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ROVANIEMI DESTINATION IMAGE TO VIETNAMESE MILLENNIAL TRAVELLERS

Case: Visit Lapland Tours

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Bachelor Thesis
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Abstract of Thesis

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Rovaniemi is on the way to becoming a well-known Christmas and winter-themed destination amongst the Vietnamese. In recent years, it has attracted more Vietnamese Millennial travellers. Rovaniemi has valuable tourism resources to develop for the Vietnamese market. The thesis aims at examining the perceived destination image of Rovaniemi under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives. Visit Lapland Tours is the commissioner of this thesis project.

Qualitative research methodology was employed to gain valuable data for research. A survey and content analysis were used to gather qualitative data on travel behaviours and Rovaniemi destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives. The achieved findings can benefit the commissioner company in acknowledging and interpreting the destination image of Rovaniemi in Vietnamese, thus would be able to formulate the corresponding destination branding plan and strategy. The initial stage of an effective destination branding is to understand how potential customer perceived destination image. The results assist the commissioner in developing a plan to improve Rovaniemi image in the branding process.

The key findings indicate that Vietnamese Millennial travellers who have visited Rovaniemi have a positive image of the city. Although two-thirds of respondents have not visited Rovaniemi, most of them identify the city as Santa Claus hometown, which is the motivation of their visit in the future. The project plan is suggested based on the content analysis and branding approach to Millennial travellers and conducted online. As a result, branding contents are compiled and distributed through suitable branding channels to attract Vietnamese Millennial travellers to visit Rovaniemi.

Key words Rovaniemi, Vietnamese Millennial travellers, destination image

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Being one of the countries in the Northern Europe region, Finland is famous for its beautiful winter scenery, forest density, and annual happiness ranking (Visit Finland 2020). Thanks to these features, the tourism industry in Finland connects to nature, especially in the north – the Finnish Lapland region (World Atlas 2020 & Finland Toolbox 2020). Rovaniemi becomes the rising destination as the significance in the number of incoming tourists and overnight stay recorded (YLE 2020). For an emerging destination, it is essential to perform destination branding effectively to the potential customer groups as it is the critical process of the differentiation one destination amongst others and improve the competitiveness (Cai 2002; Hassan, Ahmad & Aziz 2017; Kaplanidou & Vogt 2003; Saraniemi 2009).

Vietnamese people now are more aware of Finland as a travel destination. Finland is yet a hidden gem amongst Vietnamese travellers. In a report of Mastercard, the number of Vietnamese outbound travellers will reach 7.5 million, and they are more likely to travel outsides Asia by 2021 (Choong & Wong 2016). Vietnamese travellers are becoming Finland's potential target customer group, and Rovaniemi particularly their potential destination. For an effective destination process, suggested by tourism researchers, understanding how potential customer perceived destination image is the initial step for destination branding (Kaplanidou & Vogt 2003).

The commissioner of this thesis is Visit Lapland Tours company. Visit Lapland Tours is a latecomer safari house in the heart of Rovaniemi. Their safaris are arranged in Rovaniemi and surrounding areas. The company provides both sightseeing and adventure tours for their customers. Understanding the possibility in developing Vietnamese market, Visit Lapland Tours expresses their desire to attract more Vietnamese customers, as the increase in the number of Vietnamese tourists participating in their safaris. (Visit Lapland Tours Company 2020b.)

Therefore, the main objective of this thesis is to examine Rovaniemi destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives. The research focuses on answering, what are Vietnamese Millennial tourists' perception of Rovaniemi as a tourism destination. The result of this research can be used to utilise the destination branding process in promoting Rovaniemi to potential customer segments within the case company.

In order to attain predetermined objectives, this thesis was conducted using qualitative research methodology. A survey with open-ended questions was used to collect qualitative data on Vietnamese travellers' perception of travel behaviour and their expectations toward Rovaniemi as a travel destination.

2 DESTINATION BRANDING DEFINITION AND CONCEPT

2.1 Destination Concept

The main objective of this thesis was to investigate Rovaniemi destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives. First, the terms related to tourism destination image and destination branding need to be defined. Furthermore, it is essential to know the process of destination branding and the role of a destination image in that process.

UNWTO indicated the definition as "Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes" (UNWTO 2008). In another publication, tourism was explained as the activities of visitors or travellers (UN 2008, as cited in UNWTO 2020).

Destination is a central product of tourism industry. Tourism destinations are established in physical boundary locations. It offers various specific functions to serve the demands or needs of visitors or traveller either directly charges or without fees. (Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2018, 82.) For example, visitors have to pay for accommodation services, but they do not have to pay to walk on the streets.

Destination is a constitutional element where most of the aspects of tourism take place. As being stated in the "European Tourism Indicator System", a place or area which is recognised and can easily be defined as a visitor destination and has a range of facilities and products in place for tourism purposes; to measure the supply of and demand for tourism services, i.e. the visitor economy (European Commission 2016).

In a book Tourism: Principles and Practices, the authors defined destinations as amalgams of tourism products including facilities and services that cooperatively offer a "destination" experience to visitors (Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert & Wanhill 2018, 510). From Saraniemi and Kylänen, destination is a set of institutions and actors located in a physical or a virtual space where marketing-related transactions and activities take place challenging the traditional production-consumption dichotomy (Saraniemi & Kylänen 2010).

In order to attract visitors, a destination must invest in both hospitality and financial aspects. Tourism activities create a considerable demand for public services such as public transportation, infrastructure and facilities, emergency health care services. Besides, the interaction between residents and visitors is an essential factor that affects the total tourism experiences of visitors. All the stakeholders of a tourist destination should have a proper holistic approach to implement those investments to keep the attractiveness and competitiveness of a tourist destination.

2.2 Destination Image in Destination Branding

2.2.1 Destination Branding

As Anholt noted the definition of destination brand in 2009 “a perfect metaphor for the way places compete with each other in the global marketplace for products, services, events, ideas, visitors, talent, investment and influence: this is simply the reality of globalisation, and it’s inescapable” (Anholt 2009b, 1). In the same year, Saraniemi described the definition of destination brand as “the core values and commitments of a destination, and makes promises uniquely associated with the place, based on dynamic identities of the destination and its stakeholders” (Saraniemi 2009, 20). In general, destination brand can be explained as the typical features and the significant assets of places or destinations, which separate them from their competitors in different levels, within the region or country or around the world.

Destination branding became the central issue in Saraniemi research in 2009. The author denominated destination branding as “holistic, dynamic, co-created and committed identity management, based on core values of the destination and its stakeholders both on the demand and supply side, in order to build a promise uniquely associated with the place” (Saraniemi 2009, 20). In 2017 Hassan, Ahmad and Aziz described the term destination branding as “the management of place image through strategic innovation and coordinated economic, commercial, social, cultural, and government policy” (Hassan, Ahmad & Aziz 2017, 358).

In the field of destination branding, Anholt describes the process of destination branding comprehensively in the book “Handbook on Tourism Destinations Branding”, which is displayed in Figure 1.

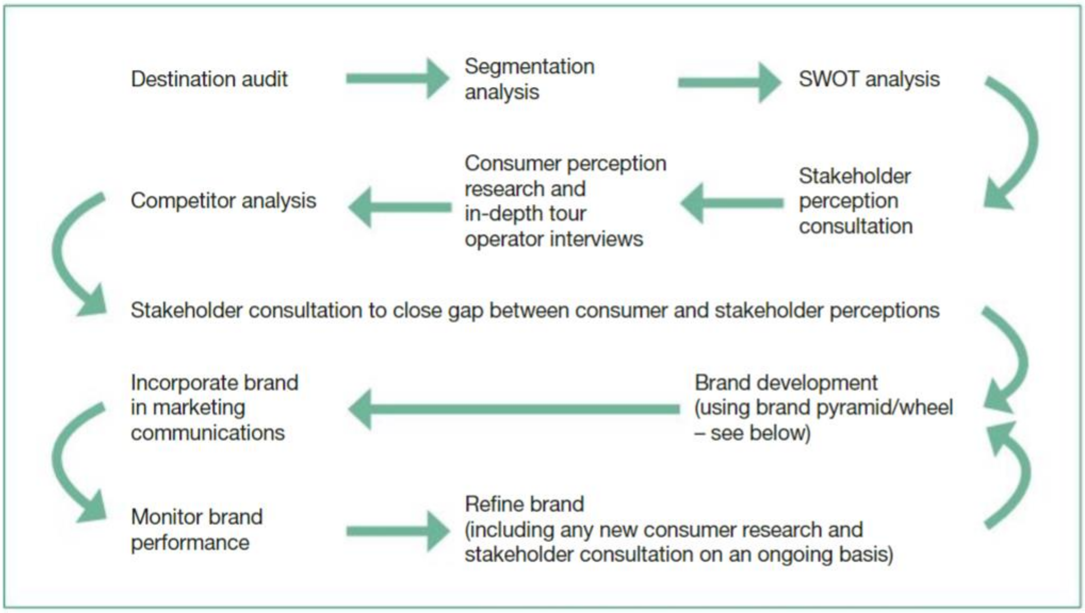

Figure 1. Destination Branding Process (Anholt 2009a)

Figure 1 shows eleven stages in the destination branding process, introduced by Anholt. The initial stage is to perform the destination audit. Destination audit is to evaluate the destination’s core assets in order to make the destination attractive to main market segments by prioritising the core assets. Secondly, segmentation analysis is undertaken to identify the key market segments. It is essential to perform a segmentation analysis as it drives destination brand development. Thirdly, a SWOT analysis should be considered as critical as the other stages of the branding process. It highlights the destination’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats under competitive context. As indicated by Yusof, Ismail and Ghazali, the role of stakeholders in destination brand developing process is significant (Yusof, Ismail & Ghazali 2014), the third stage of the destination branding process is to include stakeholder’s perception in the beginning stages of the destination branding process. Then, customer perception research is conduct in order to understand the destination brand under the visited and unvisited travellers’ perspectives. Competitor analysis is the following stage conducted in order to assess the destination’s competitive strengths and weaknesses against the competitors as well as what its visitors looking for. Having gathered the destination image perceived by stakeholders and customers, it is crucial to close the gap between their destination perceptions to begin building the destination brand. (Anholt 2009a.)

In the eighth stage of the destination branding process, Anholt introduced four different brand pyramids and three brand wheels that can be used to build the destination brand. The use of brand pyramids and wheels is to elicit destination brand essence and values in main market segments. Once the destination brand is developed, it is crucial to integrate the destination brand in marketing activities. It helps spread the destination strategic message to the target audiences. The two final stages are to monitor the brand’s performance and to refine the destination brand. They evaluate the branding process and eliminate unnecessary aspects of destination brand in the following destination branding process. (Anholt 2009a.)

2.2.2 Approach to Destination Image

Destination image in destination branding can be simply understood as a combination of ideas, feelings and expectation that is given to a specific place, by either marketers or travellers (Kamenidou, Mamalis, & Proporas 2008, as cited in Reuben 2013). It can also be termed as “The sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about a place. Images represent a simplification of a larger number of associations and pieces of information connected to a place. They are a product of the mind trying to process and pick out essential information from huge amounts of data about a place”. (Kotler & Gertner 2004, 42.) With this background, destination image is a complete portrayal of beliefs, ideas, and impressions of a travel destination (Lee & Lockshin 2011, 11).

In two studies by Beerli and Martín in 2004 and Konecnik & Gartner in 2007, presented by Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou & Apostolopoulou, the concept of destination image has been operationalised as including two components: a perceptual-cognitive component that captures knowledge and beliefs about a destination’s attributes and an affective component that describes feelings toward a destination (Papadimitriou, Kaplanidou & Apostolopoulou 2015.) These two components work together to form the overall destination image. A positive image can lead to a positive decision (Marshalls 2008; Plantinga 2017). Therefore, it is imperative to understand a destination image to make an impact on the decision-making process of travellers.

Having discussed in Saraniemi's research, the process of creating the destination image from the supply side named "destination image building" while from the demand side, it called "destination image formation" (Saraniemi 2009). Besides, Tasci and Gartner's research mentioned destination image should be investigated from both sides, supply and demand side to successfully achieve a strategic destination branding process, filling in the gap between supply and demand side of destination brand is pragmatic (Tasci & Gartner 2009). However, this thesis primarily focuses on the destination image perceived by demand-side according to the predetermined objective. Rovaniemi destination image under the supply-side will be introduced to check if there are any variables in the perception of supply and demand sides.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the first two stages of destination branding process are destination audit and segmentation analysis (Anholt 2009, 35). In the first stage destination audit, Anholt suggested that the identification of the destination core assets and key segmentation have vital impacts on choosing destination brand development methods and customer approaches on later stages (Anholt 2009). Considering the previous literature review, there are two major factors in destination image formation: stimulus factors and personal factors (Baloglu & McCleary 1999; Marshall 2008). Drawing on the objectives of the thesis, the author will research Rovaniemi destination image and Vietnamese Millennial travellers' behaviour.

It is vital to understand the destination image in the modern destination branding process. To fully understand one city brand image, city brand hexagon was introduced by Anholt and GFK America in 2011 (Figure 2).

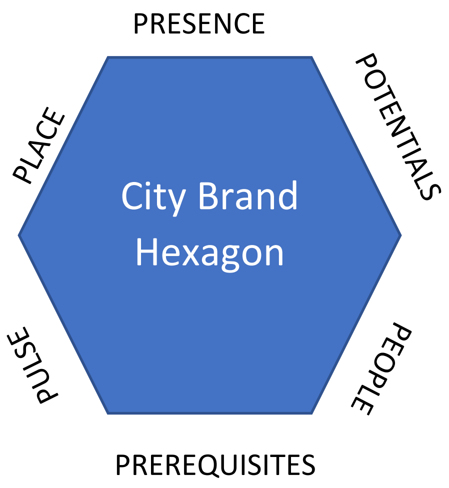

Figure 2. City Brand Hexagon (Anholt 2010)

Anholt's model was originally called the "National Brand Index". The hexagon later was redesigned as "City Brand Index". The hexagon contains six categories to investigate a city brand image. (Papp-Vary 2011.)

The first aspect, "presence" is how the city is perceived. It is measured by the city's international status as well as the global familiarity of the city. The "potential" assesses the opportunities also the capacity of the city in the field of economic and employment. It means to measure the investment potential of the city. "People" of one city evaluates the level of hospitality of its inhabitants, their involvement as a stakeholder in the tourism industry, whether they are willing to warmly welcome visitors or not, the height of language barrier between local community and visitors. The "prerequisites" reveals the perception of people on necessities and public amenities such as public transportation, accommodation, emergency healthcare, and schools. "Pulse" determines the exciting events and activities for visitors to spend their time in the city. It shows the core values what the city can offer the visitors during their trips. The "place" describes people's point of view towards the geographical and physical sides of the city. (Papp-Vary 2011.)

