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TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Case: Christmas Tourism - Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village

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| <p>Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village offers to its customers the experience of local folklore as a unique possibility for a Christmas adventure, taking place in winter season. All year around, Kalevala Spirit Oy offers services mainly for foreigners, but for local customers, as well. In winter season it attracts Russian tourists, who visit Vuokatti, with this Christmas adventure for families.</p> <p>The purpose of this thesis was to identify gaps in services of Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village. The thesis was planned to help to improve the current services and create new ones for winter season tourists.</p> <p>The theory of this study discusses product development in tourism industry. Additionally it discusses Finnish tourism industry with concentration on incoming Russian tourists. The theory supports identification of the company's present situation and areas of development.</p> <p>The empirical part studies the company's current situation. The survey was organized to collect customers feedback and opinion through questionnaire. Questionnaire consists of quantitative and qualitative questions. Throughout season Winter 2010 was collected 52 questionnaires. Furthermore, it explains the survey results.</p> <p>The appendices include the survey's questionnaires in English and Russian, as well as explanation of excursions to the Christmas Village.</p> | |
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1 INTRODUCTION

Currently numerous companies are competing in order to gain their customers, satisfy and retain them. The success of companies depends directly on the products and services that they offer. Those products and services should have competitive advantage in order to sell better, bring a bigger market share, and eventually higher profits.

In order to sustain in the market a company must have a Competitive Advantage that is able to create greater economic value in its product category. It is important that each market player develops such advantage. However, the leading and winning product besides good marketing needs strong design. That should be developed correctly, at right costs, and produced properly.

To compete in tourism industry, which mainly produces the product while it is consumed, is not an easy task. Therefore, in order to create their competitive advantage companies have to work hard with their research and development department.

The main objective of this thesis is to identify gaps in services of Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village. The thesis was planned to help to improve current services and create new ones for winter season tourists. The main competitive advantage of Kuhmo Kalevala Sprit Christmas Village is the connection to the myth of Kalevala. However, this myth has nothing to do with Christmas itself. Nevertheless, the environment that is created around it is perfect for Christmas Village.

This thesis studies the possibilities of new product development in tourism industry, the ways of its implementation and possible obstacles. Moreover, a company profile is created and feedback survey is collected from winter season customers.

2 THEORETICAL PART

The theoretical part of this thesis provides a brief summary to the practical theory for us to clarify and justify the research outcomes. Therefore, a connection should be established between the reality and the theory that supplies relevance to the study.

2.1 Tourism Product Development

Product development is usually perceived with creation and management of tangible products. The process of development is described by Andreasen M. M. & Hein L. (2000, 117-122) in form of six stages, which are Planning, Concept development, System-level design, Detail design, Testing and refinement, and Production rump-up. The whole process describes what should happen at each stage (see figure1).

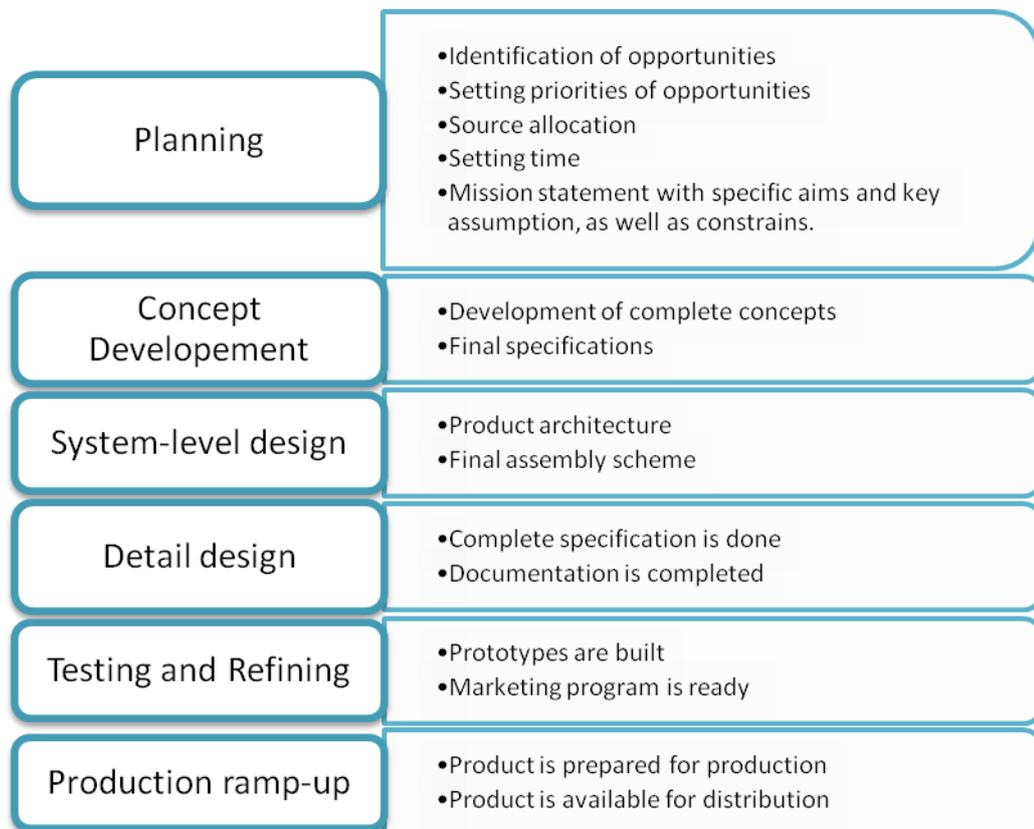


Figure 1 Product Development Process, (Source Andreasen M. M. & Hein L. (2000, 117-122)

Despite that this process for purely created for development of tangible products, it also can be used for services development. Nevertheless, modification to the process has to be done and the time of each stage should be considered wisely. Perhaps the time issue is one of the most important parts if when talking about seasonal services, where Testing and Refinement stages can take place in one particular time of the year. Therefore, pre-planning has to be taken into strong consideration by the managers.

According to Fraknoy D. (2009, 52) "Pre-planning is somewhat neglected in the companies". This happens mostly for SME's, as the manager has the possibility to observe the whole process of development. However, for development of the service, pre-planning must be considered as important part of the product development process.

Product development in tourism contains a number of stages or approaches (Tourism Development Handbook, 2010, 21). It is defined that many tourism product providers tend to focus and maintain on delivering 'existing products to current customers'. Some of those companies refine their service package in order to attract new customers. Others continue adding more and more new products to their portfolio in order to retain existing customers.

The Tourism Development Handbook, 2010 suggest four different approaches to product development strategies. The development of 'truly innovative and new products' is suggested to be done by using the 'Passages to Innovation' tool (see figure2).

The quadrant is divided in four groups, which are different from one another by their difficulty and process. It is suggested that the 'model cannot be used to explain the industry as a whole' (Tourism Development Handbook, 2010, 22). However, it has to be taken within a particular segment for comparison. At the end of the day, the difference between the quadrants varies in return on investments and potential (see figure 2).

The recipe to innovative tourism product development lies in two important stages of Research and Innovation. Successful research in product development consists of identification of the company's position and strengths. Following this, we can move on to Innovation stage. This stage consists of the following steps: Market research, Gap analysis, SWOT analysis, Planning, Partnership, Product development, Testing and Evaluation, and Launch of the product. Basically, the stage of Innovation is correlated to the previously described process of new product development with slight changes in the pre-planning phase as a result of work in service business.

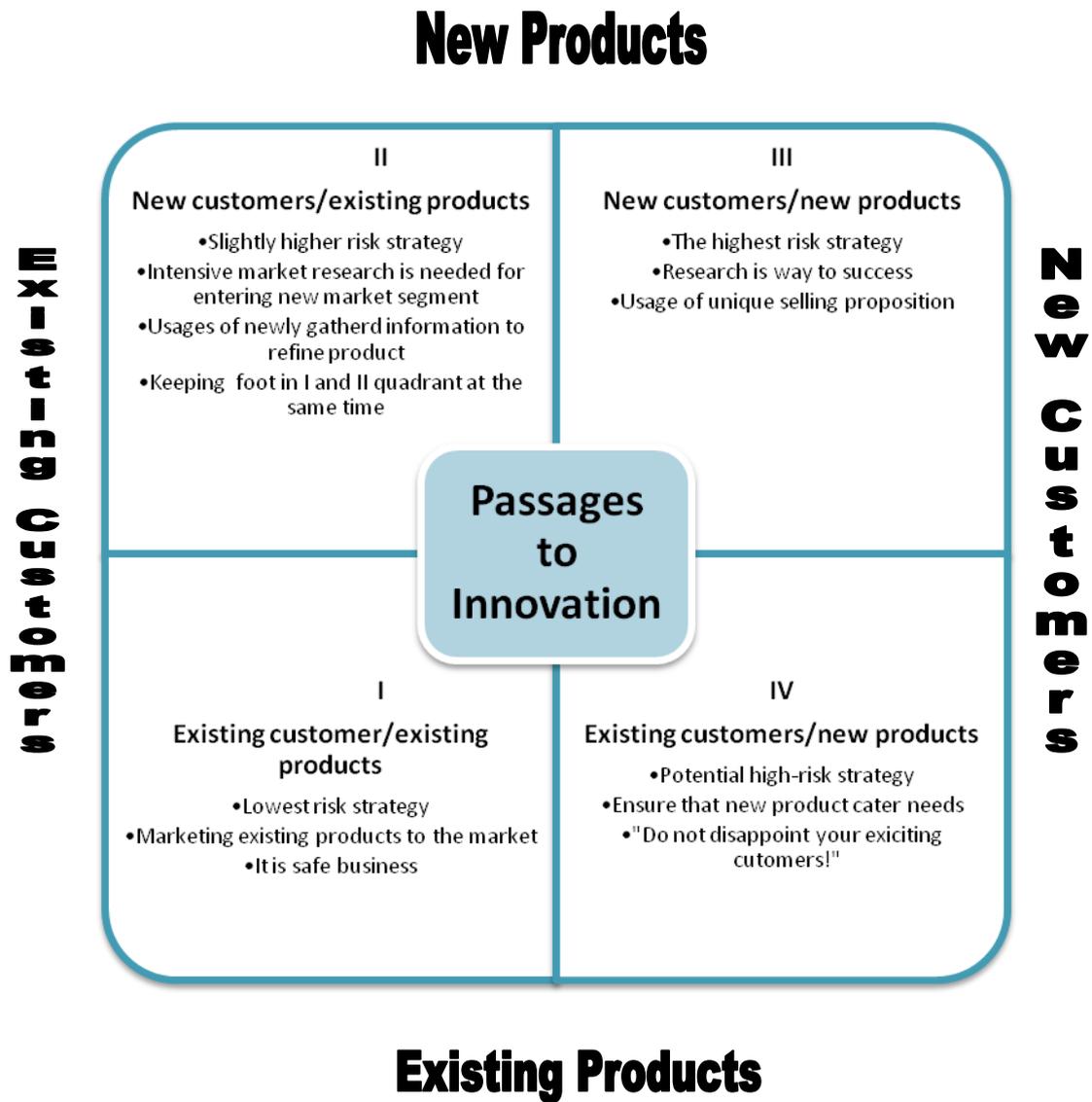


Figure 2 Passages to Innovation, explanation (source: Tourism Development Handbook, 2010, 21-23)

In relation to Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village this quadrant of Passages in Innovation (figure 2) helps to identify at which stage the company is and in which areas they could undergo development.

