

Do the services for children offered in Helsinki hotels meet the preferences of family travellers?

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20 April 2016



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Degree Program in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management	
Do the services for children offered in Helsinki hotels meet the preferences of family travelers?	Number of pages and appendix pages 42 + 5
<p>Meeting the needs of family travellers by catering to the children is a way for hotels to attract these profitable guests. The objective of this thesis is to analyse the services offered for children in four Helsinki hotels and evaluate whether they meet the needs and preferences of current domestic and international travellers. The preliminary hypothesis is that the hotels chosen to represent the hotel market in Helsinki offer similar services; that do not meet current traveller preferences. This thesis aims to be a useful tool for hotels in Helsinki to understand the preferences of current family travellers and possibly assist in choosing what services to offer children.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of the thesis covers segmentation, different motives for family members to travel, and preferences of family travellers. The travel trends of millennials and multigenerational travellers are discussed. Finally, the accommodation market of Helsinki is evaluated. The research is completed with a competitive benchmarking of four Helsinki hotels. These hotels are four different large brands to represent the Helsinki market. They are chosen as a result of having marketed themselves strongly as child-friendly on their brand websites; thus indicating that these brands have the strongest strategies for attracting and serving families. In addition, a questionnaire is completed to better understand the preferences of current family travellers.</p> <p>Highlights of the results include the benchmarking proving that the hotels target similar segments and offer many similar services. Some of which, proved highly unimportant to families in the questionnaire. The questionnaire showed that there is little difference in the preferences of millennial travellers vs.non-millennials. Improvement suggestions for each hotel are discussed, however the key suggestions are to update the brand websites and find different family segments to target to gain a competitive advantage over the other Helsinki hotels. However, most importantly, many of the services for children need to be updated to meet the preferences of current family travellers.</p>	
Keywords	
Children, Hotel Services, Family Travel, Helsinki	

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1 Introduction

Children, including babies to adolescents, make up a substantial amount of the world's population; they are valuable influencers within their families as well as the travel and hospitality industry. More specifically, the preferences and experiences of children indirectly and directly influence the purchasing behaviour of the adults travelling with them. (Carr, 1-2.) Focusing their services on children, hotels can help attract children and their families which according to hotels.com (2013.) make up the largest segment in leisure travel, averaging 4.5 travels per U.S. family each year. Common services for children include extra beds or cots in hotel rooms, high chairs in restaurants, a playroom, swimming pools, arts and crafts, games, animators, and more. Each hotel that chooses to target and serve family travellers can specify what segments of family travels and children they wish to attract. After finding the appropriate segment of travellers, the services to meet the needs and preferences of that segment can be designed. It is important for hotels to have a clear understanding what services their target guests prefer and expect. Only with clear segmentation and products to meet the target segment's wants, can hotels achieve a competitive advantage in the market.

The hotels in Helsinki host approximately 50% leisure guests, with the peak season being the summer month of July. In 2014, 47% of guests were domestic and 53% international guests. (The City of Helsinki 2015.) The largest competitors in the Helsinki hotel market are the chains of Restel, Sokotel, Scandic Hotels, and Kämp Hotels. When comparing different Helsinki hotel websites, it is evident that the upscale to luxury chain hotels in Helsinki offer little services for children. In mid-scale or upper mid-scale chains there is a larger variety of services. However, when comparing the services for children of different hotels, the services at first glance seem fairly similar. Is this a result to all the hotels targeting the same sub-segments of family travellers? Or are hotels in Helsinki overall lacking originality in their services? This is what the thesis will evaluate.

Definitions for potentially unclear terms:

Brand.com website: a term used to indicate a hotel's, brand's or chain's own webpage; not that of a third party.

Mid-scale / Upscale / Luxury hotels: terms used to identify different hotels or chains in relation to their average daily rate.

Competitive set: a competitive set is a group of hotels used primarily for comparison against a subject property for performance benchmarking purposes (STR 2015).

1.1 Aim and objective of the thesis

This topic was chosen for the following two reasons. Whilst working in hotels and also travelling with her daughter, the author came to notice that little attention is given to the services targeted for children in hotels. Even a hotel that markets itself as child friendly may in fact end up meeting little of the expectations. Secondly, the author primarily perceives the hotels in Helsinki to offer similar services to one another; and these services lacking innovation and originality. This report aims to assist hotels in understanding how much potential there is within family travellers, what services they expect, and what their competing hotels are offering. This way hotels can better edit their services and strategies to gain competitive advantage. Being from Helsinki, the author wants to contribute locally to her industry and thus the location of Helsinki was chosen as the focus of the thesis.

Achieving a competitive advantage on attracting family travellers for Helsinki hotels can be challenging. The aim of this thesis is to help hotels evaluate the competition's services and strategies; and through that be able to improve their own business strategy. This thesis will not only be relevant for the evaluated hotels, but for any hotel wanting to improve their market share in the family traveller segments. The thesis will research four hotels to represent the market in Helsinki. The objective of the thesis is to benchmark what services the hotels offer children and whether they meet the wants of current domestic and international travellers.

1.2 The research

The thesis begins by studying different types of segmentation. This is followed by the examination of current family member preferences and travel motives. The thesis continues by investigating the different trends in family travel, specifically millennials and multigenerational travellers. The theory ends with the short evaluation of Helsinki as a destination. For the research of the thesis, the services of a competitive set in Helsinki are benchmarked. The hotels are chosen primarily on the basis of how much they market themselves as child-friendly on their brand.com websites. This is done over the assumption that the hotels who market themselves as family-friendly will offer the most services for children and have a stronger strategy on targeting family guests. The four different brands are chosen to represent the suppliers of the accommodation market in Helsinki. With four large chains operating most of the hotels in Helsinki, choosing hotels from these chains well represents a large portion of the suppliers market. Information for the benchmarking is gathered via the hotels' brand.com websites and qualitative email interviews with hotel representatives. The benchmarking is analysed with a goal to identify differences in the services offered in each hotel, each hotel's market position, and what sub-segments of family travellers each hotel targets.

In addition to the benchmarking, an online questionnaire is analysed to understand the family traveller preferences regarding services for children in hotels. The questionnaire is answered by both domestic and international respondents. It is valuable to gather opinions from both international and domestic respondents because this better represents the hotel guests in Helsinki. The questionnaire primarily results in quantitative results, however a couple of questions produce qualitative results. The preferences of the questionnaire respondents are compared to the services of the benchmarked hotels to evaluate whether the four hotels in Helsinki meet the preferences of family travellers. Variables of the research include the number of children guests in Helsinki, the amount of services offered to children in hotels, the amount of hotels, and potential guest preferences.

The research question for the thesis is:

A comparative study of the services offered for children in four Helsinki hotels; do they meet the wants of current family travellers?

Furthermore, an additional research question for the thesis is:

Could services be more uniquely developed to meet the requirements of current family travellers?

The preliminary hypothesis is that the services offered by Helsinki hotels are similar to one another and target similar segments. Furthermore, the services do not focus on creating memorable and intangible experiences. With the segments of millennial parents and growing trend in multigenerational travel, the services in hotels may need to be updated to meet the needs of these travellers. Ideally, this thesis will reveal if the services offered currently by Helsinki hotels are enough to meet current traveller preferences or if they could be updated to achieve a competitive advantage.

2 Segmentation

Segmentation is the process of identifying guests into different homogeneous groups that share the same interests and needs (Lynn 2011). The main advantages of segmentation for an organization is to identify the needs and preferences of the current and target customers. Through this an organization can more effectively adapt their services to meet these preferences; consequently, positioning themselves over competitors. Effective segmentation will furthermore enable an organization to identify the market segments that are most profitable and focus their services on them specifically. Through effective segmentation, companies can discover profitable, untouched, niche markets. Segmentation of customers and choosing the target segment for a company can be done in a three-stage process: firstly, dividing the market into different segments with similar needs, secondly the segments which are most suitable for the company are chosen, and finally the services and products are optimized to meet the needs of the segments chosen. The core assumption behind market segmentation is that an organization cannot meet all the requirements of all people, thus the best way to achieve a competitive advantage is to meet the needs of specific target markets and focus the company business strategy on them. (Morritt 2009, 4-8.) A few methods for segmenting customers include geographical, demographic, purpose of trip or product segmentation. These will be described shortly below.

2.1 Types of segmentation

Geographical segmentation is commonly used in the hospitality industry. This is the practice of segmenting customers according to their geographical location. This can be as little as a 10 km radius of the hotel to an entire continent. For example, the restaurant of a hotel may focus on attracting the locals of the area whilst the rooms department targets certain nationalities. In this example, the rooms department and restaurant have localized which guests are most profitable in terms of the final guests' location. Even though certain needs are common by customers from the same location, geographical segmentation does not specify the many varied needs that may be applicable to customers in the same area. Thus it is necessary to use other forms of segmentation as well. Such as demographic segmentation, the segmentation according to age, education, income, gender, family size, and ethnicity. For example, using age as a variable for segmentation, customers can be categorized into young, middle aged, or mature categories. (Morritt 2009, 17-19.) For families, life cycle analysis can be done for the specification of what life stage the family is at currently. The different life cycles for families with children are according to Cahill (2006,139):

- 1) Full Nest I Stage – Families with under school aged children. Commonly are price sensitive, especially if one of the parents is still not back in the working life.

- 2) Full Nest II Stage – Families with all children in school. Most likely financially stable, showing more spending on children's goods and services.
- 3) Full Nest III Stage – Families with teenagers.