The city brand hexagon was chosen as a feasible tool to approach destination image in this thesis. It is important to assess the image of a city as a tourism destination.

2.3 Branding Approach to Millennial Travellers

In the last two decades of the 21st century, there are three major generations formed demographic groups of the customer segmentation: Baby Boomers (birthyear from 1946 to 1964), Generation X who was born from 1965 to 1979 and Generation Y also called the Millennials, who was born in the last two decades of the 20th century. Millennials, which can also be referred as Gen Y or the Digital Generation or The Nexters, sometimes labelled as Selfie Generation are mentioned in Tourism and Generation Y to be a demographical group, who was born at the beginning of 1980s to early 2000 century. (Benckendorff, Moscado & Pendergast 2010, 2.) Pollak labels Millennials as those who were born from 1982 to 1997 (Pollak 2015). While in 2014, the Millennials definition by Howe explained them as people who were born between the years of 1982 and 2004 (Howe 2014). Despite having an abundant number of studies on this generation over the past 20 years, there has not been an official term of Millennials were accepted the precise period when the Gen Y was born (Leppänen 2017).

Growing up in the dawn of information technology, Gen Y gets more screen time than fresh air (Benckendorff, Moscado & Pendergast 2010). Research over the last decades has shown that Gen Y spends more time watching content online than any other age groups and continuously refresh their social media feed for the latest update in their personal and professional lives (Cadwallade 2019; Chereskin 2015). Furthermore, Millennials do enjoy online shopping. A survey on American Millennials found out that 60% of the purchases are online, and 36% of them are on mobile devices (DigitalCommerce360 2019). Regardless of the expansion of online shopping, the in-store purchase is a preferable behaviour indeed. They can spend hours browsing online reviews, but they want physical interaction (Kraljević & Filipović 2017). Therefore, a prominent direct way to win Millennials heart is performing branding process online through the screen they spend time on (Chereskin 2015). It makes the situation even tougher for traditional advertisers by 67% of Millennials now do not traditionally watch TV anymore, they are switching to streaming services such as YouTube and Netflix founded in a research in 2015 (Luttrell & McGrath 2015). The stage is now belonging to online content creators.

The viral marketing approach is a cost-efficient method for tourism marketers and creators to distribute their brand on a large scale. Viral marketing can be explained as “a method of creating buzzwords or marketing pieces that are memorable and attention-grabbing in our modern, always-connected world” (Schofield 2016). Viral marketing relies much on how a brand is spread and how their audiences consume the information. It should show up in front of potential audiences as much and as bold as possible. (Barnhart 2020.) This is precisely why the term of online influencers has become fashionable in the era of viral marketing. Marketers and companies are gradually using influencers marketing strategies on plenty of online platforms concerning powerful communication collaboration results in viral marketing (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki 2018, 1).

In 2018, external data from Visit Benidorm’s report revealed that over $3 million had been paid to influencers only for the campaign “The Other Benidorm” (Femenia-Serra & Gretzel 2020). In general, more than 80% of travellers choose their tourism destination from influencers’ suggestions. It is also reported that 20% of the annual budget is the highest share for influencer marketing making by 42% tourism companies and organisation by 2019. However, the investment in this aspect seems to be uncertainty for 26 % of tourism companies and organisations (Axon Marketing and Communication 2019.) Influencer marketing is a rising star of the tourism sector. Nevertheless, regular digital advertising, which appears as a 15-second video or pop-up page on websites and other platforms, now suffers its hardship. Users are in high probability to skip or use the ad-blocking application because those regular advertisements seem annoying and unattractive proving by “26% of desktop users and 15% of mobile users use ad-blocking software”. (Dahan 2016; Rivera, 2018; Tait 2017.)

Besides, another aspect of viral marketing is word-of-mouth marketing or recently redefined electronic word-of-mouth by Gen Y (Cadwallade 2019; Kotler & Armstrong 2018; Rosario, Sotgiu, Valck & Bijmolt 2016). From 2002, Morton highlighted the importance of word of mouth marketing as Millennials tremendously value acquaintances’ opinions (Morton, 2002). WOM marketing appears when the interest of customers based on a product or service is reflected in their daily conversations (Kenton 2020). Electronic WOM came out as a result of Gen Y social media engagement. Kremers implied that “electronic WOM is a form of buzz marketing, and it can become viral if the message is persuasive or funny enough" (Kremers 2017). In electronic WOM marketing, the process involves not only influencers but also customers. In the tourism sector, travellers share their review, publish their travel blog posts or video online, or post about their experiences on social media platforms. This creates valuable marketing materials for unvisited travellers to consider. The credibility of them is based on likes and shares because research has shown that online recommendations persuade people more than traditional ones (Long 2011; Rosario, Sotgiu, Valck & Bijmolt 2016.) At this stage, the primary responsibility of tourism marketers and external stakeholders is to ensure tourism destination social media-worthy (Chereskin 2015). Besides, it is crucial to create a catching phase – a hashtag, for travellers to use on social media. Hashtag effectively stores all social media posts. Unvisited travellers are more likely to use that hashtag for further references. Beyond this, creating a storyline behind the destination is an integrated way to fully engage Gen Y travellers to the branding process (Behrendt 2018).

Morrissey also suggested tourism marketers focusing more on ethic branding as well as authentic branding approaches (Morrissey 2020). Gen Y is the generation fully understand the impact of climate change and global warming (Benckendorff, Moscado & Pendergast 2010). Apart from an environmental-friendly destination, branding campaigns should genuinely reflect what that destination is (Behrendt 2018). Raising their social awareness is a plus in branding strategy. These approaches perfectly match their desire for authenticity, collaboration, plus environment awareness.

Furthermore, the luxury sectors of the tourism industry can put more effect on promoting authenticity within the luxury. Luxury travel is not all about the five-star hotel or higher flight classes. It is authentic values provided by the local tourism industry and hospitality. Travellers expect to gain more cultural and historical values when they spend more money on travelling. Especially Millennials, they expect their experiences within luxury sectors worth both social media sharing and personal acknowledgement. (Carmela 2015.)

3 COMMISSIONER AND ROVANIEMI TOURISM INDUSTRY

3.1 Visit Lapland Tours Background

Visit Lapland Tours (VLT) is a freshman within the competitive tourism market of Rovaniemi. The company started its first winter season in December 2018 as a destination management company (DMC). The author has three months working as a sale and marketing intern in the company and have a throughout view on company operation. VLT's vision is "All that you want" and the company's mission is "provide the best services to our customers". Vision and mission imply company as a customer-centric service provider. (Visit Lapland Tours 2020.)

Over the journey, VLT has offered a wide range of products to customers. Generally, VLT offers single experience services, combined experience services, and combined travel packages. As listed on the company website, single experience services are aurora hunting tours, sightseeing tours (Santa Claus Village and Ranua Zoo), ice fishing safari, which are entirely operated by the company. Reindeer and husky safaris, ice floating, are services in cooperation with other DMCs in the city. Besides, the company provides one-day or two-day tailored made packages, which are combined the available products on customer's demand. (Visit Lapland Tours 2020.)

As a freshman in the market, VLT has not built a strong network and connection with tour operators. VLT cooperates with other DMCs and local farms instead to expand the services and experiences. However, the Finnish-cottage façade office situates in the middle of the walking street – in the centre of Rovaniemi city is an advantage to catch tourist's attention. Therefore, the most beneficial selling channel is direct offline, from the vendor customers who visit the office. Focusing on the direct offline selling channel, nationalities of VLT's customers come from all over the world. The largest share of sale volume is customers from Great China (China Mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan) in the last winter season (Appendix 3). In the winter season of 2019, they have a plan to expand the selling channel to direct online and distribute their services through online travel agencies (OTA) platforms.

According to a report generated by Bokun – a booking management platform for business, in 2018-2019 winter season, aurora hunting tour is the most booked services of the company with more than 82%. The order of other products is the one-day package, Santa Claus Village Tour, New Year Tour and Christmas Tour, respectively. (Appendix 3.) Despite the lack of experiences in the market, the company's aurora hunting tour has competitive advantages compared to other local DMCs. Aurora hunting tours are operated in a private camping land going along with a warm open-fire cottage is highly suitable for tourists who have not get used to the subarctic climate of Rovaniemi. Besides, VLT owns an accommodation service, namely Santa Holidays Home, that is linked with the service business. VLT's customers are eligible to geta ten per cent discount when staying at Santa Holidays Home and vice versa.

Since other strong leading DMCs have already reached the main target markets of Rovaniemi in the region. Newcomers in Rovaniemi tourism market have to create the network and cooperation within the existing target markets and not-so-strong target markets. It is a breakthrough for VLT to reach Vietnam as a potential market, promote Rovaniemi destination image to get travellers to visit Rovaniemi and then become the leading DMCs providing services in Rovaniemi for both Vietnamese travellers and Vietnamese tour operators.

3.2 Overview of Rovaniemi

Rovaniemi, situated around 5 kilometres south of the Arctic Circle, is the capital of Lapland province – the northernmost region of Finland. Arctic Circle (to differ from Antarctic Circle in Southern Hemisphere) runs across eight countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark (Greenland), Iceland, Canada, the United States (Alaska), and Russia (Dobrovolny 2020). The geographical area covered by the city of Rovaniemi is 8016 square kilometres, considering Rovaniemi as the largest city in Europe by size. (Lapland Above Ordinary 2020a.) In the year 2020, the total population of this city is approximately 63000, accounting for nearly 1.1% of Finland population (Statistics Finland 2020). Rovaniemi is presented as the oldest Finnish tourism destination (Popescu & Corboş 2010).

In general, tourism industries share proportion in Lapland economy was 5.7% in the year of 2018 whereas the average share proportion is only 2.5 % in the same year. Lapland is connected in plenty of minds as tourism specialised. Statistics over the years have proved that Lapland is the heart of Finnish Tourism industries by the number of registered overnight stays, the share of international overnight stay within the sector, the number of air passengers and so on. (Lapland Above Ordinary 2019.)

Rovaniemi city has built the tourism destination brand as "hometown of Santa Claus" over 35 years since it first started welcoming visitors and officially declared the brand name in 2010. Tourism appears as the fastest-growing industry of the city. (Visit Rovaniemi 2020c.) In the year 2016, the total income from tourism of Rovaniemi was €474M (City of Rovaniemi 2017). In December 2019, there was an increase of 7.3% of bed night registered in Rovaniemi compared with December 2018 (Visit Rovaniemi 2019). In term of the fast pace growth in recent years, tourism sector in Rovaniemi must have a long-term strategy to develop tourism industry to avoid being exploited by mass and unsustainable tourism. The first primary stage is to investigate Rovaniemi destination brand identity carefully.

3.3 Geographical Region

Situated in the Northern Arctic circle region (geographic coordinates is 66.5 25.71667N) and at the primary junction of Kemijoki (Kemi river), Rovaniemi has a subarctic climate (Britannica 2018; Climate-Data 2020). The subarctic or subpolar climate which appeared only on Northern Hemisphere, characterised by the sharply cold winter and briefly cool summer (Ritter 2020). The distinct geographic location has given Rovaniemi plenty of natural phenomena as tourism advantages to be competitive to the others.

The first natural phenomenon is Northern Lights (or Aurora Borealis or Aurora Australis) is the colour-skimming light show across night sky only occur in high-latitudes regions. Northern Lights happen when there is an interaction between Earth's magnetic field in the atmosphere and charged particles from Sun storms, strikes the atoms then causing them to light up. (Imster 2017.) Northern Lights nowadays is listed as a spectacular light show of the Nordic region, showed up in travellers' bucket lists as well as clickbait articles titled top 10 or best tours and activities in Arctic region (Get Your Guide 2020; TripAdvisor 2020; Visit Rovaniemi 2020e).

The second and the third phenomena are Polar Day and Polar Night take place within the Arctic and Antarctic Circle only during summer and winter. Our planet's orbit and tilt are the reason behind these two phenomena. Earth rotates around a roughly 23-degree tilted axis, Arctic region tilts away from the sun during the wintertime and so does Antarctic region during the summertime. Therefore, the sun stays under the horizon lessens the sunshine hours and daylight hours of the Arctic region in the last season of the year, while in the summer, the sun hardly disappears below the horizon. (Hocken 2020a; Hocken 2020b; Polar Discovery 2020.)

Polar Night occurs in the last season of the year, usually starts around November. It provides Rovaniemi with a brilliant winter wonderland landscape by offering warm colour twilight vistas reflected on a pure snowy scenery or a short moment of the day when the clear sky and snow-capped background are blended. Rovaniemi in the winter proposes travellers a pure and photogenic moment to escape the contaminated world. (Lapland Above Ordinary 2020b.) This phenomenon is designed for the ultimate northern light-seeking sessions.

Conversely, Polar Day or Midnight Sun is when "a part of the Sun's disk is visible above the horizon 24 hours of the day" (Hocken 2020a). In Rovaniemi, white nights are throughout the summer from the end of May till August. Especially in summer solstices, Finnish people celebrate the feast of light after six months full of darkness. In term of developing sustainable year-round tourism, a considerable number of activities in Rovaniemi during summer has been implemented such as jet skiing, hiking and horseback riding to enjoy the splendid nature as the abundant amount of energy is produced during the long-lasting day. (Visit Rovaniemi 2020f.)

On the other hand, over the history of developing, after being destroyed by Germans army during World War II, Finnish national architect Alvar Aalto conducted a plan to rebuild the city. His plan includes a reindeer-head-shaped street plan. The idea was born in 1945 as he saw the opportunities of the ashes to highlight the city topography. He outlined the reindeer head with antler against the street plan. Nowadays, travellers visit Rovaniemi quickly come across with bounty of reindeer statues or figures from the airport to the city centre, real reindeers pulling the sleigh in many tourism experiences. However, it seems that a few travellers are aware of the biggest reindeer imposed on city street plan. (Visit Rovaniemi 2020a; Watts 2018.)

Figure 3. Reindeer Head Shaped Street Plan of Rovaniemi (Visit Rovaniemi 2020a)

3.4 Cultural Identity

Rovaniemi was denoted as a city of hosting cultural exhibitions, considering its potentials to offer valuable cultural experiences for travellers as Lapland provincial capital (Popescu & Corboş 2010). From the city official website and Visit Rovaniemi, cultural resources listed are under three different sectors: handicraft, music, and architect (Rovaniemi 2020a; Visit Rovaniemi 2020b).