2.2 Tourism Industry in Finland

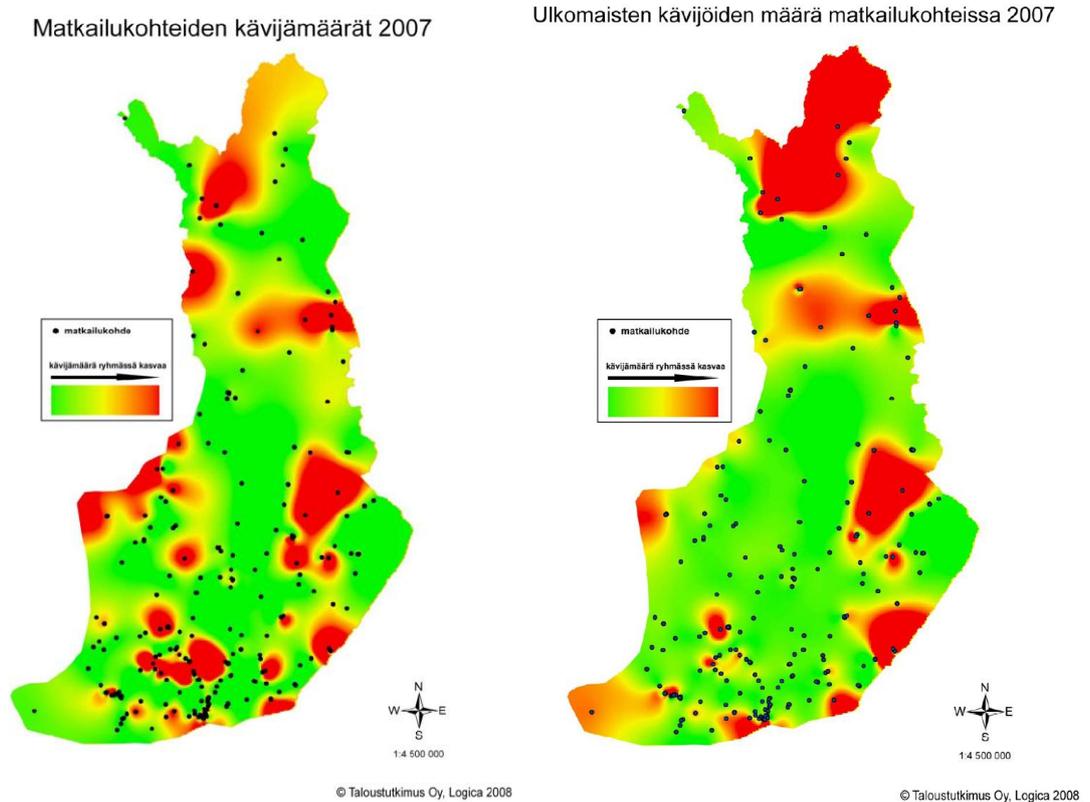
According to Ministry of Employment and Economics (2011, <http://www.tem.fi/index.phtml?l=en&s=2548>) 'Finnish tourism industry has good growth potential'. The tourism sector provides employment possibilities, taxes and export income, and wellbeing all over Finland. Finland's Tourism Strategy 2020 (FTS 2020) stated that in year 2007 the industry employed 130 500 people, which generated an annual total of around 4 billion of tax revenues. Therefore, if implementing the measures suggested by FTS 2020 by the year 2020 the industry would employ approximately 171 000 people. It is also mentioned that the main 'strengths of tourism in Finland include the country's unique location next to Russia, its attractive travel destinations/tourism areas and the diverse services offered by tourism clusters. Weaknesses include accessibility in general, unfamiliarity and high prices.'

At the moment the trend in tourism development is moving towards the usage 'of local knowledge and traditional uses of resources' (Miller, D. & Jansson, B., 2006, 50). There is another encouraging trend of utilization of tourism planning for regional and local wellbeing, as well as increasing interest in nature-based tourism. The nature-based tourism is a very work-intensive segment; therefore it can provide potentially employment opportunities for local residents.

Miller D. & Jansson B. (2006, 49) state that the present situation in Northern Finland faces the challenge to link tourism development with 'local and regional traditional knowledge'. It is stated clearly that current tourism development in various parts in Finland should rely on integrated strategies and the local community's involvement and product design. It is obvious that economic and political significance of tourism has risen in past years considerably. This is because with development of tourism regions are provided with new business activities, which leads to regional development. It brings investments to the regions, as well as work places. Tourism is considered as one of the means that provides economic development for northern regions (Miller D. & Jansson B., 2006, 43).

Currently intensity of tourism activity in Finland appears as in Picture 1 and 2. Picture 1 illustrates the general touristic activities in year 2007, picture 2 foreign tourists' activities.

The pictures below show the intensity of visitors if different regions becomes evident. It is obvious that Kainuu is one of the most visited regions among all places.



Picture 1 Travelers per tourism zone

Picture 2 Foreign visitors per tourism area

(Source MATKAILUN EDISTÄMISKESKUS, Taloustutkimus Oy, 2008, 31–34)

It is stated by Taloustutkimus Oy (2008, 39), that the top five regions are –Northern Karelia, Kymenlaakso, Kainuu, Southern Ostrobothnia and Northern Ostrobothnia. Finland receives more visitors from Russia, Sweden, and Estonia. It is important to mention that despite the financial crisis the number of visitors from Russia has increased from year 2009 to 2010 by 400 thousand passengers (Border Interview Survey, 2010, 6), which is opposite in comparison to other countries.

Tourists are visiting Finland for different reasons, such as business trips, leisure trips, friends' or relatives' visits, and other reasons. Russian tourists mostly come by land, rarely by sea and air. This is in comparison to Sweden and Estonia whose favorite means of

transportation is by sea, which is not surprising. Tourists from Germany visit Finland mainly by air (Border Interview Survey, 2010, 14).

According to Border Interview Survey (2010, 20) tourists from Germany stay longer in Finland (7,8 average nights) in comparison to Russian tourists (1,4 nights). These numbers suggest that Russian tourists do mainly one day visits, whether it is shopping or business trips. However, when Russian tourists are visiting Finland they spend around 255 Euro per visit. This in comparison with German tourists (433 Euro) is less by around 40 %. However, if one takes into consideration the average stay of Russian tourists, they come as a group with the biggest expenditures (Border Interview Survey, 2010, 29,33). This fact is supported by figure 3 of Border Interview Survey (2010, 39). With that said, the total amount of brought money to Finland by Russian passengers increased from 535,4 ml Euro to 653,1 ml Euro from year 2009 to 2010. That is mainly spent in shopping, restaurants and accommodation (Border Interview Survey, 2010, 40).

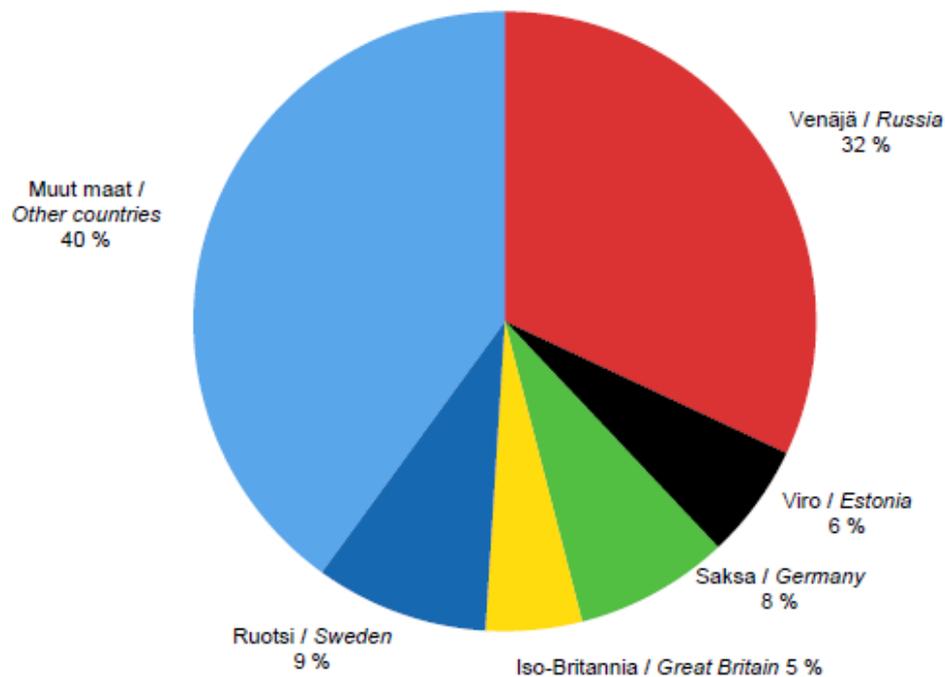


Figure 32 Distribution of total spending in Finland by foreign passengers between 1 January and 31 December 2010, by country of residence: *Source (Border Interview Survey, 2010, 39)*

2.2.1 Christmas Tourism in Finland

In the 1980 new tourism strategy was launched by Finnish tourist authorities. In the province of Lapland was established "Santa Claus Land" and further marketing was built around that theme. The obvious centerpiece was 'Santa Claus village' in Rovaniemi (Pretes M., 1994, 1). By this action 'intangible attraction of Christmas' became a commodity that allows 'consuming intangible concept such as Christmas'. After the program had been launched the number of foreign overnight stays in Lapland increased from 156495 in 1982 to 228812 in 1991 (Pretes M., 1994, 6).

The main idea behind the development of Santa Claus Village was greater than just attract tourist to Lapland. Firstly, Finnish Tourist Board was keen to promote Finland through new marketing program that create a positive image of Finland. Moreover, this program was also made to attract tourists to visit the rest of the country and not only Helsinki region (Pretes M., 1994, 8).

The first time the idea to use Santa Claus was mentioned in year 1927. Producer of children's programs announced that Santa Claus's home was found on Korvatunturi. In Finnish tradition Christmas's symbol is Joulupukki, which means "Christmas Goat". According to old tradition the goat was delivering gifts in Christmas time. However, for Santa Claus village the image of Santa was adopted from USA, which was borrowed from the Dutch "Sinterklaas" (Pretes M., 1994, 9).

Nevertheless, that discussions about establishing Santa Claus's home in Lapland was discussed since 1920's, the actual establishment was postponed until 1984. Following that governor of Lapland declared entire province as "Santa Claus Land". As a result of declaration of "Santa Claus Land" Finnish Tourist Board organizes the work group that controls all further marketing for attraction of tourists to province (Pretes M., 1994, 9). 'An essential element of this strategy was convincing the rest of the world that Finland was the real home of Santa Claus - against rival claimants in Alaska, Sweden, Norway, and Greenland' (Pretes M., 1994,9). Main idea behind all marketing campaign had a goal to tell 'the world that "Santa Claus lives in Finland"' (Pretes M., 1994, 9).

By the year 1989 the Santa Claus Land was turned into the Santa Claus Association (aka Joulumaa ry). Association consisted of 16 companies, both as SME's so and largest business's in the country. Moreover, the Association was directly connected to Finnish Tourist Board. Primary goal of this alliance was to promote the idea of the Santa Claus through licensing the use of trademark to individually owned businesses and coordination of the Santa Claus postal services, as well as promotion of different international meetings (Pretes M., 1994, 9).

However, at the beginning of 90's the Santa Claus Land Association met financial trouble, which lead to its acquisition by another company Santa Claus International Oy. This privately owned corporation acquired the rights 'to Santa Claus marketing, and is now responsible for promoting Lapland's Santa Claus attractions in Finland and abroad' (Pretes M., 1994,10).

Concerning the village itself, during years of the Santa Claus Land Association management, it was formed into nine properties throughout Lapland. Private business owners managed the operation of each. Each property was so-called "footprint" that consisted of outlets that were selling theme handicrafts and souvenirs. However, after acquisition by Santa Claus International Oy the footprint idea was rejected, even though the rest of attractions remain (Pretes M., 1994, 10).

The centerpiece of Santa Claus Land is the Santa Claus Village and its Workshop is located on the Arctic Circle a few kilometers north of Rovaniemi. This was made with special purpose of tourists or visitors to take pictures at the point that they made to Arctic Circle. Besides that the whole Santa Claus Village is turned into touristic sights (Pretes M., 1994, 12).

The Santa Claus Village is a perfect example of taking new idea of new tourism product development for attracting new customers. This was risky idea, as the origin of Santa Claus was unidentified, and claim for it is very ambitious. However, it worked perfectly with good marketing strategy. Moreover, it created spread of the idea among other touristic places in Finland. The Santa Claus Village itself is an extra example 'of a sight-market relationship in which the tourist becomes involved with the market because the sight is invisible or intangible' (Pretes M., 1994, 12)

2.3 Russian Tourists as a Target Group

According to Helsinki Sanomat (December, 2005), that majority of Russian tourists desire 'to spend the New Year in large well-appointed cottages together with their families and friends'. The rush for acquiring winter vacation starts already in October. This trend happens due to the fact that in year 2005 the first week of January was set as holiday week. Therefore, the most of the Russian families start to look for suitable place for New Year holidays in advance. According to Ojala E. (2010, 34) search in Yandex.ru (Russian version of Google) counts around 24 000 of hits of "НОВЫЙ ГОД В ФИНЛЯНДИИ" (New Year in Finland), which is the five times more than in Google.