Purpose of trip segmentation is primarily used to categorize customers into business and leisure segments. From these, sub-segments can be derived. For example, business customers can be sub-segmented into corporate, associations or convention travellers. Although leisure and business travellers may have clear differences between needs and price sensitivity, it is beneficial to sub-segment to get a clearer image of your target segment and their needs. Product segmentation involves segmenting around a product or service. For example, building an elderly resort will consequently result in targeting the elderly segment. Likewise, building budget, middle tier, all-suite, and luxury hotels will result in targeting segments with the need for these features. Product segmentation is often affiliated with price segmentation, where segments are categorized according to their price sensitivity. A common mistake is creating products according to common practices in the industry or managerial intuition without proper market research, thus resulting in services that do not meet the customer preferences. (Morritt 2009, 20-22.) An example of this mistake is mimicking the services for children of a competitor assuming this is the best practice.

A common form of deriving to the family segment is using the purpose of trip strategy. For example, the market is divided according to the purpose of travel: business and leisure guests. Hotels classify family guests to be a sub-segment of the leisure segment. However, it may be beneficial to include another form of segmentation as well to limit the leisure family segment. (Morritt 2009, 20.) For example, geographical segmentation can be used to limit the target market to a specific nationality of leisure family guests. The more specific the target market is, the higher the possibility to find common needs for services within that market.

2.2 The family segment

It is important to remember the different constructs of families. Each hotel or brand may have their own assumptions for the construct of a family. It is important to remember that the traditional views of a family are changing. The Oxford dictionary (2015) defines family as "a group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit" or "a group of people related by blood or marriage". However, in the hospitality industry the family clientele has evolved vastly from this traditional construct of a family. According to Rainer Jenss, president and founder of Family Travel Association, only about 25-30% of families consist of mom, dad and children (Poder 2015). A family may consist of adult

members other than parents, or children other than their own. It is important to recognize different constructs of families when segmenting potential guests.

Commonly when discussing family travel, it is assumed that the guests are travelling for leisure with children. According to Hotels.com, family travel is the largest segment in leisure travel. Each family travels on average 4.5 times a year. (Hotels.com 2013.) According to a study by MKG and Olakala in France (Hospitality Think Tank 2014), over half of the responding hoteliers indicated that 10-30% of their guests were family travellers, mostly visiting in the summer season for leisure.

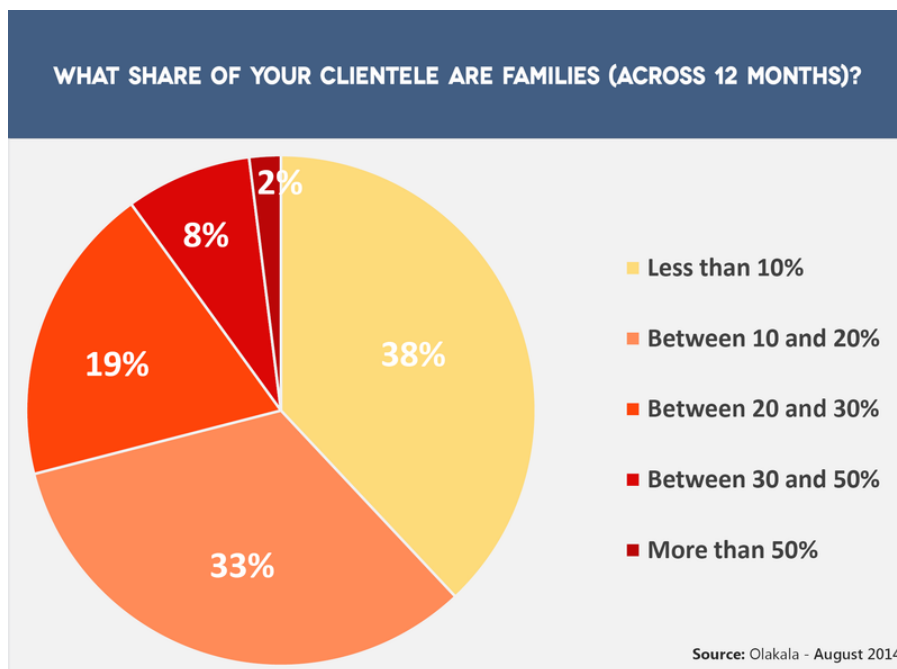


Figure 1 – Family clientele in French hotels (Hospitality Think Tank 2014)

According to the study, 62% of hotels have a guest base consisting of over 10% families travelling with children. The hoteliers who responded with having family travellers as under 10% of their clientele have evidently decided to focus on different customer segments. These statistics demonstrate that family travellers are not a segment to be underestimated. (Hospitality Think Tank 2014)

3 Family traveller preferences

Numerous studies have been conducted to understand what family travellers prefer. According to the TMS Family Travel Summit (2013), best practices for hotels to meet the preferences of family travellers are to offer affordable vacations, maximise memory making opportunities, provide larger family rooms, serve healthier kids menus, and provide activities for all ages. On the other hand, a study by Holiday Inn Resort showed that the top reasons that families go on vacation are to have fun, take a break from routines, and spend time together. The top features parents consider when choosing a hotel are: swimming pool, kids' suites, kids-eat-free programs, and special on-site activities for children. The study also found the biggest challenge for parents is saving money when planning a vacation. The replies however are most likely limited to the users of the Holiday Inn brand. (Holiday Inn 2013)

According to Hotels.com the top five characteristics of family travellers are: value consciousness, making memories, health and safety, fun for the entire family, and staycations. The need for value can be seen with many families looking for deals such as free breakfast or 50% off a second room to add value to their reservation. In addition to creating memories, families increasingly find the need for health and wellness on vacations. The study concluded that families are expecting fun and activities for both children and adults. Finally, staycations can offer a family vacation with less travel expenses. By staying close to home, the amount of travel is decreased and the time at the destination is increased. (Hotels.com 2013.)

A study by Wilska (2011) completed with Finnish respondents agrees strongly on the need for affordable and well-priced vacations. According to her study, friendly and reliable staff, along with a safe, calm and clean environment are what domestic family travellers are looking for. Family time is cherished and sought after, however memory making and experiential activities are not as important to domestic travellers and international travellers. According to her study parents appreciate playrooms and T.V areas, more specifically parents prefer practical services for children. (Wilska 2011) There is some contradiction with the results of the studies. However discounted prices, family time, and activities for children were preferences of family travellers indicated in all results.

3.1 Children's desires for family vacations

Inevitably children's desires and motivations for vacations vary vastly, especially when comparing different age groups. For under pre-school aged children (0-5 years old) the needs and desires tend to be similar regardless to whether they are on vacation or at

home. For babies, it is more essential that the destination offers a baby friendly and safe environment. Toddlers and pre-school aged children may be intrigued by their surroundings and be active movers, but nonetheless are still highly dependent on their parents. For children aged 5-12, their social and language skills have developed to such a level that they are able to compare themselves and contrast themselves to others. Social encounters such as school and hobbies give them the tools to construct their own holiday desires and motivations. Most likely being exposed to toys, movies and marketing campaigns targeted towards children will affect the motivations children have for travels. For children in this age group, swimming pools, adventure parks, and beaches tend to be in high favour. For teenagers the motivations for travel tend to vary to that of their parents. Teenagers have a need to create their own personal identity and on travels want to participate in adult-like activities rather than children's activities. In many cases, teenagers travel preference is to travel with friends rather than family. (Carr 2011, 42-45.)

According to the outdoor holiday provider Eurocamp, the 10 most wanted activities by children are: water based fun, building a sand castle, spotting animals at the zoo, playing hide and seek, eating out at new restaurants, BBQ suppers, adventuring to a castle, visiting farms, having a countryside strolls, and flying a kite. The poll surveyed 1500 families with children under the age of 11. Coincidentally, the study found technology to play little interest within families during vacation and for traditional activities to still be popular. The study found that 76% of families felt their family bonds are strongest when doing activities together on vacation. (Eade 2014.)

3.2 Children as influencers

HomeAway is the largest online vacation rental marketplace. Last year they interviewed 2,800 children (ages 6 to 18) and parents to identify how large of an influence children have on their family vacations. Results showed that 49% of parents say their children help decide on the type of destination and 77% of parents in the U.S.A say their children decide on the activities made on vacations. Around 60% of parents in the U.S.A view children's contributions as a guarantee to keep the children happy on vacation. Most (53%) include their children in planning the family vacations to get them excited about the coming trip, 42% say they include their children in the planning so the children can learn new things, and 24% include their children in the planning process as an educational opportunity. (Hotel News Now 2015.)

According to the study, children enjoy new experiences and adventures by 60% and having experiences they would not be able to have at home by 63%. Children also showed interest in staying in unique accommodations such as castles, tree houses, airplanes or

train. However, 37% mentioned the pool to be the most important facility at a hotel. (Hotel News Now 2015.)

This survey shows that children are a key contributor to planning travels and hotels need to keep in mind that the littlest of the family may have the final word on the accommodation facilities chosen by families. Since new experiences ranked high on preferences by children, hotels may need to emphasize on experiential and intangible services.

4 Trends in Family Travel

In this chapter the new trend of millennials as the next generation of parents and multigenerational travellers will be discussed. The growth of these trends, the influence of these trends on the industry, as well as their high potential as guest segments will be discussed.

