individuals wish to have had a good, enjoyable experience in the destination and that they have seen something new. They want to have a feeling of relaxation, enjoyment and content afterwards as well. Quote:

> *"Efter vill man ha en känsla av att man sett nåt nytt, viktigt också med att vila upp sig men att se nåt nytt är nog viktigare."* Translation: "*After the trip you want to have a feeling that you have seen something new, it is also important to get the chance to rest but seeing something new is still more important".* Interviewee B.

> *"Som kapten på ett kommersiellt fartyg är det trevligt att vara ut på havet utan något ansvar, man kan helt enkelt njuta av omgivningen och upplevelsen. Också att man själv får välja destinationen."* Translation: *"As a commercial captain it is nice to be out at sea without any responsibility, one can purely enjoy the environment and the experience. As well as visiting a destination of my own choice."* Interviewee H.

Perceived Barriers

Corporate customers: With companies as customers, price is rarely a barrier. What can instead be seen as a big barrier is if there is no room for flexibility and organizing is not fluent. Having it be an experience is also a deciding factor. Quote:

> *“Det är nog inte priset man tanker på direkt, det är nog viktigast med flexibilitet.” Translation: “It is not the price that one thinks about at first, the most important things is flexibility.”* Interviewee F.

> *“Det ska bli en elämysmatka, inte bara transport.” Translation: “It should be an experience trip, not just transportation”.* Interviewee E.

Leisure charter: Barriers for individual tourists are bad/slow communication, a bad schedule (not enough time in the destination), the feeling that it is all about business (they would rather support small local entrepreneurs than big companies), a price that is too high, a vessel that is in bad condition, if they have heard something bad about the provider and if the provider is not bilingual, many prefer Swedish even though they speak Finnish. Quote:

> *“Det som kan hindra mig från att köpa är att företaget inte svarar tillräckligt fort eller att man hör något negativt.”* Translation: *“The main things that could prevent me from buying aret hat you do not get a quick reply or that you have heard something negative.”* Interviewee A.
> *”Om det luktar bränt, alltså att det är frågan om bara big business så lämnar jag det (köpandet) nog. Om det är bara rahastusta så gillar jag det inte.”* Translation: *”If it smells burnt, in other words if it is only about big business then I will not buy. If it just feels like milking money, I do not like it.”* Interviewee C.

The Buyers Journey

Corporate customers: The idea is born from a need to entertain/host either staff or guests/clients whereafter the planning and buying process starts, they commonly start the buying process 1-2 months ahead of time. It is appreciated if most parts of planning and organising are done by the service provider. For every step of the journey it is important that it goes fluently, and preferably with small effort. Main planning should be done by the provider. Quote:

> *“I alla fall en par veckor i förväg bokar vi, men med internationella gäster bestämmer vi 2-3månader i förväg då det kommer folk från olika delar av världen”* Translation: *”We book at least a couple of weeks beforehand, but with international guests we decide already 2-3 months ahead of time since there are people joining from around the world”. Interviewee E.*

Leisure charter: The leisure charter tourists can often be divided into two, those that want to plan way ahead or the spontaneous ones. The most common way seemed to be planning ahead, since the nature of charter trips usually is that they need to be booked beforehand in order to get tickets or before the trip is cancelled due to few passengers. Planning commonly happens around 1 month before, since it is usually timed to summer vacation. Quote:

> *"Efter att idén fötts så sen gör jag en Google sökning på vilka charterfirmor det finns, jag jämför prisklassen och storlek på båt för en liten grupp (familj på 4 personer). Onödigt med för stor båt och priset stiget. Tar helst kontakt via epost, tycker bäst om det. Har dock också märkt att man inte alltid får svar, då borde man säkert ringa upp istället. Sen är det frågan om om vi har ett visst datum vi absolut vill eller om man är flexibel, eller alltså kan ta emot förslag. Sen är det attta reda på detaljer ännu omkring, och sedan kommer perioden av förväntan innan."* Translation: *"After the idea is born, I do a Google search on what charter companies there are. I compare price levels and the size of the boat, it should be for a small group (family of 4). It is unnecessary with a boat that is too big, and the price is then also usually higher. I prefer contacting via email. I have noticed however that you do not always get a reply, so then you should probably call. Then it is also about the time, do we have a certain date or are we flexible, open to suggestions. After that I sort out the details before it is time to start awaiting the trip."* Interviewee A.

Decision Criteria

This way you will know what makes the scale tip in your direction, what is the crucial factor that makes them choose your product over a competitors.

Corporate customers: The most important decision criteria are size of the vessel, condition of the vessel, flexibility in arrangements and schedules and that they in general are service minded. Quote:

> *"Om det blir förändringar i ursprungliga planen så vill man att det inte ska bli ett problem. Ibland är det så att vi har en klar plan, men sen vill gästerna ha nåt annat så då är det viktigt att det går att ordna."* Translation: *"If there are changes to the original plan, it is important that it does not become problematic to change the plan. Sometimes we have a clear plan but then our guests want something else, then it is important that it is possible to arrange."* Interviewee E.

Leisure charter: Price is ranked highly amongst the deciding criteria among free-time travellers. How well the schedule works out is important as well, they want to be able to spend enough time in the destination. They prefer local entrepreneurs instead of big, outside companies. Having heard of the company before makes them instantly lean in that company's direction. Being able to get service in their mother tongue is a big plus. Quote:

> *"Man vill ju inte åka vilken som helst skorv, och priset är viktigt. Priset inte i första hand avgörande, men kommer ganska högt upp."* Translation: *"You do not wanna travel with just any boat (in poor condition), and the price is important. It is not the first decisive factor, but it ranks very high."* Interviewee B.

> "*Alltid priset först. Hur länge är båten framme och hur lång tid har jag på ön. Det ska inte vara så att man bara har en timme tid och sen hastigt tillbaka. Att det ges tillräckligt med tid är viktigt."* Translation: *"Always price first. How long is the boat there and how long do I have on the island. It should not be so that I have one hour and then need to hurry back. That one is given enough time is important."* Interviewee C.

6.2 Survey results

The survey that was done in order to confirm the findings of the interviews as well as gathering demographic data received all together 62 replies – 45 in Finnish and 17 in Swedish. The survey was open for a week in May (19.-26.5.) It was shared as a personal link to relevant people, meaning people that have considered to buy or bought boat charter services, as well as in different groups mainly on Facebook. The majority of the questions have set options, but also the possibility to write freely. The groups were chosen based on relevance to the topic. The survey was shared to the following groups:

"Veneiljät" (eng. "Boaters") with 9700 members, this group consists of people who have their own boat or are considering getting one. This was the largest group that the survey was shared to, but yet the survey received such a small number of replies that it can be suggested this was the wrong audience. So an observation that can be made is that people who own their own boats rarely use charter services.