Traditionally, New Year in Russia is the time for family and friends. It is the time when everyone can get together and share all good or bad news that happened in the past year. Russian Santa Claus, which is "Ded Moroz", is also invented character that lives in Velikiy Ustyug. It is also possible to write him a letter and to visit him. That is one of the reasons for character of Santa Claus to be so popular among Russian tourists.

Apart from the traveling to Finland, Russian tourists' most popular destinations are Turkey, China and Egypt. Around 3-5% of Russians spend their holidays abroad, which makes it 42 525 000 to 708 750 000 people. That is a relatively small proportion of population. The main reason is that preparation for the trip and trip itself involve spending a lot of money, both on trip as well as application for the visa. Moreover, the most of the Russian tourists are lacking language skills for traveling. Therefore, they have to stick to travel agency's brochures and information as well as recommendations that are available either in internet or from friends' experience (Hanhisuanto S. & Haverinen S., 2007, 52).

Regarding a decision making for Russian tourists involve many factors. The first and the most important are recommendations of friends and relatives, or previous experience. Therefore, the word of mouth works perfectly with Russian audience. Other information suppliers, with less importance, are internet, advertisements, brochures, travel agencies, radio and TV programs. The second factors are the level of safety, the process of getting visa, friendliness, reception, transportation connections, prices and other possibilities for nature tourism. Moreover, the cleanliness of accommodation, customer service, availability of

restaurant and the level of its service, additional activities, prices, quality, night life and Russian language speaking personnel (Hanhisuanto S. & Haverinen S., 2007, 53).

The Russian tourists can be considered as the best target group for tourism promotion. Firstly, because easiness of access and travel. Moreover, it is expected that when traveling to Finland vacation usually is smooth and easy along with good shopping possibilities and well as peaceful and clean natural surroundings. For Russian tourists Finland is considered to be main destination of winter holiday, along with Austria, Germany, France and Switzerland. However, it is believed that in Finland winter holidays are at the excellent level in comparison to summer tourism (Hanhisuanto S. & Haverinen S., 2007, 53).

Other reasons for Russian tourists to come to Finland are possibility for an active holiday, a city holiday and a family holiday. Among that experience of downhill skiing and snowmobiling. The active tourism is gaining more popularity among Russian tourists, in particular among those who are wealthy enough and are not keen on just lying by the beach. The city tourism is mainly made for sake of shopping, which can be also done with the mix of active and family holiday (Hanhisuanto S. & Haverinen S., 2007, 54). Besides all of that reasons Finland is considered to be remarkable place to spend New Year holidays.

According to www.ayda.ru (November, 2011), Finnish consulates in Russia are increasing their working day in order to cope with winter season visa applications. The article says that according to Finnish forecast, this year amount of visa applications will increase by third in comparison to last year.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes research methodology of this thesis. The study exploits exploratory data analysis, based on secondary and primary research. The secondary data is collected through available publications. The primary data is collected through the feedback questionnaires. The main objectives of the thesis are to provide with essential information to Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village for further services' development.

The Christmas Tourism market is relatively new market, which creates a shortage of information available on this topic. Therefore, current research is built as exploratory research with the main aim to gather feedback from customers about the company.

Marketing research uses three basic research approaches. They are observational research, survey research and experimental research. In our case the most suitable research technique is survey research. The survey research gives the best descriptive data, and as a fact is the most commonly used in tourism research. The surveys can be in two forms: structured or unstructured. Structured survey is used in current research as it can be presented to any person at any given time. Therefore, main areas of the research are defined further as follows:

- 1) To build Kuhmo Kalevala Sprit Christmas Village portfolio
 - a) Internal analysis
 - b) External analysis
- 2) To collect feedback from Russian customers (using feedback questionnaire)

3.1 Primary and Secondary data collection

While carrying out a research it is important to choose whether to utilize old data or to collect new information. Generally it is beneficial to employ both types of information, secondary and primary, which can give better outcome.

According to Burns A.C. & Bush R.F. (2008, 137) secondary data is a data that was gathered in the past by other person not only by the researcher and not only for research reason. Besides that, secondary data is that was already published and not obtained through primary research. In current paper secondary data collection is used to complement theoretical part of the thesis as well as to build portfolio for Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village.

Primary research is carried out when it is needed to collect information for a specific purpose. That can be done in various ways, for instance through interviews, surveys and observation of focus groups. In order to collect feedbacks from Russian customers the questionnaire is used. The questionnaire consists of both qualitative and quantitative questions. This approach helps to collect information that can provide numerical estimates as well as opinions of customers.

3.2 Final questionnaire

The questionnaire represents one part of the survey process (Brace I., 2008,7). It is an important part of the process as it main supplier of required data. Therefore, well build questionnaire is the key of success of the whole study. The weakly written questionnaire is not going to provide the data that is needed to answer study's questions; moreover it may provide incorrect data. That without doubt can lead to wrong decision making.

Therefore, making clear what research objectives are is very important step. Moreover, the objectives must correspond to clients' or managers' needs. The areas of the research are to be set up before questionnaire seas the target audience. It is also clear, that the data collected should be as accurate as possible. (Brace I., 2008, 12). Nevertheless, it is practically impossible to obtain 100% accurate data. The problem can arise in the following steps (Brace I., 2008, 13):

- ambiguity in the question;
- order between questions;
- order within a question;
- inadequate response codes;

- wrong questions asked because of poor routing.

Other problems from that are outside of researcher's control are : questions asked wrongly; malfunction of the respondent to understand the question; failure to record the reply accurately or completely; inattention to the questions because of respondent boredom and fatigue; wish by the respondent to answer a different question to the one asked, and many others (Brace I., 2008, 13). Therefore, the questionnaire should be well structured in order to minimize those effects.

Questions in the questionnaire can be classified in different ways, such as Open or Closed questions, Spontaneous or Prompted, and Open-ended or Pre-coded (Brace I., 2008, 45). Different issues have to be taken into consideration when writing questionnaire. Those are style of language and language itself, absence of ambiguity questions, set up in advance pre-codes, as well as bias questions (Brace I., 2008, 105).

At the end of the day researcher must understand that questionnaire is the soul of the survey. It is one of the main tools in decision making process. The main three points that firstly needed to be taken into account are objective of the survey, the process of the survey (interviewing or sending the questionnaires), and an introduction that can capture respondents attention (Brace I., 2008, 121). Moreover, the format of the questionnaire should be effective, clear and easy to read; and questions should be friendly and create an interest. The way of further analysis should be set up in advance, so it does not create a chaos after data collection. And what is more important the questionnaire should be tested before sent to target audience (Brace I., 2008, 122).

In the case of current research the main objective is to identify gaps for further improvement of the services provided by Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas village. The questionnaire is divided (see figure 4) into three parts: population questions, experience questions and opinion questions. The questionnaire is distributed on the bus to the Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village customers during Christmas holidays. Final questionnaire for Russian tourists, both in English and Russian, can be found in appendix 1. The accessed data is going to be analyzed by SPSS and coded in the program automatically.

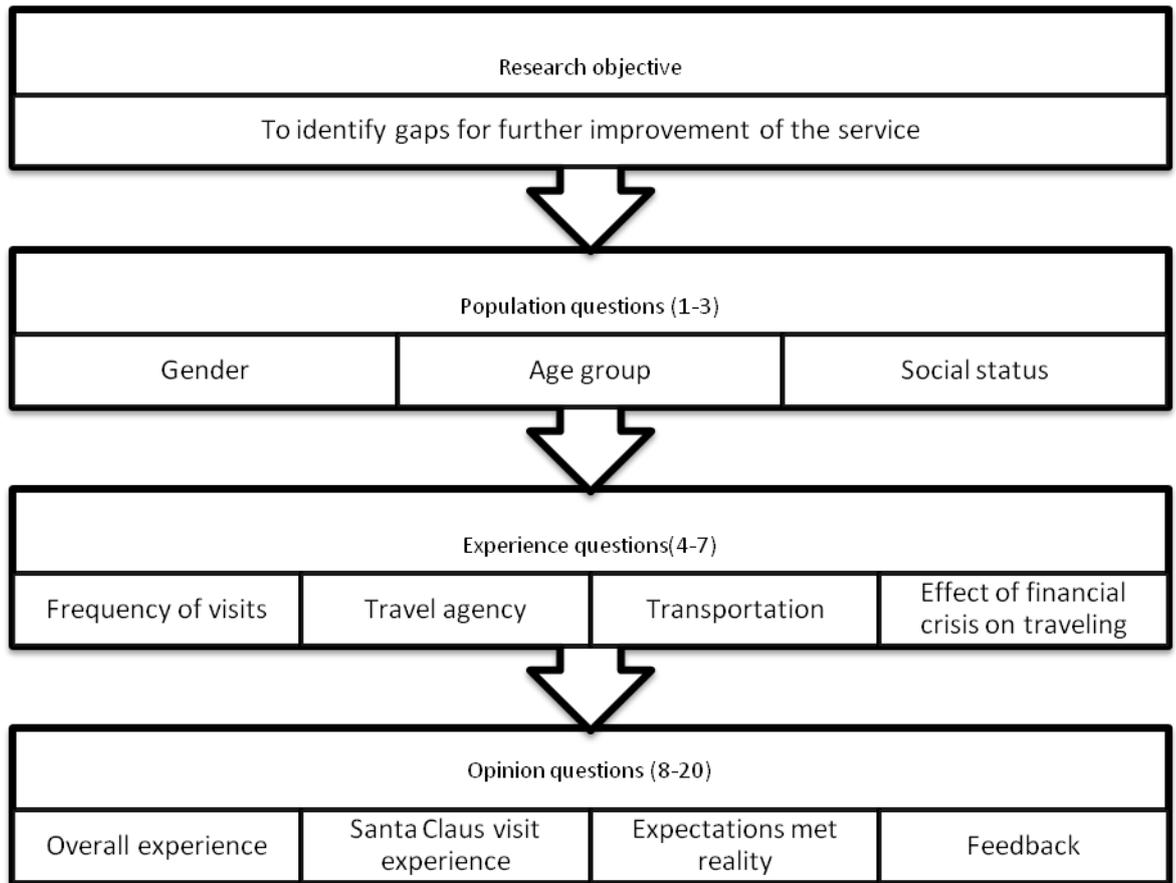


Figure 4 Questionnaire flow chart

4 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT CASE: KUHMO KALEVALA SPIRIT CHRISTASMAS VILLAGE

The company of Kalevala Spirit is based on myths and spirit of National Finnish Epic Kalevala. The name itself only makes people think of those stories and live them through. Kalevala Village (Finn: Kalevala Kylä) is entire yard where in different seasons; the company runs different products and services.

The owner of the company Akke Virtanen is the creator of the park idea as well as his main representative and innovator. His power to motivate and inspire people - his workers and customers – makes the world believe in all the magic elves and Santa Clause.

The company runs its own restaurant “Pohjolan Talo” (Eng.: Northern House) that offers *À la carte* (French: According to the menu) meals and gourmets. They serve customers meals made of salmon, reindeer and mushrooms. During off-season, the Northern House restaurant is open only upon requests and reservations.

During Santa Clause excursion tourists are visiting this restaurant to meet with Santa Clause wife or “Joulumuori”. She shows how to bake ginger biscuits and asks one of the children to take a biscuit and bring it to Santa Clause. The task is to hold it in a pocket and bring safely all the way long through elves, animals and forest creatures (according to the legend, and show itself).

Company's product range is divided into:

- Kalevala Spirit Experience (Santa Clause Excursion)
- Kalevala Spirit Gourmet
- Kalevala Spirit Design

The company runs its own restaurant that offers Finnish gourmets, such as salmon, reindeer, mushroom dishes as well as own wine, syrups, beer and Christmas drink – “Glöggi”, which is originally “glühwein” (Rus.: *Глинтвейн*). It is traditional Christmas beverage based on ginger, cinnamon, sugar and red wine. Glint wine is sold as a non-

alcoholic or alcoholic version with some percentage of vodka. It is known to be the best Christmas beverage in Finland.

Kalevala Spirit sells its own sort of Glöggi under the brand Kalevala Spirit. During Santa Clause excursion usually guests have time to taste “magic drink”. By the end of the excursion round, it is common that adults and parents are buying a few bottles to bring back home. Santa Clause shop is always too small and too full of delicious house-made conservatory. Among them are cans with honey and berry jams, which are made with care and love by the Kalevala Spirit’s recipes. For example, honey with ginger is the most sold product. There are cloudberry, lingonberry, cranberry, blackberry jams in range. All the berries were carefully picked up and selected under control of the company.