4.1 Millennials, the next generation of parents

Families, as any other market segment, changes with generations and new trends. Millennials, a generation following generation X, have in recent years joined the family travel segment. Millennials bring new trends and habits to the segment of family travellers. Such habits being higher frequency in travel, increasing a child's influence on vacation planning, and higher spending per trip. Millennials closely hold the title of "most likely to travel" since 7 in 10 millennials took over one leisure vacation in 2014 (Chen 2015). In the previously mentioned survey by HomeAway, 19% of millennial parents in the U.S.A are likely to give children full control on their vacation plans, whereas only 2% of parents over the age of 55 are willing to give that control to children. Also 34% of millennial parents give children the final decision to where they will go on vacation, whereas only 8% of the parents over 55 years of age. (Hotel News Now 2015.) According to Phocuswright's recently published U.S. Consumer Travel Report - Seventh Edition, millennials travelling with families have one of the highest average spending per trip at \$1, 683 (Chen 2015). This shows that millennials travelling with children are a great segment for hotels attracting family travellers due to their higher spending habits. However, it is important to focus on attracting the children and not so much the parents since children have an important say in the choice of hotel.

According to a study by MMGY Global the top activities of interest in millennials are:

- 81% - having enough time to relax and unwind
- 79% - a destination I have never visited before
- 78% - safety of the destination
- 76% - an opportunity to try new and unusual cuisine

(Terrero 2014.)

The previously mentioned trend of staycations is growing particularly with millennials. According to James Shillinglaw on Travel Pulse, 55% of millennials took a vacation close to home within June 2014 - June 2015. The trend is on the rise by 14% from the previous year and 23% since 2013 (Shillinglaw 2015). Staycations can provide a budget-friendly and time-saving option for a vacation. Hotels.com define a staycation to be a vacation at a

location within 80 kilometres from home, however other sources may define it as staying in the same city as one's home or driving distance from the home. (hotels.com 2013)

4.2 Multigenerational travel

An increasing trend in the family leisure segment is multigenerational travel. Preferred Hotel Group classifies this as "one of the hottest trends in travel and hospitality". In their study in 2011 they discovered that in the past 12 months 40% of active leisure travellers have taken at least one multigenerational trip. A multigenerational trip is defined as a trip inclusive of three or more generations. Of the interviewees in the U.S.A, 33% had taken a trip to Europe. This represents 2.75 million multigenerational travellers a year. (Preferred Hotels 2011.) Jens Rainer, president and founder of Family Travel Association, mentions that out of the travel industry in 2015, multigenerational travel has grown to represent 33-40% (Poder 2015). There are several reasons for multigenerational travel to be a popular form of travel. The first reason being, that the generation of baby boomers have become grandparents and seem to have the wants and finances to travel with their grandchildren. Up to 35% of grandparents feel they have the responsibility to finance family vacations that a family may otherwise not be able to finance. 26% of grandparents in the U.S.A said they had taken a vacation with their grandchild within the past year. Baby boomers tend to view travel as a must-have rather than a luxury. Secondly, families are living further apart than ever, causing the need to travel together as an option to spend time together. Finally, with the fast-passed lifestyles of the 21st century, the amount of evenings and weekends together with the family has lessened, leaving family vacations as the only way to relax with the family. Multigenerational travellers take on average 4.4 vacations a year. (Preferred Hotels 2011)

Multigenerational travellers make a good target for hotels for their frequency in travelling. Assuming both generations of grandparents and parents are financially stable, this gives a hotel double the possible buyers of family services and products in comparison to families travelling with just the parents. According to the Preferred Hotels study, the three most important aspects to choosing a vacation destination for multigenerational travellers are: the opportunity to unwind and relax, beautiful scenery, and a place they have never visited before. Also, the most important aspects affecting the choice of hotel are: value for price, room rate, and the location of the hotel has the highest influences in choosing a hotel. (Preferred Hotels 2011.)

Many hotels from the Preferred Hotels group have adapted their services for families to meet the needs of multigenerational guests. Such services are:

- group pricing
- celebration event packages
- multi-room packages
- family style dinners
- family reunion activities
- portrait photographs

For Preferred Hotels, it is important to offer memories, convenience and value for multi-generational guests. (Preferred Hotels 2011.)

5 Helsinki as a destination

As the capital of Finland, Helsinki is located in the South of Finland. In 2014 Helsinki located 52 hotels, 8, 500 rooms, and 16, 000 beds. Helsinki's lodging industry hosted over 3.3 million overnights. 47% of guests were domestic and 53% of guests international. 50% of travel was for leisure, 48% for business, and 2% for other. By nationality, the segments which bring the most overnights are (in addition to Finnish guests) Russians, Germans, British, Swedish, and Americans. The Russian and German guests show a decrease in the amount of overnights comparing 2013 and 2014 statistics, others are on the rise. (The City of Helsinki 2015) The most significant increase has been shown by Chinese guests, having increased the amount of overnights in Helsinki between January and July 2015 by 44% (Berg 2015). The average room rate in Helsinki in 2014 was 106,90 € and the average occupancy rate was 67% (The City of Helsinki 2015).

The seasons of occupancy can be categorized into low, high, and peak season. In the diagram below, notice the peak season for hotel overnights in 2011 was in July. In the following years it shifted towards August. May and June, along with the autumn months of September, October, and November are considered high season. The autumn months host a high number of meetings and conferences that strongly influences the accommodation industry. The winter months are continuously the low season months. (The City of Helsinki 2015.)

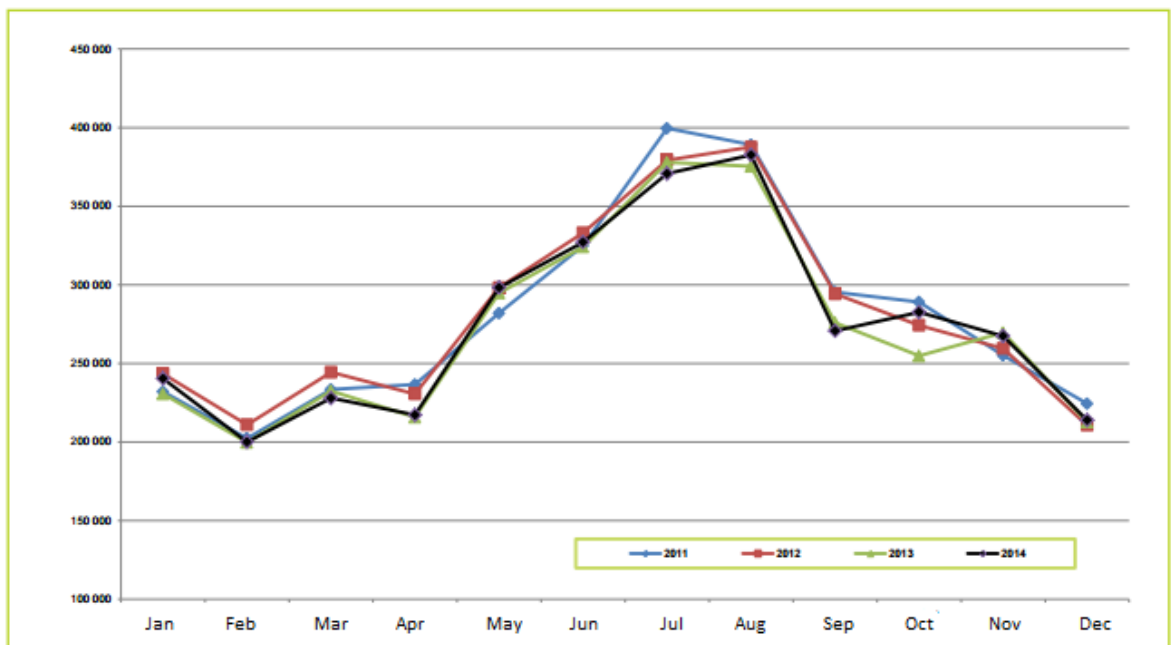


Figure 2 – Guest overnights in Helsinki hotels 2014 (The City of Helsinki 2015.)

Most hotels in Helsinki are part of a chain. The main chain competitors in the lodging industry in Helsinki are Scandic Hotels, Sokotel, Kämp Group, and Restel. 33 out of the 52 hotels in Helsinki are operated under these four chains. One way to measure the amount of families travelling with children in Helsinki, is to observe the statistics of children being accommodated in hotels. The below diagram shows the amount of children staying at Scandic Hotels in Helsinki in 2014. There are five Scandic and two Hilton hotels in Helsinki operating under Scandic Hotels. Hilton is franchised by Scandic Hotels in Helsinki.

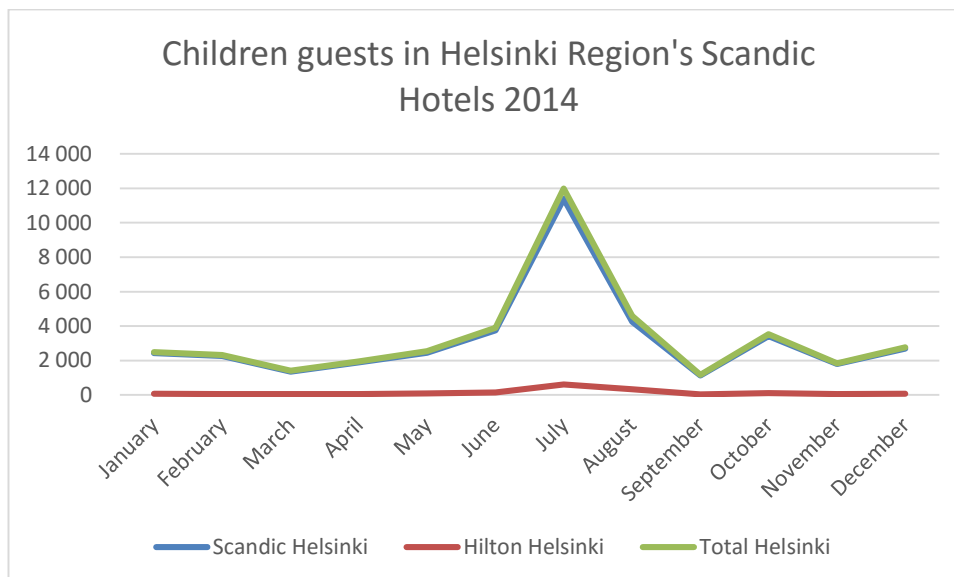


Figure 3 – Children in Helsinki region's Scandic Hotels 2014 (Peurala 8 September 2015)

In total 40,513 child guests were accommodated in 2014 in both Scandic and Hilton hotels. The amount of children ranges between 1,133 - 11,384 / month for Scandic and between 45 and 610 / month for Hilton. The most popular month was July and least popular was September. The average of children guests at Scandic hotels was 3,235 / month and 141 / month in Hilton hotels. However, the accuracy of this information can be questioned; it is not guaranteed that all children were registered at the hotels. Children can be left out from registration, especially those who were accommodated in baby cots. Nonetheless, this information is useful for identifying Scandic as a more popular chain for families travelling with children, as well as observing the fluctuations of the statistics between months. Observing the pattern of child accommodations at Scandic, it can be assumed that the peak months for child accommodations in all Helsinki is in July since the amount of guests for July is significantly higher than the other months.

