
**IDENTIFYING AND IMPROVING THE IMAGES OF
VIETNAM AS A TOURISM DESTINATION AMONG
FINNISH TOURISTS**



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Marketing Vietnam's tourism to Finland:
Identifying and improving the images of Vietnam as a tourism destination for Finnish tourists.

ABSTRACT

This writing attempts to identify the images of Vietnam as a tourism destination for Finnish tourists and suggests marketing solution for Vietnamese travelling company to improve the images of Vietnam by enhancing marketing activities in the Finnish market.

Saigontourist Transportation Corporation (STC), Vietnam which is a commissioner of this thesis project, has provided updated information about the current situation of tourism in Vietnam as well as marketing activities of company during doing this project. STC also aims to develop opportunities to enter into the Finnish market.

Acknowledging restraints of Vietnam's tourism image and the prospect for boosting the tourism industry to the Finnish market, this project will try to define essential knowledge about the Finnish conception of traveling. It will also look at the tourism market of this Nordic country by: (1) identifying the *images* of Vietnam as a tourism destination according to perception of Finnish tourists; (2) analyzing the current situation of the Vietnam tourism market and Finnish tourism market. It will also (3) study experiences of popular Asian tourism industries like Thailand and China to improve marketing and promotion Vietnam's image as a tourism destination by (4) suggesting feasible solutions to attract Finnish tourists to Vietnam. The research is based on both theoretical and empirical (interviewing) knowledge. The theory applied includes definitions and concepts of tourism destination, destination image, tourism destination marketing and customer behavior in tourism.

The major findings are recurring problems with Vietnam tourism management; that is ineffective promotion. The research also addresses the overall image of Vietnam tourism to attract Finnish tourists in accordance to their behavior as well as comparing with neighboring countries' experiences. This outcome is a foundation to improve marketing strategy including products, marketing method for company.

Keywords: Vietnam tourism marketing, destination image, Finnish tourist

Pages 53 p.



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List of Abbreviations

STC:	Saigontourist Transportation Corporation
WTO:	World Tourism Organization
WTTC:	World Travel & Tourism Council
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization
USTOA:	United States Tour Operators Association
VNAT:	Viet Nam National Administration of Tourism
WEF:	World Economic Forum
GSO:	General Statistics Office of Vietnam
TAT:	Tourism Authority of Thailand
CNTA:	China National Tourism Administration
Eurostat:	The Statistical Office of the European Commission

1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a growing sector, contributing tremendously to the economy of a Vietnam. Regardless of today's economic recession but travelling services and tourism industry have not stopped and are still growing gradually. Moreover, presenting an attractive tourism's image is a very effective method to assert the country's reputation in the world. Since Vietnam realizes the important role of this industry, the government has been concentrating in marketing tourism by funding various promotion campaigns to the world. Over the past 10 years, Vietnam has seen extraordinary growth in the number of foreign tourists, with 140 percent since 2001. (Statistics Vietnam 2011.) Moreover, our country currently has some places listed in UNESCO World Heritage Sites as evidences of effort to boost the national tourism industry. Additionally, a number of travel companies operating internationally are increasing quickly to meet the demand.

Finland is not a new but an unpopular market to Vietnam tourism for various reasons. Thus, marketing activities in this market are in the shadows, and less focused than others. However, as can be seen, travelling is a popular hobby of Finnish people. There has been a large quantity of Finns travelling to Asian countries such as Thailand or China in recent years. Understanding this interest of Finns with Asian culture and the trend to explore new experiences in new destinations of their journey, the issue of improving a marketing strategy in Finland to attract Finnish tourists and make Vietnam's image more visible to Finns is very necessary.

It is crucial to identify the image of Vietnam's tourism according to customer behavior in order to improve marketing tactics properly. The nature of tourism is elusive therefore marketing and promoting tourism is difficult. In order to apply suitable and effective strategies to market tourism in certain market, it is critical to understand the importance and functions of the tourism image according to tourists' perception. Above all, analyzing and evaluating precisely the current situation's limitations and difficulties in promoting Vietnam's tourism in Finland is the principle part of the project. It would help to determine existing problems that restrain Finnish tourists from coming to Vietnam.

Besides, general background information about the thesis project, this chapter introduces the commissioner of project, research issues, and objectives of the thesis. Overall, it clarifies the background of this writing by discussing the importance of understanding tourism destination image, tourism marketing and the attractions to Finnish's travelers to Vietnam according to Finnish traveler's behavior. This chapter also presents methodology and structure of this thesis.

1.1 Company Introduction

The current known Saigontourist Transportation Corporation started its operation in 1976 in transportation field. It was born directly from Union Tourist Company HoChiMinh City under the name Saigontourist Auto-

mobile factory with 300 employees. The company had been through many name changes due to operational method. In 1999, after achieving many accomplishments by continuous development, successful in-country expansion, Saigontourist Company was converted into Saigontourist Transport Corporation by decision of the General 35/QDUB-KT/HDQT/QD/TCT C. as it is currently known.

During the past four years, STC consistently assigned targets and became a market leader domestically which was recognized as State Enterprise Grade I on April 2003 for high quality of service particularly for timeliness and security.

On 1st, January 2005, STC was officially equitized to Joint Stock Company Saigontourist Transport. In a trend of global integration, Vietnam joined WTO and immense increase of tourism services globally, on May 2006, Board of Directors decided to buy shares of RADIUS Global Tourist Group, the third largest tourism group in the world with 90 companies of many businesses. This step was considered as a great leap opening a new development page for the company. It helps to confirm the company's standing in domestic as well as regional market. After becoming a member of Radius, the company has advantages to expand the operation in tour and hotel offering at 80 countries in the world. Besides, with over 100 hotels and member branches in system, company stands in a very high advantage in services offering quickly and easily through Vietnam territories and connecting tour with foreign agencies.

The company's current charter capital is 80 billion VND (equivalent to 3 million EUR). Last year, the company served 410,000 international and domestic tourists, earning 1.6 trillion VND (approximately 42 million EUR), up 25 percent over the previous year. (Statistics PATA 2012) The company is mainly running four major businesses including commercial trade, travel, transportation and other related services like driver training and vocational training for export labour and auto repairing. Among of those, service trading and travel services are two key businesses that bring out the most profit for company when they accounted up to 49.9 percent and 30 percent of total revenue relatively.

At present, the firm's headquarter locates in HoChiMinh city. It also has a branch in Hanoi, one representative office in Quang Ninh and one office in Singapore.

1.2 Product

For over 30 years of operation in transportation and tourism, Saigontourist has nonstop expanded services and upgraded quality to meet the growing demand of market. Saigontourist provides numerous services to its clients including

- Travel services: inbound and outbound tour operator.

At Saigontourist, with young, enthusiastic and motivated staff, travel service develops strongly and becomes as a one of the most important line of Saigontourist.

In domestic travel, Saigontourist is confident to offer customer the top quality with credible, experience and professional style of services all over Vietnam. The company can provide various forms of tourism such as sightseeing, discovering cultural historical sites, picnic and camping, convalescence, ecological tours, sea boat travelling, exchange of culture, holding conferences tours. The tour-offering package can be customized according the clients' requests. Moreover, company continuously searches for new attractive tours which always bring more alternative selection for regular clients. Especially, company has ever held tour with number of tourists to be more than 2000 persons which was not easy to be conducted by any other tourist operator in Vietnam.

Besides operating domestic tours, another plus point for the company is international travel going to several continents such as Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America. Vietnamese are more and more demanding for travelling abroad. Therefore, operating oversea tour is necessary of company's strategy to meet market's demand and affirm the leader position. With the advantage of being a member of RADIUS, company can arrange worldwide variety of choices for sightseeing tour, making hotel reservation in shortest time and cost-saving for customers.

Saigontourist particularly pays attention to innovation to be effective and efficient in operation. The company focuses on cooperating with foreign partners to improve effective management. Take the event of signing a contract with Katsuura Mikazuki Group of Japan, Saigontourist has learnt by experience the strategy to apply IT in the process to book tours on the website, which raises convenience to clients, boost productivity and reduces the cost of management.

- Organizing all-in conferences, MICE (Meeting, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibition)

The company has gained a high reputation for organizing successfully national and international conferences and seminars for HIV prevention held by Ministry of Health in 2005 in Nha Trang. (PATA Vietnam, 2006.)

- One of the key lines of the company is transport passenger services such as international and domestic plane ticket agents, car rentals and maintenance and taxi services. Saigontourist was an active unit which contributed vastly to the success of SEA Games 22nd, 2003 in Vietnam by providing all means of transportation effectively. (PATA Vietnam, 2003)
- Vocational school combining with labour export: training in multi occupations, for example driving electronics, hotels and restaurant, study abroad consultant which is considered as one of key activities of the company in 2010.

- Import and export commercial products with various distribution channels
- Security service with Long Van security company in the system of Saigontourist
- Commercial corporation sector, Saigontourist has invested in different construction projects. For example, resort, conference center, building of office and training center jobs, area commercial building and apartment, luxury stores in many provinces of Vietnam.

1.3 Mission -Vision

Saigontourist has been awarded nationally and regionally for quality of service such as the Vietnam Trademark Golden Cup and won the golden cups entitled, "For Social Progress and Sustainable Development" and "Enterprise of Culture". The achievements so far have proved the reputation and the company's sound directions. Committed to the awards that were received, the company, always with respect and pride, promotes the achievement by continuously expanding its strengths in all activities to deserve top quality in the tourism industry in Vietnam.

Saigontourist's mission is to be valued by customers as the most prestige travel company in Vietnam. Company has been constantly standardizing all activities and reorganizing operational structure particularly in developing human resources in accordance to ISO 9001 certificate about quality management system and Association of Travel Asia Pacific (PATA) as a member. Moreover, Saigontourist aims to gain global brand in tourism aspect by expediting investment and promotion tourism in Asia-pacific region.

The company is aware of credibility, quality, and that the customers' satisfaction is the best to survive and develop to deserve its business slogan "Your Trust". Regarding the goal, the company has also enhanced marketing in European market as Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine as well as in the US. More precisely, Saigontourist participates in the International Tourism Exchange, travel and tourism exhibitions in this year to approach many partners and visitors in international markets.

1.4 Research issues and objectives

This study is made for Saigontourist Transportation Corporation in Ho-ChiMinh city, Vietnam, which mainly focuses on the travelling services line. As can be seen, Finland is not a well-known country to Vietnamese and Vietnamese company except the famous Nokia phone. However, the amount of Vietnamese students come to study in Finland is increasing lately that partly become a factor to introduce Vietnamese culture to Finnish people and invite them visit Vietnam. Additionally, the relationship between Vietnam and Finland has been enhancing positively in recent years that encourage better cooperation for both countries in many fields including tourism. Due to that fact, more information is exchanged about both

countries that open up many opportunities for Vietnamese company to entrance to this Scandinavia country.

Somehow, the company has not paid much attention in promotion and marketing about Vietnam tourism in Finnish market. Hence, as a part of the strategy of company in European market, it realizes Finland is an absolute potential market and is encouraged strongly to implement strategic marketing activities.

The motivation of this study come from an internal inquiry from the company, together with the requirements of tourism development and tourism destination marketing of Vietnam and the growth and trend of Finnish tourism to Vietnam. This study attempts to identify the images of Vietnam as a tourism destination for Finnish travelers and suggest practical solutions for company to improve marketing's strategy in Finland as a part of expand in Europe.

Therefore, to determine the purpose of this writing is to improve the current situation of marketing tourism of Vietnam in Finland, the research question is

“Develop the Vietnam tourism destination image in order to attract Finnish tourists.”

To achieve a useful result for the research question, this thesis addresses these three research issues:

Issue 1: identify the image of Vietnam as a tourism destination for Finnish tourists by doing research and analyze Finnish behavior in tourism.

Issue 2: figure out challenges and difficulties of promoting Vietnam tourism in Finland by analyzing the current situation of marketing. It also desires to point out the performance and problems of national tourism destination management.

Issue 3: explore experiences from other popular Asian countries in Finland such as Thailand, China in attracting international tourists, particularly in term of operation of tourism destination marketing.

Issue 4: offer suggestions and practical solutions for marketing to make Vietnam's tourism images more visible, more attractive to Finnish customers.

This thesis is an effort to identify the image of Vietnam as a tourist destination in order to make it more visible and attractive to Finnish tourists. Currently, the major task of tourism marketing of Vietnam is making brand of Vietnam's tourism for specific target market which is Finland. Because in Vietnam, tourism destination promotion and marketing have mostly based on subjective experiences and there has been no study on the images of Vietnam as a tourism destination for foreign markets. The work

emphasizes the vital importance of the tourism destination image and its visitor satisfactions as the essence of the tourism marketing.

Additionally, the result of above research issues is extremely useful and contributed in different ways. The first one will ascertain favorable images that Vietnam can take advantage; emphasize existing strengths further in promotion and also the negative images that Vietnam must improve. The second issue determines shortcoming, limitation of marketing tourism of Vietnam to Finland, the effect of different information sources. The last one enables to suggest possibility for company to apply suitable tourism destination marketing in Finland as well as for further researching in Vietnam tourism generally.

Lastly, the writer's own proposal on how to develop marketing in Finland will be offered. These solutions are based on the research material, both literature and empirical evidence.

The images are obtained from multiple methods including researching secondary data, interviewing related persons.

In order to enhance Vietnam's image effectively, it's essential to understand the importance of tourism destination image, requirements for success of tourism marketing, Finnish customer behavior in tourism and particularly current situation of promotion of Vietnam tourism in Finland.

Practically, this research can be used as a base for company to establish marketing strategy of Vietnam in Finnish market. However, it also benefits for further apply to study the images of Vietnam for other markets.

1.5 Research Method

Collecting and analyzing secondary data is the principle method of this study. It is taken from books, existing studies and published articles. The theories presented for the current situation marketing strategy are taken from online sources but also from commissioner's provision.