Santa Clause shop offers variety of hand-made clothes (sweaters, ponchos, t-shirts); knitted accessories (gloves, mittens, hats, socks) made of wool and organic cotton; reindeer firs; hand-made candles; tribal bracelets, knives; tar soaps and shampoos; glass and wooden toys; Christmas books in English, Russian and Finnish; pieces for home decoration and interior.

Christmas dinner that is offered for the guests after Santa Clause performance is always an ending of the excursion. It consists of buffer table, self-service as well as bar where adults have a possibility to purchase beverages during the meal.

Christmas buffer normally provides pork ham (Finn: kinkku), smoked salmon, beef, potatoes, boiled eggs, salted fish in a three different Finnish ways, a few salads, as well as traditional Christmas rice porridge with berry jam. For desert, there are tea, coffee, and ice-cream/wisped cream over berry mix.

Excursion to Santa Clause village in Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit is a Christmas product whose main target group is Russian tourists (see excursion step by step appendix 3). It is not a secret how many Russian guests are coming in Finland during their New Year vacations. The main purpose of Santa Clause excursion is to make a show for families with children, to make little guests believe in magic power of Santa Clause. Santa Clause exists. Adults know it as myths but children still believe in a fairytale. It is very rare that child doesn’t believe in it. Often children are motivation to visit Kuhmo with the whole family.

The majority of the guests are Russians. Even though, they are the most demanding customers. The culture of customer service in Russia is completely different that customer

service in Europe and Finland, in particular. It can be seen in often complains of the guests. They are afraid of being cheated and fooled. They often think that serving personnel is something they should be afraid of. Some Russians count their money in that way, that they need to see that what they have paid for is fulfilling their expectations. Otherwise, they are getting desperate and starting complaining.

It is very important to serve Russians in a way how they want. They very spoilt guests. But their amount in Vuokatti is incredible during New Year and Christmas Celebration.

Competition of Santa Clause in Kuhmo Kalevala Village is apparently huge especially in Finland. Up the north, in Lapland, there is the main resident of Santa Clause, in Rovaniemi. About 200 charters are landing on Christmas Eve, and New Year from all over the world. Rovaniemi is known as a capital and home of Finnish Santa Clause. Other places where Russian tourists can meet Santa Clause is Kuusamo (Ruka Ski resort), and Kuopio (Tahko Ski Resort).

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main survey's objective was to identify gaps in services of Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas village in order to make for further improvement of the service or development of additional services. As it was planned the questionnaires were distributed to the customers that were visiting Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village during Christmas holidays. There were distributed over 100 numbers of questionnaires, out of which 52 valid questionnaires were received. The data was entered to SPSS computer program, which made further analysis.

The questionnaires were mainly filled in by females (42 respondents). This is due to the fact that in Russian culture female tends to give feedback, when male would not care much of that. This is again one of cultural issues, when person in Russia tends to think that nothing would change even if there is a feedback. The final decision is always made by somebody else. (See chart 1)

The main age groups of respondents are 26-35 (20) and 36-45(17). Mainly those are families with children (39). This result proves the fact that Russian tourists come for Christmas (New Year) holiday with families and children. (See chart 1) The question of children's age was not included into questionnaire, however according to my observations the children were in between 3-15.

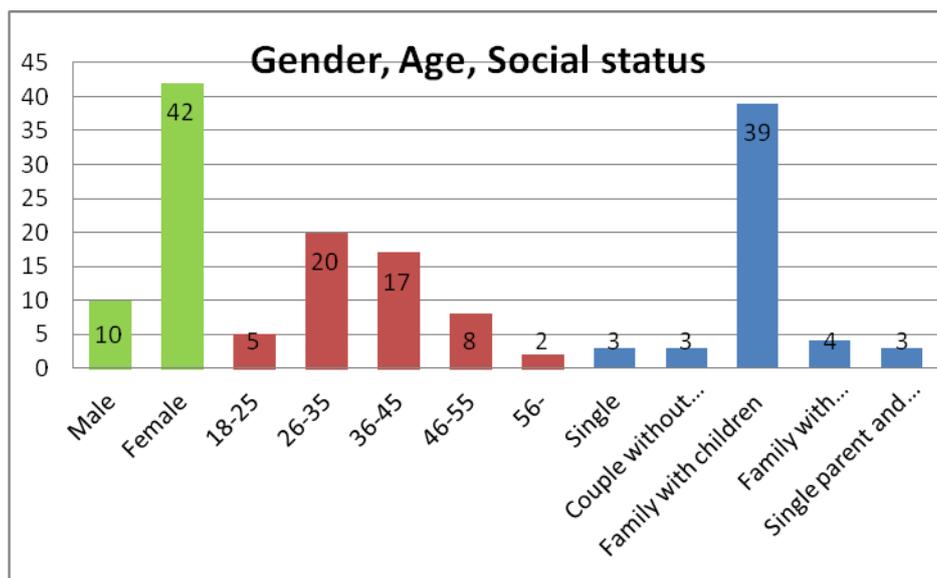


Chart 1 Population questions outcome (corresponds to questions 1, 2, 3)

For most of the respondents that was first time visiting Kuhmo (45). This means that they are considered to be new customers for Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village. (See chart 2). Those who visited Vuokatti second time mentioned prices grew and infrastructure developed positively. Most of the respondents (39) bought tickets to Christmas Village from RTG, either for in Holiday Club Katinkulta or in Sokos Hotel Vuokatti. Very few (5) bought it already at home in travel agency, which mean that not many of Russian respondents tend to pre plan their vacation at home or they have been told that all possible trip can be bought at the place. (See chart 3)

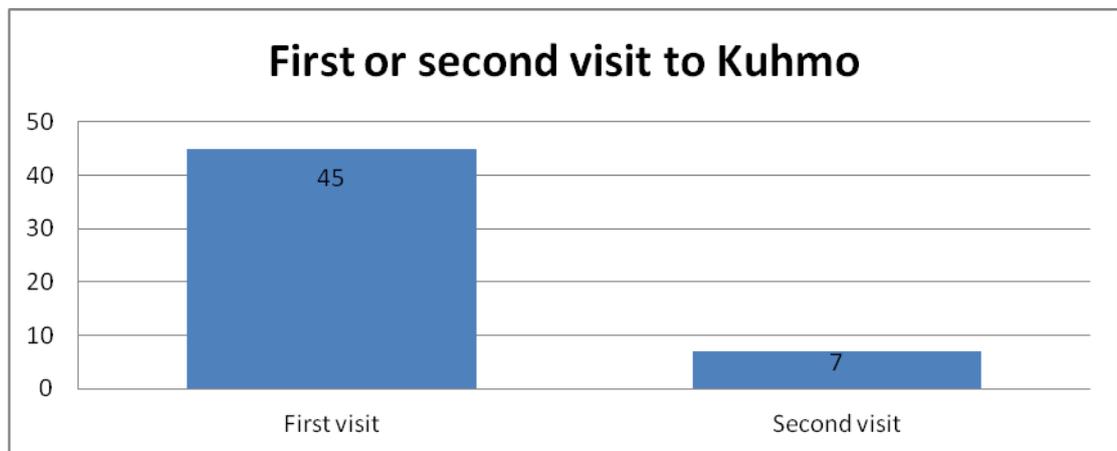


Chart 2 Frequency of visits to Kuhmo (corresponds to questions 4)

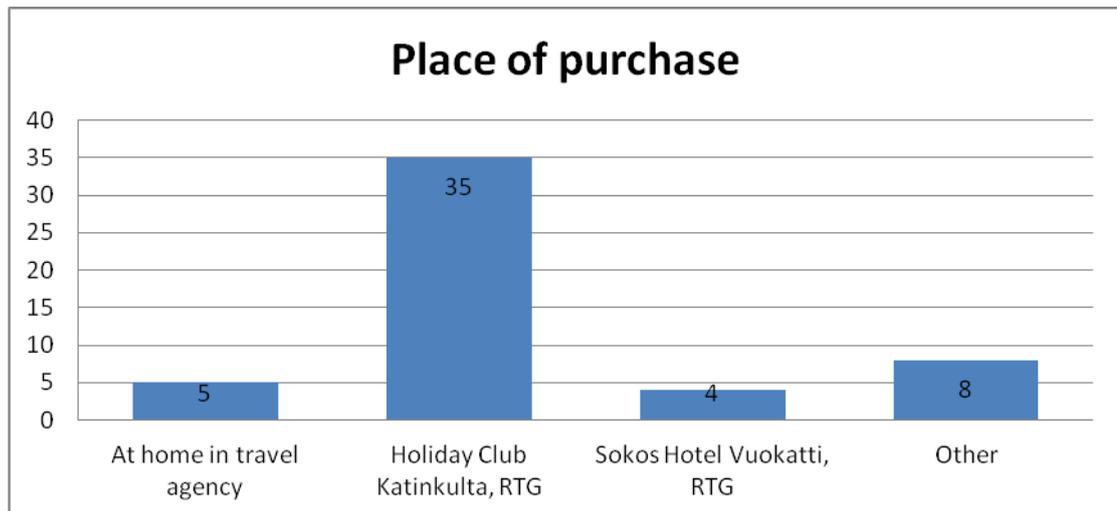


Chart 3 Place of excursions purchasing (corresponds to questions 5)

Main mean of transportation for around 40 % of respondents was charter flight. The next popular way of transportation is car and after that public transportation and charter train. (See chart 4) This data does not correlate to Border Interview Survey (2010, 14), which claims

that main mean of transportation for Russian tourists is by car and second by air. However, Border Interview Survey does not mention seasonal trend of transportation usage. With that being said, it can be concluded that favorite way of coming to Finland in winter season is by air.

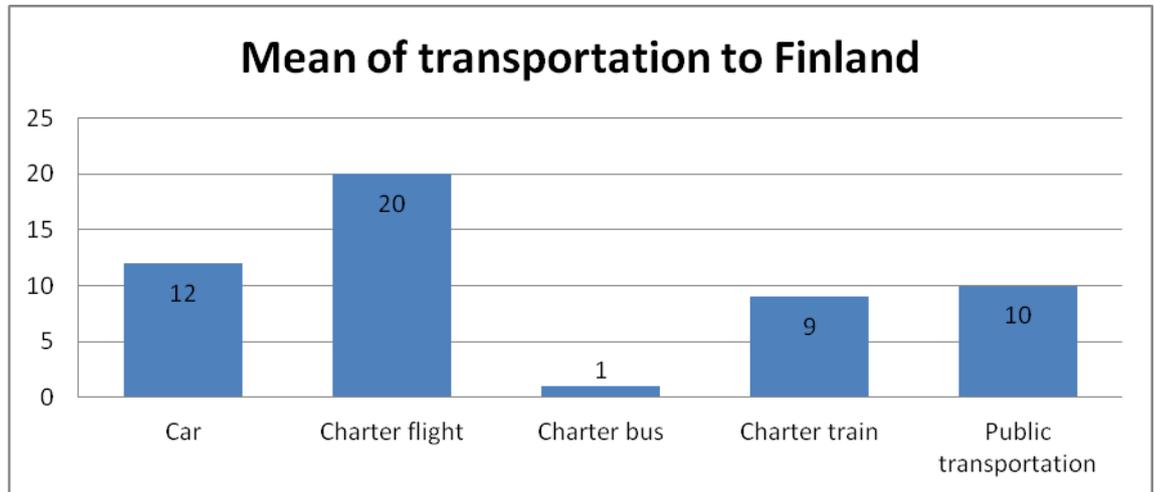


Chart 4 Mean of traveling to Finland (corresponds to 6)

Most of respondents (around 74%) did not experience the influence of financial crisis in decision of going for winter holiday. (See chart 5) It can be assumed that despite of not experiencing the influence of financial crisis there was such, due to the fact that from year 2009 to 2010 the amount of tourists from Russia increased by 400 passengers. The increase could happen due to the closeness of Finland to Russia and relatively cheap price hence good services.