The 19 hotels in Helsinki that run as independent hotels or as part of a hotel consortia sparsely market services for children on their brand.com websites. Out of these hotels, the best services are offered by Hotel Arthur. This hotel offers Suomenlinna fortress island,

Heureka science center, Linnanmäki amusement park, and Serena water park packages which include accommodation and tickets to the locations (Hotel Arthur). Other services that multiple hotels offer were extra beds for rooms and high chairs at the restaurant for small children. Out of the four largest hotel chains operating in Helsinki, only four brands market services for children on their brand.com websites. These brands are Scandic, Sokos, Holiday Inn, and Cumulus hotels. This accounts for only 18 hotels out of the 33 hotels in Helsinki run by the four large chains. Many of the remaining brands can be classified as upscale, upper upscale or luxury hotels using STR classifications. These mention little services targeted for children on their brand.com website. This indicates that the upscale and luxury hotels do not target families with children.

6 Research method

The services offered for children in four Helsinki hotels are benchmarked. Benchmarking is defined by Wöber as the systematic procedure of comparative measurement with the objective to achieve continuous improvement. Benchmarking has become a common tool for managers to assess the performance of a company and identify how to improve strategies, processes and performance. Benchmarking can be categorized into internal and external methods. Internal benchmarking is completed within an organization's different sectors identifying the strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities (SWOT) in the departments comparing them to others. External benchmarking is the comparison of an organization to other organizations. For this thesis competitive benchmarking is used; a form of external benchmarking. Competitive benchmarking is the comparison of an organization to its competitors. The objectives of competitive benchmarking are to identify performance, objectives, strategies, and programmes of competitors as well as identifying the best practices. (Wöber 2002, viii-4.) Benchmarking is chosen as a tool because it is efficient to be completed from an objective third party perspective. The results can be used by any of the participating hotels to compare their performance to others. Ideally the results will show variations in strategies and implementation of services for children. This could give the opportunity for the participating hotels (as well as others) to question and improve their services.

Additionally, an online questionnaire is conducted to attain information on the habits and preferences of travellers with children. Rather than doing a customer satisfaction survey of already accommodated guests, this way hotels can forecast what future guests may expect when booking a hotel. A guest who has already familiarized themselves with the property and services may have altered preferences than of those who have not visited yet. An online questionnaire is used as a tool for its efficiency, offering the opportunity to receive a large amount of responses in a short amount of time. It is important to obtain a sufficient amount of respondents to be able to represent the habits and opinions of the market the respondents represent. An online questionnaire is also easy to distribute on different online platforms, targeting specific segments of potential respondents. Also, an online questionnaire keeps the respondents anonymous, thus the responses may be more truthful than in one-on-one interviews. Finally, by using an online survey provider it is easier to manage data and analyse results.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used for data collection. A quantitative research method is the collection of data that can translate into numeric data whilst qualitative methods will result in opinions or observations. (Marketing Donut) The online questionnaire is primarily a quantitative research; however, some open ended questions

are used resulting in quantitative data. E-mail interviews are completed to support the benchmarking of hotels. The e-mail interviews are completed by the hotel manager or chain manager of the benchmarked hotels. Primarily the data collected is qualitative, however quantitative data is also obtained in the form of statistics. Since the information on brand.com websites can be very limiting, the e-mail interviews contribute to gaining valuable inside information on each hotel's business strategies and target segments.

6.1 Data collection for the benchmarking

The variables for selecting the benchmarked hotels are: location and the marketing of services for children on brand.com websites. The key variable is the amount of marketing done on the brand.com websites of hotels in Helsinki. Comparing the different hotel websites of hotels in Helsinki: Scandic, Sokos, Holiday Inn, and Cumulus display the most marketing and information targeting families and family vacationers. Location, brand, or Tripadvisor reviews are also strong variables that can be used to select the benchmarked hotels. However, marketing is used for this research as the key variable assuming that the hotels that place the time and energy to market themselves to families may also have the most services to offer children or the best strategic plans to attract families. Since four large chains operate most of the hotels in Helsinki, choosing four different brands in the benchmarking better represents the Helsinki hotel market than choosing hotels under the same brand. One hotel is chosen from each of the brands that most market themselves as child-friendly. Cumulus Kallio is used in the benchmarking due to its location close to the Linnanmäki amusement park, Holiday Inn Helsinki Exhibition and Conference Center - Messukeskus is chosen because it markets itself as child friendly and is located near the Linnanmäki amusement park. Scandic Park is chosen due to its high number of child guests, its amount of services for children, and strong company standards of implementing these services for children. Sokos Vaakuna is chosen for its unique services for children and central location. Information for the benchmarking is gathered using the hotels' brand.com websites and interviews with representatives from each hotel. The details compared in the benchmarking are to identify fixed structural details, services offered for children, market share of the hotel, and target segments.

The competitive benchmarking starts with comparing the structural features of each hotel such as location and amount of rooms. Also any brand children's programs and mascots are mentioned. This is followed by listing the services for children at each hotel separately and analysed. The services for children are categorized into four categories: rooms, restaurant, activities in hotel, and other. The categorization of services assists in comparing the properties. This is followed by evaluating the market share of each hotel by the amount of children guests that they have and the segments of family travellers that they

target. Much of the information is classified and thus not visible in the publicized version. Finally, the rates and customer reviews are compared. Each benchmarked aspect is carefully chosen to give an overall and detailed overview of the hotel's features and service application and potential.

6.2 Data collection for the questionnaire

The questionnaire is created using the services of Webropol, an online survey creation provider. The objective of the questions is to gain information on the habits and preferences of families travelling with children. The questions specify on experiential and intangible services offered by the benchmarked hotels, to confirm whether these are important and expected services by potential guests. The goal is to receive as many responses as possible from millennial parents and active multigenerational travellers to find any common preferences in those segments. Having established staycations to be a rising trend, the opinions of families in nearby areas are valued as much as families from further away. As previously mentioned, around 50% of hotel guests in Helsinki are domestic and thus that is the ratio that is attempted to be maintained between domestic and international responses. Attempting to receive as many responses from millennial parents as possible, the questionnaire is posted on a variety of social media platforms. The questionnaire is published on multiple parental chat forums that are based in different countries. For example, the questionnaire is published on Vauva.fi, a parental forum used primarily by Finnish mothers. Other chat forums are based in Sweden, U.S.A., and U.K. since those nationalities make up a large percentage of the travellers in Helsinki. The questionnaire is also published on numerous Facebook groups and company pages targeting parents, travellers, and hospitality professionals. Such Facebook pages include Visit Helsinki, Young Mother's Society, Marriott Hotels, and many more. The goal is to achieve 100-200 relevant replies for reliable results within December 2015.

The questionnaire can be found in the appendix 1. The opening questions are to establish the demographics of the respondent; to identify whether they are a millennial parent or have possibly participated in multigenerational travel. To try and answer the research question, many of the services offered in the hotels of Scandic, Sokos, Holiday Inn and Cumulus are listed and respondents are to answer using a Likert scale for the services being 1- not important or 5- very important. This is followed by yes or no questions to try and establish whether experiential services and creating memories for children are important to parents. The questionnaire is a quantitative research; however, two questions are left for respondents to state their own opinions on services for children in hotels.

7 Results

The competitive benchmarking of four Helsinki hotels shows that all hotels practice similar purpose of trip and demographic segmentation, along with targeting similar market segments. The services for children are more abundant for children under the age of 13 at Original Sokos Hotel Vaakuna, Scandic Park, and Holiday Inn Helsinki Exhibition and Conference Center – Messukeskus. The services offered for older children are similar at all properties, thus not giving a competitive advantage to any property. Scandic Park is the only hotel with a clear brand concept implemented in its services, whilst other properties have more room to adapt the services offered. Individual improvements are applicable to each location to activate new segments or increase existing ones.

The questionnaire results demonstrate that millennials and non-millennials have highly similar travel habits and preferences for hotel services. However, millennials find it more important for a hotel to offer services for children than non-millennials. Millennials have a higher preference for a hotel stay to be education for children. The questionnaire results indicate which of the services offered by the benchmarked hotels are viewed as less important and which very important. The results verified that many of the hotel services offered in the benchmarked hotels are viewed as unimportant. The benchmarked hotels can use this information to update their current services. Below are the results of the benchmarking of the four Helsinki hotels, followed later by the results of the questionnaire.

7.1 Benchmarking

Information was primarily obtained from the brand.com websites of the hotels. Information was also obtained through each properties hotel manager or chain manager to obtain more insight into the strategies of each hotel and their competitive standing. Much of the information obtained through these representatives is confidential and thus has been left out of the publicized version of the thesis. The complete benchmarking table is found as appendix 2. The table is divided into sections for the analysis of the results.