Every cultural resource has a crucial role and contributes equally to the total cultural values of Rovaniemi city.

Participating in a horn-work handicraft workshop in Rovaniemi let travellers immerse themselves in local life and culture and cherish the old traditions and connection between reindeer and human in Lapland culture. During a workshop, a craftsman will explain the lifespan of reindeer antler and demonstrate the process of making souvenirs from reindeer antler. The outcome products to-be-taken-home will be a touchpoint within a customer journey and emphasise the role of nature in Lappish culture. (Anundi 2017; Hornwork 2020.)

Rovaniemi music sector is widely diversified and fully active despite a thin dense population. Rovaniemi is known as the hometown of the lead singer Mr Lordi of Lordi hard rock band. Lordi was established in 1992 and became the winner of the 2006 Eurovision contest. (Lordi 2020.) On the other side, Lapland Chamber Orchestra represents a lush melody of Rovaniemi’s music. Founded in 1972, the orchestra is granted the northernmost chamber orchestra in the European Union. They have performed in both domestic festivals and abroad concerts and have dozen of international collaboration. (Rovaniemi 2020, Korundi 2020b.)

35 years after the reconstruction plan of Alvar Aalto finished, the influence of Aalto remains ultimately in Rovaniemi architect. Rovaniemi administrative and cultural centre including Rovaniemi City Hall, Rovaniemi City Library, Rovaniemi Theatre, and a congress house named Lappia House design by Aalto continues to be in use. The archetypal glass museum Arktikum was the work of two Danish architects Birch-Bonderup & Thorup-Waade. (Visit Rovaniemi 2020a.) Lumberjack's Candle is recognised as a modern symbol of Rovaniemi connects Ounasvaara and the city centre of Rovaniemi (Rovaniemi 2020b). Besides, Rovaniemi, which is the city of award-winning hotels with a various unique concept of hotels, was the host city of World Luxury Hotel Awards Gala held in 2019 (Business Finland 2019).

3.5 Attractions

Rovaniemi is a tourism destination themed Christmas and winter (Popescu & Corboş 2010). In Santa Brand book, the author clarified Santa is generally a concept of experiences more than just a person (Cheuvront 2010). In 2013, the lead character of Christmas mythology, Santa Claus was assessed $1.6 trillion prove the vast potentials of developing the Santa brand name and a Christmas themed destination (Brand Finance 2013; Nordström & Saarinen 2015). Santa Claus is the most beloved character of all ages. Children meet him in order to fulfil their dream while visiting Santa Claus by adults is an opportunity to recall their childhood. (Timmons 2014.) Santa Claus Village and Santa Park rank the two most popular attractions of Rovaniemi (Visit Rovaniemi 2020b). They are consistently promoted on traditional and digital media as Rovaniemi main tourist attractions (Visit Rovaniemi 2020c). There are three places in Rovaniemi to meet the Christmas man.

Santa Claus Office situated in the Arctic Circle, four kilometres far away from Rovaniemi airport, is the first spot to meet Santa Claus in Rovaniemi (Google Maps 2020). The office stands in the middle of a tourism functioning complex of the city. Its operation is managed by Visit Rovaniemi – a local destination management organisation. The office opens all year round, welcoming tourists from all over the world to have a private personal meeting with their most beloved Christmas character. Besides meeting and having a photo with Santa, visitors are able to request a letter from him. (Santa Claus Office 2020.)

Another spot to reach Santa Claus in Rovaniemi is in Santa Claus Holiday Village. It is a Christmas themed attraction aligned with cabin accommodation and extra services. In the 50s of the previous century, the first cabin was built for the American former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt when she wanted to visit the Arctic Circle. Fifteen years after the first visitor came to Arctic Circle. Santa Claus of Santa Holliday Village is run by a private enterprise Napapiirin Lahja Oy since 1994 and open every day. (Santa Claus Village 2020.)

Last but not least, SantaPark is a Christmas themed park situated 2 kilometres south of Santa Claus Holidays Village. Apart from two previous spots, SantaPark only opens its door seasonally, two months from June to August in the summer and two months from November to January in the winter. SantaPark is a family-owned company and started in tourism industry since 1997. (SantaPark Arctic World 2020.)

In general, winter and Christmas themed attractions take the majority of Rovaniemi total tourism attractions. The attractions outlined Rovaniemi a family-oriented and fantasy destination brand identity(Popescu & Corboş 2010).

Additionally, there are three leading cultural centres in Rovaniemi: Arktikum Science Centre and Museum, Korundi House of Culture, and Science Centre Pilke. Arktikum – iconic building by Alvar Aalto, is the first should be visited as it gives an overview of Lapland history and culture (Arktikum 2020). Pilke Science Centre, the neighbour of Arktikum, is a forestry museum introducing Lapland current forest issue regarding climate change and global warming (Pilke Science Centre 2020). And Korundi Culture House, the main theatre of Lapland Chamber Orchestra, has a significant number of northern contemporary art exhibitions (Korundi 2020a). The cultural attraction combination characterises Rovaniemi destination brand identity as a destination of cultural authenticity and scientific incarnation.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1 Qualitative Methodology

There are two primary research methodologies in approaching and analysing data in tourism research: quantitative and qualitative. Qualitative research methodology was used conducting this thesis. It is defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, 1278). Researchers use qualitative methodology to understand thoughts, concepts, and experiences, by gathering non-numerical data. Qualitative research frequently uses words and is concerned with meanings. In contrast, quantitative research focuses on using numbers and is more concerned with behaviour, explains more the cautions of those behaviours. In qualitative research methodology, the hypothesis is generated from data analysis. Therefore, the expectation of the topic or findings may limit the outcome results of the research. (Zhang & Wildemuth 2005.)

Qualitative research focuses on providing a general understanding of certain phenomena in social sciences. It describes the researched topic in greater depth by collecting in-person or open-test responses. It can help identify customer's need, understand how customers perceive a marketing message and explore a variety of market segments (Attest 2017.) There are certain main methods of qualitative research in use: non-structured or semi-structured interview, open-ended survey, participant observation and qualitative content analysis (Jennings 2013, as cited in Tekoniemi-Selkälä 2020).

Taking into account the objective of this thesis to investigate Rovaniemi destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives, the purpose of this thesis is to understand, explore and interpret rather than develop and test the hypothesis. Therefore, qualitative methodology was employed to conduct the research as it provides suitable nuances to reach the thesis objectives as well as answer the research questions.

This research fundamentally requires the qualitative content analysis method. Secondary data is collected and analysed in the first phase of the research and alongside in other stages of this thesis research. Secondary data is from textbooks, published scientific articles, existing academic studies, visual or audio data. The theories collected illustrate the empirical hypothesis that author wants to test and generate after analysing primary and secondary data (Zhang & Wildemuth 2005).

4.2 Open-ended Survey

A survey is a technique of consistently gathering direct information in a patterned way (Taylor-Powell & Hermann 2000, 3). There are two types of survey: self-administered, in which the questionnaire can be done by the respondents themselves or interviewer-administered with the help of the interviewer in the form of a structured interview. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 360–363.). Although the survey method is more adoptedly used in quantitative research, the open-ended survey is used to collect qualitative data, which aims at collecting Millennials Vietnamese travellers' point of views of Rovaniemi destination image.

Concerning the research, the author designed a Google Form survey to understand travel behaviours of Vietnamese Millennial travellers as well as investigate Rovaniemi destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives (Appendix 1). The survey consists of 43 questions in total in order to understand customer segment all-inclusively. There are three parts in the survey form respondents have to answer. The first two parts "Respondent Background Information" and "Travel Behaviour" are designed for all respondents (Appendix 1). For respondents who have been to Rovaniemi before, they have to answer 19 questions about travel behaviours when visiting Rovaniemi, planned activities and essential factors to visit Rovaniemi, the satisfaction levels on local tour experiences participated in and Rovaniemi tourism industry on general, and respondents' suggestion on improving services and tourism in Rovaniemi. For respondents who have not been to Rovaniemi, there are five questions to answer. The questions focus on identifying image of Rovaniemi by asking opinion when thinking of Rovaniemi, introduce Rovaniemi and ask their motivation and plan to visit Rovaniemi in the future.

The survey uses single/multiple-choice questions, grid questions and open-ended questions. Grid questions are used to measuring the importance level, satisfaction level and interest level of respondents. Respondents' unmeasurable opinions and suggestions are recorded in open-ended questions. Due to Covid-19, the survey was only sent out online in the first two weeks of April 2020. As the targeted participant was Vietnamese only, author distributes survey on Vietnamese travel communities, communities of Vietnamese living in Europe, Australia and Canada on FaceBook.

4.3 Trustworthiness

As the qualitative research method was employed to conduct the thesis, trustworthiness is an important factor in qualitative research, and its criteria are credibility and transferability.

Credibility implies the research findings' truth confidence level (Korstjens & Moser 2017). Data of the research are gathered through the open-ended survey answered by Vietnamese Millennials and content analysis method. Several questions related to the respondent's demographic background, travel behaviour and their perception of Rovaniemi destination image were asked, and respondents were encouraged to giving the opinion on several questions regarding Rovaniemi destination image. Then the author studied and clarified original responses to draw corresponding findings. Moreover, survey participation is voluntary.

At the same time, transferability concerns the other context where the applicability aspect of the results (Korstjens & Moser 2017). Although the research focuses on examining Rovaniemi destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives, various features and characteristics of Rovaniemi tourism industry and destination brand aspects have been taken into account in the process. Furthermore, as the final result was partly dependent on accredited and reliable journals and scientific studies' theory, the destination image approach and branding approach can be conducted by other DMCs in Rovaniemi as well as other destinations.

5 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Customers Segmentation

The result of the online survey will be explained and then analysed in-depth in this chapter. The tables and figures are in virtue of the responses received by 100 respondents, but 8 of them were eliminated because they are not members of the generation. The survey was conducted within the groups of Vietnamese people who are living in Europe, North America and a Vietnamese travelling community on Facebook.

Firstly, this chapter will present the demographic information of the respondents. Demographic information consists of age, gender, occupational status and monthly disposal income of respondents.

Vietnamese Millennials account for roughly one-third of the national population. In the Vietnamese market and customer insights, the role of Millennials in defining buying trends and behaviours is crucial. In line with the generational theory, Vietnamese Millennials share typical characteristics with other Millennials such as social media and technology engagement. (Anjoubault 2018.)

Figure 4 shows the respondents' age and gender proportion. The ages of respondents were asked to make sure that respondents are a member of the Millennials Generation. The age division was made for a chance to detect the differences between these age groups within one generation. (Figure 4.)

More than 50% of respondents represented in the group of Millennials ages from 21 to 25 years old, with 38 females. The primary gender of respondents is female, makes up more than three-quarters of the respondents because females appear more on social media platforms than males. There are only 24 out of 92 respondents are male, which takes up 26%. Male respondents appear in the first three age group.

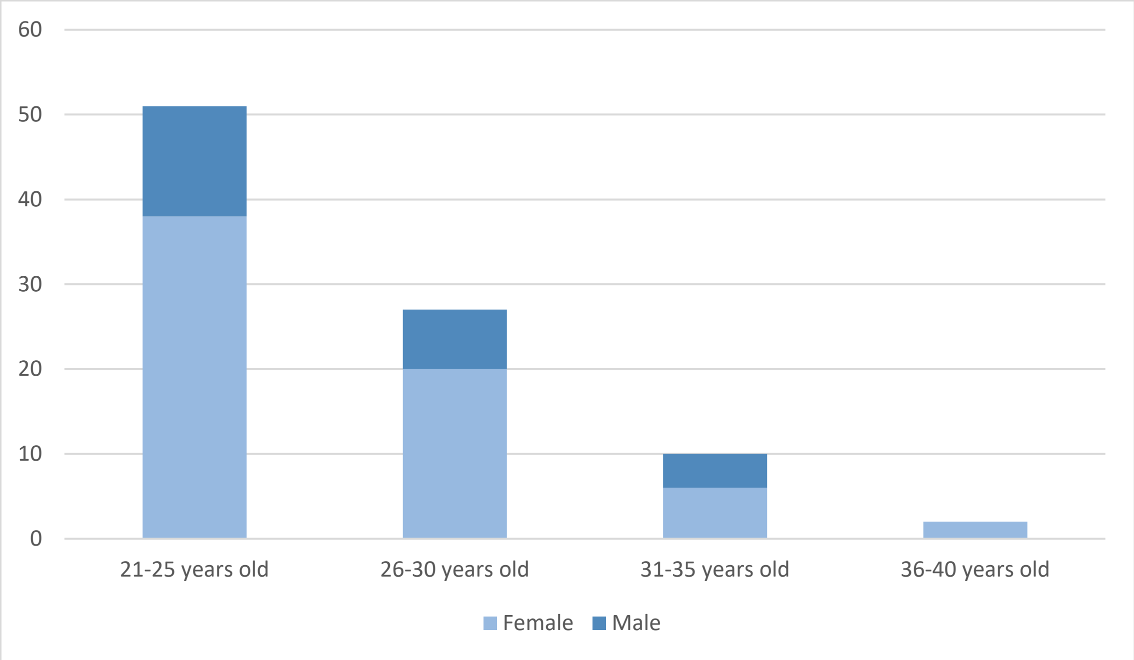

Figure 4. Respondents' Age and Gender (N=92)

The occupational status of respondents is exhibited in Figure 5. The online survey was mostly answered by students rather than employed and unemployed people. The largest share of the respondent was student with 64 out of 92, with nearly 70%, almost 30% of them are employed and unemployed. The reason behind this is because the survey was handed out on the community of Vietnamese people living abroad and most of the Vietnamese people go abroad for higher education, then job opportunity due to the limit in visa exemption for Vietnamese citizens.