For the third research issue, benchmarking method particularly functional type is used to determine how well of Vietnam's tourism promotion performance compared with other regional countries to create new standards and improvement plans.

The empirical evidence is based on interviews representatives of commissioner (SaigonTourist Company) to see the private sector's point of view. It is a valuable source for up-to-date information precisely.

The findings of different literature sources, combined with the know-how of the writer, through individual social, cultural and academic origin, enabled the sufficient support to this research.

1.6 Limitations of the research

The research is conducted in a short period of time; the main method take advantage of secondary data so the result could re-address existing knowledge discussed in other studies at some point, particularly weaknesses and problems of Vietnam tourism marketing. Moreover, it is difficult in doing field-research such as survey Finns to assess precisely Finnish customer habits in tourism. It could be considered as one of the biggest limitations.

Additionally, researching the experiences of China and Thailand in attracting Finnish travelers was mainly based on the observation of tourism promotion and marketing activities of these countries available on the internet with electronic article, magazines without insight information. Thus, the comparison may not have been fully revealed.

2 TOURISM DESTINATION MARKETING

As mentioned in chapter 1, one of the major objectives of this research is identifying the image of Vietnam as a tourism destination for Finnish tourists. To reach this goal, it is necessary to review key contents concerning tourism destination image. Moreover, it is also important to discuss about tourism destination marketing to know the role of destination image in the whole process of tourism marketing. With the aim to guide the conduct of this research, theories or models will serve as a source and background for analysis.

Firstly, this chapter discusses the theories of tourism destination then investigate the theories of tourism destination. The major issues of measuring destination image, customer behaviour in tourism are also included. Furthermore, the feature of Finnish travelling behaviour in general is brought into this chapter as well. Lastly, the effect of media on tourism destination image is highly necessary to examined.

2.1 Definitions and concepts

Simply, tourism is defined as a status of stay away from home for holidays, visiting, business concerns or any other purposes, except boarding, education or semi permanent employment (Kotler, Bowen & Makens 2003, 746.) More specifically, The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines "Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their *usual environment* for not more than *one consecutive year* for *leisure, business and other purposes* not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited."

A destination is a location with some form of actual or perceived boundary physically such as boundary of an island, political boundaries and market created boundaries are also counted.

Imagery is defined in the study of MacInnis & Price (1987) as a distinct way of processing and accumulating multisensory information in working

memory or in other words, it is a kind of mental picturing. The imagery process is determined by holistic or gestalt of representing information. Imagery is dissimilar with discursive processing which is generated from pieces of information on single attributes of stimuli rather than holistic impressions. Furthermore, in another research, Dichter (1985) has confirmed the image is composed of both individual traits and total impression that entity makes on recipients' minds. (Echtner & Ritchie 2003, 39-40.)

Benchmarking method is the systematic of comparing organizational or business processes and performances to create new standards, plans and make improvements for current processes. It is often used to enhance strategic management, communication, professionalization or for budgetary reasons. It identifies the best one within industries where similar processes exist to explain why they are successful.

2.2 Tourism destination

Understanding the image of a tourism destination is essential to influence the traveller decision-making process and choice because the perception of destination image closely related to decision-making and sales of tourist products and services. Therefore, tour operators tend to make the images as much as visible to their customers. Tourism by its nature is different from tangible product. It is a service highly dependent on its consumer behaviour. It is the high risk decision making process of consumer in tourism because of high-spend aspect. (Swarbrooke & Horner 2007, 45.)

The destination is a very distinctive tourism product. It has various possibilities for the tourist to use a range of services without direct charges are made for using them. For example, beaches, historic streets are absolutely free of charge.

In order to attract tourists, destinations must respond to the travel basic demands of customer which are cost, convenience and timeliness. For this specific service consumer, they weigh the cost against the value of destination. (Kotler et al. 2003, 724-727.) Travel costs include money, time, and effort in exchange with education, experience, recreation, relaxation and good memories consumer gain from destination. Convenience in tourism has various meaning particularly in decision making process which is time involved in gaining necessary information, language barriers, cleanliness and environmental concerns, accessibility and specific needs. Other critical elements also affect to tourism destination which are social and political issues, risk and crimes. The degree of above factors influence on tourist may vary from country and person. It depends on personality, cultural and social factors of certain country.

Tourism destination must invest more than financial or hospitality to attract tourists which is expanding public services such as public safety, traffic, crowd control and emergency health, street cleanliness. It should be implemented synchronically in internal tourism destinations from their own citizens and business retailers, travel agencies and restaurants, etc. in

training, licensing and monitoring tourist related businesses. It is highly demanded especially in encounter points like airport, public transit that visitors have first interactions with destination and can be critical to tourist satisfaction. For example, Dubai is a good example of a city that offers excellent highway system from the airport to the resorts and world class duty free shopping.

Attractions of the destination alone do not catch the attention of visitors. The value-added that destinations bring to customer is more important. Tourist operators try to provide greater value by extending travel experience and making destination experience more significant and rewarding to tourists. Such appeals could be from history, culture and people. (Kotler et al. 2003, 740-741.)

2.3 Tourism destination image

One of the key parts of differentiation for certain product is branding. In tourism, it is the destination image. Tourism organizations attempt to identify their branding because a recognized brand adds tangible values to tourism services which are largely intangible. (Swarbrooke et al. 2007, 164.) The strong brand or image identity allows the organization to give the right type of message and quality implication to their target customer.

The destination image is commonly accepted as an important part in successful tourism destination marketing. The information derived from specific destination is as essential means of promotion for tourism. (Molina, Gómez & Martin-Consuegra 2010.) In Morgan & Pritchard (1998) research, there is a clear relationship between a positive image and positive purchase decisions. Thus, the biggest challenge of destination is to create a memorable and positive image of the destination. This image should be recalled in decision making process and entice them to select particular destination. Only images that are carefully created and positioned in tourists' minds can *survive* the evaluation process. (Jorgensen 2004, 13-14.)

It is often described simply as an *impression* of a place or *perception* of an area. In Echtner & Ritchie (1991)'s study presented by Jorgensen (2004, 15-16), the central concept of tourism destination image is the perceptions of individual destinations attributes in holistic impression made by the destination. It comprises functional characteristics, concerning the tangible aspects of destination and psychological characteristics which relates to intangible side. Moreover, destination images can be arranged from traits which are commonly used to compare to other destinations to those which are unique to few destinations. More exactly, destination images are perceived both individual attributes such as climate and facilities and holistic impressions like mental pictures of destination. In addition, the functional characteristics indicate a directly measureable component such as price level, facility and attractions whereas the psychological view is intangible values, for example safety and hospitality. Those two dimensions (attribute-holistic, functional-psychological) can range from common to unique features. For example, common destination image may consist of common features as price level and infrastructure which are functional characteris-

tics and unique atmosphere belongs to psychological characteristic. The common-unique dimension has a heavy effect on destination competitive. For that reason, in order that a destination can be differentiated as a favourable destination, it could be improvement the psychological characteristics that are unique features associated with it. Nevertheless, functional characteristics and common features should not be neglected as they are standards of tourist's expectation of destination.

More specifically, the destination image is defined as the combination of individual perception of destination attributes and the holistic impression. It comprises functional characteristics involving tangible, measurable features and psychological characteristics concerning intangible or more emotional aspects. Besides, the image can range from common-functional and psychological to unique- functional and psychological components. For example, a destination's image can include ratings of some common functional characteristics (price level, infrastructure, climate...) It's also evaluated by other common psychological aspects such as level of hospitality, safety, environmental issue, services, etc. simultaneously, the images are accessed based on unique functional (mountain or beach or festival) and other unique psychological characteristic (auras, atmosphere). Figure 2.3.1 below illustrates the simple idea of this conception of destination image.

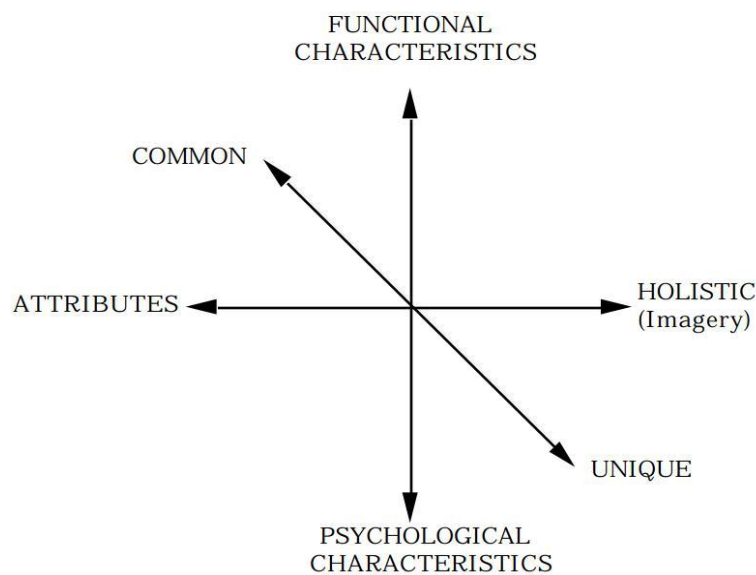


Figure 2.3.1: The components of destination image
Source: Echtner & Ritchie, 2003.

Echtner & Ritchie (2003, 42-43) describe Reilly's (1990) viewpoint that the term destination image is used to illustrate a general mental picture, a destination stereotype. It is assumed that each individual have a unique mental picture that publicly held of that destination.

Destination image contains a set of marketing activities which aims to create the positive image and influence affirmatively on choice of consumer with destination. First of all is the creation of a name, logo or slogan that truly identifies and differentiates a destination to others. It also expresses

the unique associated with outstanding expectations of destination to tourist. Moreover, it assists to consolidate and strengthen the emotional connections between the tourist and destination. Lastly, the image helps customer to reduce searching cost and possible risk. (Olimpia B., 554-559)

Destination image must include not only culture, economy, sport activities but also characteristic of a destination. A destination can have several images depending on tourist and context. The image cannot change the physical attributes but the perception of recipient. The perception is based on personal experience, education or knowledge, perceived information through mass media and stereotypes.

2.3.1 Destination image formation

According to Gartner (1993), the destination image is formed by three interrelated components which are cognitive, affective and conative. In other word, the cognitive component is formed on the basis of tourist's belief of a destination. Gartner (1993) describe the cognitive factor as "the sum of beliefs and attitudes of an object leading to some internally accepted picture of its attributes". Secondly, the affective component is the motives of the tourist for selecting one destination compared to another because it connects to tourist's evaluation of destination choice. Finally, the conative element of image is the determinant leads to action because the decision of selecting destination is made. As can be assumed that conative element is formed on the basis of cognitive and affective components. In other word, Gartner concluded, "the conative component's relationship to the other two components is direct. It depends on the images developed during the cognitive stage and evaluated during the affective stage". However, within a destination marketing context, the cognitive image has become a determinant because marketers can directly make influence on the tourists in their selection process. (Jorgensen 2004, 13-19.)

In the research of Reynolds (1965), the formation of image is the development of a mental construct of several impressions chosen from different information sources. In destination image, information sources include promotion literature (travel guide, brochures...), references (relatives, friends or travel agents...) and the general media (television, magazines, movies...) Moreover, when tourists actual pay a visit the destination, the image will be affected and modified based on previous information and experience. (Echtner & Ritchie 2003, 38.)

Satisfaction of the consumer is extremely related to building an image. Firstly, it leads to positive word of mouth of product that in turn brings in new customer and as a proof for quality. Furthermore, maintaining the repeat customer to bring steady source of income by satisfying them with no need for extra marketing expenses to new customers. Lastly, dealing with complaints is expensive, time consuming and negative image. The most negative feedback would result from a positive image and a negative experience which implies the destination itself has been over-evaluated but under expectation of tourist. This fact emphasizes the important role of image congruence or in other word, warranty of the compatibility between image and satisfaction. (Olimpia B., 554-559.)

The process of destination image formation emphasizes two decisive points. First of all, it gives the possibility to individuals an image of destination even if they have never visited the destination. It is useful to measure these images, for example strengths and weaknesses, accuracies and inaccuracies of the destination in planning marketing strategy effectively. Additionally, since there are changes in the image before and after visitation, it is important to measure and adjust the images flexibly by either controlling or monitoring the tourists.

The best offers of destination produce positive image through public relations and advertising campaigns. However, image building is also impacted by disturbing social problems like criminals, diseases and human rights that cause negative image on tourism and leave for long effect after the problem occurred.

2.3.2 The effect of media on tourism destination image

Tourism destinations are heavily influenced by pictorial creations such as movies, television and music or also by famous celebrities in recent years (Kotler et al. 2003, 737.) These tools of media involve in destination attractiveness like beautiful nature, interesting culture or entertainment feature. In tourism, the means of media like internet, brochures, guides, films, etc. form an active and open way of getting information for tourists.

Potential tourists are not able to test the destination before purchasing which leads to result in uncertainty attitude for the tourists. Therefore, the decision of potential tourists to select certain destination is often based on its image and expectations through promotion. (Jorgensen 2004, 5.) Certainly, consumer preferences for selecting travel destination have been influenced by media.

The cognitive component of destination image is defined as the development of a mental notion based on impression coming from information sources. Self-information is obtained from mass media including promotional material (brochures, posters). (Molina et al. 2010.)

Investment on media at a national level to attract the tourist has grown rapidly. It is important to conduct a consistent marketing effort so destinations should have established partnership in communication with tourist organizations and related businesses like television producers, national magazines, etc.

2.3.2.1 Advantages and limitation of major media types

Media for marketing is classified in terms of functions that are brand-building and directional. Branding building is commonly seen in traditional mass media (TV, radio, magazines and newspapers). Directional marketing are means designed to assist audience locate suppliers of desired services; for example, brochure, poster, travel guide. The directional types are designed with highly organized settings that allow consumer to collect

and access necessary information. In Fernandez and Rosen's research (2000), credible source like newspaper is perceived as more informative than television. (Kim, Hwang & Fesenmaier 2005, 44.) The research of Engel (1978) concluded that the criterion commonly used to determine whether one type of information source is more effective than the others was the fact that a large percentage of tourist may access to it (Molina et al. 2010, 726.)