Table 1 – Features of the four Helsinki hotels

	Scandic Park	Original Sokos Hotel Vaakuna Helsinki	Holiday Inn Helsinki Exhibition and Convention Center - Messukeskus	Cumulus Kallio Helsinki
Amount of rooms	523	270	244	121
Location	Mannerheimintie 46, near the Opera and Finlandia building landmarks	Asema-Aukio 2, opposite the Central Railway Station	Messuaukio 1, next to the Helsinki Conference Center	Läntinen Brahenkatu 2, near the amusement park
Children's program	Kids Concept		In restaurant: Kids Eat Free – program	
Mascot	Yes, Sigge the hedgehog	Yes, Onni Orava (a squirrel)	Yes, Turix the star	Yes, Galaxi the star

(Cumulus), (Holiday Inn), (Scandic Hotels 2015), (Sokos)

Each hotel is located in a different part of the city. Sokos Vaakuna is the most central of the hotels, with multiple transportation opportunities available within walking distance. Scandic Park is at walking distance of the center. The hotel is nearby to sites such as the Finlandia House, the Opera House, the National Museum, the Olympic Stadium etc. For guests attending events at one of these sites, Scandic Park is for its location a good choice for accommodation. Holiday Inn Messukeskus is located next the Helsinki Conference and Exhibition Center; the Linnanmäki amusement park and the Sea Life museum are accessible either by foot, by public transportation, or a shuttle service available during summer. The city center is 4 km away; accessible via public transportation. Cumulus Kallio is located in the Kallio borough of the city, closest of all four hotels to the Linnanmäki amusement park and the Sea Life museum. The hotel is also next to a sports center; the city center is best accessible via bus or tram.

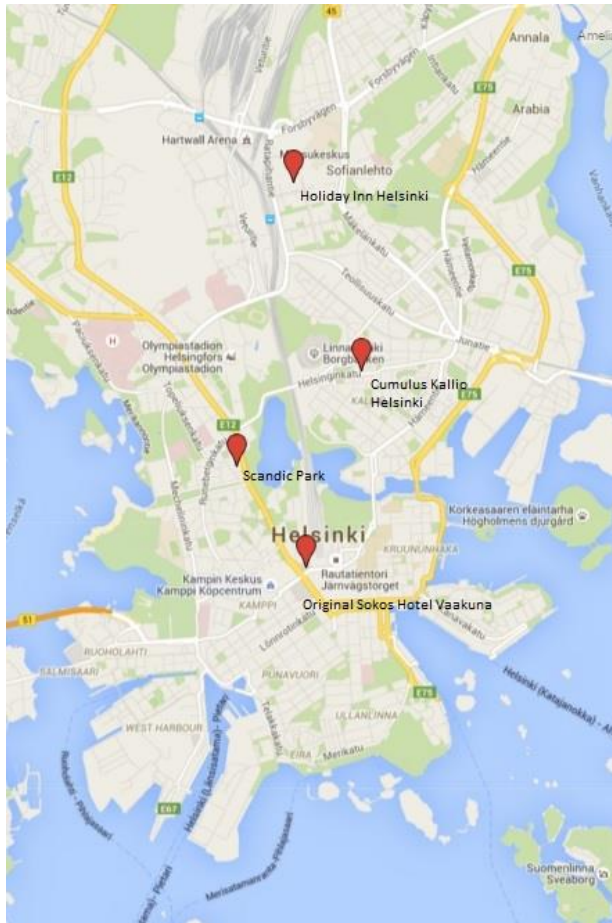


Image 1 – Benchmarked hotels on a map (Google Maps)

The above map gives a visual image of the locations of each hotel. All the hotels are in central Helsinki but in different neighborhoods. Each location has its own benefits and can bring a competitive advantage during different events and different times of year. Below are the services for children offered by Scandic Park. The services are divided into four categories: rooms, restaurant, activities in hotel, other. Most of the services offered at Scandic Park are part of Scandic's Kids Concept program. Overall there is an even variety of services dividing into each category. Families are offered discounts such as free accommodation for children (in the same room as the parents) and half price on all the dishes on the restaurant menu (for children under 13 years old). Activities for children include the swimming pool, a play area and other seasonal activities.

Table 2 – Scandic Park’s services for children

Rooms	Restaurant	Activities in hotel	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children under 13 years old accommodate for free in the same room as the adults • Additional children’s rooms at 50% off • Children’s TV channels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half price on menu dishes • Child-friendly dishes on the menu • Kids’ buffet during high occupancy • Crayons and crafts in the restaurant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities such as film time and quizzes (seasonal) • Welcome gift from the reception • Meet Sigge (the mascot) at breakfast or dinner (seasonal) • Play area with a PlayStation • Swimming pool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation packages, such as to the amusement park (seasonal)

(Scandic Hotels), (Scandic 2015)

Unique services that Scandic Park offers children are: meeting the mascot, a swimming pool, free accommodation for under 13 year olds (including in extra bed), and unique activities such as film time and quizzes. The Scandic Park brand.com website markets its services as seasonal services. However, the Kids Concept manual claims some of these services are all-year guaranteed services. Why market them only as seasonal services?

Sokos Vaakuna offers 2-3 services in each category. Additional rooms for children are available at discounted rates and extras are brought up for babies in the hotel rooms. In the restaurant, a large playroom is available for children to play in and children’s menus are available for healthy food options. Intangible services include

Tables 3 – Original Sokos Hotel Vaakuna Helsinki’s services for children (Sokos Hotels)

Rooms	Restaurant	Activities in hotel	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional children’s rooms starting at 59€/room • A potty, crib, and picture book for babies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playroom* • Children’s menu • Children’s extras at breakfast (seasonal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playroom* • A surprise gift from the reception • Binoculars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scooters and helmets • A map of the city with toy shops and candy shops marked • Packages, such as to the amusement park and Sea Life (seasonal)

*The same playroom

Unique services that Sokos Vaakuna offers children are borrowing scooters from the reception, a picture book for babies, and a map of Helsinki with all the toy and candy shops marked on it. However, the map is only offered for Finnish speaking guests according to the brand.com website. Observing their services, they are focusing services on domestic travelers. In addition to only having the children’s maps in Finnish, the English brand.com website is not updated. For example, the section describing the services for children, the Children’s City museum is marketed as a travel location for families. However, this museum has been closed for over two years. A lack of updating their English website indicates international travelers are not the main focus group.

Holiday Inn Helsinki offers additional children’s rooms at discounted rates. Extras are brought up to the rooms for children, such as a potty and a stool to reach the bathroom sink. All rooms have bathtubs and children’s television channels. The restaurant offers the brand concept of Kids Eat Free, where children eat for free when accompanying an adult. Holiday Inn requires the children’s menu to include dishes that are free from artificial additives and low in sugar and salt. Activities in the hotel include a playroom, board games and cards, and a surprise gift.

Table 4 - Holiday Inn Helsinki Messukeskus' services for children

Rooms	Restaurant	Activities in hotel	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional children's rooms at 49/55€ • For babies: a crib, a baby bathtub, additional garbage bags, and kitchen paper in rooms • For older children: a children's pillow, and a stool (to reach the bathroom sink) in rooms • Children's TV channels • Bathtubs in all rooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids Eat Free • Children's menu • Children's extras at breakfast (seasonal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playroom • Reading, board games and cards • Surprise gift (seasonal) • Children can sign the children's guest book (seasonal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discounted tickets to Sea World • Sea World accommodation package • Shuttle bus service to the amusement park during summer months (at an additional cost) • Multi-room packages

(Holiday Inn), (Hatakka 13 January 2016)

Unique services Holiday Inn Messukeskus offers children are: multi-room packages, internationally recognized Kids Eat Free - program, additional extras in the room for babies and toddlers, bathtubs in all rooms, a shuttle to the amusement park, and games to borrow from the reception. Holiday Inn Messukeskus is the only benchmarked hotel to offer multi-room packages which indicated to be in demand with multigenerational travelers in previous chapters. The English brand.com website does not mention almost any of the services offered for children. Including more information on the services for children could increase the amount of international guests traveling with children. The Finnish brand.com website has a lot of information on the services offered for children. I recommend for the hotel to add the service of bringing trash bags and kitchen paper along with the baby crib onto the brand.com website. This can help attract guests with small babies. Especially parents that do not have much experience of travelling with a baby might need the re-assurance that the hotel is baby friendly. In addition, the shuttle bus to the amusement park

is a service that was not mentioned on the brand.com website. Marketing this unique service could help attract leisure family travelers in the summer wanting to visit the amusement park.

Additional rooms for children are offered at a significantly discounted rate at Scandic Park, Sokos Vaakuna, and at Holiday Inn Messukeskus. Other services that the three hotels have in common are: additional children’s treats at breakfast (seasonal), children’s menus at the restaurant, a play room, and seasonal room + activity packages. The packages are mainly to the amusement park or to the Sea Life museum. The surprise gift (given most likely at check-in and consists of a small bag with children’s crafts / candy / booklet) is offered by Scandic Park and Sokos Vaakuna year round, and seasonally at Holiday Inn Messukeskus. The playrooms at all three locations emphasize on offering toys and crafts for under school aged children. For school aged children, Holiday Inn Messukeskus offers Disney Chanel and Animal Planet in the room televisions. Scandic Park has a PlayStation. In addition, older children can use the business center computers at all locations. Cumulus Kallio offers a potty in the room for babies, healthier food options at breakfast, a scavenger hunts, children’s guest book for signing, numerous accommodation packages.