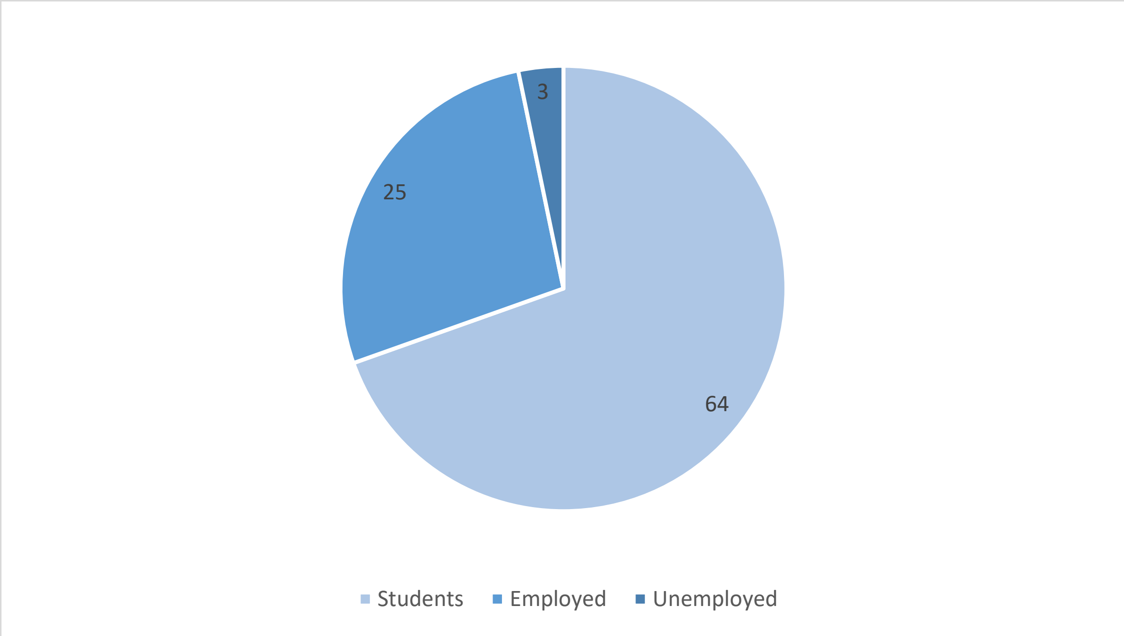

Figure 5. Respondents' Occupational Status. (N=92)

The last aspect of Millennial demographic information to examine is the monthly disposable income. Figure 6 demonstrates the disposal of income collected from Millennials, who answered the survey online.

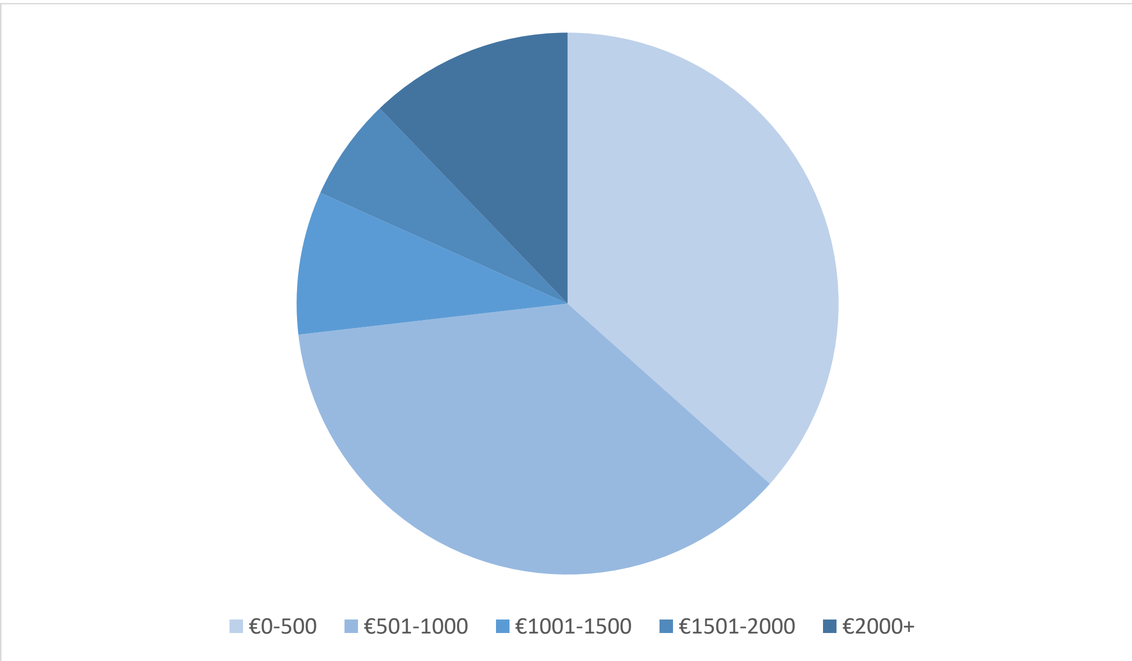

Figure 6. Respondents' Disposal Income Rate (N=92)

As shown in the chart above, the common patterns in monthly disposal income are two groups with €0-500 and €501-1000 monthly disposal income. They both arrive in the first place with 30 respondents, take up 32% both over the total responses. There are 10 Millennials can reach the beyond €2000+ disposal income, whereas there are only 5 Millennials questioned have no more than €2000 monthly disposal income. This can be explained because of the majority of respondents was student, the disposal income from their part-time salary is not as high as employed respondents.

5.2 Vietnamese Millennials Travel Behaviour

After the overview of the demographic information of respondents, this part measures Millennial travel behaviour for better extensive customer insights as well as suitable products and services. According to Axhausen travel behaviours are described as “the physical movement of persons outside their reference locations for any purpose” (Axhausen 2007). Research on human travel behaviours has 80 years of tradition. According to the generational theory, thanks to globalisation and the development of Information Communication and Technology, the results of generational behaviour and approach studies can apply broadly on members of generation cohort without the limitations of geographical boundaries (Benckendorff, Moscado & Pendergast 2010).

In the view of understanding Vietnamese Millennial travellers, the survey was designed to ask travellers about their travelling frequency, partners, budget, purposes, duration of the trip, the primary source of inspiration, means of transportation, types of accommodation, the use of car renting services, planned activities and the importance of authenticity in tourism.

The annual travelling frequency of Vietnamese Millennial is firstly illustrated in Figure 7, in which 2-3 times travelling a year is the most common answer amongst the respondents. There are 41 of questioned respondents travel two to three times every year, being five responses higher than the answer “once a year or less”. While the number of Vietnamese Millennials who travel from four to nine times per year and more than ten times a year take up only 16% of the total respondents.

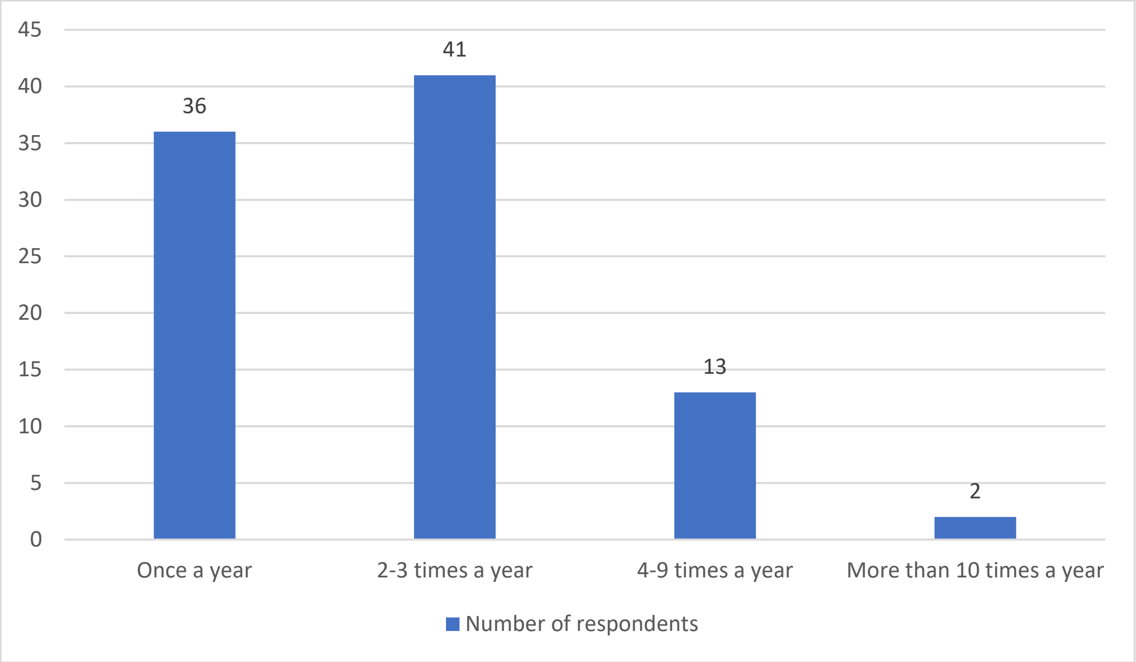

Figure 7. Annual Travelling Frequency of Respondents (N=92)

Secondly, this survey asked respondents how long their trips usually last on average, whose answers are denoted in Figure 8. According to Figure 8, Vietnamese Millennial travellers typically spend from 3 days to 7 days for their trips. Overall, the findings suggest that respondents are not in high probability to stay in their tourism destinations either too short or too long.

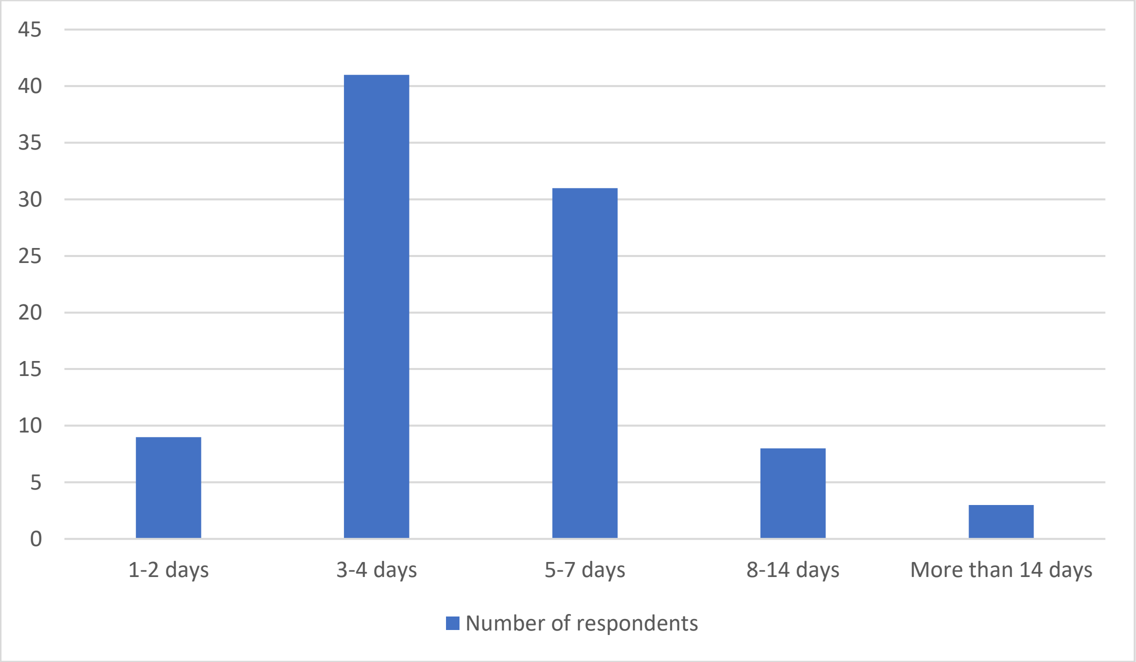

Figure 8. Vietnamese Millennial Average Trip Duration (N=92)

A considerable number of studies also pointed out that Millennials are more likely to travel and do spend more time on travel (Benckendorff, Moscado & Pendergast 2010; Professional Travel Inc 2016; Forbes 2014; Vikholm 2016). Forbes in 2014 predicted that by 2020, there would be a 47% increase equal to 320 million international trips are expected to be made by Millennials each year, starting from 217 million in 2013 (Forbes 2014). A report by Condor Ferries in 2020 reveals generational patterns on the travel trends and statistics for 2020. In 2019, 82% of Millennials who questioned travelled while there is only 75% of the other demographic groups travelled. The average number of trips made by Millennials is 5.6 per year. Their trips usually last 6.4 days in reference to 6.2 days for Gen X and 6.6 days for Gen Z. (Condor Ferries 2020.) The collected responses are following literature research.

Thirdly, the following chart will provide the information on Vietnamese Millennials travel budget (Figure 9). Travel budget is another aspect to be investigated amongst Gen Y travellers. Figure 9 displays three levels of travel budgets amongst Vietnamese Millennial travellers. Travellers choose their tourism destinations based on how much they are willing to pay in those destinations. At the same time, it indicates how likely a destination become popular amongst a generational cohort when their budget and tourism pricing are compared to each other. Concerning the travel and leisure industry, a survey carried by VISA summarises the key findings on the affirmable trends in Vietnamese travellers' community. Vietnamese Millennial travellers are said to have an average budget of €1000 in their trips.

The pie-chart shows respondents' typical budget on travelling. It is indicated in the question that the transportation expenses are included in their travel budgets. The most common answer appears to be the medium budget with 52 responses (56%). This is corresponding with previous disposal income findings. It is no surprise that more than a quarter of received responses only spend less than €300 during their trips since more than two-thirds of respondents are in their student lives. The ratio of large travelling budget seems to be on a balance scale with the proportion of low budget. The findings suggest that from the group of questioned Vietnamese Millennials, they are more likely to spend a moderate amount of money to enjoy the experiences.

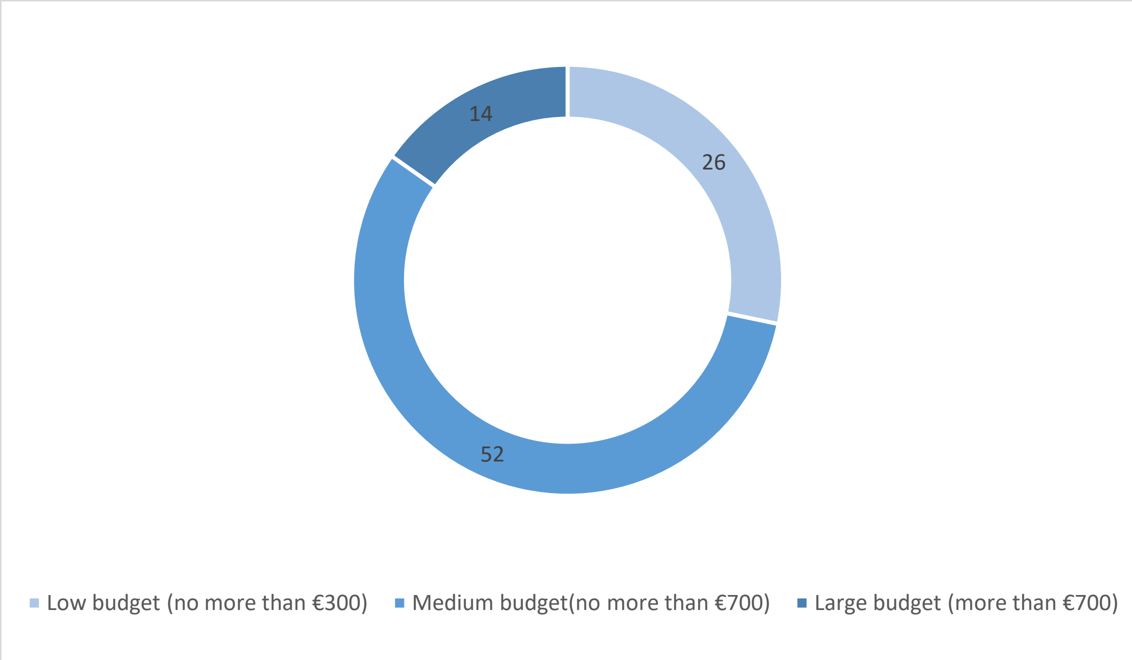

Figure 9. Respondents' Travel Budget (N=92)

Respondents' travel purposes are represented in Figure 10 below. There were five different purposes introduced in the question suggested by Yorke and one section "other" so that respondents can add their purposes (Yorke 2013). Reviewing past literature, Millennials is the trendsetter of "bleisure" – the combination of leisure and business travel phenomenon. 86% of Millennials are willing to combine their business trip with a leisure trip compared to 56% of Gen Xers, and 20% of Baby Boomers are willing to do so (Turk 2016).