"Skärgårdsturism – Saaristomatkailu" (eng. "Archipelago Tourism") with 315 members from the Parainen area. This was a highly relevant group due to it existing specifically for matters about archipelago tourism and also in the correct area, Parainen and the Turku Archipelago.

“Öbundna – Saarretut” (eng. “Besieged”) with 637 members. This was also a highly relevant group from the region of Parainen and on the topic of the archipelago.

“Naiset kalastaa” (eng. “Women fishing”) with 656 members. This was not as secure a choice as the previous two since it is not directly linked to tourism, it was however considered a likelihood that the members could have used charter for fishing trips.

The main demographics of the survey are those aged 21-30, 41-50 and over 60. The majority were females. The Swedish audience mainly lives in Turku, Parainen and the Parainen archipelago (Nauvo and Houtskari). The Finnish audience lives in Helsinki, Turku and the third spot is shared equally between Parainen, Nauvo, Korppoo and Espoo.

In the Finnish survey the three main “triggers” for people to go on a trip are the wish to see/experience something new (71.1%), a break from everyday life (42.2%) and having heard someone talk about a place/an experience (37.8%).
In the Swedish survey the three main triggers were in the same order with the following percentages respectively 88.2%, 47.1% and 41.2%. Below, the Finnish respondents results can be observed. The question in English is “what works as a trigger to the idea that you want to go on a holiday trip”, and the replies are in order from top to bottom: a break from everyday life, the wish to experience/see something new, to learn something new, the wish to rest, seeing inspiring photos/videos, hearing someone telling about a place, hobby, needing to get from place A to B, be together with family and the knowledge about an upcoming vacation.

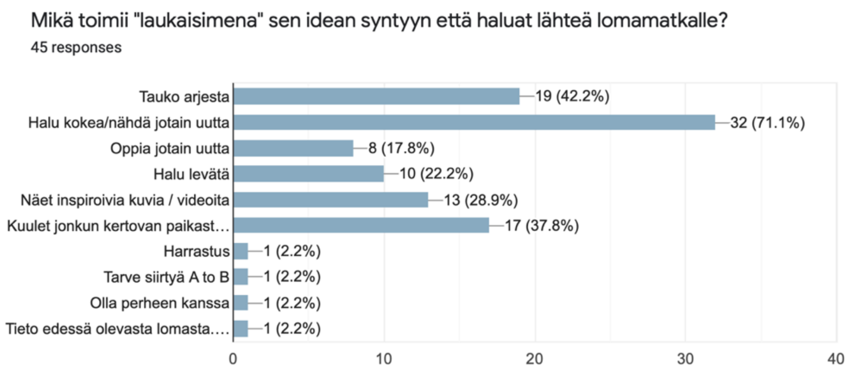

Figure 4. The triggers of deciding to go on a trip. (N=45)

38 out of 64 respondents find the service provider through searching on the internet. After that the two biggest are finding them on social media and hearing someone recommend them. 34 out of 64 respondents prefer email as the mode of communication with the provider.

On the question of the most important factor/s when choosing a specific provider, the results differed between the two languages. In the Swedish survey the most important one was that you have heard good things about the provider, meanwhile smooth communication was the most important factor in the Finnish survey. Number two and three in the Swedish survey were professional impression and then smooth communication. In the Finnish survey number two was professional ability and on a shared third place came that you have heard good things about them and that they are a local company. The graphs for both languages can be observed below, the survey question in English is “what factors affect that you choose a specific service provider?”:

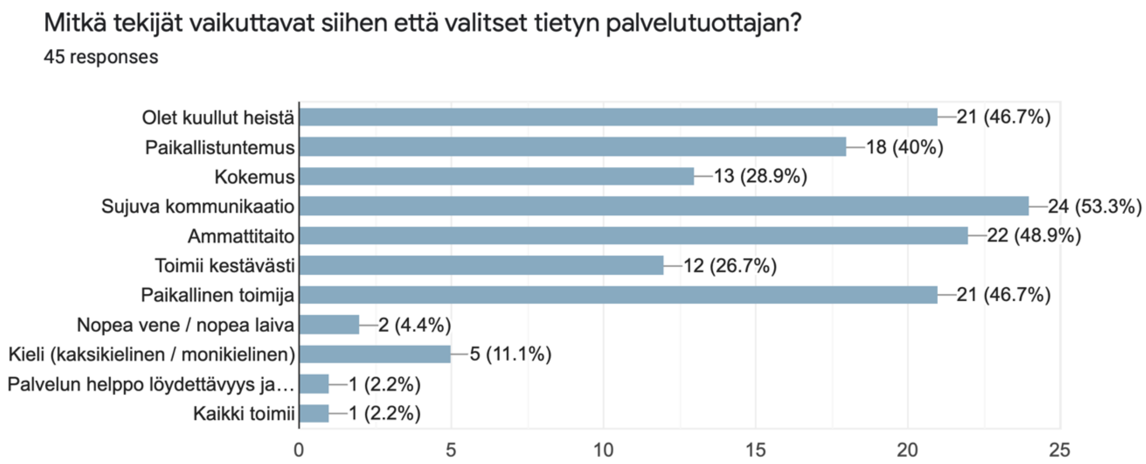

Figure 5. The Finnish replies on why they choose a specific provider. (N=45)

The replies of the Finnish audience are in order, from top to bottom, the following: you have heard about them, local knowledge, experience, fluent communication, professional expertise, works sustainably, local entrepreneur, fast vessel, language (bi- or multilingual), it is easy to find the service and that everything works.