Different media channels have their own strengths and weaknesses in delivering a message. Owing to these differences, the message delivered aims to address different affective and cognitive process. Accordingly, some media types seem more effective than the others, but rather costly and less audience selectivity. For example, television can combine sight, sound and motion which appeals to the senses, high attention and high reach. Yet, TV or filming is aim to maintain familiarity with a certain brand and reinforce positive experiences whereas print media a likely to lead to favorable behavioral response. (Kim et al. 2005, 43-44.)

Walter, Sparks and Herington (2007) has discovered that the inter-relative between the presence of concrete pictures and the quality of consumers' consumption visions. Moreover, concrete words together with instructions to image also contribute to the quality of the consumption. Hence, marketing materials; for instance, brochures, flyers, poster and travel guides which are well-organized in combining text and picture is the most effective strategy. (Kim et al. 2005, 46-47.)

Loda, Norman and Backman (2007) revealed that the general publicity under either forms presentation or sequencing results significantly higher than other types for credibility, message strength and purchase target. It is affirmed that publicity is an important element in tourism marketing mix in persuading potential tourists to visit a specific destination. (Kim et al. 2005, 45.)

The internet has become a critical tool for marketing tourism. It brings substantial advantages over tradition means in terms of cost reduction, increase speed of information exchange, increase customer involvement particularly the interactivity feature. Customers are effortlessly communicated with companies to find what they need while companies can easily response to customer to promptly provide their demand. The website is also considered as electronic billboard, electronic catalogue that give necessary information and contact for potential customers freshly and up-to-date. Another plus benefit of online marketing is high accessibility with 27/7 and 365 days a year from any location in the world. Nonetheless, the low level of web-based business is one of the current constraints of online marketing. Most business leaders do not realize the huge impact of the web on commerce or fail to exploit its full potential due to lack of management commitment or investment. Though internet has become the most popular medium for marketing, the demand factor is still a problem because a low number of web-users in some countries. (Liu 2000.)

In recent survey of United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA), most its members report the issue of utilization Social Media in marketing, naming Facebook as the top channel, by 90 percent of respondents. Blogs, Twitter feeds and YouTube came in close second at 40 percent. Members generally (97 percent) believe using Social Media increases consumer engagement. The next most frequently given reasons are marketing, special offers and to drive traffic to company websites. (USTOA members 2011.)

There is a range of publications that offer advertising effectiveness for tourism organizations. Among of that, brochures are an important means that convey the image and message to potential customers. It is supposed to transmit the purposes of organizations and information to stimulate interest and demand to target customers. Customers often decide to buy the product based on the standard of the brochure and the information it contains. Hence, to create a good brochure, it is vital to clarify the appropriate image and content serving clear purposes, meet the desire of target customer. Furthermore, the most important issue must avoid is misleading advertising in brochure because it is essential to honestly introduce products in promotion material for long term development.

2.3.3 Measurement of tourism destination image

Although the term tourism destination image is frequently used in much research in the tourism field but discussion on a concrete measurement method is somewhat avoided. However, in the definition of destination image implicates that measurement involves both attributes and holistic components under the cooperation with functional and psychological characteristics. Additionally, the process of measuring needs to consider not only common traits but also unique factors which differentiate a particular destination (Echtner & Ritchie 2003, 44.)

This section briefly examines the methodologies used to measure destination image. Generally, there are two techniques used in image measurement research which are structured and unstructured techniques that have been using by most of researchers.

The structured method concentrate on attributes by driving respondent describe the destination image in terms of specified attributes by the scales. It is likely links to a set of semantic differential according to Ferber's research (1974) (Echtner & Ritchie 2003, 44.) The advantages of this method are easy to administer, simple to code and the results can be analyzed using statistical techniques because it bases on standardized scales. Plus, it also benefits to compare different destinations across each of attributes. Nevertheless, with this kind of method, unique characteristics of the destination and the holistic impressions cannot be addressed directly in scale items. In other word, structured methodology favors the common traits in functional and psychological characteristics than unique features and holistic impressions.

In contrast, an unstructured approach uses free form, open-ended questions for respondents to describe their impressions of destination more

freely. Result is analyzed by using various sorting and categorizing techniques to determine the image dimensions. With unstructured methodology, it is more conducive to measure the holistic component and also to capture unique features. However, the result of this type is variable depending on language skills (verbal or writing) and willingness to provide their knowledge of destination. Certainly, because of using an unstandardized form, it is difficult to gain statistical and comparative analysis as structure method.

Overall, the ideal measurement approach of destination image includes both types; for example structured methodology to measure the perceptions of functional and psychological attributes, in combination with open-ended questions to identify the holistic impressions and unique features captured of destination. Otherwise, a focus on any method or component of destination may lead to incomplete measurement or unpractical results.

2.4 Customer behavior in tourism

The decision to spend non-refundable money on travel versus purchasing tangible products involves psychological determinants. The most important variables are demographics and lifestyles among others that are prestige, escape, sexual opportunity, education, social interaction, family bonding, relaxation, and self-discovery (Kotler et al. 2003, 729.) Therefore, in order to understand comprehensively customer behavior in tourism, there are various models have been developed to describe and generalize consumer behavior patterns. The models attempt to show the important role of different elements effect to decision making process (Swarbrooke et al. 2007, 40-48.)

The most popular of all consumer behavior in tourism models is the Howard-Sheth model of buyer behavior which was developed in 1969. In the model, it emphasizes the importance of inputs to the consumer buying process and how these inputs impact on final decision. The model is shown in Figure 2.5.1.

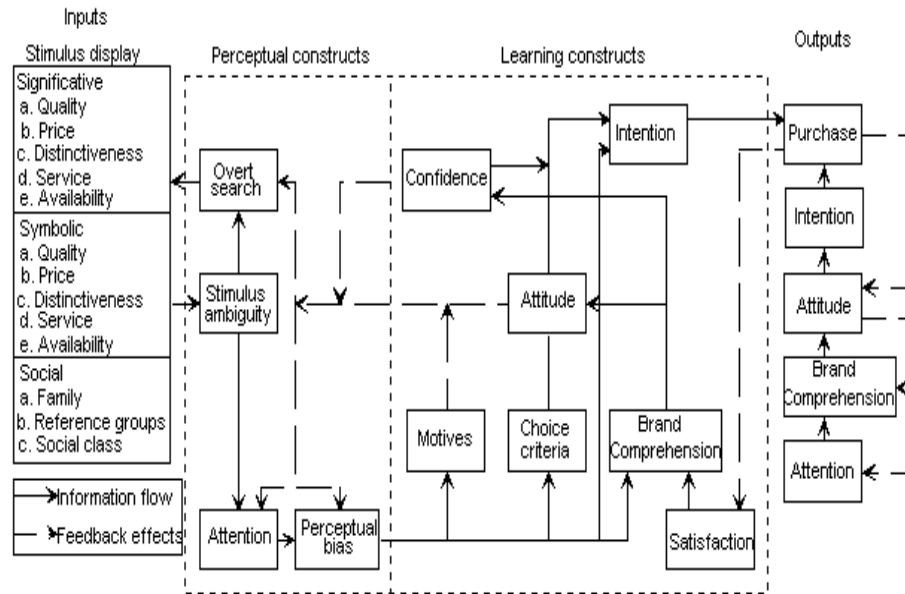


Figure 2.4.1: The Howard-Sheth Model of buyer behavior
Source: Swarbrooke et al. 2007

According to this model, there are three major sets of stimuli that influence the motivation of consumers in decision making, which are symbolic and social inputs. In other words, they present different types of information sources in the consumer behavior. The central part of the model concerns with psychological aspects that are perceptual and learning constructs. For example, perceptual bias occurs when customers twist the received information in order to fit with their experiences and existing knowledge that impact on buying decision. Finally, the outputs are the result of the perceptual and learning processing and how consumer response to these variables (purchase, intention, attitude, brand comprehension and attention)

Additionally, to complete travel buying behavior, consumers normally pass five stages of decision making process. This is clearly shown in a linear model of Mathieson and Wall (1982) about travel buying behavior. They include Feel need or travel desire, information collection and evaluation image, travel decision (choice between alternatives, travel preparation and travel experiences and travel satisfaction outcome and evaluation.

All these models that have been adapted that involved consumer behavior during the purchase and post purchase decision stages. Most of models of consumer behavior in tourism are seemed to be linear and quite simpler compared to general consumer behavior.

2.5 Tourism destination marketing

Tourism marketing comprises two main industries which are hospitality and travel industries. They are highly interrelated. This relationship will increase in complexity (Kotler et al. 2003, 10.) Commercial marketing is integral factor that influences on destination selection (Kotler et al. 2003, 743.)

Tourists travel to destination. The desire of certain destination to be recognized presents a challenge in marketing tourism. Regarding to Bergstorm, Yu and Medweth, destination marketing is regarded as an integral part of developing and preserve a particular location's popularity. However, tourism planners often focus on taking advantage of popularity and destination development without being aware of retaining and preserving the attributes that create the popularity and attractions to travellers in the first place. (Kotler et al. 2003, 721.) A destination's attractiveness can be lost by violence, political instability, natural catastrophe, environmental factor. Destinations that fail to maintain necessary infrastructure lead to huge loss in sustainable tourism. In addition, tourism development must balance the temptation of maximize profit with preservation of the infrastructure, nature of destination and local residents' life. Thus, how to harmonize tourism with other industries in tourism destination marketing is extremely influential element to tourism industry and whole national economy. In reality, there are places where concentrated merely on tourism business without paying notice to develop other industries and local lives that cause the loss in nature of destination attraction. As above stated, hospitality is a critical part of tourism marketing which is the quality of life for local residents. Hospitality is not a temporarily emerging issue. It is simply well-connected to the sustaining tourism.

Because tourism competition is fierce and constantly changing in the tourist market, plus a huge diversity of strong tourist destinations but also declining places upgrade, the issue of investment is the key for long-term successful tourism destination. Competition among destinations engages to restaurants, facilities, sports, cultural amenities and entertainment. Testimonials and rankings of destination in travel brochures, advertising, travel guides and promotion campaigns are advantages for effective marketing destination. Making a friendly destination image is the task of national tourism organizations, travel agencies which may be public or private, profit or non-profit. It is essential for all tourism businesses, agencies and these organizations to work together to promote destinations, tourist boosting and developing product in order to ensure customer's expectations are met. Government operations goals is to maximize the possibility of all related activities supporting tourism and recreation, assist the needs of general public and private sectors of industries involved tourism.

Marketing only can be seen from the point of view of the final result, which mean from the customer's point of view. Moreover, the main purpose of marketing is to know and understanding customer so well that service sells itself (Kotler et al. 2003, 10.) In fact, government and travel companies normally do marketing from their point of view as a producer. Thus, the result can not satisfy the customer's need. The demand of customer and the service we offer are in different page. Therefore, it's importance to understand the core concept of marketing, particularly marketing tourism. Successful marketing is determined by the customer. In other word regarding to Drucker (1973), foundation of marketing is customer orientation not about producer. Thus, the good method to do marketing successfully is define target customer and need then proffer a suitable, accessible value package because consumers make decision of choosing cer-

tain service based on their perception of value. The aim of marketing is to present and indicate customers the service value that we can offer compared with competitors in market and generate customer value profitably. Customer perception and competition changes over time therefore, marketing strategy is an ongoing process and never stop. Design differentiated services and offering new consumer benefits could help to gain more customers.

Generating events that appeal to a target market and are harmoniously appropriate with a community's culture can provide immensely beneficial results, especially if the events are organized regularly over a period of year. According to Gnoth & Anwar's perspective, destinations must choose events that are congruous with the needs of locality without creating controversial and concern with host communities (Kotler et al. 2003, 742.)

Furthermore, effective destination marketing requires similarity between the images used with the destination for long-term periods. Otherwise, destinations fall in the risk of losing enormous potential customers caused by bad word of mouth. With development of technology, it is impossible to control widespread information. Hence, travel agents are completely responsible in giving out images of destination and receive feedback from customers.

Overall, information is the key to stay competitive of tourist organizations. Tourist products and services need to constantly change to meet demand of the changing market. Upcoming markets must be determined and served. Accomplish these tasks that will support tourist organizations gain competitive advantages. (Kotler et al. 2003, 737.)

2.5.1 Tourism destination demand

WTO predicts that international tourist arrivals will grow to 101.56 billion by 2020, almost double the amount in 1998 (Swarbrooke et al. 2007, 103-105.) The economic position of the region or target country has a direct influence on the levels of tourism demand. It also identifies the influences and determinants that affect the choices of tourism destination.

Demographic and social changes influence the patterns of tourism demand. Consumer knowledge of destination also affects tourism demand. This is particularly important in developed countries where individuals are eager to explore travel experiences. The growth of media has been a reflection of increase tourism demand. The reduction in prices of tourism holidays as a result of tourism competition has also boost the demand for this industry. Simultaneously, the development of value for holiday packages has added is one of the main reasons for the growing of tourism demand.

2.5.2 Target market and segmentation in tourism

Like other industry, tourist marketers must know the actual potential customer as well as their wants and needs to determine which target market to serve and decide suitable services to provide. It is impossible to serve all tourist demand because not every tourist is keen on a particular destination. Thus, it is a must to consider what tourists desire, which segment to attract in order to not to waste investment on trying to attract everyone who travels. A destination can define target markets subjectively or objectively. Choices will be constrained by natural conditions such as climate, topography, resources, history and culture. (Kotler et al. 2003, 730-731.)