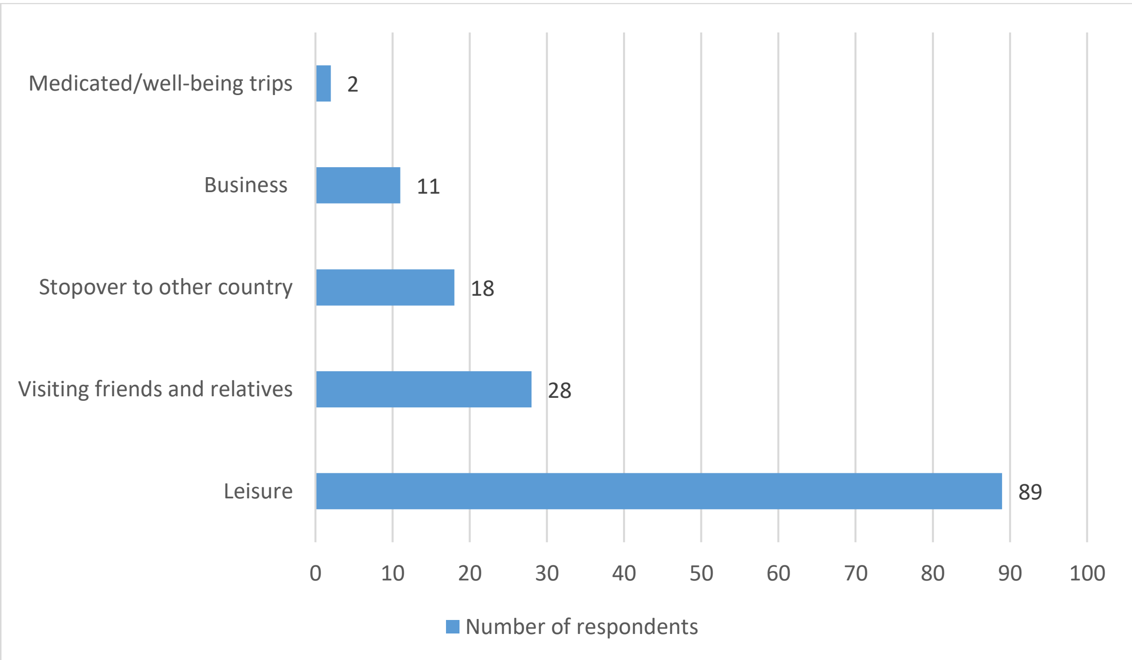

Figure 10. Travel Purposes of Respondents (N=92)

The question allowed respondents to choose as many options as desire because not all the trips have the same purpose. The most common travel purpose amongst respondents is leisure, with 89 out of 92 Vietnamese Millennial travellers chose that option. Besides, the Millennials Generation seems to be too young to go on medical trips. Vietnamese Millennials have the same mindset with others on enjoying their personal lives. But this result also pointed out they are family-oriented or in desire for collaboration because roughly one-quarter of responses travel to visit their friends and relatives.

Travel purposes connected with planned activities since the primary travel intentions decide what travellers are going to do when they arrive at tourism destinations. Figure 11 presents planned activities chosen by Vietnamese Millennials travellers in the questionnaire, in which “try local cuisine” and “go to famous attractions” are the two most wanted-to-do activities.

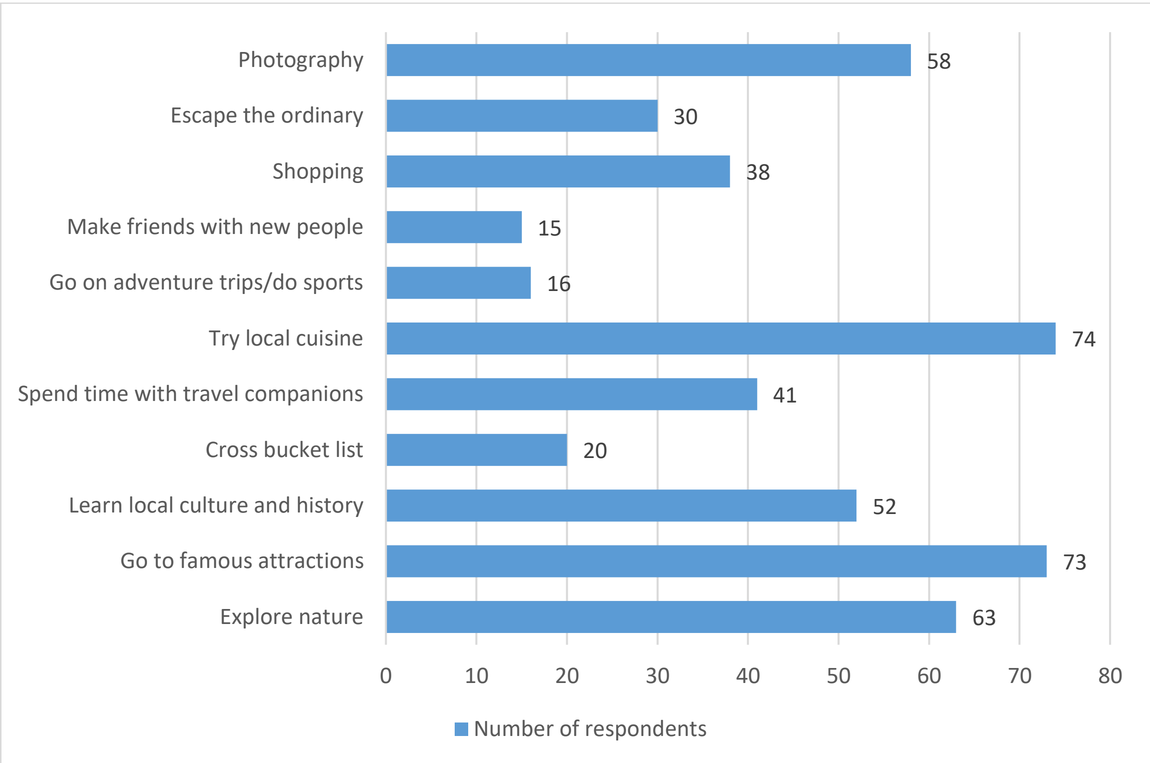

Figure 11. Vietnamese Millennial Travellers’ Planned Activities (N=92)

There are 74 and 73 responses choosing to those two options. “Explore nature” seems to be a favourite activity with roughly two-thirds of responses. Photography is obviously outlined in the to-do list of respondents with 58 answers out of 92. While “learn local culture and history” arrives in the fifth-place, accounting for over 50% of responses. They are typical activities for a leisure trip. On the other hand, 41 respondents considering “spend time with travel companions” is an intended activity is in alignment with the biggest ratio of friends.

The three least expected-to-do activities from respondents’ perspectives are: crossing bucket list, making friends with people and going on adventure trips. Crossing bucket list seems to be a mediocre activity. At the same time, these findings highlighted generational characteristics in Vietnamese cohorts seeking authenticity in tourism. Therefore, the column chart in Figure 12 shows the responses of Vietnamese Millennial Travellers when there came the question “Is it important for a tourism destination to preserve its authenticity” on the scales from zero to five, in which zero is not at all critical, and five is very important.

Gen Y is illustrated in literature as the generation that seeks authenticity in tourism (Benckendorff, Moscado & Pendergast 2010, 58–72; Fiz 2018; Pendergast 2009; Sofronov 2018). According to Condor Ferries report, 60% of respondents rated cultural authenticity is the most crucial part of total travel experiences (Condor Ferries 2020). When travelling, Millennials preferably immerse in local spheres than just a contemporary tourist. This generation is known for being highly allergic to fake and touristy experiences. (Fiz 2018, as cited in Sofronov 2018.) Gen Y wants to be a part of the culture; they have an opportunity to experience. In the meantime, Gen Y wants to differentiate themselves from what the others usually do when travelling, and that will be the uniqueness in their social media posts (Mya 2019). They have an enormous desire for authentic value. So, experiencing local values is considered to be ethic. Furthermore, the four most planned activities show their intense engagement with social media. Travellers not only want their experiences to be authentic, but it is also worth social media sharing.

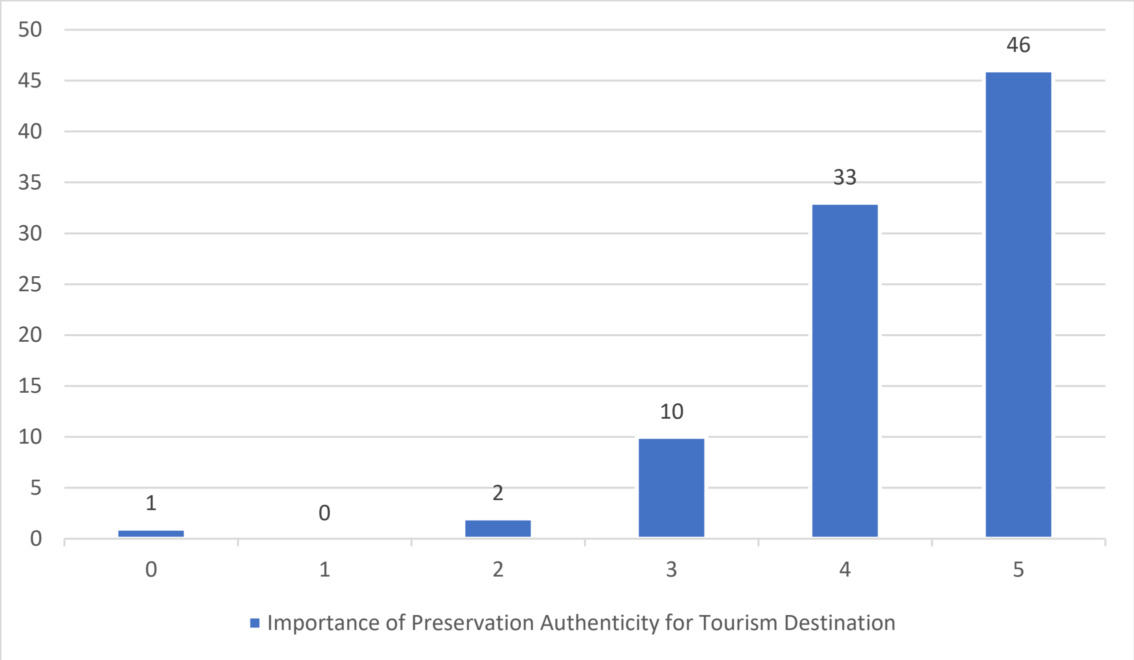

Figure 12. The Importance of Authenticity Preservation for Tourism Destination.

Authenticity holds a crucial role in the travelling industry in Millennials segmentation since it is their values. People travel to a place outside their usual environment for not just being there. They want to know how the residents perceive the cultural and historical values. Most of the respondents agreed that the authenticity of the destination itself is highly essential for tourism in that destination to bring authentic experiences. The tourism industry cannot provide its customers with authentic experiences when the place does not preserve the cultural and historical values have had along with history.

On the other hand, the primary source of inspiration has specific impacts on planned activities as well. Travellers plan their activities from what they see other travellers do in the same destinations, or from what travel experts recommend them to do. Table 1 displays the primary source of inspiration regarding planning trips and activities of Vietnamese Millennial travellers. From the table of the result, those digital sources of travel information are the most popular inspiration sources for Vietnamese Millennial Travellers. The survey results are likewise with the generation studies, indicate that Vietnamese Millennials are tech-savvy (Chereskin 2015; Prensky 2006).

Table 1. Popular Sources of Travel Inspiration for Vietnamese Millennial Travellers.

Sources of Inspiration for Vietnamese Millennials Travellers	Number of Respondents
Social media	46
Online travel agencies (TripAdvisor, Expedia)	18
Destination websites	13
Personal preferences	10
Search engines (Google, Bing)	2
Vietnamese travel bloggers	1
Review from various platforms	1
Travel books	1

5.3 Rovaniemi Destination Image under Vietnamese Millennials Travellers' Perspective

This chapter will analyse Rovaniemi destination image under respondents' perspectives from the survey results. Respondents were divided into two groups: travellers who have been and who have not been to Rovaniemi to gain the most subjective results. To examine Rovaniemi destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives, the survey questions were designed to approach the aspects of city brand hexagon from customer's perspectives (Appendix 1).

Beyond that, this chapter also includes the customer perspectives on the tourism experiences provided by local tour companies in Rovaniemi. This part is made of types of experiences Vietnamese Millennial travellers had tried; how much they rate those experiences on the scale from 1 to 5, in which the level of satisfaction are represented respectively as: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied, and extremely satisfied; general scores on those experiences and their trips to Rovaniemi.

According to the survey result, there are 31 out of 92 respondents answered that they had been to Rovaniemi as travellers, and more than two-thirds of the respondents have not been to Rovaniemi. And surprisingly, around half of the responses have travelled to Rovaniemi more than once. (Appendix 2.) This part of the chapter will firstly analyse their travel behaviours when they were in Rovaniemi as well as explain Rovaniemi tourism destination image under the perspectives of travellers who have been to Rovaniemi.

On top of that, most of them came to Rovaniemi either alone or with their friends or relatives to enjoy Rovaniemi. From 31 respondents who came to visit Rovaniemi, the primary purpose of them is a leisure trip, while “visiting friends/relatives” arrives at the second place of the most chosen option (Appendix 2.)