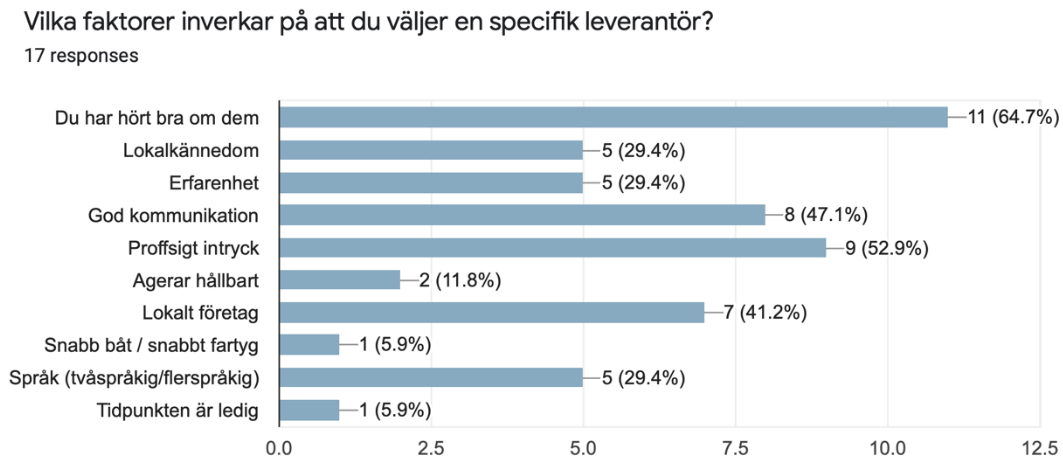

Figure 6. The Swedish replies on why they choose a specific provider. (N=17)

The replies of the Swedish audience are in order, from top to bottom, the following: you have heard well about them, local knowledge, experience, fluent communication, professional expertise, works sustainably, local entrepreneur, fast vessel, language (bi- or multilingual) and that a specific time/date is available.

The factors that can prevent both groups from buying from a certain provider were identical: number one was an expensive price, secondly bad/slow communication and thirdly, the condition of the vessel. For the Swedish crowd number three was shared also with lacking language skills. The graphs for both languages can be observed below:

Figure 7. The Finnish replies on what prevents them from buying from a specific provider. (N=45)

As can be seen, the results were pretty similar between the Finnish and Swedish audiences (Swedish below). The replies of the Finnish audience are in order, from top to bottom, the following: a high price, insufficient language skills, slow / bad communication, have not heard of them before, poor condition of the vessel, a slow vessel, a bad customer service experience, if things do not go fluently, lack of professional expertise, a general view of the entrepreneur from word-of-mouth.

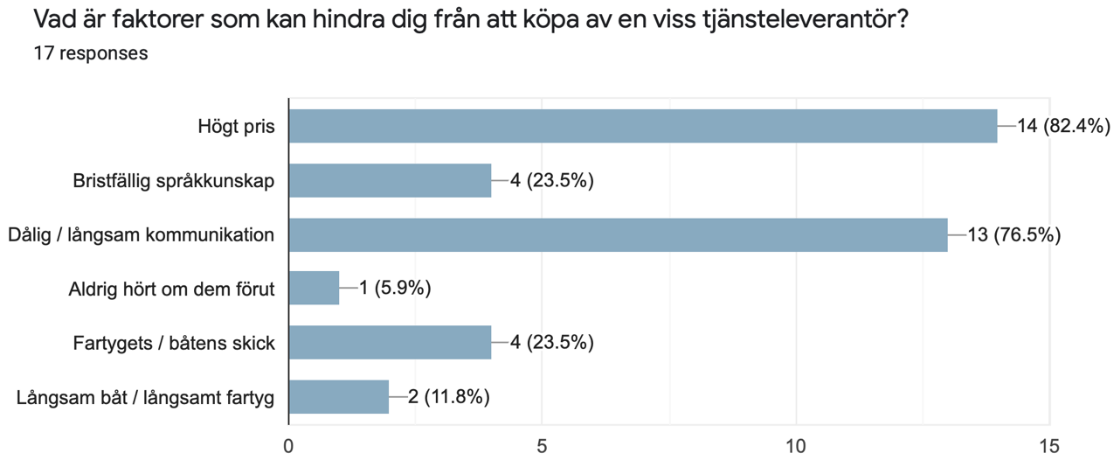

Figure 8. The Swedish replies on what prevents them from buying from a specific provider. (N=17)

The replies of the Swedish audience are in order, from top to bottom, the following: a high price, insufficient language skills, bad / slow communication, never heard about them before, condition of the vessel and a slow vessel.

As an experience both language groups expected to learn something about the places and the locals during the trip. Secondly, that the trip goes quickly and smoothly.
Both language groups would rather pay a higher price for a small group of passengers rather than have more passengers and pay a lower price, which in other words means that a large majority is prepared to pay a higher price for a more personal experience.

The most important criteria for the trip for the Finnish crowd was an affordable price, and then safety and local knowledge. Meanwhile the Swedish crowd rated local knowledge as the most important and then the experience factor as well as enough free time.

Both groups prefer free time over planned activities, but guided tours of the destinations were highly valued as well. Both crowds expect to feel like they have gained a new experience after the trip and they want to feel entertained.

The free comment section was mainly used by the Finnish respondents and some noteworthy comments from there include the wish for clear information on the website and social media, it should be easy to find and to understand. Cooperation between companies in the archipelago region was also valued highly since it makes for smooth traveling and provides versatile services. Below, some quotes and their translations:
“Iso ero jos matkan tekee ilman tai lasten kanssa, eri ohjelma”: A big difference if you go with or without children on the trip, the programme is different. This is a good point, one that someone without children would not consider. The trips of Aspö Charter are family friendly, many of the destinations offering activities for children as well.
”Ystävällinen palvelu on tärkeää sekä siisteys/hygienisuus”: friendly service is important, as well as cleanliness/hygiene. This comment is intellectual, the thought of hygiene is something that has most likely risen in the priorities of people during the COVID-19 pandemic.
“Det är alltid viktigt att understöda lokala företag”: it is always important to support local companies. This was a topic that many comments touched upon, and locality is highly valued.
” Sujuva yhteistyö eri yrittäjien välillä parantaisi palvelukokemusta, esimerkiksi aikataulujen yhteensopivuus”: fluent cooperation between entrepreneurs would improve the service experience as a whole, for example schedules fitting together. This is a fair point that the author has run into before as well, at the moment it can be quite a challenge to plan a trip in the archipelago fluently since schedules are seldom planned to go together.

The results of the survey can be observed in detail in appendix 3 in Finnish and appendix 4 in Swedish.

7 Conclusion

This thesis set up to research a buyer persona for the services of Aspö Charter, but the result ended up being that there are in fact two buyer persona for them – the leisure tourist buyer persona and the corporate buyer persona. Based on these results I would recommend Aspö Charter to develop a separate trip package for corporate groups, the most beneficial format would be to have a trip frame available with room for flexibility and tailoring it to the needs of the group. This is important since flexibility stood out as the most important factor for corporate customers. For the leisure tourists it is important to have clear, easy to find information available. Communication should also be fluent, since this is key for many of the leisure tourists. When planning their holiday they do not want to spend a lot of time digging for information and waiting on answers from the provider, planning and booking should be easy so that they can start awaiting and looking forward to their trip instead. During the trip it is important that they have a good amount of time to experience the destination, they prefer local entrepreneurs, communication should be fluent and the price level should be good – they are prepared to pay a higher price for a more personal experience but it can not be too expensive either.