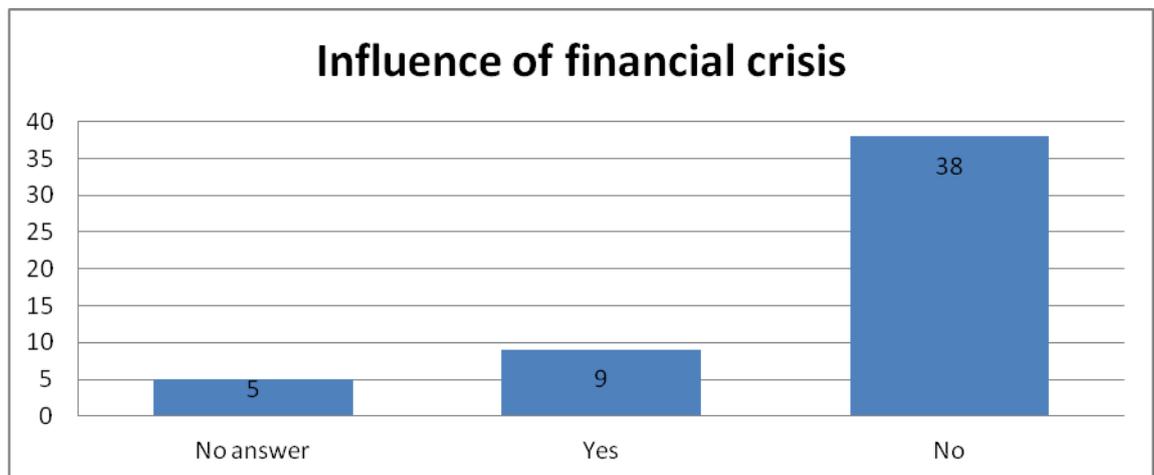


Chart 5 Influence of financial crisis to traveling capabilities (corresponds to questions 7)

The main reason for respondents for coming to Vuokatti is that it is a "winter paradise", and that is surrounded by beautiful nature. Moreover, it was pointed out that it is great place for family vocation and good place for skiing. (See chart 6).

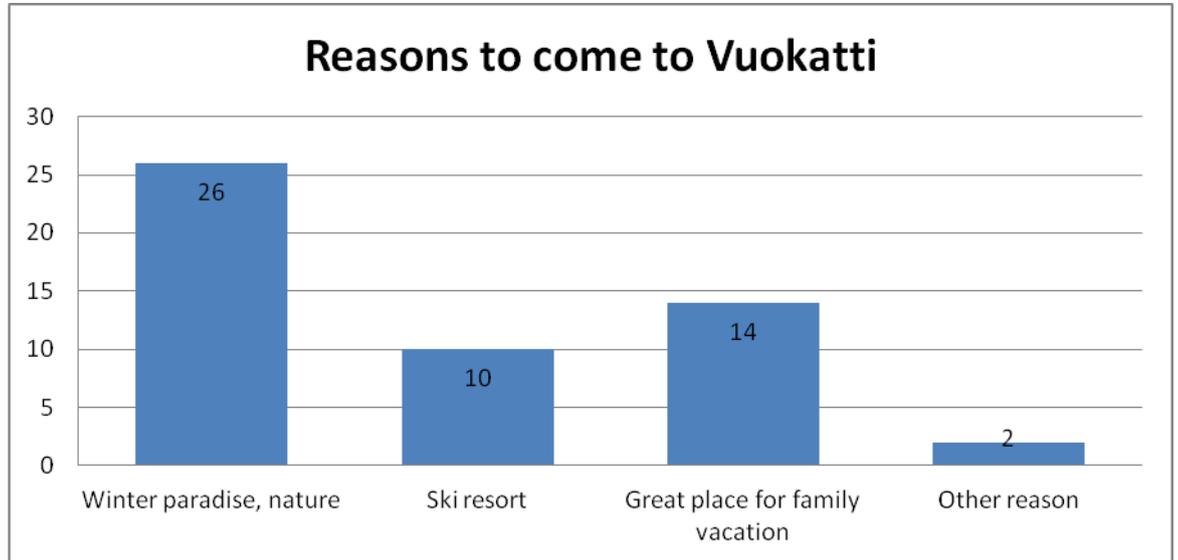


Chart 6 Reasons for coming to Vuokatti (corresponds to questions 8)

Two main sources of information about Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village were Internet and Travel agency (see chart 7). This contradicts to previous findings by Hanhisuanto S. & Haverinen S. (2007, 53), which say that this two have less importance hence recommendations of friends and relatives.

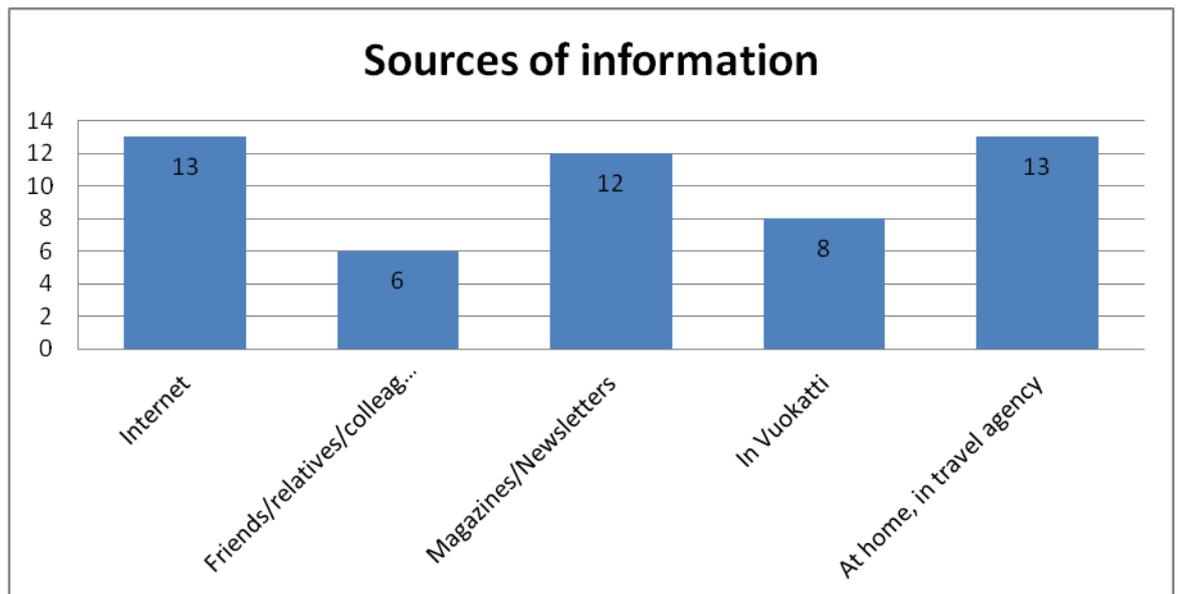


Chart 7 Sources of information for trip pre planning (corresponds to questions 9)

The tickets to excursion are usually sold by agents in Vuokatti at different points. The product is usually described by short presentation (38 respondents) or by pictures and slides. (See chart 9). For about 48% of respondents the price for excursion is well defined for services is offered. However, 34 % of respondents were not happy with the price. (See chart 8). The process of payment for excursions did not have any problems. However, respondents have pointed out that price for souvenirs was too expensive, which is 35 Euro per book. The groups were too big and reindeers' ride too short. Moreover, there was not enough of a show and song-singing. Besides that, elves were too slow.

The suggestion was to include the price of Glöggi into price of excursion. Most of the tickets were purchased during the trip (48), which can tell that either Russian tourists were prepared for buying excursions at place, or that intention was unplanned. Other reasons for that are availability of excursions' lists and timetables at travel agencies, as well as thorough descriptions. Moreover, there is sort of unwillingness to purchase excursions in advance due to possibility of cancellation of the trip. Very few mentioned that they love to plan their trip in advance, so they do not need to worry about that at the place (see chart 10).

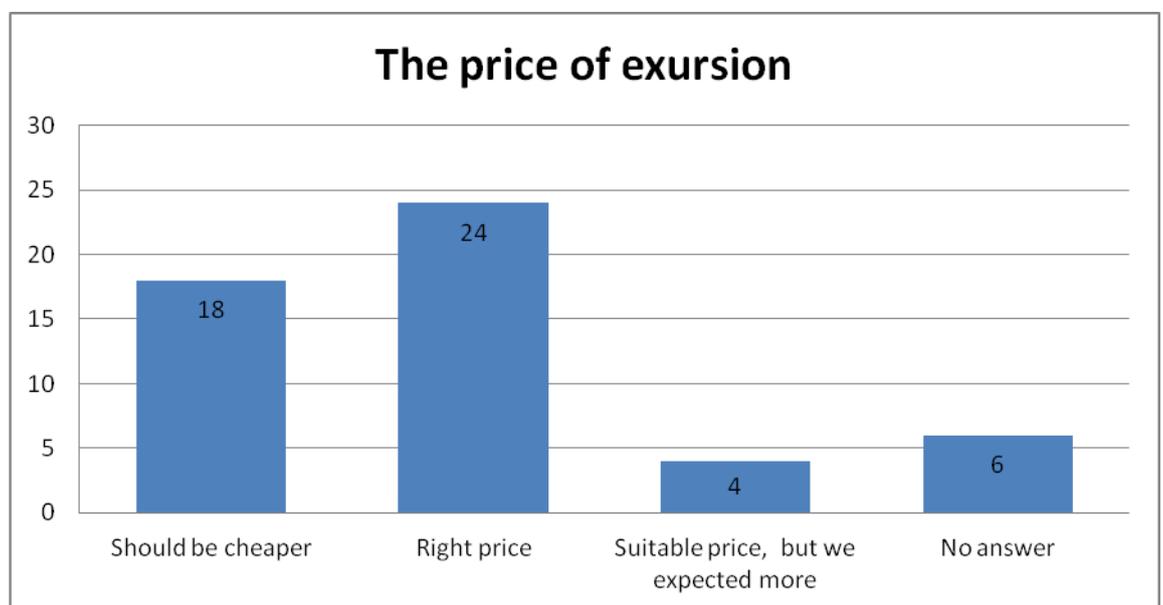


Chart 8 The fairness of excursion's price (corresponds to questions 10)

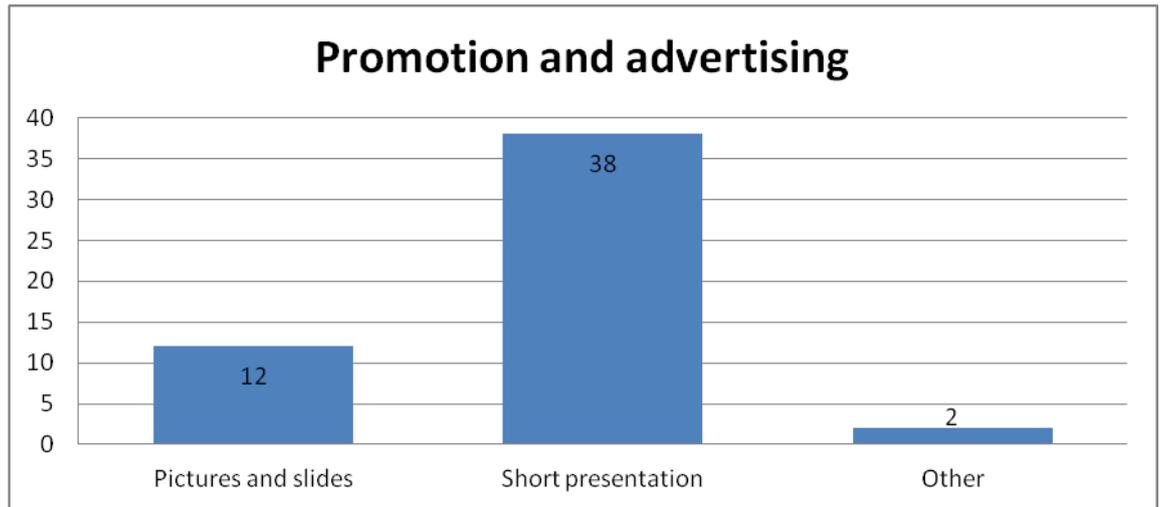


Chart 9 The ways how the excursion was promoted to respondents (corresponds to questions 11)