The term of traveller’s behaviour can be defined as “the way they select, purchase, use and evaluate travel products, services and experiences” (Reisinger 2009, 279−283). Plane seems to be the most favourable means of transportation for the respondent when they want to come to Rovaniemi. Because most of their travel purposes are holidays and leisure, accommodation services are advantageous amongst the customer segmentation (Appendix 2). As being discussed previously, destination brand images are partially reflected on travellers’ motivation and planned activities (Tang 2013). Figure 13 and Table 2 indicate the results of their predetermined motivation and activities.

Table 2. Popular Planned Activities Amongst Respondents Who Visited Rovaniemi

Types of activities	Number of respondents
Visit Santa Claus and Arctic circles	29

Northern Light Hunting	22
Sightseeing	17
Arctic Animal Safari (reindeer/husky ride)	17
Visit museum	10
Snowmobiles	8
Ice igloos	4
Ice fishing	2

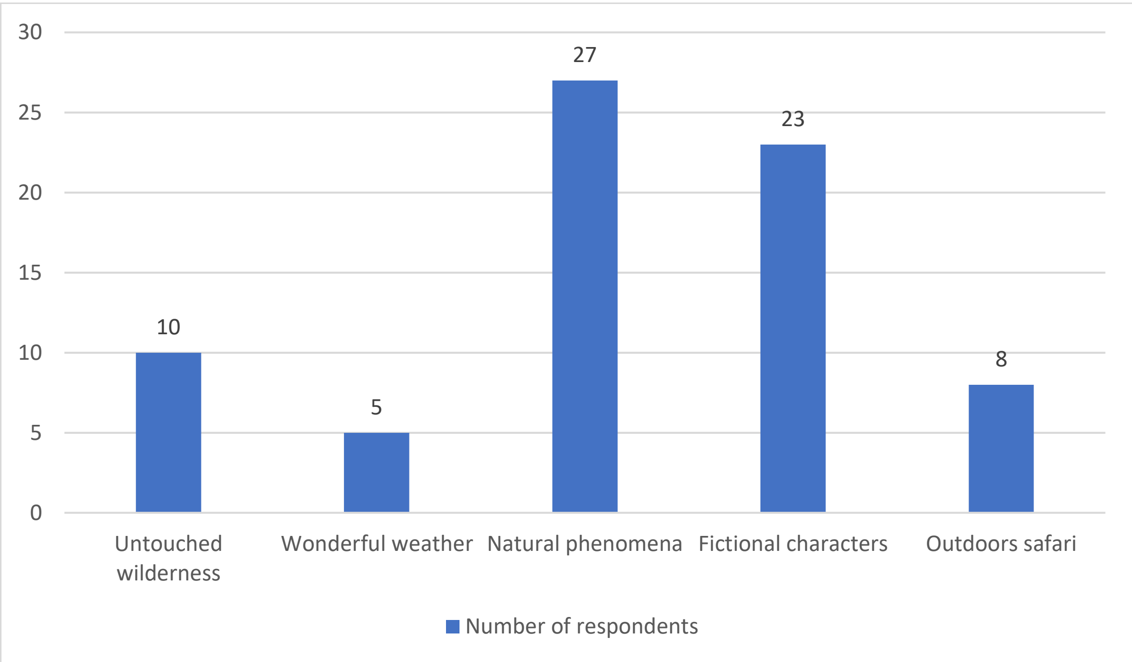

Figure 13. The motivation of Rovaniemi Visited Respondents. (N=31)

It can easily be seen from the result that there is a great proportion of the respondents think of Rovaniemi as a tourism destination of natural phenomena and Santa Claus hometown, in which natural phenomena here is mostly considered as northern lights. Arctic animal habitats likewise another aspect comes to respondents' mind about Rovaniemi image. As Rovaniemi is located in an ideal geographical area for Northern Light observation, this is an element that makes up destination brand image of Rovaniemi under respondents' perspectives. On the other hand, it was reported that Singapore, Thailand, Japan and South Korea are top visited countries by Vietnamese Millennial travellers (VISA Inc 2017). These tourism destinations are identified an equivalent destination image as a safe, social and environmental-friendly, unpolluted and ecological destination with an affordable budget (Aung, Nge & Hichitake 2015; Chen & Hsu 2000; Ohkubo & Muromachi 2014; Zeng, Chiu, Lee, Kang & Park 2015). Therefore, Rovaniemi is an emerging destination amongst visited Vietnamese Millennial travellers as the positive perceived destination image.

Besides, the perceived destination image is affected by the satisfaction level when using tourism products and services (Papp-Vary 2011). From 19 recorded responses, it is outlined that they are satisfied with the tourism products and services used, and the overall tourism experience in Rovaniemi (Appendix 2). The overall satisfaction level is contributed to the positive destination image of Rovaniemi. Many respondents thought that the price of services is expensive due to higher-living standard

When investigating destination image, perceived image under unvisited customers is a crucial aspect to be noticed. In order to study the image, unvisited respondents were asked to describe “What comes to your mind when you think about Rovaniemi?” in a short answer. 61 responses were collected and classified in Table 3.

Table 3. Rovaniemi destination image under unvisited respondents' perspectives.

Perceived Destination Image	Number of respondents
Santa Claus/Santa Village/Santa Claus hometown	18
Snow and snow-related activities	8
Northern Light	8

Arctic animals (reindeer, moose, husky)	8
Little-to-no idea about Rovaniemi	19
Mistake Rovaniemi with other cities or countries	4

Unvisited Vietnamese Millennial travellers are divided into two groups: one is interested in visiting Rovaniemi, and the others are little aware of or know nothing about the city. In the first group, respondents capture a general image of Rovaniemi the same as the projected destination image of Rovaniemi discussed in chapter 2.3. Santa Claus is the Rovaniemi is a destination where the red residence locates as the most perceived image. Northern Lights and outdoors safari activities, in general, come in the second place, amongst the most perceived images of unvisited Rovaniemi respondents.

In the other group, respondents have just an ambiguous image of Rovaniemi. “Tree, old, ancient” is most used words to describe Rovaniemi and only one is aware that Rovaniemi is “a wonderful city in Finland”. Besides, there are three respondents mistake Rovaniemi with a city in Italy, and one thinks Rovaniemi is a state in the US. Rovaniemi is not a mainstream destination for Vietnamese Millennial traveller. Additionally, unvisited respondents were asked a grid question about the interest level toward Rovaniemi’s tourism activities. As they know little-to-no about Rovaniemi tourism, the activities introduced in the question also partly present Rovaniemi tourism industry. The interest level responses collected to highlight the potential aspects of a favourable destination image under unvisited respondents’ perspectives. The author chose this question to introduce Rovaniemi tourism activities to respondents who have not been to the city. Respondents will give their

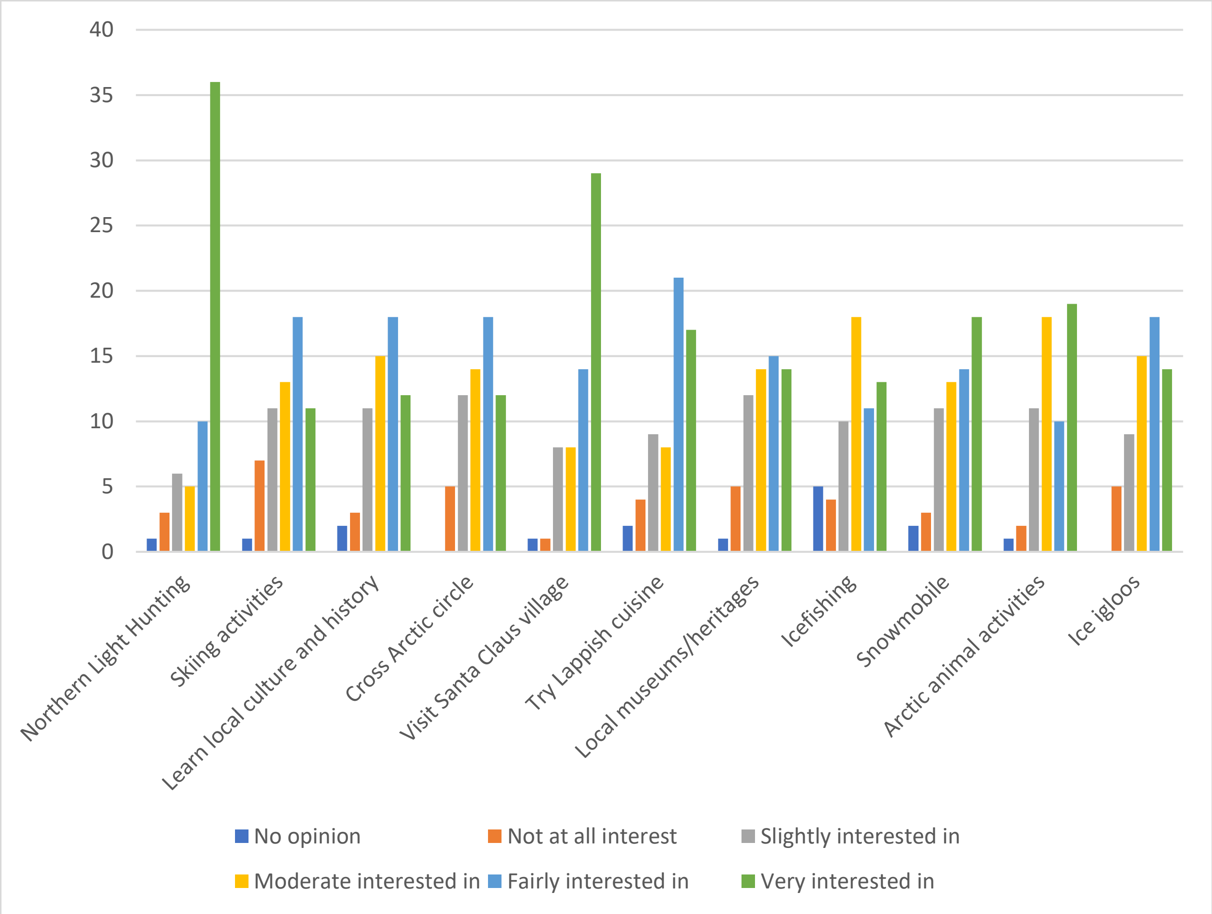

Figure 14. The interest level of unvisited respondents toward Rovaniemi's tourism activities (N=61)

According to Figure 14, Northern Light hunting and Visit Santa Claus village are two aspects that gain the most interest of unvisited respondents. This finding is in accordance with the visited respondents' planned activities. Lots of respondents mentioned their wishes to meet Santa Claus once with their family or participating in a Northern Light hunting trip. The activities in the cultural category get the same interest level from unvisited respondents as the visited respondents with an average score of 3.37. In term of cultural, Arktikum is the most visited attractions. While salmon soup and reindeer meat are two outstanding specialities to try in Lappish cuisine according to one respondent.

6 DISCUSSION

This chapter will recap the findings as well as give commissioner several future recommendation ideas for a better approach to Vietnamese Millennial travellers. From theoretical research and data collections, the author managed to reach the intended objectives of the thesis. The thesis figures out Rovaniemi destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of Vietnamese Millennial travellers visit Rovaniemi. Hence, DMCs, as well as tour operators, must understand the destination perceived image under potential market's perspectives. In tourism research, destination image is an emerging topic that gains much attention for the last decades. However, the number of conducted researches on Rovaniemi destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers' perspectives has remained the same for the last ten years. By performing this research, the author believes that it will connect the literature gap in tourism research.

Qualitative methodology was used to conduct the research. A survey with multiple-choice, open-ended and grid-scale question was used to collect data. There were 92 responses from Vietnamese Millennial travellers for the survey, and 62 responses received from the open-ended questions.

Consequently, it might affect travel behaviour results. Despite the accurate number of respondents, it cannot be valid for the whole Vietnamese Millennial travellers group on a certain degree. Future research can be conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of this research result.

Rovaniemi destination image perceived by tourism stakeholders as a political-stabled, culture-oriented and uncontaminated destination. Rovaniemi destination identity is highlighted with the name" Official hometown of Santa Claus", which makes Rovaniemi become an accessible destination for all-age ranges. Furthermore, Rovaniemi has a unique natural phenomenon and diversified ecological system in which reindeer and husky are a part of tourism experiences. It can be concluded that Rovaniemi has advantages compared to other destinations in the same categories amongst Vietnamese Millennial travellers.

Rovaniemi has advantageous resources to build a strong destination identity, and the commissioner can take advantages of this to develop the Vietnamese market.

It is emphasised from the survey result that Vietnamese Millennial travellers share a majority of generational characteristics, travel behaviours and trends with Millennials in other countries (Anjoubault 2018; VISA Inc 2017). The characteristics and behaviour play crucial roles in choosing methods and channels to reach Vietnamese Millennial travellers. Authenticity in tourism industry is described as a compulsory element. Vietnamese Millennial travellers travel for memorable experiences and valuable history and culture knowledge.

Based on survey analysis, Vietnamese Millennial travellers who have visited Rovaniemi have a positive image of Rovaniemi as a travel destination. Travellers recognise the city as Hometown of Santa Claus, in accordance with projected destination image by internal stakeholders as well as marketers. On the other hand, Vietnamese Millennial travellers who have not visited Rovaniemi seem to have a vague and unclear image of Rovaniemi as a tourism destination. Hence, they are not willing to visit Rovaniemi. The reason is due to the complex travelling visa application process and the lack of information about Rovaniemi in the Vietnamese language.

However, Vietnamese Millennial travellers outline a distinct behaviour for themselves: choosing clean, safe, and environmental-friendly destinations to visit. The favourable perceived destination image of customer segmentation is in accordance with Rovaniemi supply-side perceived image. Therefore, the commissioner can conduct a project plan for a better destination branding for Rovaniemi to attract more Vietnamese Millennial to visit Rovaniemi.

At the moment, the best-selling channel of the commissioner is direct offline, targeted at FITs – Flexible Independent Travellers. Commissioner should focus on B2B channel for more sustainable operation and development and profitable year-round. It helps the commissioner have a stable number of customer both in the high and low season. The project plan is mainly carried online for the cost-efficiency and booking behaviours of Vietnamese Millennial travellers as addressed in chapter 2.4

Being the most promoted identity of Rovaniemi, “Santa Claus official hometown” phrase and natural resources – the most valuable destination identity of Rovaniemi is at the heart of the project plan. First of all, a series about Rovaniemi, Lapland and Finland are published through a variety of platforms to draw customer segment attention. The preferred languages are Vietnamese for posting in the Vietnamese travel community, Vietnamese living in Europe communities, Vietnamese international student communities on social media, i.e. Facebook; English for Instagram, and company blogs and multiple languages on company Facebook. The use of the Vietnamese language is to make the content friendly and reachable amongst Vietnamese Millennial traveller community. Using English on company official social media profiles makes the marketing content consistent and also reachable to other markets. The topic of series can go from general to detail: the beautiful landscape and Aurora light show, Santa greeting from his hometown, the joy of customer for the first time experiencing Arctic animal safari, the process of Finnish travel visa for Vietnamese applicants, transportation in general and so on. On social media channels, the series should be updated on a 2-week basis to follow up.