Besides, increasing events like festival, celebrations as a vital component in attracting tourist is also to establish the destination's identity. Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany is a good example here. Munich is already a famous destination but Beer Festival has become a brand of this city, a wish-list destination for a millions of tourist every year. (Kotler et al 2003, 724-727.)

To facilitate defining tourist segments, audit the destination's attraction and choose segments reflect features that tourists interest in is a good approach.

2.5.3 Destination competitiveness

Destination competitiveness can benefit for governments and tourism businesses see the strengths and weaknesses of destination in order to understanding and apply appropriate strategy to increase tourists.

The most comprehensive framework developed by Ritchie and Crouch (Mazanec, Wöber &Zins 2007) emphasize the differentiation between comparative and competitive advantages on five different factors. They are qualifying and amplifying determinants, destination policy, planning and development, destination management, core resources and attractors, and supporting factors and resources. But in fact, the initial competitiveness concept is focus on price levels. The price competitiveness index is discussed in an early stage based on exchange rate adjusted purchasing power parities. Certainly, price competitiveness of destination is one of the most important factors influencing tourist flows.

In major concept of World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) (2001) discussed by Mazanec, Wöber &Zins (2007), destination competitiveness involves eight competitive dimensions made up of numerous indicators. They are openness, heritage and culture, infrastructure, communication and facilities, social competitiveness, education, tourism price competitiveness and environmental preservation. Those eight dimensions are also valuable in destination's performance measurement. The proposed model of destination competitiveness of WTTC and Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto (2005) is explained more detail in figure 2.6.3.1

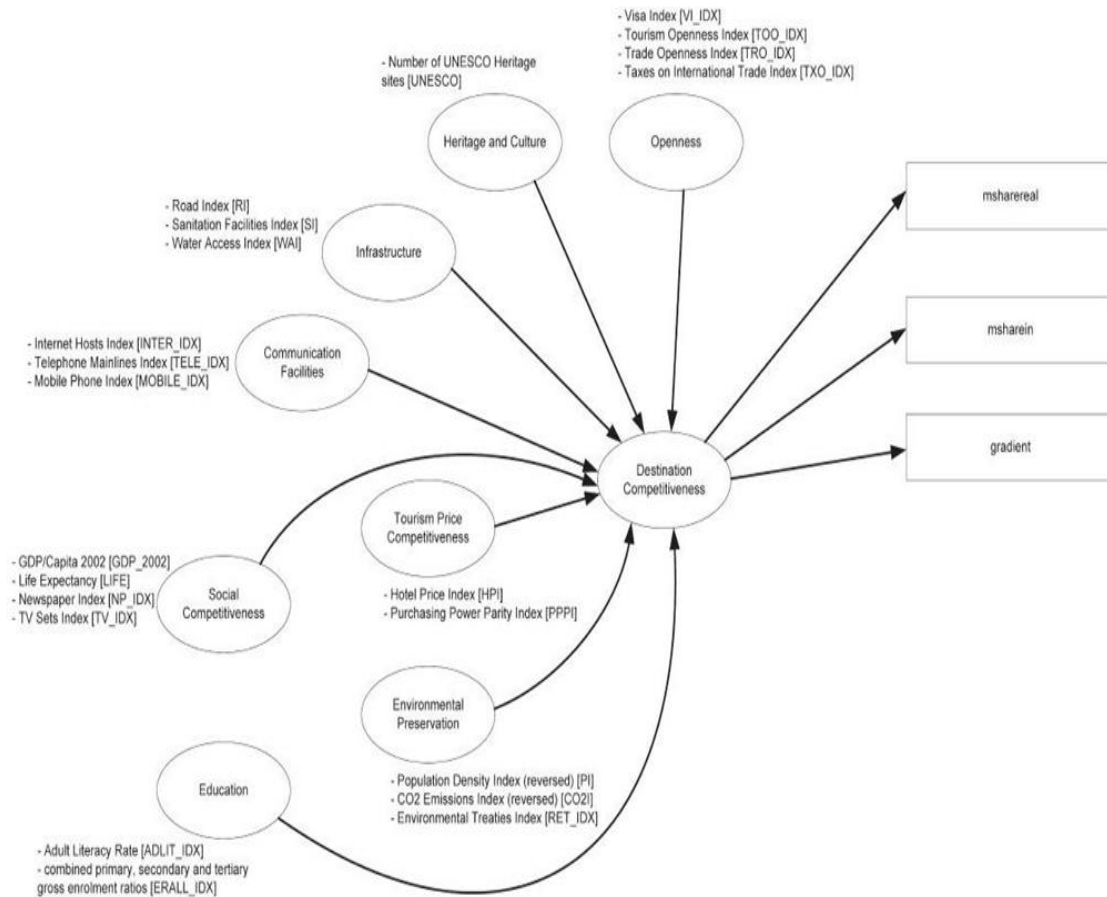


Figure 2.6.3.1: An explanatory model of destination competitiveness: latent variables and formative indicators
Source: Mazanec, Wöber & Zins (2007)

In the model, two tourism market share indicators are included to address the positioning of destination in tourism industry. First, ordinary market shares (msharereal) based on the amount of international arrivals. It is used for simple competitive rankings and portfolio analyses. Another added indicator is distance-weighted market shares (msharein) used to account for destination in terms of geographical. These two indicators are evaluated relatively based on market growth rate (gradient). D'Hartserre (2000) and Hassan (2000) also mention the important role of market position relative to competitors and the ability to maintain, sustain its position in destination competitiveness (Dwyer & Kim). Moreover, in WTTC's model, the natural and cultural attractiveness which was highlighted in many other studies are not adequate to represent for destination competitiveness. But the attractiveness of tourism destination becomes a rough indicator by the number of heritage sites, which are listed in Heritage List of UNESCO. Furthermore, to be competitive in long term development, a destination not only focuses on economic perspective but also on ecological, social, political and cultural as well.

Another model developed by many authors named Integrated Model in which main elements contribute to destination competitiveness give a different perspective as figure 2.6.3.2 below

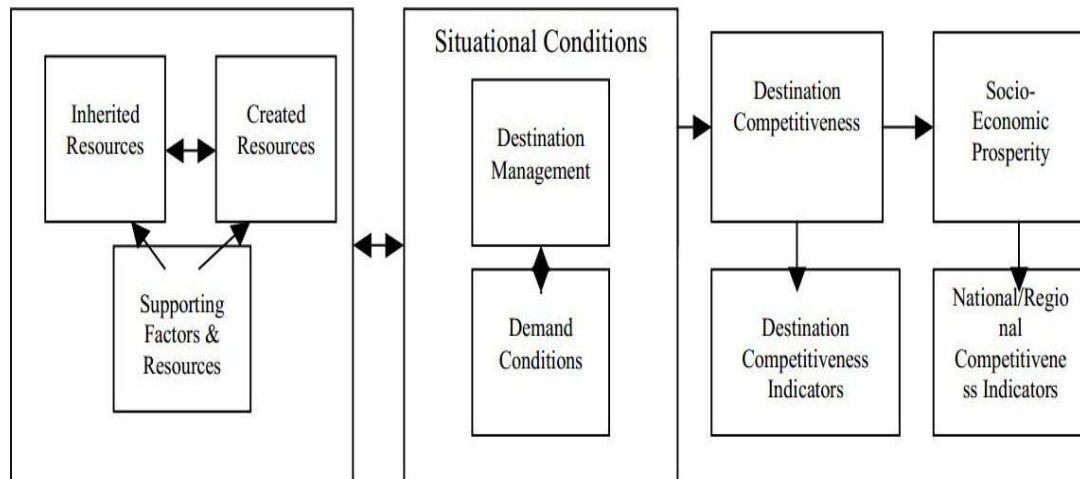


Figure 2.6.3.2: Integrated Model of destination competitiveness
Source: Dwyer & Kim

Accordingly, the inherited resources (natural resources and cultural resources), created resources (tourism infrastructure, special events, range of available activities, entertainment and shopping) combined with supporting factors and resources (quality of service, accessibility of destination, hospitality and market ties) provide the foundations of successful competitiveness of a destination.

Destination management factors benefit for enhancing core resources mentioned above and also best adapt to the situation conditions. These factors hold a key role for coordination, provision information, monitoring and evaluation. This category is influenced within situational conditions including micro environment (destination location) and macro environment (global changes). The price competitiveness also belongs to situational conditions. Additionally, the demand conditions closely relates to destination management which consists of tourist demand-awareness, perception and preferences of destination and destination image. It defines the limit and impact on the potential of destination competitiveness. The actual visitation depends on the match between tourist preferences and perceived destination image offerings by destination management.

However, the integrated model also suggests similar indicator with model of WTTC in sustaining socio-economic well-being for residents. The integrated model recognizes the demand condition factor as an important determinant. It emphasizes the issue of developing the destination image in a way that matches the evolving customer preferences, which are critical to tourist flows. Focus only on the supply side gives an incomplete picture of destination competitiveness.

3 VIETNAM TOURISM AND FINNISH TOURIST MARKET

There are not many studies on Vietnam tourism destination image. However, the existing research underlines that the major characteristics of

Vietnam tourism marked through a long dramatic history. In order to identify the images of Vietnam as a tourism destination for Finnish tourist as one of the major goals of this research, apart from reviewing the theories of tourism destination image and marketing, it is critical to examine the key factors of Finnish tourist market and Vietnam tourism industry. Determine the target segment, its trend and demand as well as requirements to satisfy customer's need. The discussions in this chapter are served as a background to the result of this research. It contributes significantly to offer feasible proposal to company's development strategy and measures for Vietnam to attract Finnish tourists. This chapter also attempts to clarify difficulties and challenges to promote Vietnam tourism in Finnish market.

3.1 The tourism development of Vietnam

Since Vietnam's economic reform from 1986, tourism in Vietnam has had favourable condition to develop strongly as one of the key economic sector. Tourism is determined as "an important strategic orientation in socio-economic policy in the process of industrialization and modernization of the country" (CPV, 1994.) Additionally, the strategy of Tourism Development of Vietnam for 10 years period 2001-2010 states the orientation to develop tourism become head economic sector of national economy. The overall goal of this strategy is to make Vietnam become central tourism destination in region. The target of this strategy includes the fact that Vietnam will attract around 5.5-6 million foreign tourists by 2010, and a share of USD 4-4.5 billion of tourism income by 2010, approximately 6.5 percent of Vietnam' GDP. (The Government of Vietnam, 2002.) In reality, in 2010, Vietnam received approximately 5.1 million international visitors.

The development of Vietnam tourism is clarified clearly in Figure 3.1. The number of international arrivals and number of visitors comes for tourism increase steadily from 1995 to 2010, significantly from year 2009 after recovering the global recession up to 13 percent.

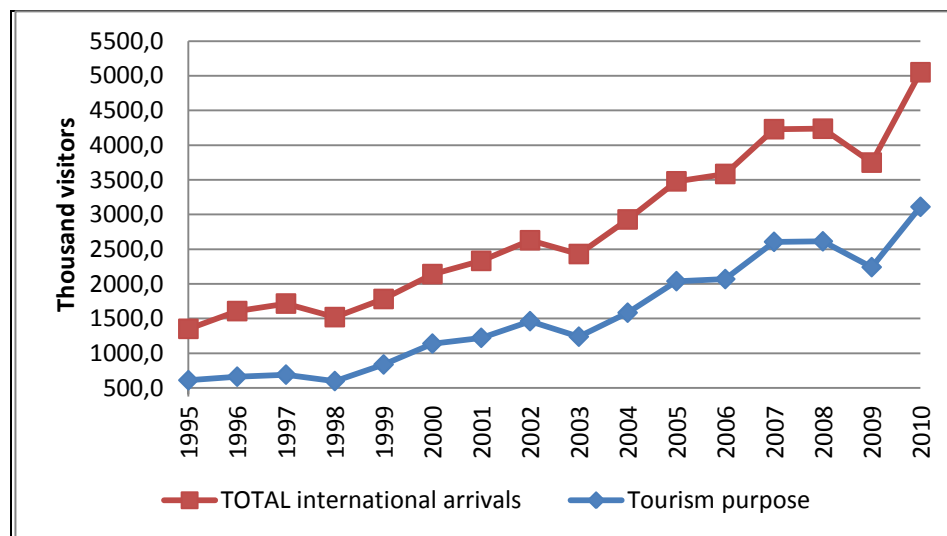


Figure 3.1 Evolution of international arrivals and leisure visitors (1995-2010)

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO) 2011

As a fact, Vietnam tourism has developed extensively in recent years not only regionally but also globally. This country is becoming an appealing destination. According to Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2011 from the World Economic Forum (WEF), travel sector was ranked 14th in the region and 80th overall, up nine places since the assessment in 2009. The specific attributes such as rich cultural resources with several World Heritage cultural sites (ranked 36th), natural resources in terms of World Heritage natural sites (ranked 24th), international fairs and exhibitions, and strong creative industries has contributed to this higher position in tourism destination and country's price competitiveness overall (ranked 16th).

The year 2012 is expected to be a turning point with bright potential for Vietnam tourism industry when it is ranked as one of the top attractive destinations to international tourists by different experts and credible tourism organizations in the region and in the world. For instance, as a survey result of USTOA, Vietnam is the top tourism destination in 2012 voted from travellers. The survey revealed Vietnam was cited most frequently when asked to name the top "off-the-beaten-path" or emerging destination that will attract popularity in 2012. (USTOA members 2011.) The survey also exposed *experiential travel* is an extremely important factor that consumers are looking for in their vacation. The experiential travel factor includes food, wine and culinary tours, historical and educational exploration, art and culture in general. Moreover, the American news website The Huffington Post that conducted survey through Facebook and Smart Travel Asia magazines also listed Vietnam particularly Hoi An in top ten charming holiday destination. (The Huffington Post 5.3.2012; Smart Travel Asia 7.2011.)