Like mentioned before, this is classified as a research based thesis even though the research result could be classified as a product. The reason for this being a research thesis is that the process of creating buyer persona, is built upon research. First, the in-depth interviews were conducted. They brought lots of interesting insight, but 8 interviews is not a whole lot so one really understood the need for the survey that confirmed the findings of the interviews which worked as step two. Though the survey received a little less responses than expected, patterns could still be observed and there was enough material to reach a conclusion about the buyer personas. The buyer personas were created by extracting the information included in the Five Rings of Buyer Insight from the results of the research which was a great method for this aim.

8 Discussion

When conducting research it is important to consider the ethical viewpoint, this has been done by handling the results both from the interview and the survey so that no personal information can be connected to the interviewees and respondents of the survey. It is only the interviewer who knows the connection between the interview answers and the interviewees, this is to remain like this and the records as well as transcripts of the interviews will not be stored further upon publishing this thesis. Ethicality was also considered by informing the interviewees the purpose of the interviews before starting, informing them about the anonymity as well as asking for permission to record the interviews. Every interviewee accepted.

The method of creating buyer persona was a new research method for me and in general a bit unusual, usually it would have been done the other way around – first the survey to narrow down the topic, and then interviews to gain further insight. This learning curve in itself has affected the process, but that is to be expected when learning new skills.

My suggestion on further research is to focus solely on the cycling tourists on The Archipelago Trail and build a persona upon them, since there is so much untapped potential in that market and those people that have already come into the archipelago to experience it would probably be keen to see even the more isolated parts - if they only knew about it.

My main learning goals for the thesis have been to learn about buyer personas and the method of creating them as well as deepening my research skills. I believe these goals have been met and I am certain I will have great use of this knowledge and these skills in future work within marketing.

The thesis process in itself can be a bit of a challenge, and the circumstances of this past year has made it even more so. I have noticed big effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in my thesis writing process – time management, stress management and a general lack of motivation. When your life changes dramatically and you have to worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones and a large portion of your social life disappears, you really start to understand Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Both of these belong in the lower levels of the hierarchy: safety as well as love and belonging. When basic needs such as these suffer, it is difficult to find motivation for something higher up in the hierarchy such as studying – which falls somewhere inbetween the two highest levels of the hierarchy: esteem and self-actualization. The thesis process has still been a very educational process, probably even more so due to the difficult circumstances. It has brought a lot of knowledge in both familiar and unfamiliar topics, and a whole new skill has been gained – namely the method of creating a buyer persona.

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Visit Parainen, 2020c. A map of The Archipelago Trail.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview questions

Background information:
Gender, age, what sort of charter service they have used.

Opening question (an invitation to explain the buyer journey):
Imagine that you are booking a trip or think about a charter trip that you have done. Describe the process in as much detail as possible. From the idea forming to what you feel like afterwards.

Leading interview questions (based on the process presented in my theoretical framework):

1. **(Priority initiative**)
   What triggers you to start looking for a trip/holiday?

2. **(Success factors)**
   What do you expect from this trip/holiday? What do you want to feel/be different afterwards?

3. **(Perceived barriers)**
   What can be factors stopping you from buying from a certain provider?

4. **(Buyer journey)**
   What is the process you go through when buying a trip, from start to going to afterwards? *(Main question)*

5. **(Decision criteria)** What are the deciding factors of the trip that you choose to buy?

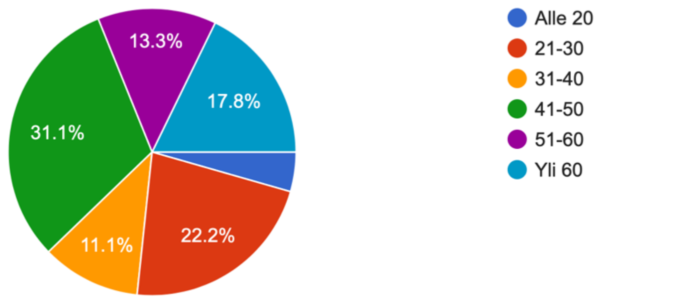
Appendix 2 – Survey questions translated to English

1. Age?
2. Where do you live?
3. Gender?
4. What works as a trigger to the idea that you want to go on a trip?
5. How do you find the service provider?
6. How do you prefer to communicate with the provider?
7. What affects your choice of a specific provider?
8. What can prevent you from buying from a certain provider?
9. What do you expect from the trip as an experience?
10. Which one would you rather choose:
    - A small passenger number but a higher price, makes for a more personal experience, or
    - an affordable price but with a lot of other passengers
11. What is the most important factor of a trip? And how important a factor is the price?
12. What else do you expect from the trip?
13. After the trip, what should it feel like?
14. Any last comment?

Appendix 3 - Survey questions and results in Finnish

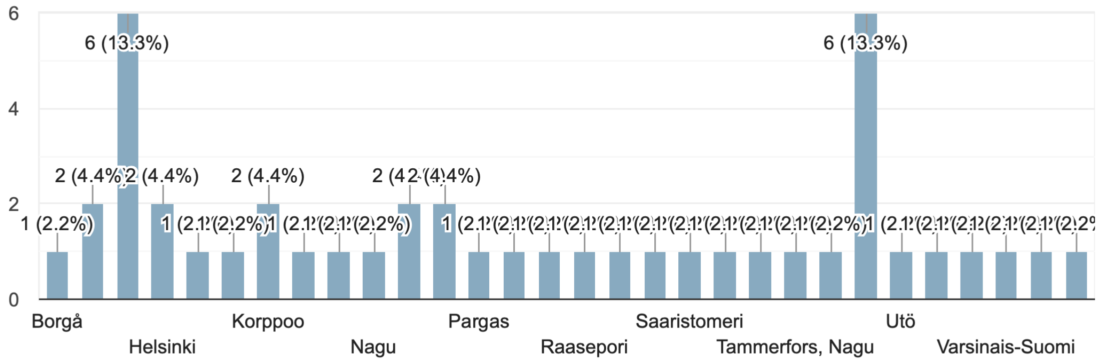
Ikä?