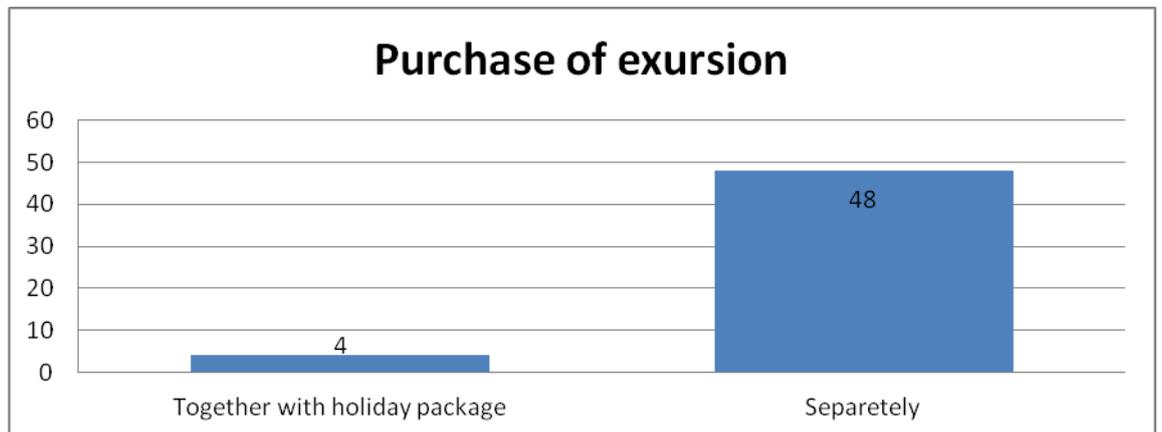


Chart 10 Purchase of excursion (corresponds to question 12)

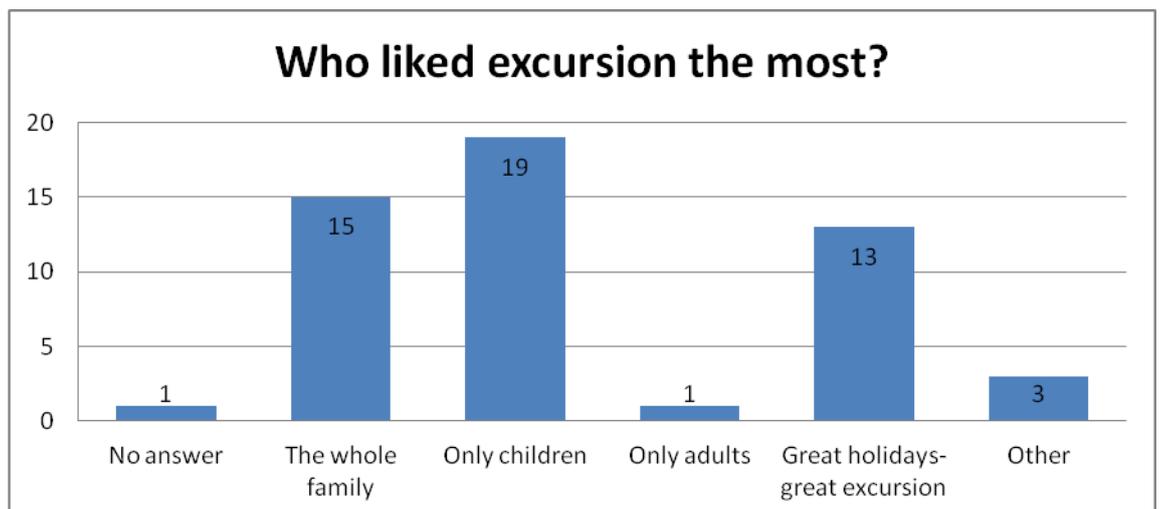


Chart 11 The excursion most preferred by groups (corresponds to question 13)

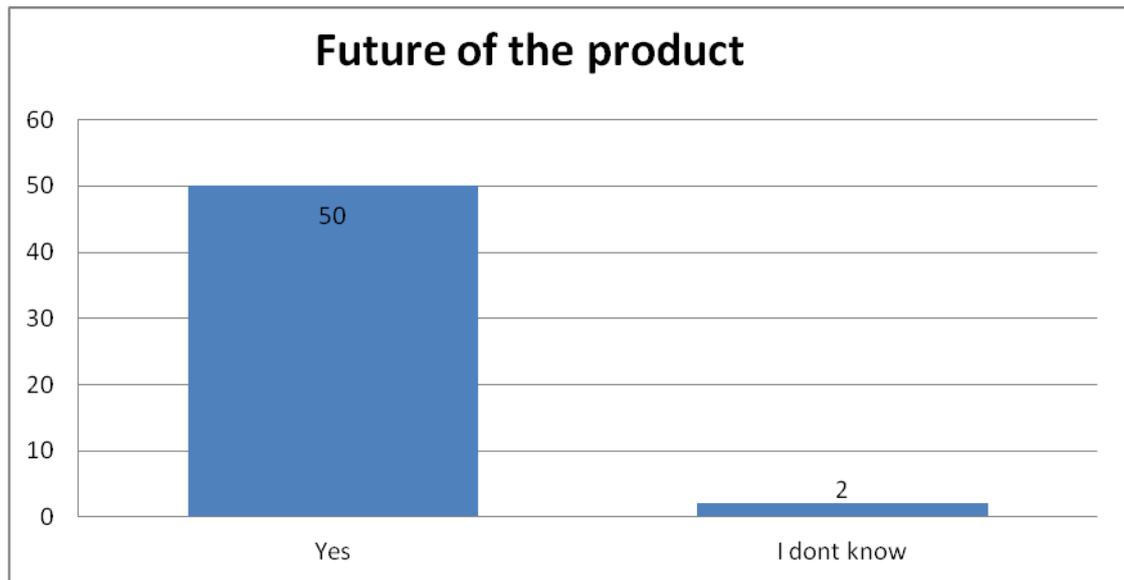


Chart 12 Future of the product (corresponds to question 16)

By the most respondents (50) the product has potential in the future (see chart 12). That excursion has potential as for children so and for whole family (see chart 11). It was pointed out that the trip captures the essence of the holidays, conclusively making this excursion being great.

Most of the respondents (83%) would definitely come to Vuokatti again, as the trip met their expectations (see chart 14). Main reasons for coming second time are the following: acceptable vacation, ideal for vacation with little children, in warmer winter or in summer, beautiful nature and fresh air, peaceful and quiet place. For those who pointed out "NO" for visiting Vuokatti second time the reasons are the following: too quiet for young generation in the area of Vuokatti, not enough entertainment in the evening time, infrastructure of Vuokatti is not well developed, some people prefer to visit different places every year.

For 50% of the respondents there were no barriers concerning coming to Finland as well as traveling across it. However, few mentioned that long distance and visa application is one of main barriers that travelers from Russia can face. Along with that language and currency can be bring a little discomfort in traveling (see chart 13).

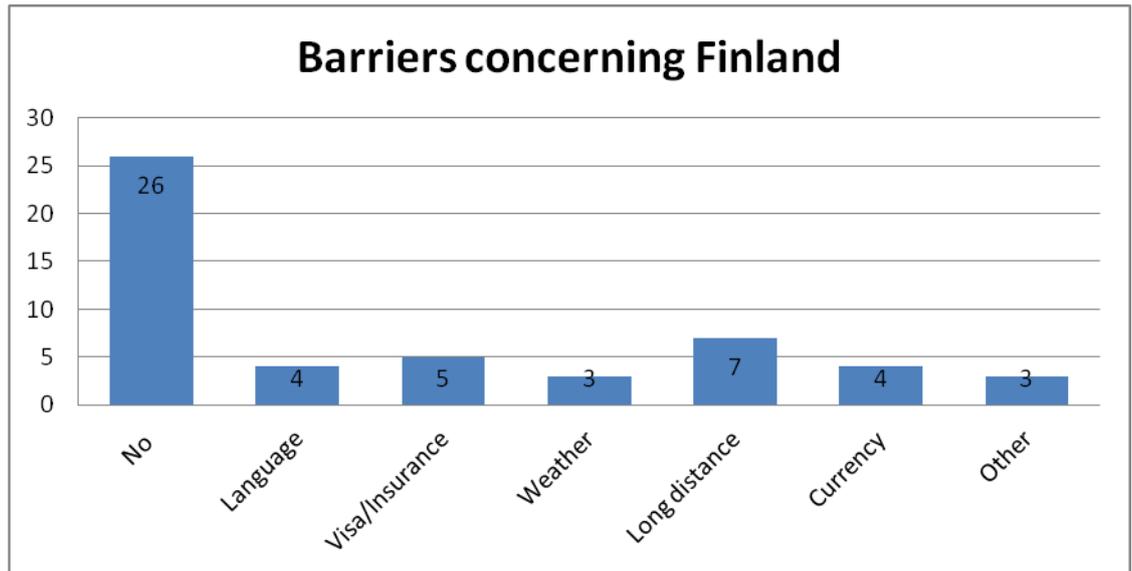


Chart 13 Barriers concerning coming and traveling in Finland (corresponds to questions 19)

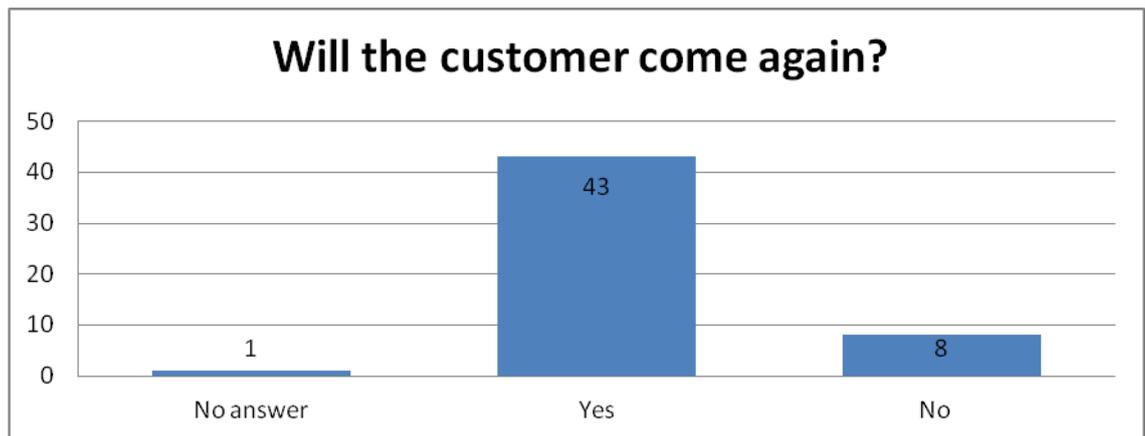


Chart 14 The second visit to Vuokatti (corresponds to question 20)

The feedback for further improvements in the excursion process and content was made as follows:

- More stories about Santa Claus
- Movie about Santa Claus in the bus
- Creation of magical feeling before coming to the Christmas village
- Christmas music in the bus

- Wider variety of menu in the restaurant, which includes sups
- Groups of kids at one time from 4-6
- Photos with Santa Claus to be made with professional photo camera
- More games with children
- It is too boring for adults
- Glöggi could be included in the price of the excursion
- Gift giving by Santa Claus should be organized more thoroughly. Meaning either all kids receive the same gifts or parents should be notified in advance that they can choose gift for their children.
- On the way to Kuhmo the stories of the region and Finland could be also told.
- Free gifts to children (small reindeers for example)
- To teach Santa Claus some Russian phrases
- Santa Claus should be more entertaining
- More actives elves
- Availability of excursion after 09 of January
- Better outfit for elves, so that they could look more real

The results of the survey show correlation to previously found data of the fact that Russian tourists prefer to come for winter holidays with family (Border Interview Survey, 2010). They do seek for great vocation with good service and accommodation.

However, few of respondents have pre planned their free time trips during their stay in Finland. Nevertheless, they look for information in the internet and from their local travel agencies. This in fact does not correlate to previously gathered information about the first source of data about possible trip. Which according to Hanhisuanto S. & Haverinen S (2007) are the family member or friends, or own previous experience.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The results for the research have showed that there is a gap for improvement in the company's services and operation. It is important to keep customers satisfied with the services and product that are offered. It is obvious that Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village every year attracts new customers with their existing product. Therefore it could so that they might not need any improvements. However, taking into consideration that customers' group is always the same, which Russian customers group, several adjustments need to be made to satisfy this group. The following suggestions were built according to customers' feedback.

1. It was mentioned by respondents, though the price for excursion was fair the excursion itself was lacking entertainment points.

Some visitors mentioned that the size of the group was too big “for that money”. Indeed there is always a queue to get in the Northern House to see Joulu Muori, to take pictures with characters and elves. The smaller the group - the easier to attract attention of the participants by the bus guide. It is also much faster to go through the forest, additionally avoiding queuing in front of Santa Clause.

Little children usually are very curious to meet Santa, so they are prepared to sing a song, read a poem or show their talents in arts or any other way. But sometimes, there is no time for big group to talk with Santa Clause as much as they want because the next group is waiting outside to get in the house. It is easy to stop the group and make them sing Christmas carols while the previous group is having pictures at the same time. But if the group is huge (over 30 passengers) is it impossible to stop them all in once or ask to gather and wait. There must be gap more than 45 min between excursion arrivals.