Holding the theme "Heritage Tourism" this year, Vietnam tourism industry is expected to gain a remarkable increase in international arrivals as well as a strong competition in the Asia-Pacific region. The industry estimates to welcome 6.5 million international tourists in 2012 in which a strategy to continue to promote growth and sustainable development. One of the goals of the promotion strategy is keep the yearly average growth of 11.5-12 percent from 2011 to 2020. (VNAT 2012.) Only two first months of year 2012, Vietnam has welcomed 1.31 million foreign visitors, up to 27.1 percent a year over year.

Compared to other countries which have faced to political instability and natural disasters like Egypt, Japan, Greece, Vietnam is emerging as an attractive and safe destination. The major focus of Vietnamese Tourist Administration is raising the number of international visitors with the objective to be top three fastest growing markets in terms of international passengers by 2014. (The International Air Transport Association. Tourism Review 2.2011.)

3.2 Performance analysis

In order to evaluate accurately the performance of Vietnam tourism, it is very important to analyse strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of current situation.

Strengths

Vietnam destination tourism has diversity of tourism resources, which are a strong advantage to further develop with many world heritages, rich culture and ethnic diversity. Compared to other countries in Southeast Asia, Vietnam has political stability, plentiful potential of tourism. For example, up to 2011, Vietnam has seven World Heritages, eight world network of Biosphere Reserves recognized by UNESCO. In terms of overall image rank in the world, Vietnam stands at 27th in 156 countries with 125 charming beaches, one in twelve countries has the most beautiful bays with Ha Long Bay and Nha Trang Bay. Moreover, there are 54 ethnic diversity with different distinctive of traditions, culture and lifestyles. (Ministry of culture, sports and tourism of Vietnam, 2011.)

According to Finpro, VNAT is following a long term plan to diversity of the tourism promotion in Finland, which brings more foreign exchange from Finnish market into the country. The new "Strategy of development Vietnam tourism to 2020, provision 2030" of VNAT has approved by Prime Minister to continuous improvement of tourism. Tourism will become the key sector of economy which is fully focused and invested from government.

Vietnam is becoming a trendy destination of Finnish market in several recent years with the numbers of Finnish tourists visit Vietnam continuously increase remarkably from 2771 in 2000 up to over 10 thousands in 2010. (Vietnam Tourism Statistic, 2012.)

Weaknesses

On the surface, the tourism industry especially hospitality sector seems to be developing remarkably in order to meet the demand of increase number of tourists. Meanwhile, Vietnam has gained significantly reputation on the international rank. However, despite of such a rapid improvement, Vietnam still has been seen lagging behind its Asian counterparts. Poor marketing, disregard for marketing own strengths and bureaucracy seem to be responsible for the problem. Organizations for promoting tourism are under budget and in need of reorganize the operation in many areas. (Vietnam lags behind due to poor marketing. Tourism Review 6.2011.) Vietnamese tourism has been lacking of doing market research and investing to develop new tourism products to attract tourist to come back. Vietnamese travel companies themselves have not cooperated effectively with national tourism of Vietnam as a major role to promote tourism to the world. Additionally, VNAT and travel companies are still passive in promotion the destination image. Precisely, Vietnam tourism has not had any representative office in the world while Thailand has over 20 offices and Malaysia has 40 offices all over the world. For example, there is no department in

the Vietnamese Embassy in Finland that is responsible for the promotion of tourism in this Nordic country. It is assumed that the budget for marketing and promotion of Vietnam tourism is much lower compared to neighbouring countries. Therefore, the ability to access official information about tourism of Vietnam is limited and spontaneously. Potential customers could be confused with unreliable and insufficient available information from tour operators. It reduces the number of trips, the length of stays and expenditure of tourists. Even more importantly however, because of the rigid centralized system, the private sector hardly has a role to develop individually or seek support from government in approach foreign markets.

For many continuous years, Vietnam has never had a clear common message for tourism promotion, particularly in producing the slogan and symbol of Vietnam tourism. They are usually not received consistent agreement from community or even from foreign experts. It is criticized that they do not suggest anything specific and clear about Vietnam or describe any attractive image of Vietnam as a destination. For example, Professor Leo Jago of Victoria University (Australia) and the Research Director of the Australian Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre commented, very few travellers will choose to visit Vietnam by hearing the slogan "Vietnam-the Hidden Charm" because foreign travellers do not understand what the hidden charms are about. This slogan does not reveal unique or distinctive characteristics of Vietnam destination image. (Tin moi, 2009)

Vietnamese companies have weak information communication technology (ICT) penetration in promotion, marketing and sales tourism products. Finnish tourists are heavily users of ICT to organize their journeys actively and communicate with suppliers. ICT helps tourism management organizations and tour operators promote their products and services through e-marketing tools; serve customers up-to-date information of destination, convenience of trip planning with lower cost.

Although the fact that capital Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are the two energetic cities, which appeal to visitors of all ages, tourism services still has not been completely satisfy tourists. Experts also agree there is a lot of matter required for heavy improvement. Moreover, the environmental issue is considered as potential threat because it is developing too fast at a dangerous pace without preserved policy. The quality of tourism infrastructure, cleanliness and environmental issue might heavily undermine the image as discussed in tourism destination image literature. In this sense, National Administration Tourism and private sector ought to take serious actions concentrating on remoulding the managerial system and marketing method to sustain tourism development.

In addition, lacking of tourist guides who can speak languages other than English somewhat causes the inconvenience for tourist. This attitude is very impractical and needs changing. Particularly, another negative feedback from customer is overcharging at many sites of cultural and historical

relevance. Small and mid-sized businesses take advantage of the site popularity to increase their prices to international tourists.

Opportunities

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) has decided to pass open sky policy that will increase more ability of accessibility, for example, more international flights (direct, cheaper and more frequent). At the moment, there is no direct flight from Helsinki to Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City and it is quite expensive but Finnair has planned to operate a direct route to Vietnam in their strategy due the increasing number of flights has been taken in recent years. Moreover, Vietnam has decided to exempt tourist Visa for Finnish tourist when visiting Vietnam under 15 days which expand the convenience and accessibility to Vietnam. VNAT has planned to establish official tourism offices overseas to strengthen the activeness and professionalism in management of tourism. These offices abroad are in charge of enhancing the effectiveness of tourism management and promotion in target markets. (VNAT, 2012.)

Owing to Vietnam National Administration, Vietnam's tourism industry estimates to welcome 6.5 million international tourists. In order to reach this target, they will launch the campaign to enhance the awareness for community-based tourism. The Government realizes that tourism development should benefit for community and boost the local economy is a sustainable way. They have been funded 11 million euro to implement the five-year responsible environment and society tourism (ESRT) development programme by European Union period 2011-2015. The important role of improving the quality of services should be emphasized. Moreover, the national tourism administration simultaneously focuses on develop unique experiences to gain higher competitiveness in the region and the world. For instance, Vietnam should promote maritime, heritage tourism and eco-tourism. This is also responsibility of tourism companies to strengthen Vietnam's advantages to produce special tourism products to attract visitors.

The development of Vietnam tourism industry is based on hospitality and community to create a friendly environment for tourism. According to VNAT, raising public awareness of destination image of Vietnam is essential. Every Vietnamese individual should be aware of own responsibility of promoting the image of Vietnam. Friendly, green, clean environment and beautiful country is one of the most important objectives that Vietnam tourism aims to.

Threats

Furthermore, despite of expanding popularity of Vietnam as a tourist destination, the country has been coping with the intense competition with neighbouring markets as Thailand, China and Singapore which have developed their strong tourism destination images for many years. Hence, Vietnam must focus on building a stronger destination image than its com-

petitors in order to influence on destination decision making of international tourist.

Vietnamese travel companies tend to consider customer behaviour of Finnish tourists as similar as other Nordic or European tourists while Finland has distinctive culture and differ from its counterpart. More importantly, they often underestimate the potential of Finnish market due to low population, small group of tourist and independently when travelling of Finns. Therefore, in marketing activities, companies often apply the same strategy to Finnish market that effect heavily to overall result. (Dinh, interview 10.4.2012)

Recently, the international disputes with a bordering country (South China Sea and Paracels Island) that led to a few protests in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh also caused concerns of international tourists.

3.3 Vietnam-Finland relations in tourism

Since 1974, Finland and Vietnam have started cooperating in the official development to create bilateral relations including cultural cooperation. From 1st January 2009, Vietnam has exemption tourist visa for Finnish travellers when visiting Vietnam under 15 days. This is a righteous decision which makes Vietnam and Finland closer and encourage more Finnish tourists come.

Representative of Vietnamese Embassy in Finland said the Vietnam tourism sector must include Finland in the list of key market in Northern Europe to speed up promotion in future. Particularly, many Vietnamese travel companies in Ho Chi Minh City have submitted for permission to participate in annual Nordic Travel Fair (Matkat Expo). This is the biggest travel fair in Northern Europe and the Baltic region which is held on January of every year in Finland. Nordic Travel Fair is universally recognized as a leading travel industry event. There were nearly ten thousands Finnish tourists visited Vietnam in 2008, grew around 160 percent compared to year 2007 that makes Finnish market became the highest growth rate within Northern European market. (Matka Expo 2009.) Moreover, realizing the prospective of development in travelling of Finns to Vietnam, Finnair- the Finnish National Airlines plans to launch the direct flight between Helsinki and Hanoi as well as Ho Chi Minh City in the earliest time. In 2012, Vietnamese Travel Association in Ho Chi Minh City cooperates with Vietnamese Embassy in Finland; National Air Carrier Vietnamairlines continued attending in Matkat Expo. The Vietnam tourism stand in Matkat Expo 2012 was larger scale with more attendants who are travel businesses. Saigontourist also joined in the Fair this year. Tourists from Northern Europe are noticeably increasing in recent years and also the group has higher expenditure when visiting Vietnam. Therefore, this is a very potential market that Vietnam tourism must fully exploit. In this occasion, Vietnamese Embassy in Finland organized a seminar about tourism with many travel companies from Vietnam and Finland. (Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism Ho Chi Minh City, 2012.)

The number of Finnish tourists visiting Vietnam grows significantly every year from 2000. There was a small decrease in 2005 due to SARS epidemic effect but from 2006, it continued growing, particularly in 2008 with 35 percent. Detail is illustrated by the figure 3.3.1

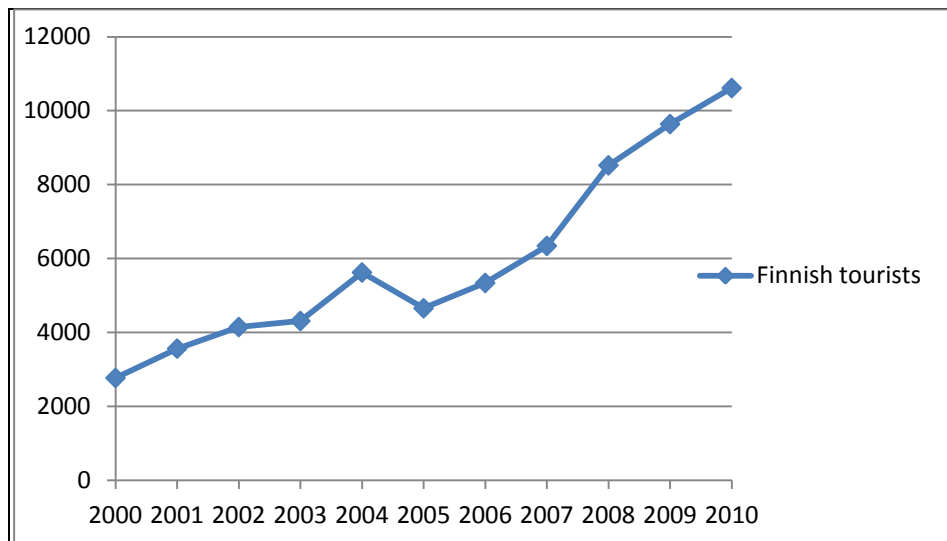


Figure 3.3.1: The number of Finnish tourist visited Vietnam 2000-2010
Source: Vietnam tourism Statistics (2012)

3.4 Finnish tourist market

As we know, the tourism market is very diverse. One of the latest major growth markets in Northern Europe is based on climatic factor. Tourists from Northern Europe who want to escape harsh winter climate at home, travel to warmer countries to get a summer sun holiday. This target market is called the 'snow bird' market (Swarbrooke et al. 2007, 135.) Finns are considered to belong in this market. In general, this market has characteristic that the trips are long duration from two to four week as their usual holiday period. Moreover, they spend 90 percent more money than the average European tourist on food, accommodation and attractions while on holiday due to the fact that their level of income is generally higher and their adaptability of foreign cultures in the best in the world.