45 responses



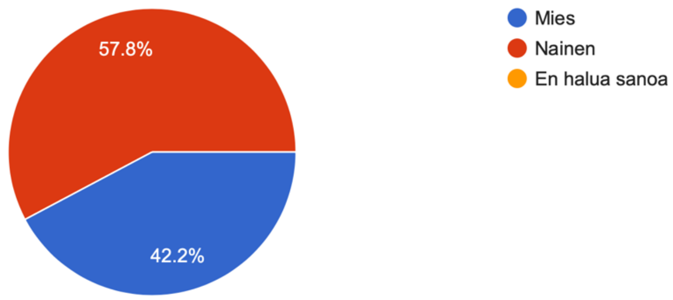
Missä asut?

45 responses

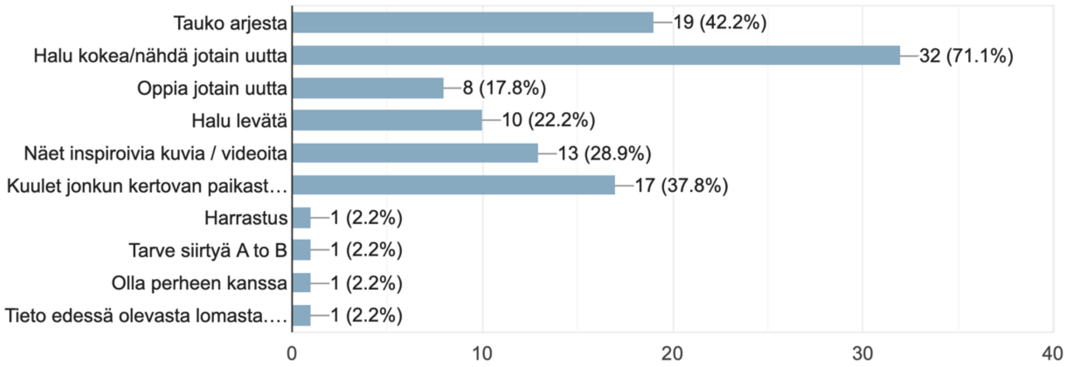


Sukupuoli

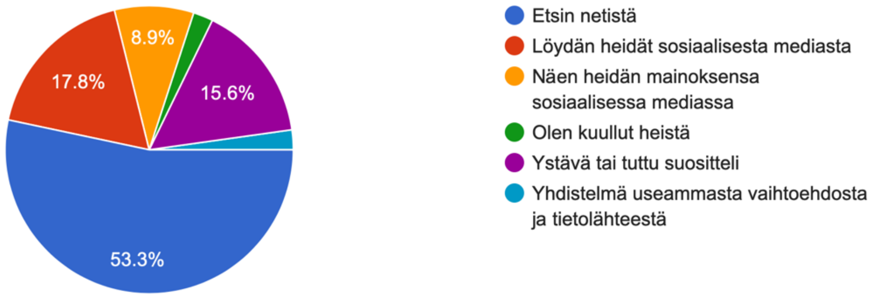
45 responses



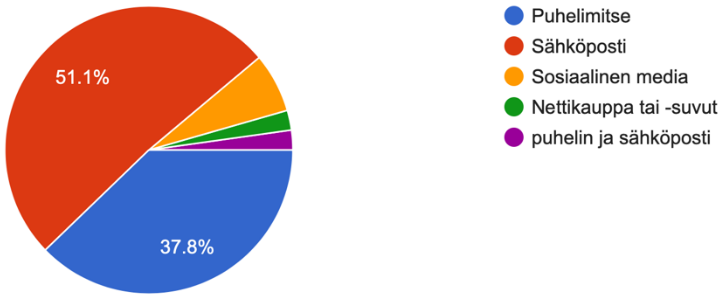
Mikä toimii "laukaisimena" sen idean syntyyn että haluat lähteä lomamatkalle?
45 responses



Miten löydät palvelutuottajan?
45 responses

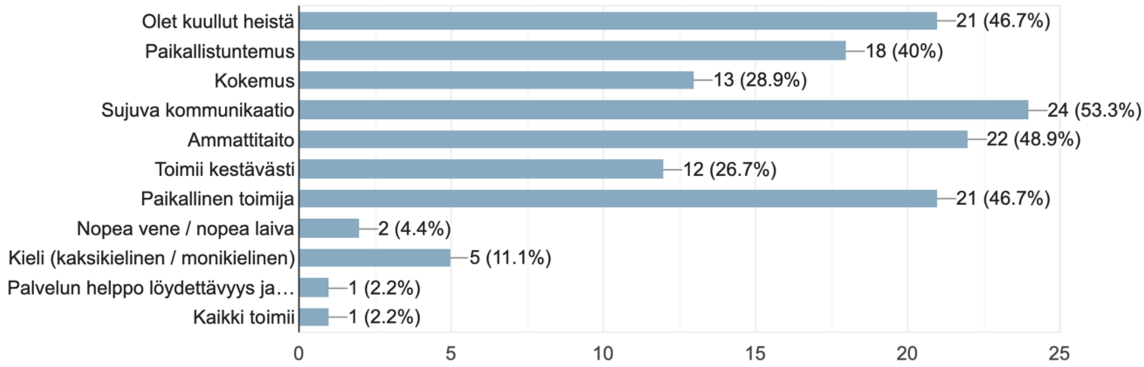


Miten mieluiten kommunikoit tuottajan kanssa?
45 responses



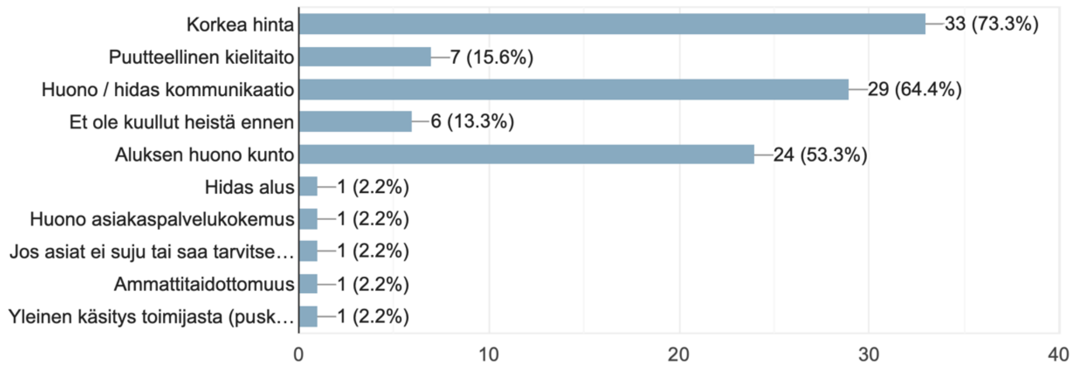
Mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat siihen että valitset tietyn palvelutuottajan?