Secondly, the commissioner can record a video series (or vlog) about operating tours such as Aurora hunting tours, ice fishing, Arctic animal safaris. Virtual contents effortlessly get viral and viral marketing is a trend amongst Vietnamese Millennial travellers as discussed in the theoretical background. Videos should include one type of activity from end-to-end, the joy of customer when using service without directly interrupt them. Editorial work has to be done attentively to have an outcome that perfectly reflects the services and experiences. Vietnamese subtitle can be added to the videos. Commissioner yet lack of internal human resources to manage the considerable workload of vlog making process. Adding Vietnamese subtitle to existing travel vlog with the creator’s permission can be an alternative choice.

Thirdly, the commissioner should put more effort into getting Vietnamese Millennial travellers who are living in other cities in Finland to come and visit Rovaniemi. They are the most potential group amongst Vietnamese Millennial travellers thanks to location, means of transportation to get to Rovaniemi and the adaptation level to Finnish weather and social situation. Commissioner hereby re-post the series within the online communities of Vietnamese in Finland. Besides, a discount code can be offered amongst communities of Vietnamese living in Finland in the lunar new year. The lunar new year is an important celebration for Vietnamese. However, not everyone can make it home due to work or study and long-distant travelling. With discount code, they will consider travel to Rovaniemi as a destination for spring break.

Besides, the commissioner can encourage Vietnamese Millennial travellers to write review or feedback on their website, Google business and other OTA platforms and publish their experiences on social media profiles such as Facebook or Instagram. By creating electronic WOM, target customer group draw their attention more to Rovaniemi tourism destination.

On the other hand, in the context of B2B channels, the commissioner can aim at Vietnamese Millennial travellers who usually book a tour package for their family. Summer is a perfect season to promote Rovaniemi as a destination to this group as it is not the peak of tourism season and the increase in demand for family tour packages from Vietnamese in general (NLD 2019; Vietravel 2018; VNExpress 2019). Hence, launching summer package in Rovaniemi is an effort to develop sustainable year-round tourism industry of the city. Therefore, building network and connection with Vietnamese tour operators are vitally compulsory. This cooperation helps reduce the complexity of the travel visa application process for customer segmentation. Promoting summer in Rovaniemi To cooperate with tour operators, the commissioner should invest in facilities and infrastructure to meet the standard requirement.

Moreover, multi-day packages should be designed to offer. Summer is a hidden gem of Rovaniemi. It offers cool weather with sunshine all days. Besides, travellers have a chance to meet the red man without getting into a long queue line. Families have a memorable time together in a clean, uncontaminated environment with joyful outdoors activities such as camping, picking berries, and fishing. There are only two disadvantages of the summer. Summer is not Aurora hunting season as the sun is all-day active. It is not the season to do Arctic animal safaris as the weather in the summer is too hot for them.

However, the disadvantages of summer tourism in Rovaniemi can turn out to be a motivation. When travellers are satisfied with their trip experiences, it becomes a motivation for them to revisit Rovaniemi in the winter to experiences Christmas and winter atmosphere in the hometown of Santa Claus, then experience the Aurora hunting tours and Arctic animal safaris. Once the connection with Vietnamese tour operators is built, the commissioner can be proactive by providing Vietnamese tour operators brochures and other branding and marketing materials in Vietnamese. Within questioned Vietnamese Millennial travellers, location, Santa hometown, and natural resources are not strongly illustrated identities. Branding contents should emphasize on these identities. Rovaniemi’s logo and slogan have to be embedded in textual and virtual branding materials.

After one winter season conducting the proposed plan, the commissioner can again do market research on the perceived image of Rovaniemi within Vietnamese Millennial travellers. Moreover, the commissioner has to evaluate the outcome of the project by social media statistics, a number of Vietnamese Millennial travellers visit Rovaniemi and use their services, and the satisfaction level towards their offered services. In summary, the research shed light on future study on Rovaniemi destination image to Vietnamese Millennial travellers to develop better branding strategies.

There are some limitations in conducting the thesis. Concerning the research reliability, it bases on Vietnamese Millennial travellers responses from the survey. Collected data was recorded and carefully analysed by the author in order to get the most suitable results for the general population. The responses gathered the experiences from Vietnamese Millennial travellers on experiences and opinion on Rovaniemi destination image. This data helps in generating the social idea of Rovaniemi perceived destination image under Vietnamese Millennial travellers’ perspectives. There were eight responses from other generation cohorts eliminated to make sure the data is Vietnamese Millennial-centric. However, the survey was conducted in English. There might be respondents who cannot understand it completely to give sufficient answers. For example, the open-ended questions were not answered by all of the respondents, and some of them were in Vietnamese. While analysing the data, language supervisor pointed out a problem with the question about the travel frequency of respondents. There was no option for tourists who travel ten times a year.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 1(6) Survey on Rovaniemi As A Destination to Vietnamese Millennial Travellers

➢ <u>Respondent Background Information</u>

How old are you? ○21 – 25 ○26 – 30 ○31 – 35 ○36 – 40 ○Other

What is your gender? ○Female ○Male ○Prefer not to say

Occupation? ○Student ○Employed ○Unemployed ○Other (please specify)

How much is your disposal income?○€0-500 ○€501-1000 ○€1501-2000 ○€2000+

➢ <u>Travel Behaviours</u>

How often do you travel?

○Once a year or less ○2-3 times a year ○4-9 times a year
○More than 10 times a year

Who do you travel with?

○I travel alone ○Relatives ○Friends ○My partner ○Family with children
○Family without children ○Other (please specify)

How much is your travel budget? (including transportation)

○Low budget (no more than €300) ○Medium budget (no more than €700)

○Large budget (more than €700)

What is the purpose of your trips?

○Business ○Holidays/leisure ○Visiting friends and relatives

○Stopover to travel to other countries ○Medical treatment/well-being trip

○Other (please specify)

How long are your trips on average?

○1-2 days ○3-4 days ○5-7 days ○8-14 days ○More than 14 days

What is your priority source of information in terms of planning your trip?

○Social media ○Travel books ○Destination's website ○By yourself

○Online travel agencies (TripAdvisor, Traveloka…) ○Other (please specify)

How do you travel to your travel destination?

○Plane ○Train ○Bus ○Cruise ship ○Your own vehicles

Where do you stay during your trips?

○Hotel ○Hostel ○Airbnb ○Apartment (not Airbnb)

○Your friends/relatives' places ○Local host from Couchsurfing

○Other (please specify)

Do you rent a car/drive your car while you travel? ○Yes ○No ○Maybe

What is (are) your planned activities before you travel to a new destination?

○Enjoy your holidays ○Explore nature ○Photography ○Go to famous attractions

○Learn local culture and history ○Cross your bucket list ○Try local cuisine

○Spend time with your travel partners ○Do on adventure trips/do sports

○Make friends with new people ○Shopping ○Escape the ordinary

○Other (please specify)

Do you seek the authenticity in your trips? ○Yes ○No ○Maybe

How important of authenticity in the tourism industry?

0=not at all important; 1=unimportant; 2=slightly important; 3 important; 4= fairly important; 5-very important

Is it important for a destination to preserve its authenticity?

0=not at all important; 1=unimportant; 2=slightly important; 3 important; 4= fairly important; 5-very important

Would you like to try something new at your travel destination?

○Yes ○No ○Maybe

Have you ever visited Rovaniemi? ○Yes ○No

- <u>For respondents who have been to Rovaniemi</u>

How many times have you been to Rovaniemi?

○Only once ○2-3 times ○4-5 times ○More than 5 times

Where did you depart to Rovaniemi?

○Viet Nam ○Other cities in Finland ○Other (please specify)

Who comes with you to Rovaniemi?

○I travel alone ○Friends/partner ○Relatives ○Family with children

○Family without children ○Business partners ○Other (please specify)

What is your purpose to travel to Rovaniemi?

○Business trip ○Holiday/leisure ○Visiting friends/relatives ○Other (please specify)

How did you come up with the idea of travelling to Rovaniemi?

○Traditional ads, articles… ○Social media ads ○Friends/relatives' suggestions

○Bloggers/influencer's review ○Your own knowledge/experiences

How do you travel to Rovaniemi? ○Plane ○Train ○Bus ○Your own car

Did you rent a car/drive your car while you were in Rovaniemi? ○Yes ○No ○Maybe

What is your motivation to travel to Rovaniemi?

○Untouched wilderness ○Wonderful weather ○Outdoors safari

○Natural phenomena (Northern Lights, Polar Night, Midnight Sun…)

○Fictional characters (Santa Claus, ELF…) ○Other (please specify)

How important of these following factors when you decide to travel to Rovaniemi?

0=no opinion; 1=not at all important; 2=slightly important; 3 important; 4= fairly important; 5=very important

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Nature						
Weather						
Price						
Location of Accommodation services						

Public transportation						
Lappish cuisine						
Attraction and activities						
Political state/safety						
Accessibility						
Visa exemption						

What is (are) your planned activities you want to do before you travel to Rovaniemi?

○See Northern Lights ○See Santa Claus ○Try Lappish cuisine

○Go to Santa Claus Village/Cross the Arctic Circle ○Participate in skiing activities

○Experience the Arctic animal safari (husky, reindeer safari) ○Work/Study

○Go to Arctic snow hotel ○Go to Northern Light Village ○Learn Sami culture

○Meet your friends/relatives ○Other (please specify)

What is your type of accommodation in Rovaniemi?

○Hotel○Hostel ○Airbnb ○Apartment (not Airbnb) ○Your friends/relatives' place ○Local host (Couchsurfing…) ○Other (please specify)

What are your activities when visiting Rovaniemi?

○Visit museum ○Visit Santa Claus Village and Arctic Circle ○Sightseeing

○Northern Light hunting ○Arctic Animal safari (Reindeer/husky/combination)

○Ice fishing ○Snowmobile ○Ice igloos ○Other (please specify)

Did you book any activities from local tour companies? ○Yes (please specify) ○No

Can you please tell more about those experiences? ________________________

How would you rate your experiences with that company?

1=very dissatisfied; 2=dissatisfied; 3=neutral; 4=satisfied; 5=extremely satisfied.

Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the experiences you participated in or generally tourism experiences in Rovaniemi? _________________________

What is your overall experience when visiting Rovaniemi?

1=very dissatisfied; 2=dissatisfied; 3=neutral; 4=satisfied; 5=extremely satisfied.

How would you recommend improving Rovaniemi image as a destination? ________________________

➢ <u>For respondents who have not been to Rovaniemi</u>

Have you ever heard about Rovaniemi? ○Yes ○No

What come to your mind when you think about Rovaniemi? _________________

Do you plan to come to Rovaniemi in the future?

○Yes (please specify what motivates you to travel to Rovaniemi)

○No ○Maybe

What is your interest level towards these activities in Rovaniemi?

0=no opinion; 1=not at all interested in; 2=slightly interested in; 3 moderate interested in; 4= fairly interested in; 5=very interested in

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Northern Light hunting						
Skiing activities						
Learn local culture and history						
Cross Arctic Circle						
Visit Santa Claus Village						
Try Lappish cuisine						
Local museum/heritages						
Ice fishing						
Snowmobiles						
Arctic animal activities						

Ice igloos						

Appendix 2 1(3) Travel Behaviours Result from Respondents Who Have Been to Rovaniemi

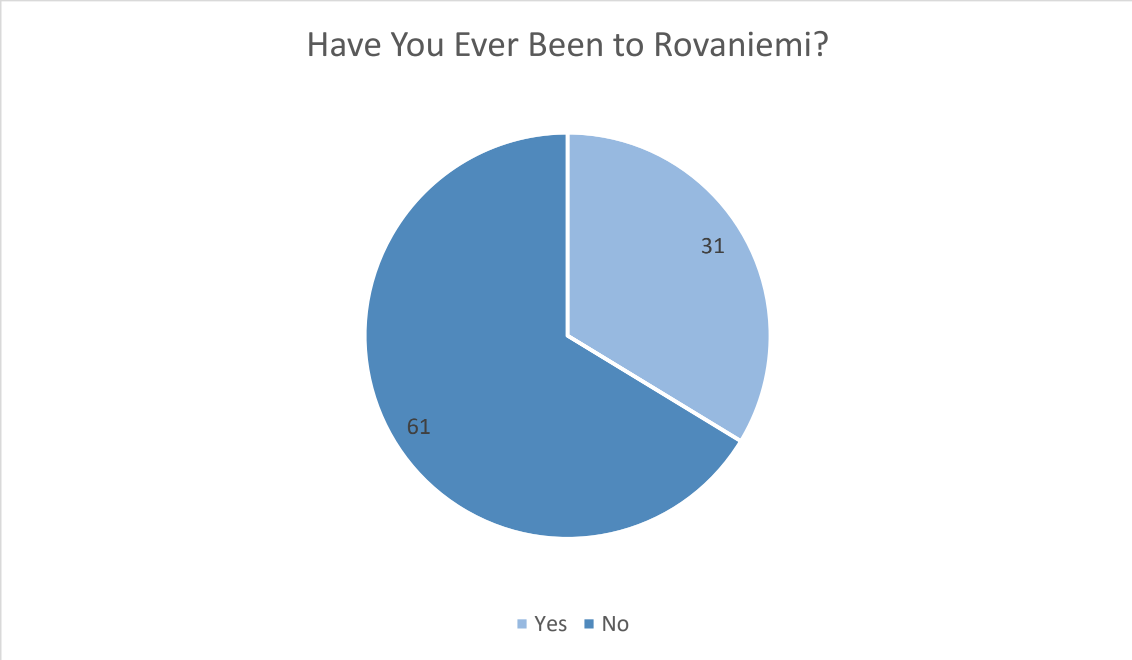

Figure 15. The Number of Respondents Who Have and Have Not Been to Rovaniemi. (N=92)