2. Suggestion is to employ more myths into program, more of song singing.

Some of the clients are willing to spend more time with Santa Clause, as well as having their dinner together. For Russian tourists, New Year's celebration is a very important party when they like to dance, sing songs, drink and eat a lot of tasty food.

Therefore, being abroad for some of them, means they can behave like they cannot at home. Very few Russians are shy.

While being on holidays, typical Russian man or adults mainly want to relax. After outdoor activities, ladies and men are happy to stay inside with plenty of tasty meal on the table. It is very famous Russian custom to drink and eat. Having some shots of vodka and dinner is normal in Russia. Spirits help to increase appetite and blood pressure. Combining with tasty Christmas food in Kalevala Spirit, many tourists wish there would be more entertainment at the restaurant with live music.

For instance, elves can perform, playing music in band. Song-singing after great dinner is essential for Russian soul, heart and mind. At least, there must be musical decoration like a stereo sound system in the dining room. It is very fascinating for Russian visitors to eat Christmas meals in the best Finnish traditions with some Christmas soundtracks

3. Due to the fact that mainly excursion is attracts families with children, the menu of the meals during Christmas season could include special soups.

It is very common to eat soup for starter in Russia. Soup can also be a main meal for lunch. Even though it is light, it fulfills the appetite. For Russians it is typical to include soup in lunch menu. Every Russian mother cooks soup or “borsch” (so-called, beet-root soup) and knows how healthy is it for stomach.

4. This part is concerning art program. It is important to remember when dealing with Russian customers that amount of money spent equal to quality of service or product that is received. According to the feedback, at the end of the season elves were too slow and not entertaining. In addition to that bear did not have good costume. Therefore, there is a place for elves motivation program or to implement shift work. The elves during winter season work every day and receive couple of visiting groups per day. And even more before New Year eve, the Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village receive around 12-17 groups. Consequently, all personnel that are involved in entertainment program are very tired. It is always important to keep your personnel satisfied to insure outcome of the product or service that is produced.

5. The reindeer ride was mentioned to be too short and too slow, which is 400 meters.

During excursion tourists meet with Forest Elf who is introducing his knowledge of forest language and know everything about animals. He shows children Santa Clause's reindeer and is offering a very short ride in open sledge. It is quite exciting for young visitors, so they jump all together or sharing into small groups, and are waiting to get on sledge. The idea of the ride is to introduce wild animal to people from big cities and towns. Unfortunately, it is not very pleasant for reindeer itself being used for more than 200 children daily. By the end of the high season this poor reindeer can hardly breathe.

It would be more reasonable to organize a little zoo in that area where Forest Elf has his campfire and shelter. There might be sheep, reindeer, rabbits, husky dogs. It is not necessary to ride little guests. It would be easier to show them to the public without usage. Otherwise, guests are either complaining about the distance of ride or having difficulties to get into sledge standing in line. When frosts are very low, both guests are reindeer is suffering.

6. Another comment was concerning guide in the bus. For Russian culture the information about certain place they visit is very important. This is either that they want to know everything or to share their experience after returning back home. Therefore, the guide should be well trained about the culture, historical facts, local news and other stories that are in the region as well as in whole Finland. It is understandable that this is not company's concern. However, that could be regional promotion done through the guides in the bus. Especially when the distance of 70 km from Vuokatti to Kuhmo and back taken into consideration.

Some little guests are asking about Finnish Christmas Fairy-tales. There might be a video tape with Christmas cartoons or the guides can read a book about elves and their Christmas duties and jokes.

7. Other comments were concerning Vuokatti entertainment in the evenings. Suggestion at this point is to organize visit to Vuokatti of Santa Clause from Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village before New Year eve. This is on one hand is the way to promote the Village itself and to be involved in the celebration.

A number of clients would be very happy to meet Santa Clause in front of their cottage door. They would make a special order to invite Santa into the family party. Therefore, Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit could produce another product, e.g. Private Dinner with His Majesty Santa Clause or Mr. Santa Clause. It would be more fun for families with children. However, children do need sleep in the night, even if it is New Year Night. For this reason, there could be organized “Private Dinner on New Year Eve”. For tourists in Vuokatti, especially those who stay in holiday apartments, Kalevala Spirit could organize “Visit of Santa Clause”, so that children could receive presents straight from Santa Clause but at home.

8. The concept of gift-giving should be equal.

Santa Clause gives every child a Christmas puzzle as a gift. But at the same time, parents are allowed to bring own presents or buy some from hand-craft shop of Kalevala Spirit. While children listen to Santa Clause and his Christmas stories, their parents are shopping and putting packed presents in one sack. Then parents go to join their kids and Santa Clause. Together with puzzle, child gets additional present but they think it is from Santa Clause. Assistants in the souvenir store help to pack and sign a present for each child.

The problem is that sometimes adults think that organizers of excursion invite them into souvenir shop for additional shopping, and there is no need to buy anything. Subsequently it creates a gap between children that receive more gifts and those that receive only one. This is due to the fact that most children open their presents immediately and become very happy. Lastly, some of the parents are upset because their child is not satisfied as the others.

There should be additional announcement for all parents either while purchasing of the vouchers at the sales office or inside the store in Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village.

In summary, the product that Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village offers is very interesting for Russian tourists and meets their expectations. However, several changes could be adapted in order to meet Russian culture expectations, which is amount of money spent equal quality of the product consumed.

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<http://www.ayda.ru/finland/news/2348>

LIST OF APPENDICES

1. Surveys for tourists in English
2. Surveys for tourists in Russian
3. Excursion step by step

Dear guest(s),

We kindly ask you to leave a feedback about your experience in Christmas Village of Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit. This questionnaire is anonymous. We need to know what you think about our hospitality for further development of products and services in Vuokatti and Kuhmo. You can mark several answers, if needed.

1. **Gender:**
 - Male
 - Female
2. **Age group:**
 - 18 - 25
 - 26 - 35
 - 36 - 45
 - 46 - 55
 - 56 and older
3. **What category of clients would you put yourself in?**
 - single
 - young couple
 - family with 1-3 children
 - family with children and grandparent(s)
 - single parent with a child/children
4. **Is it your first time that you visited Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit?**
 - Yes, it is my (our) first time in Christmas Village
 - No, we have been there before; When was it? What changes did you notice about the excursion?
5. **How did you purchase this travel package to Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit?**
 - From travel agency at home
 - From RTG sales points in Katinkulta
 - From RTG sales office in Sokos Hotel Vuokatti

Some other way
(specify) _____
6. **What type of transportation did you use to reach Vuokatti? (mark several if needed)**
 - own car/minibus
 - airplane (charter)
 - charter bus
 - charter train
 - public train/bus connections
7. **Has financial crisis affected your travelling patterns abroad (to go to Finland or to Vuokatti) during last 2-3 years comparing to your usual winter holidays during the stable economical situation?**
 - Yes
8. **What did attract you to come for holidays in Vuokatti?**
 - No
 - Winter paradise (snow, nature, landscape)
 - Vuokatti Ski Resort offers great facilities for skiers of any level and style
 - Vuokatti is a quiet tourism destination with no history of terrorism or nature disasters
 - Vuokatti is perfect for active family holidays
 - Other (specify):

9. **How did you know about Vuokatti Ski Resort and Christmas Village in Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit? (mark several if needed)**
 - from Internet
 - from my (our) colleagues, friends and relatives
 - from travel magazines and newspapers
 - We were familiar with Vuokatti before but it has been our first time in Kuhmo
 - My (our) tour operator promoted me (us) Vuokatti at home country
10. **Does the price of the excursion program match with its content?**
 - No, the program should be cheaper
 - Yes, the price is OK
 - The price is suitable for most of the clients but content should be a bit more fascinating
 - The price is too low for such program
11. **What methods of promotion did the seller used to advertise you the package to Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit?**
 - we saw some parts of video illustration
 - we saw pictures and/or slides
 - we were only told shortly about the content of the program

12. Did you buy excursion to Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit together with a holiday package?
- No, we(I) can purchase it during our (my) vacation in Vuokatti
 - Yes, as I am (we are) willing to pay for excursion before the start of holidays
13. What sort of feedbacks would you choose to leave about Vuokatti and Christmas program of Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit? (mark several if needed)
- «It was nice, all of us are happy, especially our children»
 - «Our children are happy, but we also expected some amusement for adults»
 - «My child is very upset because he says Santa Clause is not real»
 - «Vuokatti is a good destination, and trip to Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit was very interesting»
 - «Next time we will bring here the rest of our family, and of course visit Santa Clause»
 - Other (specify): _____
14. What changes would you suggest for organizers of the excursions?
- _____
- _____
- _____
15. If you have been to Vuokatti during last 2-3 seasons, what changes do you see now in Vuokatti? Specify.
- _____
- _____
- _____
16. Is there future for Christmas excursions on Russian (Ukrainian, etc.) tourism market?
- _____
- _____
17. Have you had difficulties while buying the excursion? If yes, what kind of? (specify)
- _____
- _____
18. Did the trip to Santa Clause meet your expectations?
- Yes
 - No
 - Mostly, except food/weather/price/long way/big group/etc. (specify)
19. What are the possible barriers and difficulties which you may experience when going abroad for holidays and New Year celebration to Finland? (mark several if needed)
- No barriers
 - Language difficulties
 - Some custom restrictions (visa, passport, insurance, etc.)
 - Weather conditions in Finland (hard frosts, snow storms, slippery, etc.)
 - Financial difficulties (expensive country, high prices, high currency rates...)
 - Long distance from home – too far away to drive
 - Other (specify): _____
20. Would you come again to Vuokatti next season or next time? Explain your answer.
- Yes, _____
 - No, _____
- Comments (optional) _____
- _____

Thank you for your feedback!
We hope to see you next season again!

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



KAJAANIN
AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
 UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES



Уважаемые гости,

мы постоянно совершенствуем уровень туристических услуг в Вуокатти. Будьте добры, примите участие в нашем опроснике по экскурсии в Кухмо Калевала Спирит! Данный опрос является анонимным и Ваше мнение поможет нам иначе взглянуть на качество предоставляемых нами услуг, разобраться в их достоинствах, а также в возможных недостатках, которые в последующем мы постараемся устранить. Анкета состоит из 20 вопросов, большая часть которых имеет возможные варианты ответов.

1. Ваш пол (нужное обведите):

М Ж

2. Ваш возраст :

- 18 - 25
- 26 - 35
- 36 - 45
- 46 - 55
- 56 и старше

3. Охарактеризуйте себя как клиента/туриста :

- я приехал(а) один/одна
- мы молодая/средних лет/пожилая пара, без детей
- мы семья с 1 - 3мя детьми
- мы приехали всем семейством, с бабушкой и дедушкой
- я приехал(а) сам(а) со своим ребёнком (детьми)

4. Это Ваш первый тур в деревню Кухмо Калевала Спирит?

- Да, я/мы впервые был(и) у Санта Клауса!
- Нет, это был мой (наш) второй/третий визит;

Если Вы уже бывали в Кухмо Калевала раньше, то вспомните и напишите, пожалуйста, когда это было и как с тех пор поменялось Ваше мнение о представленной нами здесь программе?

5. Расскажите, как Вы приобрели путёвку на эту поездку?

- Дома в турагентстве
- В Вуокатти, в отеле КатинКулта у стенда RTGActive
- В Вуокатти, в отеле SokosHotelVuokatti в офисе RTG
- Другое (уточните): _____

6. Каким видом транспорта Вы добирались до Вуокатти?

- Своя машина/ микроавтобус
- Самолет (Чартерный рейс)
- Автобус (Чартерный рейс)
- Поезд (Чартерный рейс)
- Обычным рейсом по расписанию (поезд/автобус)

7. Появлял ли финансовый кризис на Ваши тур.поездки и/или каникулы за границей (в Финляндии или Вуокатти), по сравнению с периодом более устойчивой экономической ситуации?

- Да
- Нет

8. По какой причине Вы приехали отдыхать в Вуокатти? (если необходимо, отметьте несколько вариантов)

- Зимняя природа, чистый снег, красивые пейзажи, свежий воздух
- Горнолыжный центр Вуокатти подходит всем: и профессионалам, и просто любителям зимних видов спорта
- В Вуокатти безопасно: нет угрозы природных катаклизмов или террористических актов
- Вуокатти – идеальное место для семейного отдыха
- Другое (уточните): _____

9. Как Вы узнали о существовании экскурсии в деревню Кухмо Калевала Спирит? (если необходимо, отметьте несколько вариантов)

- Из Интернета
- От друзей/ родственников/ коллег по работе
- Из рекламных газет/журналов по туризму
- В Вуокатти
- Дома, в турагентстве

10. Соответствует ли стоимость экскурсии её содержанию?