45 responses



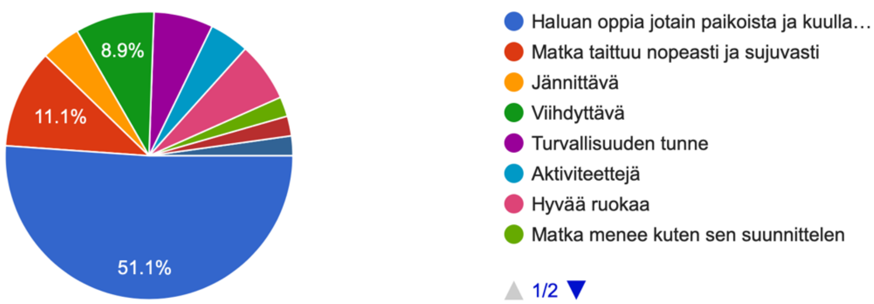
Mitkä tekijät voivat estää sinua ostamasta tietyltä tuottajalta?

45 responses

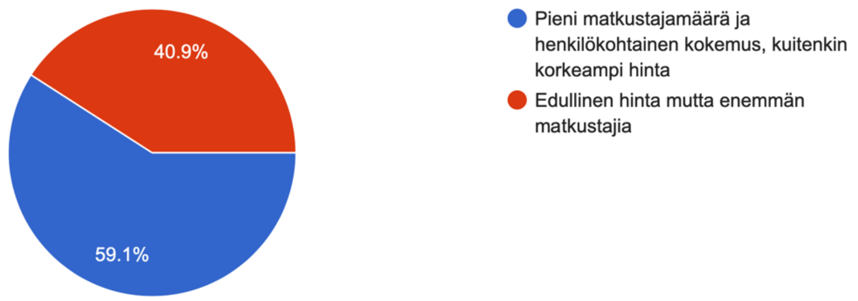


Mitä odotat matkalta elämyksenä?

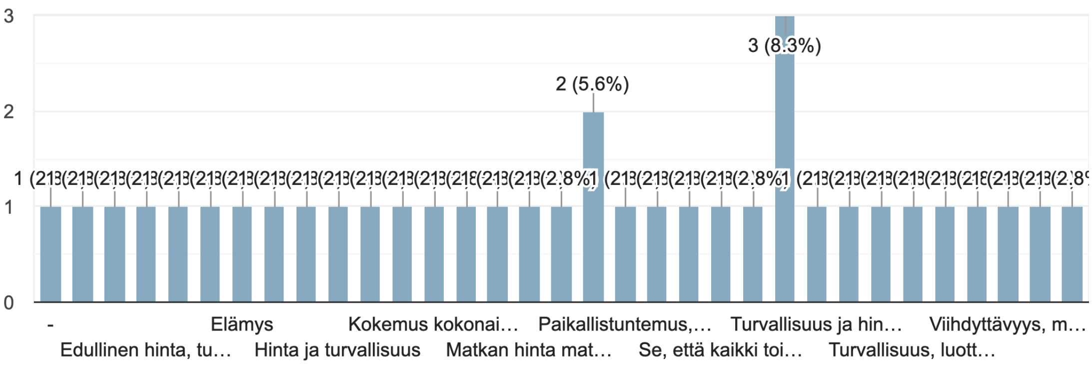
45 responses



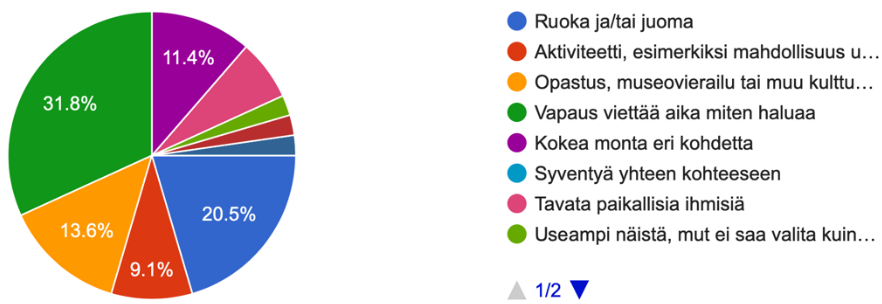
Kumman valitset mieluummin?
44 responses



Mikä on tärkein tekijä matkassa? Ja, kuinka tärkeä tekijä on matkan hinta?
36 responses

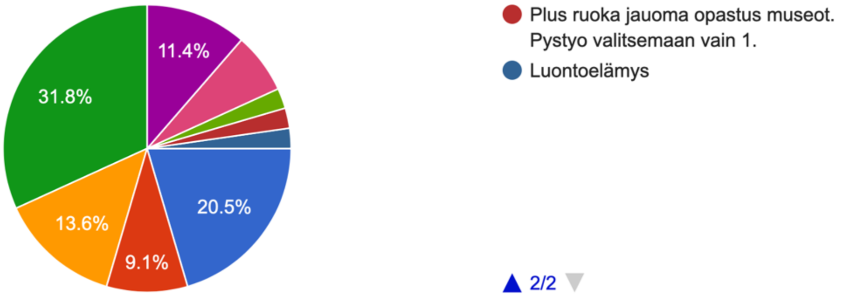


Mitä muuta toivot matkalta?
44 responses



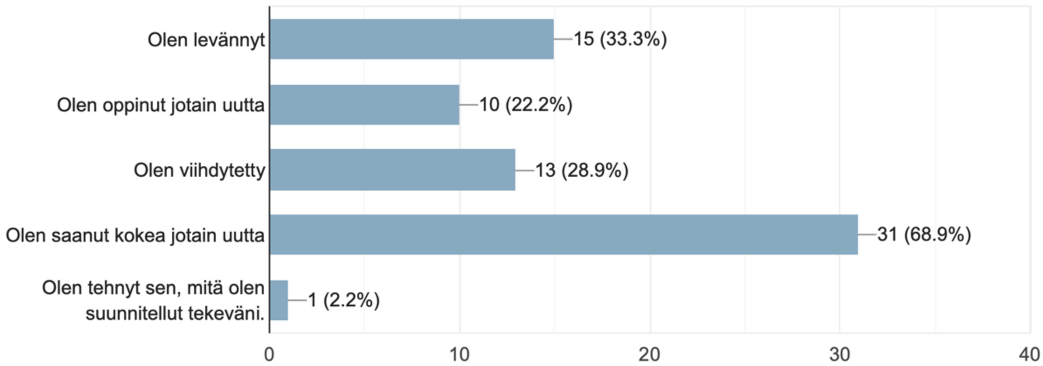
Mitä muuta toivot matkalta?