In year 2010, Finnish tourism market increases 11 percent from 2009 in making leisure trips abroad which was about four million trips. The number of trips Finnish resident made in total and trips abroad grew gradually from 1,858,000 to 2,578,000 trips

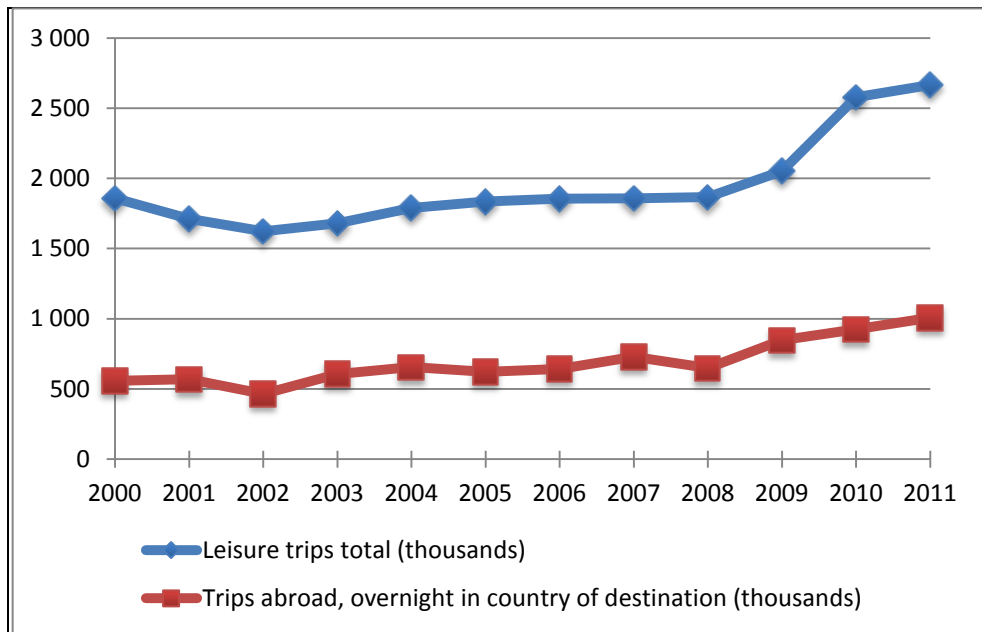


Figure 3.4.1: Finnish travel 2000-2011
 Source: Finnish Travel Statistics Finland (2011)

In terms of target market of this research which is Finland, there is a strong growth in destinations from Finnish tourists which continues the positive performance of previous years. The leisure trips are not strongly affected by the downturn of economy. Tourists may decrease the level of spending on their holidays but it seems they do not change the habit of travelling abroad (the number of trips increased by 6 percent). The number of outgoing trips from Finland is anticipated to keep growing. Meanwhile, outbound tourist expenditure will escalate at an annual rate of four percent in constant value terms. (Finnish Statistics 2011.) This means that Finns will continue to make more trips. It also exposes that tourists tend to upgrade travel accommodation and special services at destinations.

3.4.1 The major segments of Finnish tourists and trends

According to Eurostat research about general trends of European holiday-makers, Finnish tourists aged 25-44 are the group travel most and followed by the group 45-64 age with over 35 percent of total. Main reason can be explained is economic factors. Out of those two classes, the 15-24 market supplies more tourists with 18.1 percent than the 65 plus group (8.7 percent). Detail of number trips made by different age groups is presented clearly in table 3.4.1

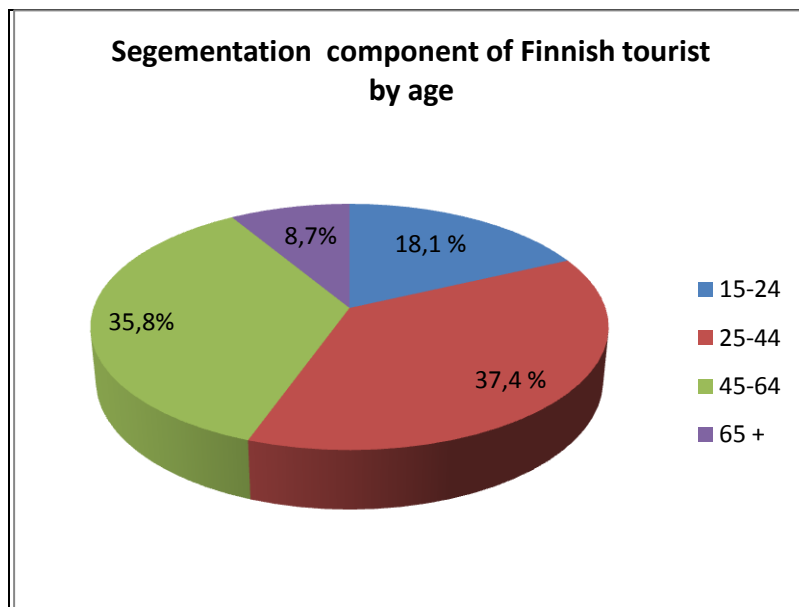


Figure 3.4.1.1 Finnish tourist by age group
Source: Eurostat, 2002

There are three important segments with great potential when marketing outbound tourism in Finnish market. They are families and children, singles with no children and empty nesters.

The majority of Finnish tourists take whole package trips are families with children for convenience and control over safety and expenses. The most reasons for these families travel are whole family should have shared time and experiences together while children can have fun and parents can relax. Single culture is growing in Finland. Singles either travel with other singles or they go alone that all makes this segment is more prospective in this industry. Singles have the advantage of freedom and social interaction. The key motive of singles travel is to find new friends and share experiences.

Empty nesters are adult couples, aged 45+ with no children living together. Generally, this group of people is expected that will make up 21 percent of the world population by 2050. This segment rapidly grows globally and Finland is not an exception. Empty nesters are generally a wealthy segment of society. They tend to spend more leisure time on themselves by travelling. They prefer to take longer vacations and slightly spend more money than other tourists when on holiday. Among all of these segments, empty nesters are the most attractive target group due to the fact that they have greater desire to travel; a lot of money and spend more money on their holidays; take longer vacations and make trips outside of the peak season. (Nordic Outbound travel market, 2011.)

In terms of general trends of tourist's habit, Finnish tourists do not have remarkable change in destinations. The top favorite destinations are quite stable recent years as presented in figure 3.4.1.2

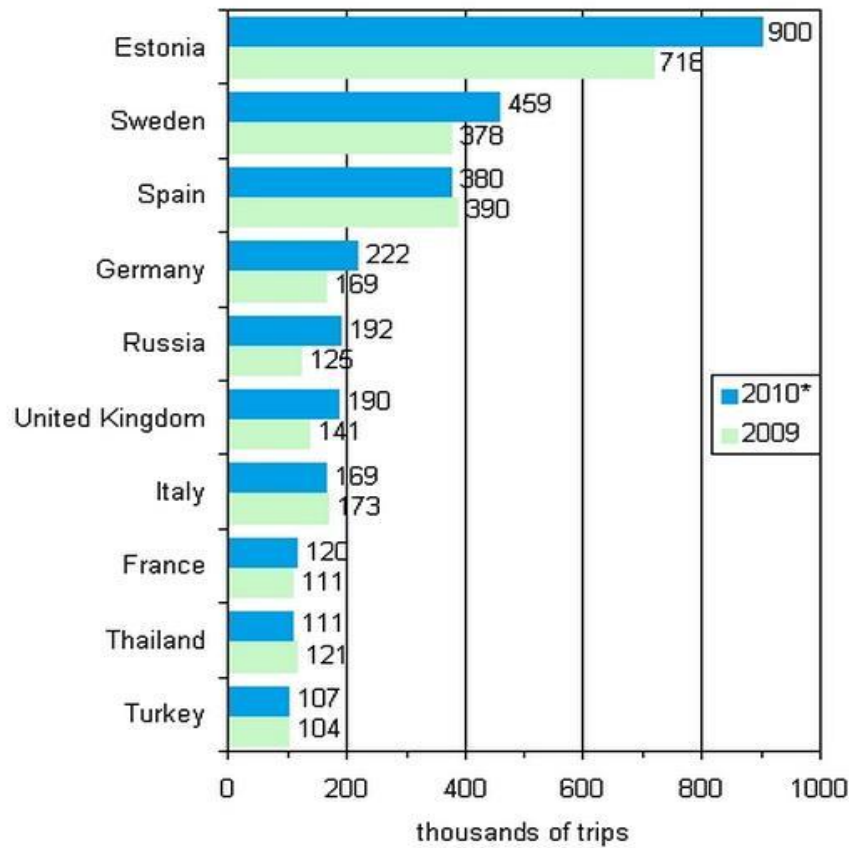


Figure 3.4.1.2 Finnish residents' favorite destination countries for leisure trips with overnight stays in 2010 and compared with 2009
Source: Finnish Travel Statistics Finland (2011)

Beach and city breaks are the most common type that Finns take and these are likely to remain so in the following years. The most important factors looked for when selecting a particular destination are interesting towns, good weather, value and food cuisine. As a fact, the nature of tourism destination image has alternated in increasing interest in beach holidays and environmental issues are examples of trends which are predicted to Asian-Pacific region. It is over a half of the total 203,000 trips to Asia and Oceania destination area made by Finns is to Thailand in 2010. Moreover, the statistics shows in 120,000 trips, there is up 111,000 journeys are for leisure (approximately 92 percent). (Finland statistics 2011.) Thailand is the only Asian countries in top ten favorite destinations for leisure trips as well as the longest distance destination Finnish tourist made in last year. The next favorite destination of Finns in this area is China and Japan with 47,000 and 15,000 trips relatively.

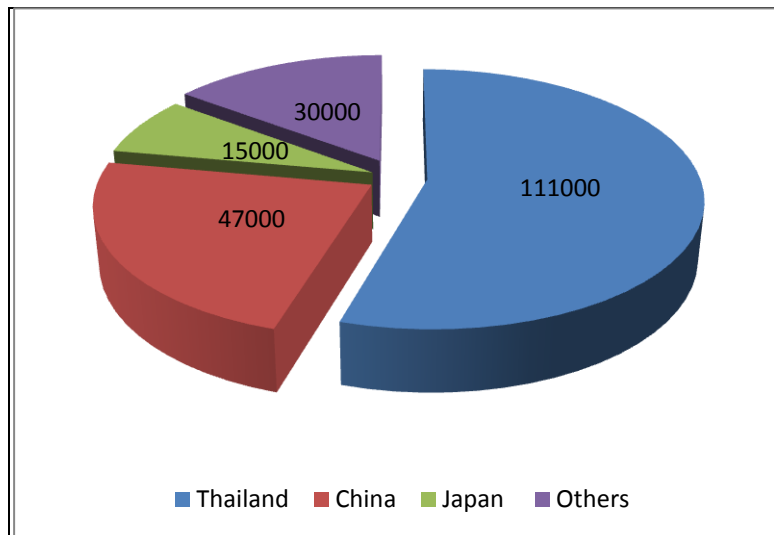


Figure 3.4.1.3: Popular destination of Finnish tourist in Asia-Pacific region

Source: Finnish statistics 2011

About the trip frequency, Finland is recorded quite high figures of two trips per tourist and about 39 percent to outside the EU of 71.4 percent total trips. (Eurostat, 2002.) The tourist flows in Finland tend to be evenly distributed over time which is confirmed by the average number of trips per tourist.

Base on the research of Eurostat, Finnish tourists prefer trips involving less than 15 overnight stays. The preferable length of nights that Finns spend average in the trips involve is 4 to 7 nights when it accounts for 76.1 percent out of 90 percent total holiday taken while average stays of 8 to 14 nights takes 21.1 percent. Moreover, the research also exposes the highest season of travelling of Finns is in June and July (33 percent) and the lowest season is in October and November (10.8 percent). Besides the summer holiday, Finns also have a tendency to travel outside Europe in winter time which occurs in late of December to February. The average budget for trip abroad of Finnish tourists in 2010 is about 1,500 euro which is average 100 euro per day.

3.4.2 Finnish customer behaviour as a tourist

Finnish tourists are looking for a warm climate and cultural experiences where they can relax and spend time with family, relatives and friends when travelling. They are becoming more and more demanding in explore unique travel experiences in the future. Experiencing different cultures is also an element that attracts Finnish tourists. Unique experiences that travelers have not been tried before will become more popular. For instance, cooking and taste local meals would be a culinary experience. In addition, Finnish tourists are similar to tourists from Nordic countries those who become more aware of the culture and environment of the places they visit. Furthermore, Finns are very price-conscious, expecting value for money and efficiency.

There are six critical features when Finnish tourists select tourism destinations which are culture and local people, climate, cleanliness, active holidays, shopping and food cuisine. Nevertheless, as their travel experiences become richer, they seem to be more attracted by destinations where involve self-development and creative expression.

In terms of organizing the trips, Finnish tourists tend to book both accommodation and transport directly when staying in their own country. There is over 70 percent of Finnish using intermediaries such as tour operators and travel agents to book package trips abroad. There is 17.4 percent of Finns reserve accommodation and travel direct from supplier while only 5 percent of Finnish tourists do not use any mode of organization for their trips. All inclusive package tours are especially popular among tourist as families. (Eurostat, 2002.)

Finnish tourists are heavy users of information and communication technologies. Therefore, online information searches on the internet are the key tool of organizing trips. Finnish tourists favor to book their trips online because it is more flexible. They can plan their journeys exactly whatever they want by choosing, comparing different selections. Certainly, they can organize it whenever they want according to their schedule. The another reason of increasing use of booking online is also explained by the expectations in finding a good deal, for example, booking hotel room.

The high level of the technology and communication platforms also means that social and mobile media play an extremely important role of promotion and marketing. Tour operator and travel agents is recommended to increase their information and level of communication online to serve potential tourists.

3.4.3 Approach to Finnish travel companies

Only few companies in Vietnam have the ability to cover the costs of conducting marketing campaign in foreign markets such as exhibiting themselves in big travel fairs like the Matkat Expo. Therefore, the idea of having a joint marketing system with travel companies in Finland could allow them get better visibility to Finnish tourists with the limitation of resources. The backbone of joint marketing consist of product and destination packaging, collaboration on events and trade shows as well as implement online campaigns aimed to target customers.

There are a few Finnish travelling companies offering tour to Vietnam. They are considered as key channels to implement marketing activities and enhance the business cooperation between Vietnamese travel agents and Finnish companies.

CTW Kaleva Travel is Finland's largest business travel agency offering a full range of services in both business travel and leisure travel. They have 15 offices and service outlets in 12 different locations of whole Finland. To achieve the unrivalled quality leadership in tourism, they invest heavily

in the quality of operations and open to all levels of partnership. Company has a strategic partnership with Carlson Wagonlit travel. Kaleva Travel's areas of expertise include the flexible leisure travel tours all over the globe, incentive travel and long-distance travel, cultural oriented and tours for groups. Company also has additional offices and locations in Tallinn, Tartu, Riga, Lithuania and Romania. Particularly, Kaleva Travel Company is one of two companies has cooperation with Tourism Authority of Thailand.