- Нет, эта экскурсия должна быть дешевле
- Стоимость оправдывает содержание/окупается
- Экскурсия доступна по деньгам, но её содержание не оправдало наших ожиданий
- Стоимость занижена

11. Как Ваш туроператор/турагент рекламировал(а) Вам эту экскурсию?

- Мы смотрели видео-фрагменты

- Мы видели фотографии и/или слайды
○ Нам вкратце рассказали про экскурсию
12. **Вы купили экскурсию сразу при оформлении путёвок в Вуокатти?**
- Нет, т.к. мы можем передумать в любую минуту или купить экскурсию на месте
○ Да, поскольку мы предпочитаем бронировать всё заранее
13. **Какое высказывание из нижеперечисленных, по Вашему мнению, наиболее точно подходит, чтобы одной фразой описать Ваши впечатления от экскурсии:**
- «Супер! Мы довольны! Дети получили море впечатлений!»
○ «Дети в восторге, ну а нам, взрослым, большего и не надо!»
○ «Мой ребёнок расстроился, т.к. подозревает, что Санта Клаус ненастоящий»
○ «Экскурсия прошла замечательно, как и весь наш отпуск в Вуокатти!»
○ «На следующий Новый Год привезём к Санте своих друзей и родных»
○ Другое (уточните):

14. **Ваши пожелания в адрес организаторов экскурсии:**

15. **Если Вы бывали в Вуокатти последние 2-3 года, какие изменения Вы заметили?**

16. **Как Вы думаете, будет ли эта экскурсия так же популярна через 2-3 года?**

17. **Были ли у Вас сложности при оплате и/или приобретении билетов на экскурсию. Если «Да», поясните Ваш ответ.**

18. **Как Вы считаете, экскурсия к Санте Клаусу оправдала Ваши ожидания?**
- Да, вполне
○ Нет
○ Почти, если бы не сильный мороз/большая группа/дорогие сувениры и т.д.
19. **Существуют ли какие-либо трудности или препятствия относительно Ваших отпусков/каникул в Финляндии?**
- Нет
○ Языковые трудности
○ Некоторые таможенные правила и ограничения (страховка, виза и т.д.)
○ Погода в Финляндии (скользко, сильный мороз, метели и т.д.)
○ Расстояние и протяжённость пути (далеко от дома)
○ Финансовые препятствия (курс валюты, дорогая страна, высокие цены)
○ Другое (уточните): _____
20. **Вы бы приехали в Вуокатти на каникулы/в отпуск ещё раз? Поясните ответ.**
- Да,

- Нет,

- Ваши пожелания и предложения (если есть)**

Благодарим Вас за ответы и отзывы!

Хорошего Вам отпуска и отличного настроения!

С Новым Годом и Рождеством Христовым!



KAJAANIN
AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES



Stages of Excursion

The excursion to Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village

1. Tourists collection

Guide comes to Vuokatti from Kajaani with empty bus from Pohjolan Matka. At Katinkulta Holiday Club guide collects list of visitors to Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village from representatives of RTG. RTG is a partner that distributes tickets to Christmas Village. In one day there can be up to 3 trips. With the list that is received from RTG guide knows where and how many visitors have to be collected. The points are Holiday club Katinkulta, Vuokatinmaa, Vuokatti Ski Slopes, Sokos Hotel Vuokatti and cottages at Vuokatinhovi.

2. On the way to Kuhmo

On the way to Kuhmo guide tells facts about city and country. Closer to the destination point guide starts cheering up customers. Kids are excited to see elves and everyone is happy to be at the point after 40 km drive. At the Kuhmo Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village two elves are waiting. One is taking information about passengers, number of children and adults. The other one, son of the owner Kalle Virtanen, guides the group in the village.

3. The Northern House (Pohjolan Talo).

After all guests left the bus, elf-guide is welcoming the group by asking where they come from, and how was the trip. Elf-guide is usually Russian-speaking. The yard of Northern House is full of Christmas decorations as well as interesting constructions. Usually there is one or two sheep that children always like to take picture with. A pile of firewood, smoke sauna, small wooden houses – everything reminds of countryside life. In addition with snow, Christmas music on the background and decorations – all this makes people think they arrived into fantasy world. Inside the Northern House, Joulu Muori (the wife of Santa Clause) is waiting for little guests and their parents to get in and join her story. She introduces her little elves-helpers who are lazy and sleepy, and then asks all little guests to take off top jackets and hats. Children listen to a Christmas fairytale while their parents are watching the house, decorations, tasting warm Glögg-wine, or making pictures with baby-elves. After the Christmas story, little guests are making Christmas ginger biscuits together with Joulu Muori. Ginger dough is ready and young guests cut out different figures. After forming the biscuits, everybody tastes already baked ginger biscuits.

According to the legend, little elves are magic creatures. They study in elves' school, learning magic tricks, and hand-crafting. Their main duty is to help Santa Clause to watch children all over the world and report to his post-office who deserves his presents or not. As long as a child studies well, listen to their parent(s), and behave all year round, Santa Clause will bring a present for New Year and Christmas. Elves are also obliged to learn human activities and disciplines. For instance, they practice foreign languages, learning mathematics, song-singing, playing music, dancing, reading and painting. Joulu Muori is the head of elves' school and she controls the educational process. After that elf-guide is asking the group if they would like to continue excursion to discover Christmas forest and find Santa Clause. The group leaves Northern House and follows the guide.

4. Sauna-elf

Walking through the winter forest, tourists reach a tiny smoke-sauna. A smoke is running out of the chimney. A campfire is burning in front of the sauna and sauna-elf is watching around. He works as a sauna volunteer. A red towel is hanging on the door. Sauna-elf is wondering why so many young girls and boys came to see him. Tourists say they are searching for Santa Clause. Sauna-elf asks children to form a ring and dance together. Somehow more little elves are running from the forests, and they come to teach visitors their songs. Performing Christmas dances, the group is getting excited and finally, everybody is wondering where is Santa Clause. Sauna-elf doesn't know where Santa Clause went. At the same time, elf tells the group that Santa is probably having a sauna and asks guests to go and check. Visitors are very curious and one by one they go inside the smoke-sauna. It is full of smoke inside and nobody can find there Santa Clause.

Sauna-elf immediately realizes that Santa Clause has already taken his Sauna in the morning. He also reminds the guests that Santa Clause likes sauna very much and especially on Christmas and New Year eve. After visitors looked inside the sauna, everybody understood that Santa is gone but he left his red towel on the door. Sauna-elf precisely shows the direction where Santa Clause might have gone. Finally, elf-guide asks the group to continue their search. All together the group asks sauna-elf: "Missä Joulu Pukki?" which means "Where is Santa Clause?" in English. Sauna-elf precisely shows the direction to the right and says "May be there". According to the plot of adventure, all elves including Santa Clause have bad memory. So, there is no guarantee they know their age.

5. Elf-smith

Passing through the forest, the group finds a workshop of Elf-smith. His workhouse located on the bank of the lake. The elf-smith is welcoming the group inside his workshop where he forges the iron. His duty is to take care of Santa Clause's sledge. He warms up iron sticks on the fire and forges with hammer afterwards. Elf-smith asks little boys if they would like to help him. Helping elf-smith with work means he can explain the group how to find Santa Clause. But he cannot remember where exactly Santa Clause went. So, he suggests that tourists should go to the right. And the journey continues further.

6. Tar-elf

Tar-elf sleeps on the steps of her little house until the group arrives to meet her. She gets up because of loud boys and girl. They are curious of tar-elf and her campfire, which warms up a huge pot. A smoky aromatic liquid is boiling inside the pot. Tar-elf cooks a special nutrition for Santa Clause reindeers that have to fly and share presents all over the world. Elf tells to the guests how important if her job. She asks children to dance around the fire and all together they learn magic tricky words to support the fire. Tar-elf cannot remember by heart all ingredients of the nutrition in pot. As all the elves, she has bad memory. Elves are always happy and they have no sense of time. They watch the sun to understand what time it is. Only Santa Clause with Joulu Muori is taking care of elves to teach them different crafts, arts and tricks. When visitors ask tar-elf where Santa Clause lives, she asks to watch the fire: where smoke blows, there is Santa Clause house. The group thanks tar-elf and tar-elf goes back to sleep inside her tiny house.

7. Forest-elf

Forest-elf is a keeper of magic forest. He loves nature and takes care of all forest inhabitants. He knows language of animals, and can talk to them. Forest-elf sits near the campfire and surprised to see the group. Then he usually asks where do they come from and why. All little guests answer they are willing to find Santa Clause. In a while everybody gets a warm apple-cinnamon juice as a welcoming drink. Children usually show their talents, sitting around campfire. Some read poems, others – singing. Forest-elf is getting entertained by his visitors. Among decorations he has one big campfire, with benches around and reindeer furs on, and one small fireplace to boil juices. There is also a shelter and little house with a fire inside, which is set to be his home.

After conversation with tourists, forest-elf offers them to taste smoked salmon and his assistant give out everyone a piece of glow-fried salmon on a wooden plate. When children ask forest-elf about Santa Clause, forest-elf says that he cannot remember where exactly he left and offers children to go and talk to his reindeer. Children run up to the hill, where reindeer awaits them together with his care-takers. Adults thank forest-elf and follow their children. Reindeer track is very short, it is only 400m. After that children stop nearby small reindeers and feed them or take pictures. When the group is ready to continue the tour, all guests thank reindeers and walking across the hill.

8. Santa Clause

After reindeer's ride, guide-elf is bringing the group to the Santa Clause residence. It is located across the hill. Children and adults are separated. First children enter Santa Clause office. At the same time adults enter the residence from another door and visit handicraft store to buy souvenirs and presents for their children. While parents make shopping, children watch a Christmas performance at the office of Santa Clause. He has personal interpreter who helps with Russian-language translations. If there are children, who know English, Santa Clause speaks English himself. Children have about 30 min to watch Santa Clause and get the feeling they have found him in magic Christmas Village. When parents have done shopping, they are returning to their children. And the group continues conversation with Santa Clause. At the end children receive free presents as well as parents prepared by their parents. By the very end of the conversation, every family takes pictures together with Santa Clause and leaves the residence. Guide-elf is leading the group to the restaurant.

9. Departure to Sotkamo-Vuokatti

After Christmas buffer-dinner, all the passengers go back to the bus. The return trip is quite and dark. Usually tourists have a nap on the bus. Some of the passengers leave the group in Sotkamo to have a look in the shops and the rest of the group goes back to their hotels. The bus makes stops in the same order as on the way to Kuhmo: Vuokatinhovi - Sokos Hotel Vuokatti – Vuokatti Ski Slopes – Vuokatinmaa – S-Market Vuokatti – Holiday Club Katinkulta.

The bus guide and driver thank the group and welcoming them on excursion again next Christmas.



Charter bus of Pohjolan Matka is the best solution for group transportation between Vuokatti and Kuhmo.



Welcoming ceremony in front of entrance to Kalevala Spirit Christmas Village.



Elf-receptionist is welcoming groups. Her duty is to count amount of groups and individual visitors.



Kalle Virtanen and his young elves are welcoming guests in front of Pohjolan Talo, where Joulu Muori (Santa Clause's wife) is baking ginger biscuits.



Russian-speaking guide Elena is entertaining her group by playing Christmas songs with accordion.



Visitors are welcomed at Forest Elf's by a cup of "magic drink", which is made of cinnamon-apple syrup.



Tar Elf is representing her territory.



Tar Elf is on duty to boil special petrol for Santa Clause's Reindeers that makes them fly.



Elf is working in craft shop and serving guests warm Glöggi in Pohjolan Talo (Northern House).



In the Northern House children are trying ready ginger biscuits as well as helping Joulumuori (Santa Clause wife) to cut them out in different shapes.



Joulu Muori is holding a red envelope with ginger biscuit that should be passed to Santa Clause. One of little guests must bring it safely through the forest adventure.



Little elves are studying. Joulu Muori is also a head of Elf School. Elves are learning different magic skills all over the year and preparing songs for Christmas.

“Pikku tontut” means “little elves”.