44 responses



Matkan jälkeen - miltä pitäisi tuntua?

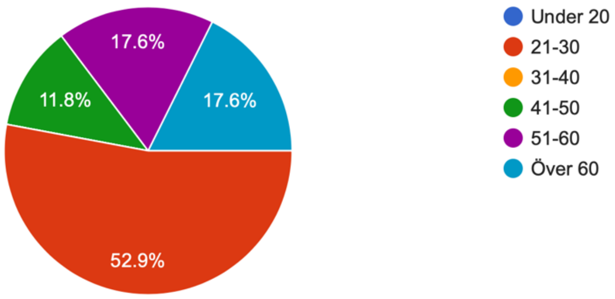
45 responses



Appendix 4 - Survey questions and results in Swedish

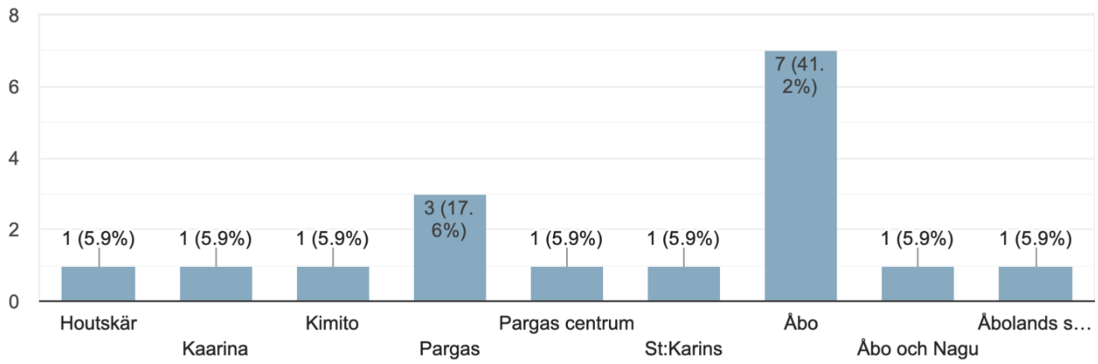
Ålder?

17 responses



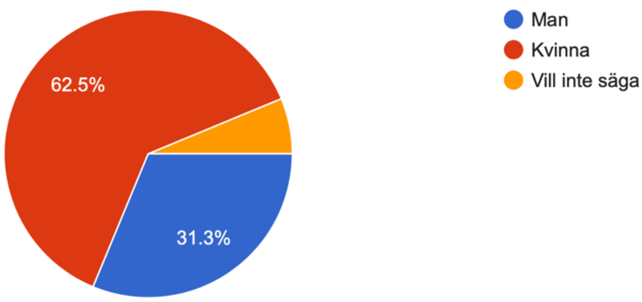
Var är du bosatt?

17 responses

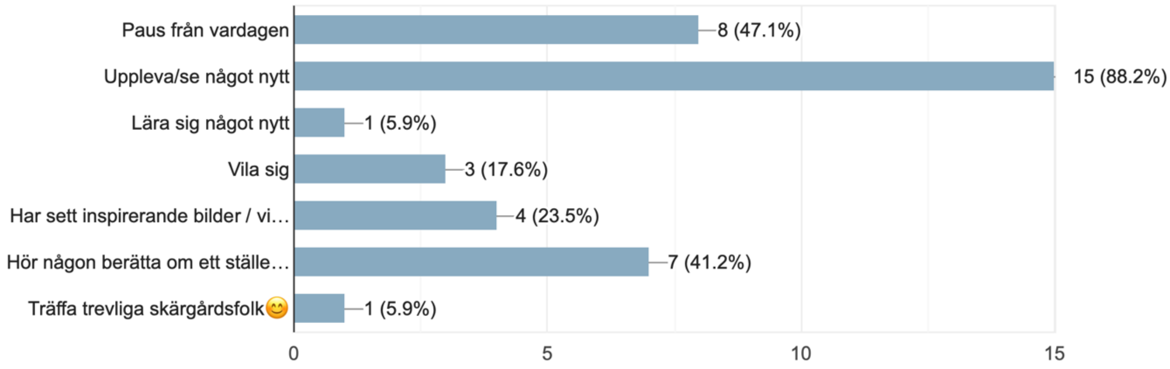


Kön

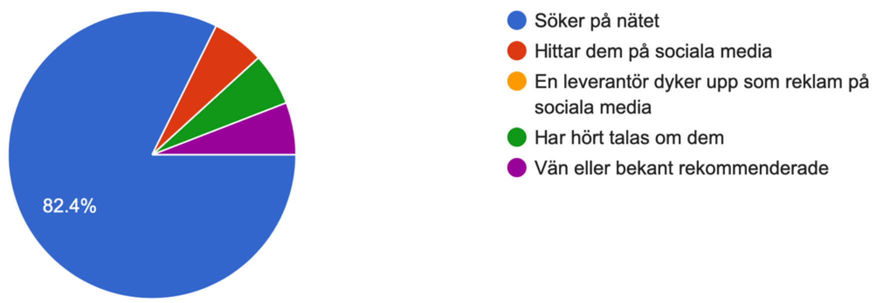
16 responses



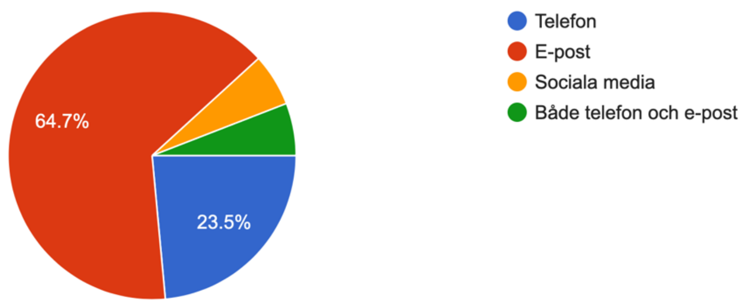
Vad är 'triggern' till att du vill åka iväg på en semesterutflykt?
17 responses