Aurinkomatkat is the leading outbound Finnish tour operator that consist of not only traditional holiday packages but also of only flights, only hotels, theme travel, tailor made trips and group travels. Company is a member of the Finnair Group. It represents 115 official retailers across Finland and has offices abroad in Estonia and Russia. Presently, company holds its share cover about 35 percent of Finnish travel field. One of the main focuses of its sustainable tourism program is improve the environmental performance of its contract partners. Among the themes raising customer awareness and cooperation with partners who respect nature and local culture are included. Company also attempts to engage with local travel agents to create a better tourism services and find possibility for concrete action to sustain tourism.

Tjäreborg is a part of Thomas Cook Group Plc, a leading international tour operator group and also own Scandinavia's largest charter airline Thomas Cook Airlines. Tjäreborg is Finland's third largest tour operators that have its market share of package tour is 21 percent with 80 percent of tours sold through the internet.

Mandala Travel Company is a 100 percent Finnish owned company. This company particularly focus on tailored-made trips to distant countries where there is strong connections to oriented tourism destinations related to Buddhism culture such as India and Thailand. In order to provide the best service in every trip, company corporate with the best partners in target countries. The organization of Mandala is people who have specialized knowledge of target areas and some of them have lived for a long time in those countries. One of Mandala's missions in their operation is the responsibility to the environment in both home countries and target countries.

Currently Mandala is the only Finnish travel company that offer whole package to Vietnam, mainly to the Northern part and the central region. Those tours especially are hiking, trekking and cycling trips. While Kaleva Travel Company, Aurinkomatkat and Tjäreborg offer only basic tours to different destinations of Vietnam include flight ticket and accommodation. Therefore, customers after book a trip to Vietnam they also have to plan the trips themselves with lacking of official available information of target destination.

4 THE IMAGE OF VIETNAM AS A TOURISM DESTINATION FOR FINNS AND EXPERIENCE FROM CHINA AND THAILAND

This chapter presents the first research issue, identifying the images of Vietnam as a tourism destination which is also one of the most important issues of the whole research. It includes the exploration of general images of Vietnam in attributes-based and holistic dimension. Besides, the analysis of China and Thailand experience in marketing tourism is also a displayed in this chapter.

4.1 Identifying the general image of Vietnam

As was discussed in chapter two about methodology of the destination tourism images, particularly the theory of the elements of tourism destination image, measuring and formation, to identify the image of Vietnam as destination tourism, it is necessary to cover attribute-based images and holistic images. The attribute-based image is measured by the level of important of different characteristics and factors of Vietnam collected from international tourist feedback in different researches. Holistic images include functional, psychological and common-unique dimension. (Echtner & Ritchie 2003, 42-43.)

4.1.1 Attribute –based image

In the tourism literature, researchers usually highlight the important role of attributes impacting on identifying the image of a particular destination. The most common attributes discussed can be named as (1) culture, history, (2) landscape, (3) services, (4) entertainment, (5) relaxation, (6) climate, (7) price, (8) safety, (9) community and hospitality, (10) events and activities, (11) accessibility, (12) adventure and (13) wild life or environment. (Echtner & Ritchie 2003; Olimpia B; Jorgensen 2004.) However, the order and impacting level of frequently used attributes need to be analyzed considerably because not all destinations share the same core attributes and tourists also have their own perception of selecting destination.

In some other studies about Vietnam tourism destination image, these initial and frequent attributes encourage tourist to select Vietnam as their destination is described following in a table 4.1.1 below

No.	Destination image attributes of Vietnam		
1	Cheap purchases	12	Friendly people
2	Exotic food, delicious cuisine	13	New experience
3	Interesting local ways of life, rich culture	14	Convenience
4	Historical places, world heritage sites, beautiful architectural buildings	15	Cleanliness
5	Beautiful landscapes and beaches	16	Relaxing atmosphere
6	Cultural festivals and events	17	Safety, security
7	Souvenirs, handicraft items	18	Political stability
8	History	19	Good climate
9	Tourism service quality	20	Adventure
10	Tourism infrastructure	21	Accessibility (information

			available)
11	Entertainment	22	Close to other destinations

Table 4.1.1: An initial literature-based list of tourism destination image attributes for Vietnam

Source: Bui 2011

The table listed the most relevant attributes to Vietnam destination from tangible (1 to 8 and 10) to less tangible or psychological attributes (9 to 22). Besides, base on the tourism literature in Asia, the attribute-based adding to destination image is identified (14) political stability, (15) tourism infrastructure which already counted in the table.

Moreover, it is interesting to find out other characteristics contributing notably is freshness of product, healthy eating habits and economic development. Foreign visitors are impressed by fresh products Vietnamese consume as well as healthy eating habits (well balance of protein, carbohydrates and vegetables). Particularly, experiencing modern and busy lives in the capital Hanoi and the biggest city like Ho Chi Minh City probably changes their perception, their image of Vietnam as a poor and backward country. Therefore, the factor of economic development becomes a key attribute contributing to the image of Vietnam in recent years. In other words, the impression of history and the interest of a revolution turn into the attraction of Vietnam positively. The impression of history includes long dramatic history and colonial charm. On the other hands, friendly attitudes of residents toward international tourists as well as the interesting, diverse local lives constructively impact on destination image. More and more different festivals and cultural events have been created by National Administration Tourism to attract more international visitors. (Bui 2011)

Likewise, poor tourism infrastructure, criminal level or unsecured feeling (traffic, thieves and beggars) and bad environment protection cause a negative image of Vietnam as a tourism destination.

On the other hand, VNAT suggests eight attractions that Vietnam tourism should promote to international tourists as an appealing destination. They are (1) thrills, (2) wilderness or nature, (3) heritage, (4) festival, (5) pristine, (6) enjoyment, (7) scenery and (8) essence. There are various ranges of activities that tourists can experience in each attributes to be explored by tourists.

4.1.2 Holistic image

Geographically, Vietnam as a tourism destination is often captured in three patterns by tourists: (1) Vietnam in connection with Cambodia; (2) Vietnam in connections with other popular Asian destination such as Cambodia, Thailand and China and (3) Vietnam alone. The first and second patterns are more popular in Finland than the third because “The farther you travel the larger area a *destination* includes.” (Takamatsu 2007, p.26)

In addition, the southern regions (Ho Chi Minh City, MeKong Delta) and central regions (Hue Former Capital, Da Nang Beach City and Hoi An Ancient Town) of Vietnam are also often introduced to international tourist than the northern region.

Regarding the physical images of Vietnam, Ha Long Bay, French architectural buildings (colonial charms), the three world cultural heritages (Hoi An Ancient Town, Hue Former Capital and My Son Sanctuary) and the old resident town in Hanoi are the most frequently presented as attractions of Vietnam tourism.

However, beaches and seaside resorts are not commonly highlighted by travel companies while Vietnam has all the most beautiful resorts in Da Nang, Nha Trang, Phan Thiet, Phu Quoc and Con Dao.

As regards to traditions and culture, the images of a traditional festival as the Lunar New Year or pictures of Vietnamese girls wearing national costume (Ao dai) are presented on many of the brochures. Delicious culinary culture also frequently emphasized as an indispensable part when introduce about Vietnam tourism.

As for other products, traditional handicraft products and shopping areas, luxury hotels in Ho Chi Minh City are also introduced to international tourist.

As a fact, the emotional holistic affects remarkably to Vietnam destination image is a memories linked to the Vietnam War or in other words, the colonial charm. In addition, the "hidden charm"¹ element inspires the tourist to experience *unpredictable* trip that has effectively lead travellers to connect destination with their own experience.

According to Mr. Dinh, representative of Saigontourist Company, Vietnam still remains negative tangible images of destination tourism. Certainly, poor infrastructure is still the biggest problem which is shown in the facilities of the airports in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The issues of inconvenient domestic transport system, the poor drainage system causing a lot of troubles when travelling in raining season are damaging the holistic image. Moreover, tourists express the disappointment towards the level of crime (pick pocket, street begging and robbing) in the public, which make them feel unsafe and uncomfortable while they are searching relax to spend their holiday. (Dinh, interview 10.4.2012)

For a certain group of tourists, it is very interesting experiencing the traffic in the seas of motorbikes in the streets in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. This image is a strong impression in their mind which shows the image of a developing Vietnam with dynamic and energetic or even exciting. But for other groups of tourist, it is a messy, noisy and dangerous situation. The majority of travellers assumed that it is dangerous to participate in the transport system in these two biggest cities without help of a local. The polluted and dirty environment is also harmful to the general image. Re-

¹ Vietnam tourism slogan in 2010

garding the environmental and social issue, international tourists also concern about undisciplined habits of Vietnamese who often throw waste freely in public places, not queuing in the line and not follow public regulations.

The Vietnamese cuisine is not only famous in region but all over the world. Many times, CNN or BBC introduce Vietnamese typical delicious dishes such as Pho (beef noodle soup), Goi cuon (fresh spring rolls), Cha gio (fried spring rolls) and the newest one Banh mi (Vietnamese sandwich) in their channels as the most favourite food in the world. Tourist can easily find food are sold by street vendors that takes place in everywhere of whole Vietnam as unique cultural image. Yet many tourists do not dare to try because of the unhygienic.

4.2 The effect of different information sources

To measure the effect of media and other information sources on destination image of Vietnam, it is necessary to analyse what kind of information sources or media habit that impact on Finnish tourist when making decision of holiday destination. This analysis is considered as a useful base for making recommendation for Vietnam travel companies and also for national tourism management in marketing Vietnam's tourism image to attract more Finnish tourists.

In the recent research of Mediemministeriet of The Nordic Travel in 2011, five most important sources of information that effect on choosing a specific destination are (1) been there before, (2) Google, (3) references from friends and relatives, (4) official website of travel agency and (5) official website of attractions. This fact clearly emphasizes three of fifth sources are from the internet. Interestingly, the most ineffective information sources are TV programmes, exhibition and fair visits because tourists more prefer new communication technologies than traditional media.

In a European Commission's report about attitudes of Europeans towards tourism reveals that the internet and recommendations of friends and relatives are the most important elements to Finns in decision making process of planning trips.

Most important information source effect on making decision of destination	%
The internet	39
Recommendations from friends and colleagues	21
Personal experience	14
Catalogues, brochures (non-commercial)	8
Travel/Tourist agencies	6
Media (newspaper, radio, TV)	5
Guidebooks and magazines (commercial)	5

Table 4.2.1: The attitudes of Finns toward information source in making decision of destination

Source: European Commission statistics (2008)

Moreover, in spring 2008, there was 70 percent of Internet users in Finland used the internet to browse travel and accommodation websites. This is also the 4th most popular purpose of internet use in this country.

There is a various range of conventional media sources (newspaper and magazines) covering almost every interest. There is also a vastly change of using radio and satellite broadcasting in marketing but they are expensive in Finland. Advertising is also relatively costly.

Some of the major media in Finland that consist of

- Daily newspapers: Helsingin Sanomat, Aammulehti, Iltalehti, Kauppalehti and Ilta Sanomat
- Travel Trade: Ikkunapaikka
- Magazines: Matkaopas (a travel magazine), ET lehti and Matkalehti.

4.3 The experiences of China and Thailand in attracting international tourists

This section focuses on the third research issue stated in the introduction, which is to discover the experiences of China and Thailand in attracting Finnish tourists and international travellers as a basis for suggesting marketing strategy to improve the images of Vietnam in Finland.

These two countries China and Thailand are chosen for analysis in this research because they are all the key destinations for Finnish tourists in Asia region. Particularly Thailand has ranked in top ten list of the most frequently visited destination for leisure by Finns. (Finnish statistics 2011.) China is also the next favourite destination in Finnish market and it has similarity with Vietnam in economic development model.

4.3.1 China

China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) is an organization directly associated to the State Council (the central government of China) which is in charge of

- Establishing and organizing the implementation of market development for tourism; organizing external publicity and significant promotional activities on the China tourism's image. It also coordinates the work of China's tourist institutions stationed abroad.
- Promoting the international communication and cooperation of tourism and take responsibility of affairs related to collaboration with international tourist organizations. Moreover, CNTA examines the market access qualifications of travel agencies engaged in international tourism.

The policy of the Chinese government is to actively develop international arrivals since the reform in 1978. In over 20 years, China always attracts tourist with long history, rich culture, colourful local conditions and cus-

toms. In 2000, China already stood in the fifth largest destination with inbound visitors up to 83.44 million that brought US \$ 16,244 billion (7th largest in the world) income for country. Furthermore, China received around 61.8 million international tourists in 2010 (China Tourism Statistics 2010.). China is anticipated to have 130 million in 2020 according to WTO which generates average annual growth rate in 7.8 percent in period 1995-2020.

China moves up its position in world's top tourism destination in 2010. It is a significant change in the world rank when China rose up to third places in terms of arrivals, overtake place of Spain, Italy and the UK which have stayed in past few years. As a fact, there is a stable growth in China with nine percent. It has become the region's top destination that represented around a quarter of the additional arrivals in the whole Asia and the Pacific region. Hong Kong also enters the top ten destinations at ninth place. (UNWTO 2011.)

The China and Finland relations is prospectively developing in both investment and tourism filed. The Embassy of Finland, together with Finnair, has an informal basis corporation but well-functioning with a number of travel agencies in order to expedite the tourist visa is three weeks for Finnish tourists.

The legal status and organization of CNTA is partly similar to that of VNAT. However, the major difference is CNTA is not only limited to organizing promotion activities for target markets but also coordinating the operation of China's tourism institutions in abroad. China has a large network of 18 overseas offices.

Travelling to China is concentrated on the three official Chinese holiday periods that are the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year) in January or February, the May Holiday and the National Day Holiday. In 2000, CNTA started new promotion campaign with the slogan "New Millennium-China 2000" in international media and continued its active promotion of main tourist products concentrating on the world heritage sites in China. To promote the work, CNTA frequently organizes promotion and exhibitions to target markets. These activities encompassing specialty promotion and publicity are diversity with passionate appeal, gain quite effective results. In addition, China has succeeded in promoting various tourism destinations with diverse tourism products to international tourists. The attractive destination of China is not only Beijing and Shanghai but also a number of other cities and destinations. Chinese tour operators are knowledgeable and proactive to introduce new destinations along with new products to those destinations constantly. Therefore, even the repeat tourists will always find new destinations to explore in their next trips.