Table 5 – Cumulus Kallio Helsinki’s services for children

Rooms	Restaurant	Activities in hotel	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potties and cribs available for babies • A TV channel for children in rooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy food options for children at breakfast 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A scavenger hunt • Children can sign the children’s guest book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation packages (such as to the nature center Haltia) • Theatre accommodation packages • Rooms Escape package • Discounts for the nearby recreation center

(Cumulus), (Vitikainen 14 January 2916)

Cumulus Kallio offers the least services for children out of the benchmarked hotels, however they offer a broader choice of accommodation packages. From experiential services, they offer discounts to the nearby recreation center and a scavenger hunt for children at the hotel. They also offer different packages such as the room + Haltia package. Haltia is

located in the National Park of Nuuksio and concentrates on offering information on Finnish nature to its guests. Another unique package is the Room Escape package. Room Escape is a game concentrated around the task of escaping the room the players have been placed in through interactive and logical tasks. This service is targeted towards older children and adults. These packages are unique and innovative; they vary vastly from the packages offered by the other benchmarked hotels.

The below table is crucial for the competitive benchmarking of the four hotels. The target segments, targeted age groups of children, the amount of children visiting the properties, the ratings on Tripadvisor, and the daily rates are compared. Comparing these variables gives an understanding of the market share and competitive standing of each hotel

Table 6 – Competitive benchmarking of the four Helsinki hotels

	Scandic Park	Original Sokos Hotel Vaakuna Helsinki	Holiday Inn Helsinki Exhibition and Convention Center - Messukeskus	Cumulus Kallio Helsinki
Targeted age group of children				
Targeted family segments				
Amount of children guests				
Daily Rate	168 € / room**	188 € / room**	185 € / room**	115 € / room**
Average rating by families on TripAdvisor	3,89 – Very good	4,04 – Very good	3,81 – Very good	3,75 – Very good

(Tripadvisor), (Scandic Hotels), (Sokos Hotels), (Cumulus), (Holiday Inn), (Vitikainen 14 January 2016), (Järvelä 5 January 2016), (Hatakka 13 January 2016), (Huopainen 8 January 2016)

**The Daily Rate was taken for the random date of Saturday 16th April, 2016 for 1 standard room, 1 night, accommodating 2 adults and 1 child, including breakfast. All prices were checked on the same day from each hotels' brand.com website

Evaluating the rates of each property is limiting because all properties / brands practice individual revenue management. Thus the pricing strategies may vary. On a specific day

the room rate may be 100€ but the next 150€ for the same room. The rates are affected by the current occupancy and predicted occupancy of the hotel. Any events taking place near a hotel can bring a higher demand for rooms for one hotel but not the rest. Also the rate code used makes a significant difference in the rate of a room. For the benchmarking, the daily rate was taken for all properties. The benchmarking showed Sokos Vaakuna and Holiday Inn Messukeskus to have similar rates; the highest. Scandic Park's room rate was a little lower than these; Cumulus Kallio offered the lowest rates. However, for families of two adults and two children, Scandic Park and Sokos Vaakuna are the only hotels to offer four person rooms.

TripAdvisor is an online tool that can be used by guests to compare hotels in Helsinki. TripAdvisor has over 50 million reviews and is used by potential guests, OTA's, and hotels themselves to evaluate performance. 93% of potential guests are influenced by TripAdvisor reviews when booking a hotel; and as much as 53% of guests will not book a hotel without reading online reviews (whether TripAdvisor or another source). (MGHworld.net) Thus having good TripAdvisor reviews are crucial for hotel success. Scandic Park has the most reviews by families, 220, whilst both Cumulus Kallio and Holiday Inn Messukeskus have under 12. With Holiday Inn Messukeskus having very little information on their services for children on the English website along with little reviews from families on TripAdvisor, this confirms to why the amount of international families staying at the hotel are low. Having a strong recognizable brand is not enough to attract families. Also, since Cumulus is not an internationally known brand, having a large amount of positive reviews from families is necessary to convince international guests to stay with the brand. All hotels have an overall very good rating on TripAdvisor, however Sokos Vaakuna has the best average rating of all. With the strongest rating on TripAdvisor and excellent location, the highest room rate of the benchmarked hotels is reasonable for Sokos Vaakuna.

7.1.1 Reliability

The amount of children guests in the competitive benchmarking affects poorly the reliability of estimating each hotel's market share. The amount of children guests is given using different scales of measurement for each hotel. In addition, comparing the room rates and TripAdvisor scores once is not reliable enough to make definite assumptions. The rates and reviews can alter quickly, thus the given values are not relevant for a long period.

7.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was open for one month, between December and January 2015-2016. The questionnaire was answered by 83 respondents. Attempting to target younger parents by posting the questionnaire on social media to answer the questionnaire, yet only 22 of the respondents are between 20 - 30 years of age. This accounts for 26,5 % of the respondents. None of the respondents are under 20. The respondents are diverse, well mimicking the visitors in Finland. However, the representation of Finnish opinions is smaller than was expected. Out of the respondents 24% are from Finland. Respondents from the U.S.A and the U.K are also well represented. A good representation of U.S.A and U.K respondents is valuable because these nationalities make up a large ratio of the international hotel visitors in Helsinki.

7.2.1 Travel habits of respondents

The average amount of children travelled with is 1,82. This indicates that hotel rooms with a four bed option are in high demand; giving Scandic Park and Sokos Vaakuna an advantage. This of course depends on how many adults are also travelling; and whether the guests prefer to have a separate room for the children. The age of the children the respondents travel with is indicated in the pie chart below. Children ages 0-13 year olds make up 96% of the children travelled with.

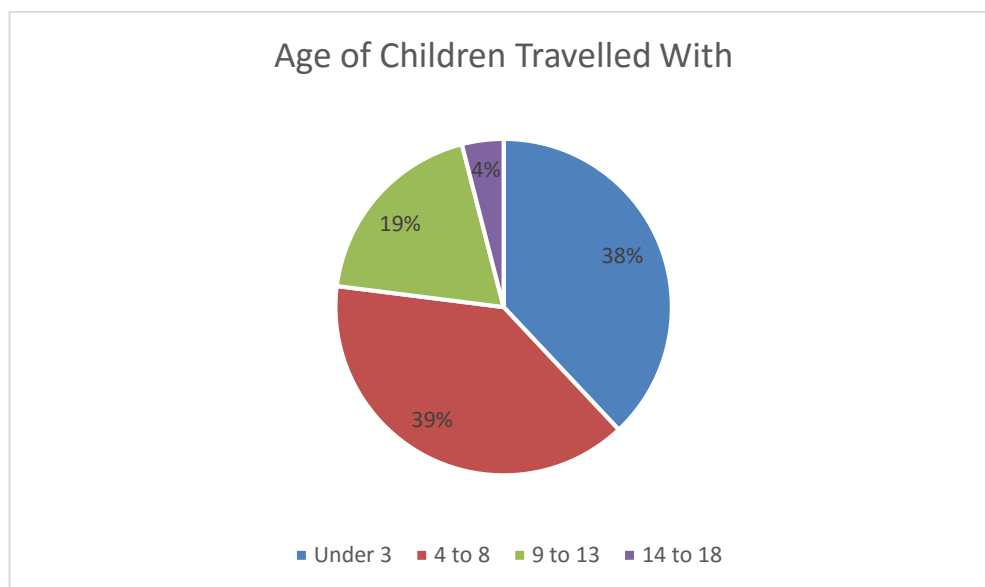


Figure 3 – Ages of children respondents travel with

Children aged three and under account for 38% of children travelled with, children aged four to eight account for 39% of child travellers, nine to thirteen year olds account for 19% of children travelled with, and fourteen to eighteen year olds account for only 4%. Younger

children, under eight years old, make up the largest portion of the children’s market. For hotels wanting to target large family segments, targeting Full Nest I stage guests would be an option.

The amount of nights travellers spent at a hotel with children within the past year varied between 0-110. The average is 12,98 nights within the past year. Below Figure 4 demonstrates the amount of respondents who took a staycation within the past year, followed by Figure 5 with how many of the respondents took a multigenerational trip within the past year. Surprisingly, the travel habits of millennials and non-millennials are very similar.

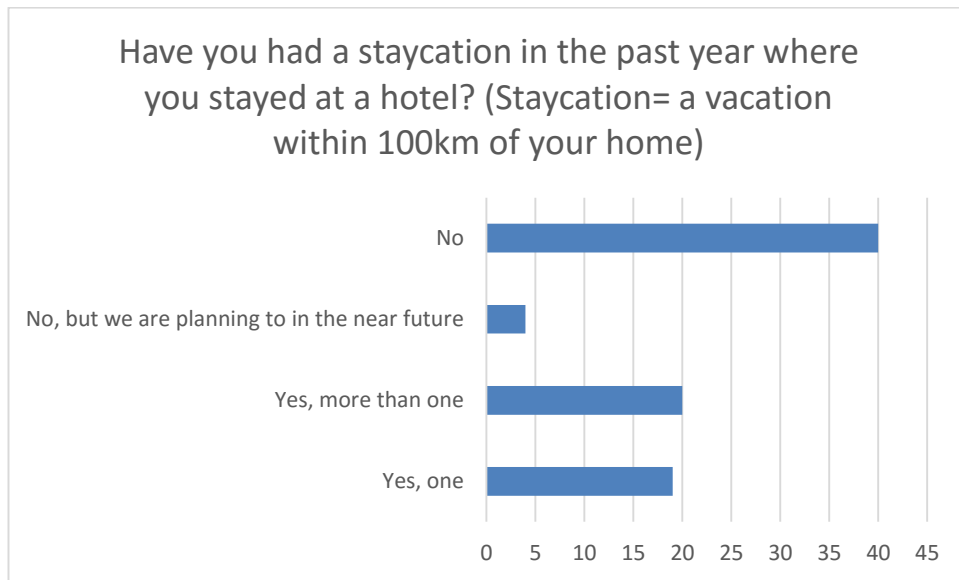


Figure 4 – Staycations

According to the questionnaire, around half (39) of the respondents had had one or more staycation within the past year. Another 40 respondents had not taken a staycation within the past year. Four out of the 83 replied that they had not had a staycation, but were planning for one in the near future. For both millennials and non-millennials, the ratios of having had, planning one, and not having a staycation proved to be very similar. Both millennials and non-millennials had the reply of ‘not having had a staycation’ accounting for 50% of responses. Thus, staycations proved to be popular, but not any more popular with millennials than with non-millennials.