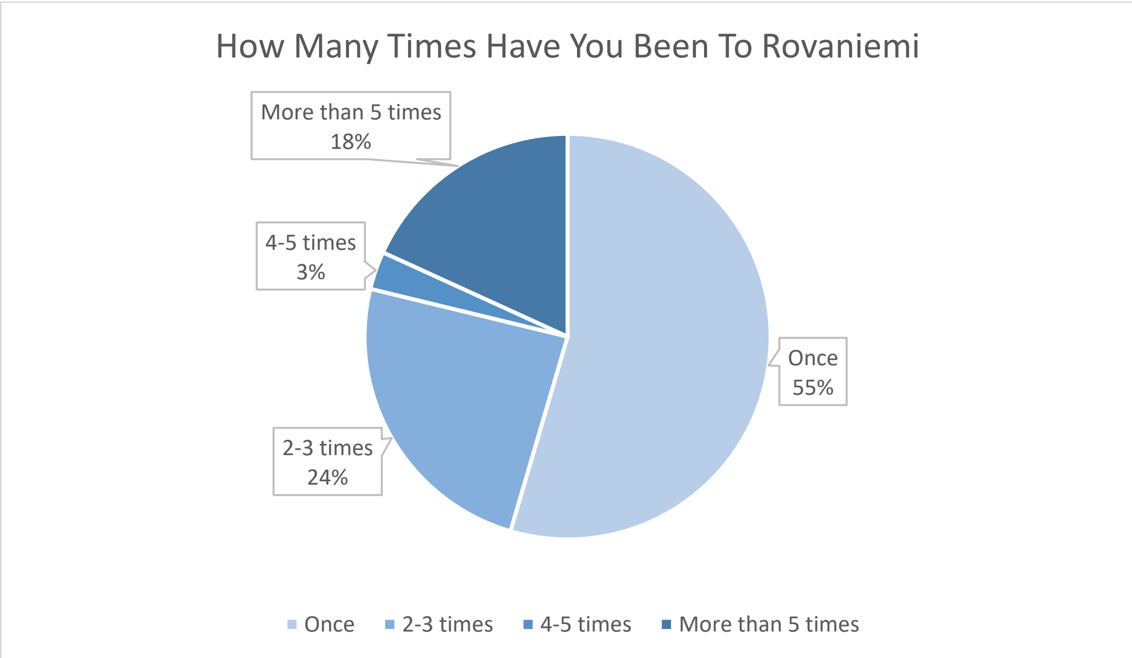

Figure 16. Responses on Travel Frequency to Rovaniemi (N=31)

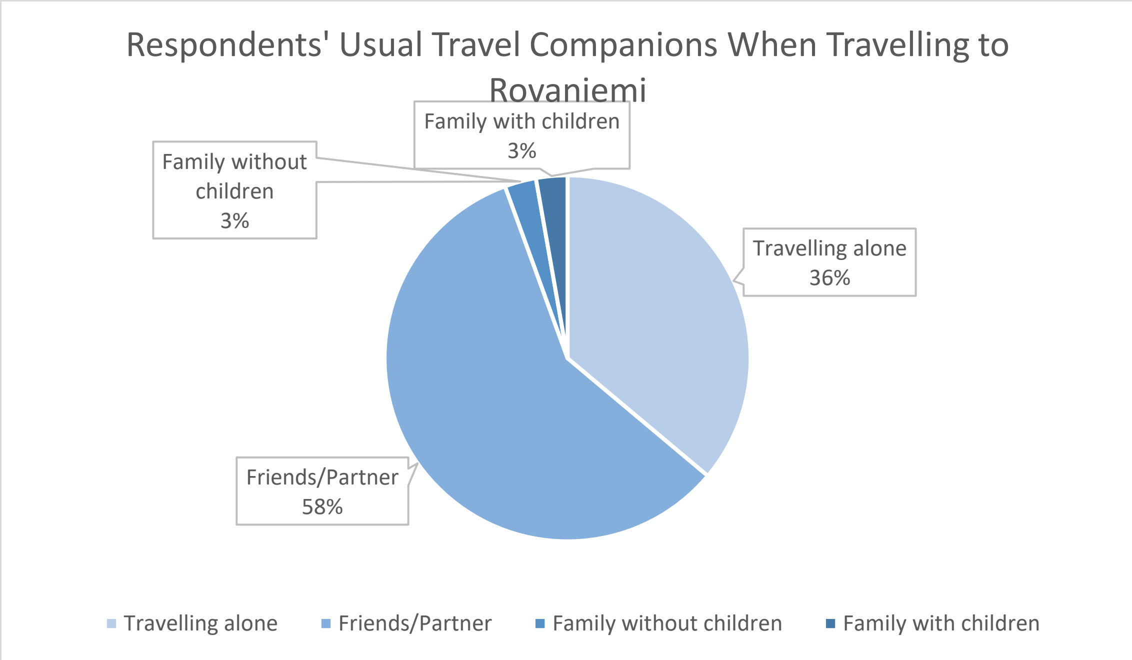

Figure 17. Respondents' Usual Travel Companions When Travelling to Rovaniemi.

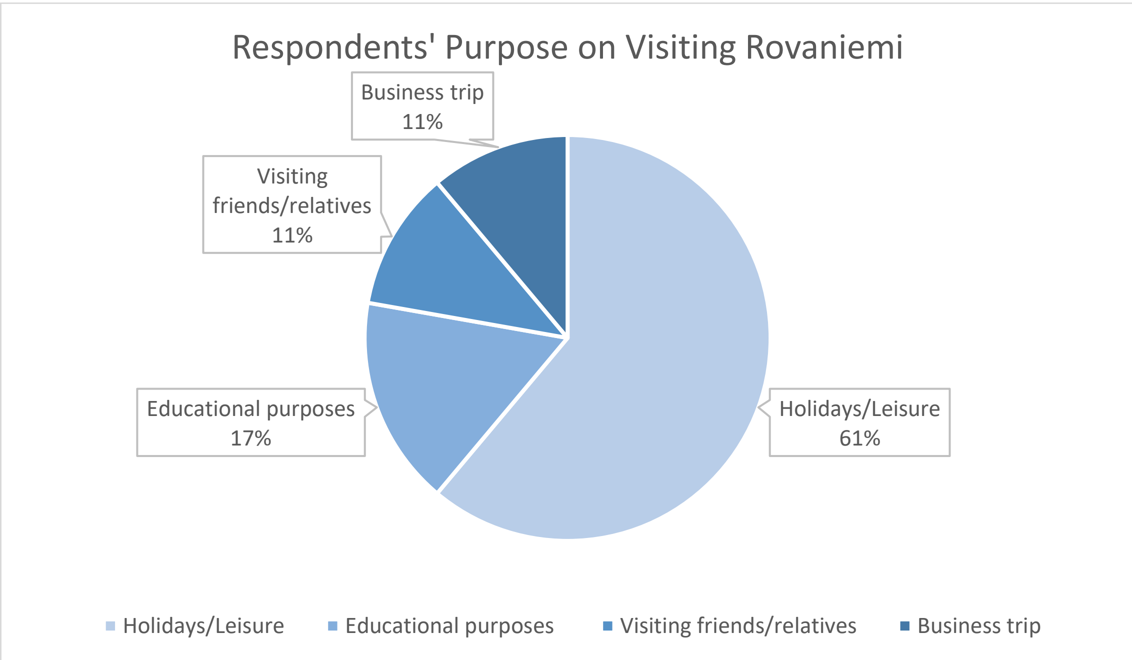

Figure 18. Respondents' Purpose on Visiting Rovaniemi

Table 3. Respondents' Types of Accommodation and Means of Transportation.

		Number of Respondents
Types of Accommodation	Airbnb	11
	Friends/relatives' places	10
	Apartment	8
	Hotel	6
	Hostel	6
	Local host (Couchsurfing, …)	1
Means of Transportation	Plane	18
	Train	16
	Bus	8
	Own vehicles	4

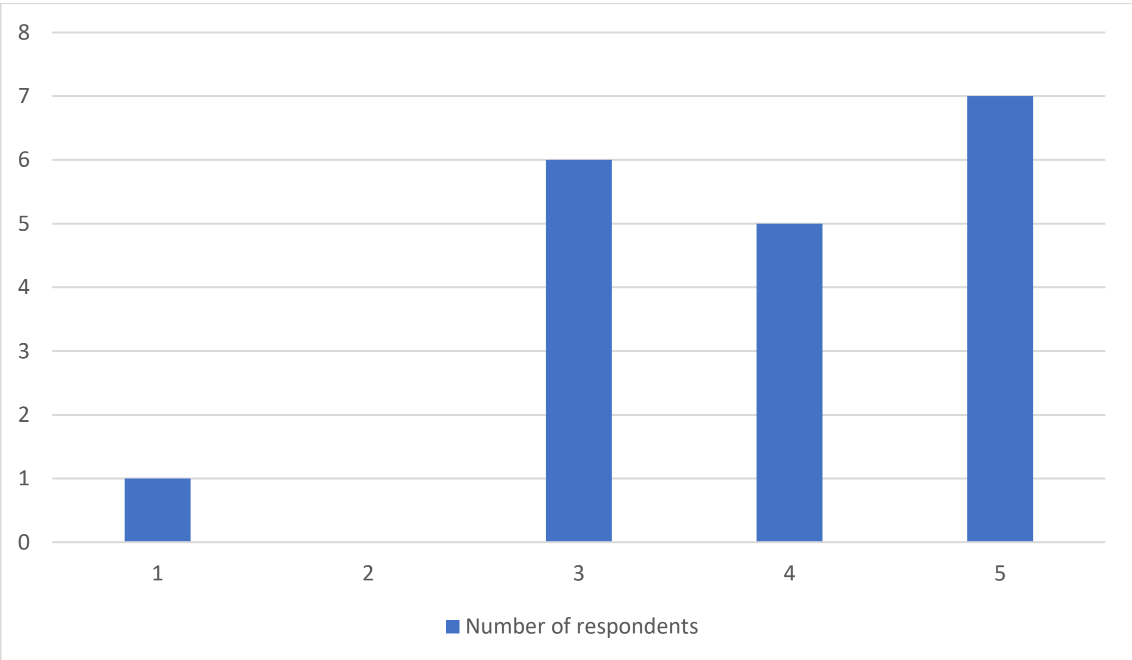

Figure 19. Satisfaction Level of Visited Respondents on Experiences Used

Appendix 3 1(3) Visit Lapland Tours Company Unpublish Report

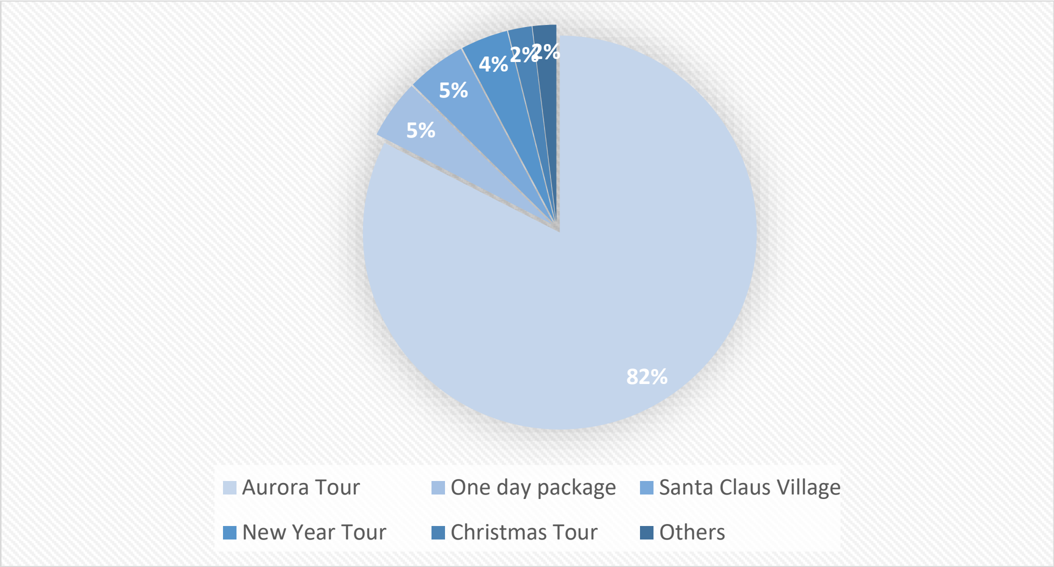

Figure 20. The Percentage of Sales Volume from the Main Activities (Visit Lapland Tours Company 2020b)

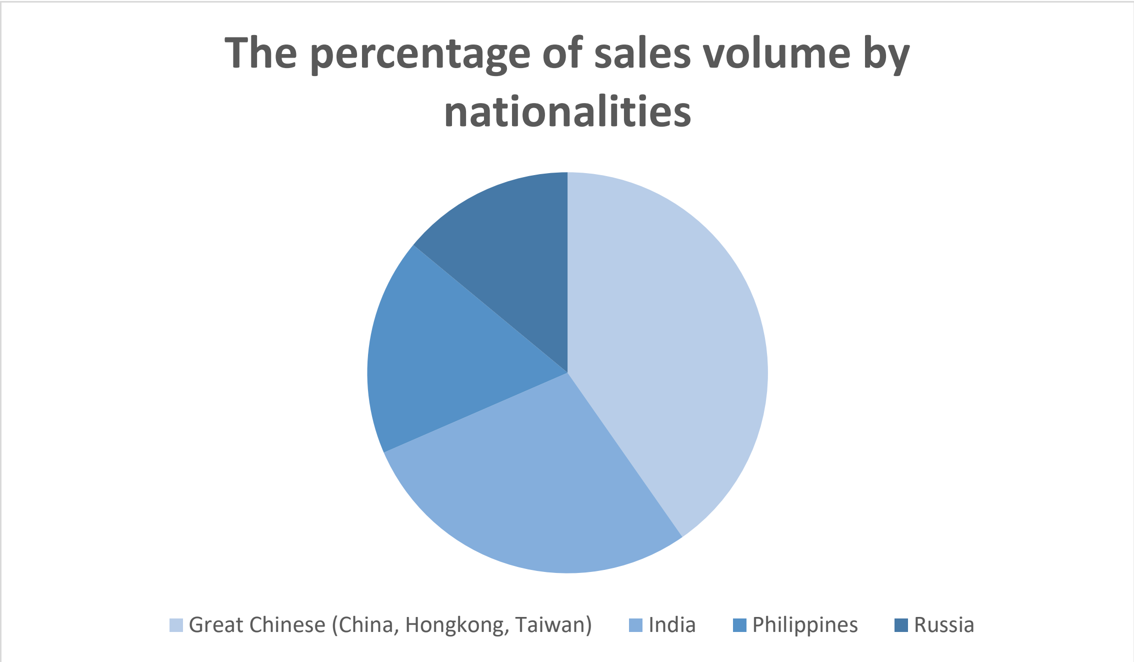

Figure 21. The Percentage of Sales Volume by Nationalities (Visit Lapland Tours Company 2020b)