Hur hittar du leverantör?
17 responses

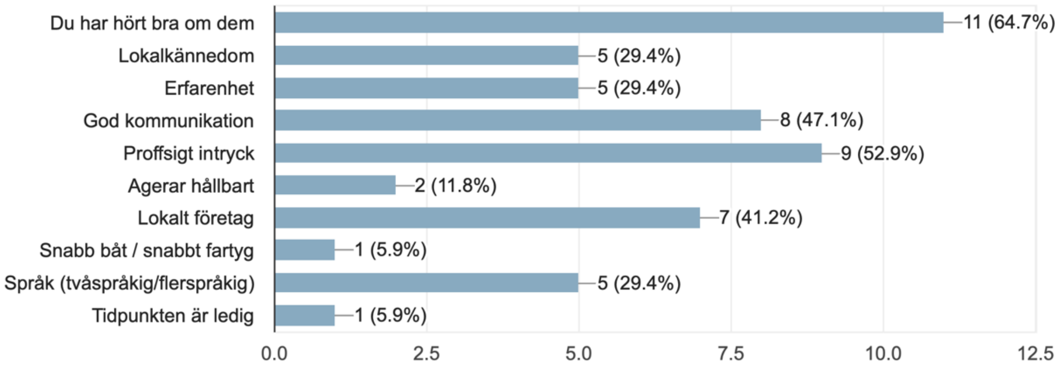


Hur kommunicerar du helst med leverantören?
17 responses



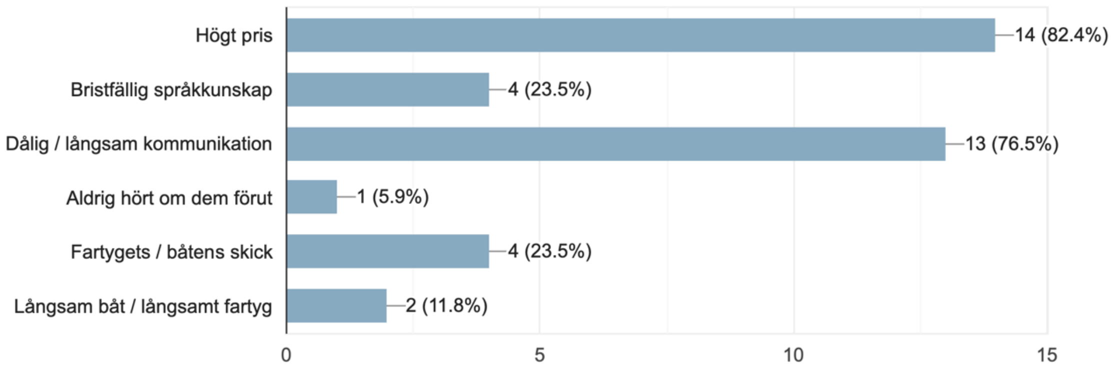
Vilka faktorer inverkar på att du väljer en specifik leverantör?

17 responses



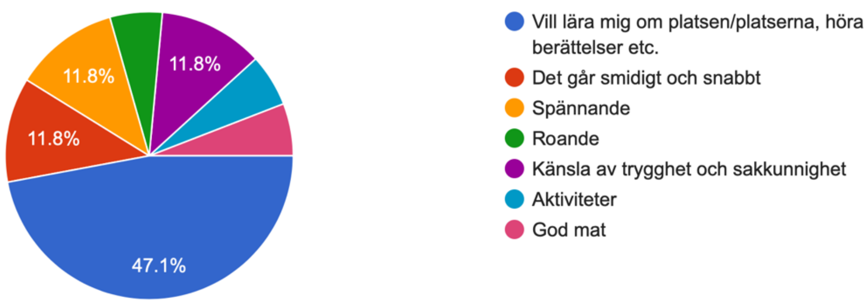
Vad är faktorer som kan hindra dig från att köpa av en viss tjänsteleverantör?

17 responses

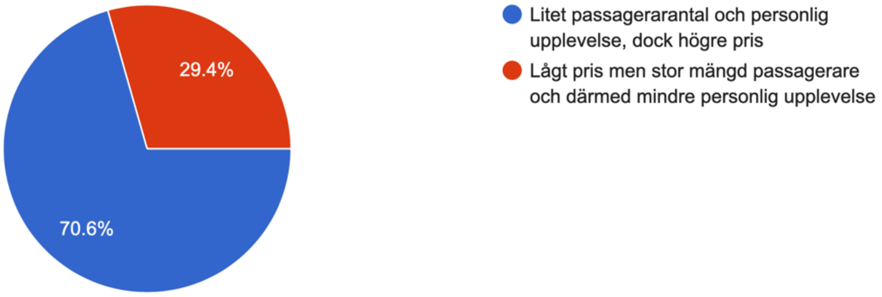


Vad förväntar du dig av resan som upplevelse?

17 responses



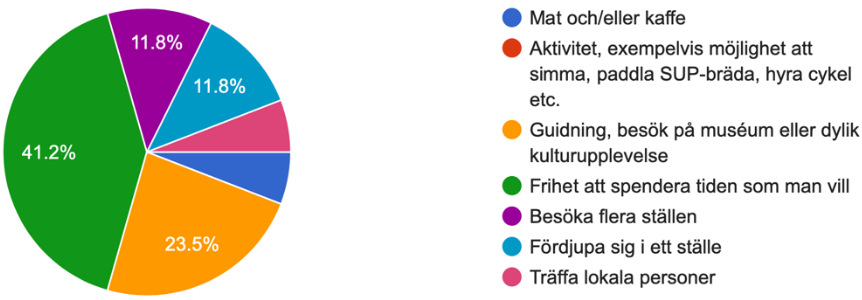
Vilket väljer du hellre?
17 responses



Vad är den viktigaste kriterien för resan? Och, hur högt kommer ett bra pris bland kriterierna?
13 responses

Nya ställen
Upplevelsen !
En upplevelse
Får inte ge känsla av överpris. Lokalkännedom ger mervärde. Inte för bundet och tight program.
Lokalkännedom, kunskap
Trygghet, lokalkännedom
Lokalkännedom viktigt. Får inte vara för lyxig båt, mera klimat-tänk med långsam båt som inte ger stora vågor och buller. Priset mittemellan.
Att man är fri att välja eget program och att båtarna endast tar en till olika ställen
Trygghet och bekvämt
Lugnt och fridfullt, trygghet, ett pris som motsvarar det man erbjuds
Smidighet
Lokalkännedom, priset är ganska viktigt
I vetan om att man är i bra händer och proffsigt vetande om både vattenområden och körande.

Vad vill du ha under resan?
17 responses



Hur vill du att ska kännas efter resan?

17 responses