Figure 5 shows that 42 respondents had one or more multigenerational trips within the past year, this accounts for over 50% of respondents.

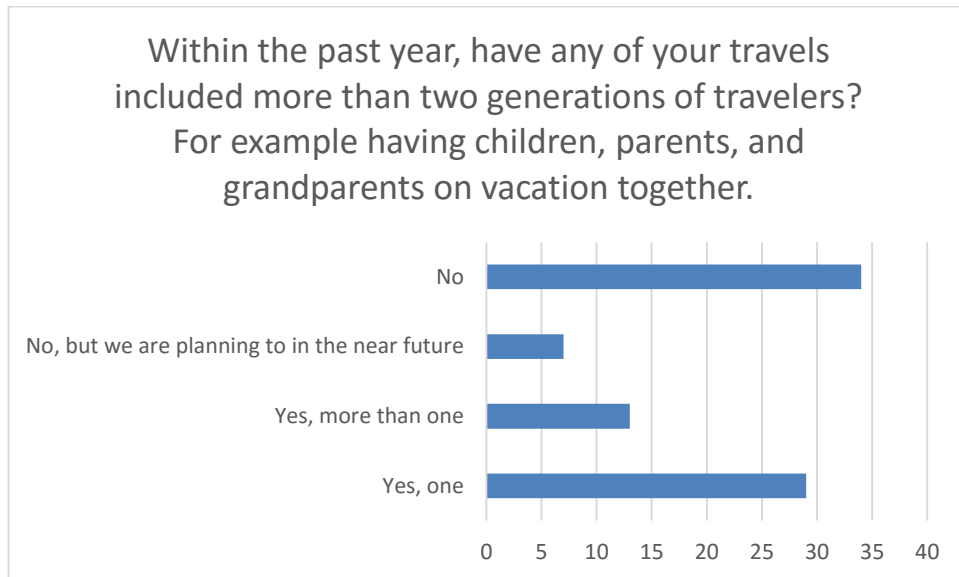


Figure 5 – Multigenerational travels

Again, the ratios between the different answers proved fairly similar between millennials and non-millennials. However, 18% of millennials who have not had a multigenerational trip are planning one for the near future when only 8% of non-millennials are planning one for the near future. Figures 4 and 5 prove that staycations and multigenerational trips are both popular purpose of trip segments.

7.2.2 Preferences in services

The welcome gift, scavenger hunts, trivia questions, PlayStation, and a brand / hotel mascot are significantly the least important services for travellers with children. The swimming pool is the most important, followed by children’s TV channels, colouring paper and crayons, and discounts on additional children’s rooms. The playroom has the most even distribution of preferences, being seen nearly equally as least important as very important. The rest of the services, discounts at the restaurant, room packages, and library lean towards being very important rather than not important. Comparing the responses of millennials and non-millennials, millennials find colouring paper & crayons along with discounts at the restaurant significantly more important than non-millennials. They also find a swimming pool significantly less important than non-millennials.

When asked about activities travellers with children would like hotels to organize for children, arts and crafts proved most wanted. Sports and musical activities received a high amount of preference. Educational classes received little interest. However, when comparing responses by millennials to non-millennials, millennials find sports activities significantly less interesting than non-millennials, whilst the other activities remain ratio wise

similar. To understand the importance of a hotel stay to offer new experiences, to be memorable or to be educational, the below questions were asked. Since the benchmarked hotels were chosen on the basis of strongly marketing themselves as child friendly on their brand.com website, the importance of this was also asked.

Table 7 – Experiential preferences

	yes	no	not sure
When booking a hotel, it is important that the hotel markets itself as child friendly.	72	8	3
I would prefer for the hotel to organize activities for children.	50	15	18
The hotel should offer new experiences for the family.	48	18	16
The hotel stay should be memorable for the children.	61	8	12
It is important that a hotel stay is educational for the children.	15	48	19
The children's menus at restaurants should focus on offering healthy options.	70	7	6
The hotel should offer a babysitting service.	43	27	13

The above table shows that it is essential hotels market themselves as child friendly for travellers with children to make a booking. 60% of respondents prefer for hotels to organize activities for the children and 58% think hotels should offer new experiences for the family. 73% of the respondents think a hotel stay should be memorable for the children. An educational stay was not important to many respondents. However, 84% of respondents agreed that a restaurant's children's menu should focus on offering health. The below two tables divide the responses into the opinions of millennials and non-millennials.

Table 8 – Experiential preferences, millennials

	yes	no	not sure
When booking a hotel, it is important that the hotel markets itself as child friendly.	19	2	1
I would prefer for the hotel to organize activities for children.	12	3	7
The hotel should offer new experiences for the family.	15	4	3
The hotel stay should be memorable for the children.	17	2	3
It is important that a hotel stay is educational for the children.	6	10	6
The children's menus at restaurants should focus on offering healthy options.	19	1	2
The hotel should offer a babysitting service.	12	8	2

Table 9 – Experiential preferences, non-millennials

	yes	no	not sure
When booking a hotel, it is important that the hotel markets itself as child friendly.	53	6	2
I would prefer for the hotel to organize activities for children.	38	12	11
The hotel should offer new experiences for the family.	33	14	13
The hotel stay should be memorable for the children.	44	6	9
It is important that a hotel stay is educational for the children.	9	38	13
The children's menus at restaurants should focus on offering healthy options.	51	6	4
The hotel should offer a babysitting service.	31	19	11

Once again the ratios between responses for both groups are fairly similar. The largest differences are in the third and fifth questions. For the claim “the hotel should offer new experiences for the family”, the millennials agreed at 68% whilst non-millennials at 54%. For the claim “it is important that a hotel stay is educational for the children”, the millennials agreed at 27% whilst non-millennials at 15%.

In the qualitative question of what factors affect the respondents' satisfaction at a hotel, the most common responses were: friendly / child friendly staff, cleanliness, and quality of food. The final question of the questionnaire asked for general comments of services for children, many reoccurring similar comments were:

“In general there is no real service for children, it is always a sort of extra that is done as a must. It would be so much better if children were treated as genuine guests and not as coming along with their parents.”

“Hotels with well-staffed kids clubs are great. Parents get to have a break while kids play with each other and have fun doing new things. Also like an earlier dinner service for children.”

“Hotels should have nutritional foods for kids.”

7.2.3 Reliability and validity

A limitation of the questionnaire is language barriers. Since the questionnaire is not in many of the respondent's native language, respondents may have been resistant with replying to it or might have misunderstood the questions and answer falsely. Some of the respondents may have answered the middle options on the Likert scale when they did not have an opinion on the question or did not know how to answer; thus affecting the reliabil-

ity of the results using the Likert scale. The questionnaire specifically mentions that questions can be skipped, however many may have answered the middle option, for example 3 on a 1-5 Likert scale just for not having a specific answer or opinion. This immediately affects the reliability of the results. The reliability of the results is also affected by the fact that a similar study has not been done before and the results cannot be compared.

The validity of the responses is controlled by the amount of respondents, nationalities of the respondents, and the age of the respondents. This could have been improved by having a larger percentage of Finnish respondents to represent the 50% of domestic travelers in Helsinki. More respondents would have been useful to be able to compare the preferences of millennials and non-millennials. With a larger amount of respondents, more visible differences may have been noted.

7.3 Conclusion

The preliminary hypothesis stated that the services targeted towards children in Helsinki family-friendly hotels are fairly similar and target the same age groups. To some extent this proved correct; all properties benchmarked have similar target segments. Since one of the hotels has a larger market share than the rest on their target segments, the others still have room to gain a competitive advantage in other family segments. For example, full nest stage III guests and international guests are segments that none of the hotels are targeting. Many of the services need to be updated to more experiential and memorable services / activities to gain that competitive advantage. Also hotels need to focus on offering services that are wanted rather than copy the same type of services from each other. One of these is the surprise gift, it is one the least wanted services yet most of the hotels have them.

On aspects such as offering healthier children's food menus and offering room + activity packages the hotels in Helsinki meet the preferences of family travellers. Offering healthy and quality foods is highly important to current family travellers. The Sokos Vaakuna restaurant, Loiste, offers the most innovative and healthy children's menu. Sokos Park offers the most interactive children's menu, where children are given a menu where they can circle which main dish they want, chose the side dish and drink separately themselves. The back of the menu offers drawing activities for entertainment. The menu offers both healthier and unhealthier options (such as french-fries). Holiday Inn Messukeskus has clear company requirements on offering dishes with low salt and sugar content and no artificial additives. Holiday Inn Messukeskus is the only hotel to offer free dining for children. Cumulus Kallio does not have its own restaurant but markets a close by Grillson Steakhouse

& Bar. This restaurant also offers both healthier and unhealthier food options on the children's menu. Overall, all menus offer at least a few healthier children's meal options and thus do not need improving in terms of offering healthy food options.

However, to meet the expectations of creating memorable experiences for children, the hotels could replace many of their services for more interactive activities. Many of the services offered in the benchmarked hotels are unimportant to potential guests with children. A hotel mascot, a welcome / surprise gifts for children, trivia questions, a scavenger hunt, and PlayStation showed to be the least important services to the respondents of the questionnaire. However, colouring supplies showed to be wanted. Perhaps these unimportant services are old fashioned and need to be updated to more innovative and new services, keeping in mind that families are looking for memorable experiences.

None of the benchmarked hotels have a competitive advantage on the services offered for over 13-year-old children. However, since only 4% of the questionnaire respondents travel with over 13-year-old children, it may not be necessary to offer services for such a small amount of guests. Unless, a hotel wants to create a niche target segment out of teenage guests. With high expectations of millennial travellers to have different preferences than non-millennials, the questionnaire showed that the travel habits of both groups are fairly similar when it comes to taking staycations and multigenerational trips. In terms of services, millennials find colouring paper and crayons and discounts at the restaurant significantly more important than non-millennials. They also find a swimming pool and sports activities significantly less important than non-millennials. Millennials also prefer a hotel stay to offer educational and new experiences more than non-millennials.

Scandic Park is the biggest of the benchmarked hotels. The hotel is the only one to have a concept for the services for children and follows strong company standards on what needs to be offered for children all year long. A strong brand, the Kids Concept, four person rooms, and a larger amount of Tripadvisor comments from families gives the hotel a strong advantage over its competitors. On the brand.com website it is written that many services are only offered during summer and holiday seasons. However, some of them are year round services; why mention they are only offered during "summer and holiday seasons"? Also, holiday seasons vary for different nationalities and cultures and can lead to misunderstandings in guests booking accommodation. Scandic Park could try to upgrade their standing on the Tripadvisor rankings of family-friendly hotels. Tripadvisor being an influential source of information, it is important to be well-standing on lists such as "best family-friendly hotels in Helsinki".

As was confirmed by the questionnaire, a swimming pool proved as the most important service for travellers with children. Having a swimming pool gives a large competitive advantage to Scandic Park for targeting travellers with children; the swimming pool could serve dually as a service for both fitness interested guests and children. On the brand.com website the pool could be mentioned under the services for children instead of the fitness services. Children's pool toys could be added at the swimming pool to make it more welcoming for children. In addition, also Sokos Vaakuna and Holiday Inn Messukeskus should also improve their webpages, especially the English language brand.com webpage. Updating their English webpages could significantly increase the amount of international family visitors. For Holiday Inn Messukeskus I recommend to mention the amusement park shuttle service on the brand.com webpage.

For Cumulus Kallio and Holiday Inn Messukeskus, even though the average rating on Tripadvisor is good, the amount of reviews is very small. At this moment, Cumulus Kallio has 8 reviews from families and Holiday Inn Messukeskus has 11 reviews from families. Such a small amount of reviews from families is alarming and a potential guest wanting to choose a family-friendly hotel may be turned away due to such a small amount of reviews. Thus, the hotels could ask more of the family guests to give reviews.

Holiday Inn is a well-known brand internationally and this can strongly assist in gaining a competitive advantage in attracting international families. Starting by updating their English brand.com website. Additionally, multigenerational travel showed to be common amongst the questionnaire respondents thus targeting multigenerational travellers can prove very successful if marketed better. Also, offering memorable experiences that are specifically targeted towards the entire family (grandparents to babies) should be offered. These memorable experiences can be family dinners, organized trips or activities.

8 Self-evaluation

The process of writing a thesis proved more time consuming than expected. Improvements in the process of the thesis would have been keeping to the schedule and primarily set timeline for the completion of the report. The largest stepping stone was delimiting the research. The topic of comparing the services for children in Helsinki hotels was clear from the beginning, however the approach of the research was changed numerous times. The reason for this was the lack of previous similar studies on the topic. Hopefully, in any future studies, this research can help in the delimiting of a research and influence the approach of the study. If this research were to be re-done, the reliability of the benchmarking and the validity of the questionnaires should be improved. In addition, the email interview questions should have been more specific. For example, asking the amount of children guests was too vague and units of measurement and time spans should have been indicated.

The topic proved highly fascinating and the knowledge obtained from both the process of writing the thesis and the topic is highly valued. Hopefully the knowledge gained will be useful in my future career. Many hotels have an employee who is responsible for the services offered for children and the hotel's children guests. I hope to someday be that employee at her employer.

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Appendix 1 – Questionnaire questions

Demographics

- 1) What year were you born in?
- 2) What country are you from?
- 3) How many children do you travel with (on average)?
- 4) How old are the children?

Please note the objective of the questions are to gather information on the travel habits of families including children. Therefore, in your responses only consider the answers that include children in your travels / hotel stays.

- 5) Within the past year, how many nights have you stayed at a hotel?
- 6) Have you had a staycation in the past year where you stayed at least one night at a hotel? (Staycation= a vacation within 100km of your home)
- 7) Within the past year, have any of your travels included more than two generations of travelers? For example having children, parents, and grandparents on vacation together.

Preferences

The below questions are meant to better understand the preferences of families with children when staying at a hotel. The questions are to be answered on your preferences when travelling with children. Please answer with 1 being least import and 5 being most important.

- 8) It is important the hotel offers to the following services:

A playroom

“Welcome gift” when checking in

A swimming pool

Children’s tv channels (in room)

Netflix (in room)

Scavenger hunts

Trivia questions

PlayStation

Coloring paper and crayons

Discounts at the restaurant

A hotel / brand mascot

Room + fun park packages

Multi-room packages

Discounts on additional rooms for children

A library to borrow books and board games

- 9) Are any of the options below services your child would enjoy to be organized by the hotel?

Educational classes

Arts and Crafts

Sports

Musical activities

- 10) *Please answer yes or no for the following questions. Again, please consider your answers in regards to your preferences when lodging with children.*

When booking a hotel, it is important that the hotel markets itself as child friendly.

I would prefer for the hotel to organize activities for children.

The hotel should offer new experiences for the family.

The hotel stay should be memorable for the children.

It is important that a hotel stay is educational for my child.

The children's menus at restaurants should focus on offering healthy options.

The hotel should offer a babysitting service.

- 11) What factor mostly affects your family's satisfaction at a hotel?

- 12) Do you have any personal opinions or general comments on the services offered for children at hotels?

Appendix 2 – Competitive benchmarking of four Helsinki hotels

	Scandic Park	Original Sokos Hotel Vaakuna Helsinki	Holiday Inn Helsinki Exhibition and Convention Center	Cumulus Kallio Helsinki
Amount of rooms	523	270*	244	121
Location	Mannerheimintie 46, near the Opera and Finlandia building landmarks	Asema-Aukio 2, opposite the Central Railway Station	Messuaukio 1, next to the Helsinki Conference Center	Läntinen Brahenkatu 2, near the amusement park
Children's program	Kids Concept		In restaurant: Kids Eat Free - program	
Mascot	Yes, Sigge the hedgehog	Yes, Onni Orava (a squirrel)	Yes, Turix the star	Yes, Galaxi the star
All year round guaranteed services by the brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome gift from the reception - Children's TV channels - Half price for kids on all dishes on the menu - Some child-friendly dishes on the menu - Crayons and crafts in the restaurant - Children (under 13 years old) accommodate for free in the same room as the adults - Additional children's rooms at 50% off 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A surprise gift from the reception - A book corner with books, board games, and magazines - A potty, crib, and picture book for babies - Additional children's rooms starting at 59€/room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kids Eat Free (with a paying adult from the restaurant) - Children's menus; must include dishes free from artificial additive and low in sugar and salt - Children's activity material at the restaurant - Multi-room packages - Additional children's rooms at 49/55€ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A scavenger hunt available at some locations - Potties and cribs available for babies - Healthy food options for children at breakfast - Children can sign the children's guest book - At least one TV channel for children in rooms
Additional seasonal services guaranteed by the brand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kids' buffet in the restaurant - Proper play area or playroom with PlayStation - Meet Sigge at breakfast and/or dinner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children's extras at breakfast - Play corners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Children's extras at breakfast - Surprise gift - Children can sign the children's guest book 	

	- Activities -> Film-time, quiz, etc.			
The hotel's additional services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Swimming pool - Seasonal packages available (such as to the amusement park) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Binoculars, scooters and helmets can be borrowed from the reception - A map of the city with toy shops and candy shops marked (only for Finnish speaking guests) - A large playroom is open alongside restaurant Loiste - Children's menu at restaurant Loiste - Seasonal packages available (such as to the amusement park and Sea Life) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bathtubs in all rooms - For babies: a crib, a baby bathtub, additional garbage bags, and kitchen paper is brought to the room. - For older children: a children's pillow, and a stool (to reach the bathroom sink) is brought to the room - Sell discounted tickets to Sea World - Sea World accommodation package - Playroom - Reading, board games and cards can be borrowed from the reception - Children's TV channels - Shuttle bus service to the amusement park during summer months (at an additional cost) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seasonal packages (such as to the nature center Haltia) - Theatre and accommodation packages - Room Escape accommodation package - Some discounts at the nearby recreation center
Targeted age group				
Targeted family segments				

Amount of children guests				
Daily Rate	168 € / room**	188 € / room**	185 € / room**	115 € / room**
Average rating by families on TripAdvisor	3,89 – Very good*	4,04 – Very good*	3,81 – Very good*	3,75 – Very good*

*Source: TripAdvisor

**The Daily Rate was taken for the random date of Saturday 16th April, 2016 for 1 standard room, 1 night, accommodating 2 adults and 1 child, including breakfast. All prices were checked on the same day