Nevertheless, the factors that most explain the huge number of international tourist to China could be the expanding of China as a huge economy with various opportunities for business people besides the attractive of long history and rich culture.

The analysis of the national tourism organization of China in this section reveals that CNTA like VNAT is more administration-oriented than cooperation-oriented. Thus, tourism destination marketing is limited to promotion activities. This also explains that CNTA and VNAT are not flexible and active in cooperating with the private sector. Moreover, they are also less directly involved in the tourism destination marketing process in target market.

4.3.2 Thailand

The tourism authority of Thailand (TAT) is an organization belonging to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports responsible for the promotion of Thailand's tourism. Similar to VNAT, it functions as a key representative to proactive marketing strategies to develop new markets for Thailand.

TAT has led all the efforts of Thailand in improving national tourism industry since the early 1990s. In other words, TAT is a central organization which is fully responsible for spread out all the information about tourism from the marketing material and advertising campaign, images and statistics. Moreover, TAT provides information and data on tourist areas to the public. The main objective of TAT is encouraging both Thai and international tourist to travel in and around the country. Issues should be noticed are that the activities and measures taken by TAT always aimed at specific targets and clear goals. Therefore, there is always consistency and effectiveness of images of Thailand tourism to tourists. It also assists the national tourism management set the development plans for tourist destinations and support implementing strategy of personnel and production in tourism aspect.

Actually, TAT was quite success with their task when the slogan "amazing Thailand" has been on the lips of travel agencies for a while; whereas very few have heard of a decent campaign coming out of Vietnam. This promotion campaign with the specific themes as a distinctive image of Thailand is a good model that VNAT should learn from.

It is noticeable that TAT has better corporation with Finnish travel companies. This practice of TAT is act that has not been done by VNAT or any domestic travel companies. More importantly, TAT has very quick action in responding to the crisis concerning to tourist safety such as recent political upheaval. Their image got recovery quickly. TAT is always supported by the participation of the national leaders of Thailand in its marketing events so that the image gains higher credibility to tourists.

Furthermore, Thailand has succeeded in attracting international tourist because they always set comprehensive goals in their marketing plan and policy. They are stated including:

Promoting and developing the operation on proactive marketing strategies for increasing the new markets as well as the niche markets. Thailand is actively targeting niche markets such as golf holidays or adventure holi-

days. This is for the intention of attract more quality tourists to this destination.

Improve cooperation in all level from domestic and international on the development of tourism markets. This act aims to make Thailand not as top appealing destination but also to be the tourism hub of Southeast Asia.

See the vital role of development of community's life quality in all regions of country in the policy of government. For instance, tourism industry must undertake to create jobs for people, increase the income in order to help country's economic problem.

In other words, discussing attributes that effectively contribute to create attractive destination, Thailand has exploit thoroughly all necessary dimension. In functional dimension, there are six terrific factors that are fascination of cheap purchases, exotic food, historical places, friendship, virgin tropical rural regions, and gorgeous sights. In social dimension's perspective, the advantageous features found that are cheap travel convenience of accessibility for all categories of tourists. Thailand is also evaluated as calm and relations that significantly adding to its emotional dimension. Last but not least, the cultural experience and the climate in epistemic dimension are indispensable element of successful Thailand's tourism. (Olimpia B., 554-559)

TAT has utilized those important attributes to design a marketing campaign that cover adequate aspects of tourism products sought by international visitors named "Amazing Thailand". This catchy slogan clearly defines nine themes (1) Amazing shopping paradise, (2) Amazing tastes of Thailand, (3) Amazing culture and heritage, (4) Amazing world heritage, (5) Amazing natural heritage, (6) Amazing Thai arts and lifestyle, (7) Amazing sports, (8) Amazing agricultural products and (9) Amazing gateway. At some point in reaction to the 2009 tourism crisis, the marketing slogan in international was re-launched as "Amazing Thailand, Amazing Value" (Jantararat & Williams, 2000.) Right after this act, Thailand was listed in top city destination ranking of tourism in the world by Euromonitor magazine rate in 2010 as an obvious evidence for successful marketing strategy. Moreover, Thailand is also placed at top ten destinations in 2011 that Finnish tourists travel for leisure as well as the longest distance trip they made. (Finnish statistics 2011.) Finnish tourists not only visit Bangkok (third place of top city destination for best value of travelling) and surroundings but in addition many travel down to the southern beaches and islands, for example Phuket, Changmai, Ayutthaya and Pattaya. During the period 1995- 2008, the amount of international tourist arrivals to Thailand increase gradually and always stable stand in top 20 countries welcome most tourists arrivals. (Economic Statistics of Nationalmaster.com)

Additionally, TAT signed agreements with several Finnish tour operators (Kaleva Travel and Mandala Travel) to increase the number of Finnish travellers to Thailand and offer whole package for Nordic market. The

number of Finnish tourists to Thailand kept the level of over 100 thousands every year.

The consequence of the tsunami in 2005 is an excellent example showing the brilliant strategy and effort of national tourism management particularly TAT to recover the image of Thailand in the Scandinavia market. In that disaster, the number of victims from Scandinavia is the highest but it had a quite rapid recovery. This market began to get back positively and it resulted in more than a six percent growth rate in the same year. The growth in the number of tourists and the return of visitors has emphasized the impression of hospitality, assisting foreigners in disaster. More than that, Thailand got many prizes of popular destination from the Scandinavian countries.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will focus on how to improve the current marketing strategy of company in promotion Vietnam tourism in Finnish market. This is own suggestion of writer based on above analysis about Vietnam tourism market and Finnish tourism market combined with theory basis discussed. These suggestions is considered as personal marketing efforts of research author with the expectation of Vietnam tourism image will be more visible in Finland to attract more Finnish tourist visit Vietnam, improve Vietnam destination image in public and media, target customer perception and Finnish tourist operators by Saigontourist Company activities initially.

5.1 Public and Media

Generally, Vietnam has never been in brilliant opportunity to improve their popularity like current before. It has more heritage sites recognized internationally and more celebrities continue to visit the country also. Besides the awards and higher position on global tourism rankings, many new luxury branded hotels entranced or set to open soon in Vietnam. All of these elements generate the new image of Vietnam as a top luxury destination in Asia. These factors should be highlighted on brochures and websites. Additionally, what should be implemented promptly for Vietnam tourism is focus on gaining better position, planning and marketing through social media, especially after the visits of celebrities such as Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

Moreover, the marketing activities must be better coordinated between national government and localities in generating consistent destination image in different information sources both media and public. The Vietnamese Embassy in Finland must be more active in giving out the tourism information as well as encourage promotion activities like fairs, exhibitions about Vietnam in large cities of Finland. The Embassy is considered as an only representative of Vietnam image in Finland, therefore, being proactive organize different cultural events, promotion campaigns in Finland in to increase the visibility personal experience of Finns about Vietnam as a country and as a tourism destination. It is important to participate actively

in different exhibitions or trade shows to deliver widespread guide book, brochure about Vietnam tourism. In order to raise the Vietnam tourism in Finland, it is necessary to publish articles in some travel magazines or daily newspaper which is create more credibility and positive image.

Because the references from friends and relatives count as a major source of selecting destination, hence, Vietnam must improve the tourism service quality (overcharge, tour guide attitudes) more effectively to encourage tourists repeat their travel and recommendations to potential tourists who have not been in Vietnam.

5.2 For target customers

Saigon Tourist should discover new products to keep the repeat travellers, design new tours that are favoured by Finnish tourists. For example, invest and develop eco-tour which is trendy worldwide and also in Finland simultaneously raise the community's awareness of environment in that area. Different types of tours should be designed appropriately for each market segment. For family and empty nesters segment, the appealing image of destination as beautiful landscape (beaches and resorts) in relaxing atmosphere, heritage sites, history and cultural festivals (Lunar New Year festival, Hue festival etc. For singles tourist, tours should include adventure tours to explore unique experience, cultural events (local life) and entertainment, diversity of activities as shopping, food exotic. The current trailing tour that Mandala Company is introducing is a good start and should be promoted in larger scale. Currently, Saigontourist doesn't offer similar products in order to offer unique experience to tourist. Company has offered tours to Southern region; especially to visit Mekong Delta (floating markets) is already an advantage. It would be more outstanding when combining with food tasting typical dishes in each province as an added value to customer because this region is well-known about food cuisine.

The internet has become a useful marketing tool for small tour operators. In fact, the coherent website can offer product to niche market and reach their target markets directly. Majority of small tour operators targeting specific customer groups on website will have a better chance of providing relevant content than those reaching for mass audiences. Users believe the information on niche sites is more accurate and made for them. For suppliers, the internet increases the ability to reach actual and potential tourists more directly. Particularly in Finland, potential tourists are heavy users of this tool. Hence, company website must be reorganized to meet the requirement for Finnish market. News of Vietnam tourism and new product offer should be updated more frequently. Currently, the website has advantage of the information of each tour is quite clearly and detail but not well-organized. The online booking function only works for reserve hotel but not booking a tour. This is one of the biggest restrictions of the current website. Company must add this function directly into tour information to increase the convenience for customers. Moreover, there are few errors of website functions need to be fixed immediately to avoid confusion and reducing reliability the image of company.

5.3 For corporation

It is also essential that Saigontourist must develop higher standards of marketing strategy and human resources (marketers, tour guides and decision makers) for the tourism industry to serve long term goal of Vietnam tourism in target market. At the same time, company is required to remain focusing on quality of destinations and product promotion. Company is also recommended to create private partnership in tourism destination marketing in Finland as Thailand does. Company need to become pioneer in teaming up with major Finnish travel companies to be active in expediting Vietnam tourism in Finland and raise the number of Finnish tourists. This is a feasible solution that company can approach this market. Mandala travel and Aurinkomatkat travel companies are high prospective partners for SaigonTourist. For instance, Company should put more effort in create joint marketing to publish image and attractions, tour information in partner's website. Saigontourist encourage partner in supporting tour arrangement. For example, company can tailor tours; create itineraries featuring exclusively for certain target segment to meet their desire.

In order to marketing new products, the company can discount for groups of tourists, design a brochure and travel guide for target customers in accordance with partners' strategy. Communication in target market's language is essential, which is Finnish in this market. Moreover, company must be more proactive in improve company's visibility and credibility itself in different kinds of trade show, exhibition in Finland. Every year, there are many kinds of festivals about Vietnamese culture, art and music show in Finland organized by Vietnamese Embassy or other organizations. These are brilliant opportunities for company to introduce company image and products with small budget. More importantly, draw customer's attention to destination before selling tour because unless customer decides to come to destination, there is never an opportunity to choose the product of destination.

Additionally, negotiate with airlines such as Finnair and Vietnamairlines for special excursion fares from Finland is another important factor to have price competitive advantage.

6 CONCLUSION

Tourism is unlike any other product; it is very complex to build brand because it is largely intangible. Thus, creating tourism destination image as a recognized branding is add tangible values to its services. The biggest challenge is to create a unique, memorable image in customer's perception positively. The core concept of destination image is consists of individual attributes in holistic image. It includes functional, psychological factors in common-unique dimension. It is impossible to change the physical attributes of destination but the holistic image which is perceived by customer can be oriented regarding to personal experience, education and knowledge and particularly information gained from media. Each type of media has its own strengths and limitations. It all depends on the level of possibility that target customer can access. The main aim of media usage in

marketing destination is sending the right message of image to right audiences. Hence, the issue of selecting effective and efficient media type influence strongly on the overall result of marketing strategy.

Tourism marketing is an integral factor that strongly influence on choice of destination. Tourism competition is intense and changing constantly, thus the issue of preservation and upgrade destination popularity and its advantages are the key of long term successful tourism destination marketing. The result of effective marketing strategy is seen from customer point of view. Hence, marketing planners have to define the target customer in order to offer suitable value of tourism product based on customer's perception.

While Vietnam has been gaining higher popularity as an appealing tourism destination, there is a lack of study on destination image in attribute-based and holistic that strongly affects on tourist's decision making to select Vietnam as their destination. More importantly, the decision making of tourist depends dramatically on the degree of congruency between the perceived images and guided ones. One of the major findings of this research is Finns seem very sensitive to personal safety, hygiene and environmental issue. Unfortunately, these elements are not taken into consideration by tourism industry.

The results of this research could help tourism marketers of tour operator and travelling companies understand the structure of destination image as well as to identify the related core attributes of destination image. Base on the research, travel companies are able to build the effective and strong tourism destination image of Vietnam by taking advantages that Vietnam tourism possess.

Generally, Vietnam is a trendy destination for Finnish tourists in recent years. Thanks to the diversity of resources both in natural resources and cultural resources, Vietnam is gaining higher position of the tourism image in the world. Moreover, national government administration also put more focus in building long term strategy for promotion tourism of Vietnam in period 2010-2030. Nevertheless, Vietnam still remain few major problem needed to improve promptly. Mainly, it is poor marketing activities, bureaucratic system. Vietnam tourism is often inconsistent and ineffective in marketing destination image, particularly in producing the promotion image (logo and slogan), no clear theme in each marketing campaign. Therefore, Vietnam still lags behind its Asian counterpart such as China, Thailand and Singapore. In other hands, most of tour operators are plodding in investment to develop new tourism product to refresh the destination to tourists. Additionally, the bad quality of service, infrastructure, hospitality and environmental issues are strongly impact on the repeat of travelling and the references from persons who have been in Vietnam. More importantly, the references from friends and relatives are one of the key sources that affect on decision making of choosing destination process of potential tourist. Hence, it generally caused the reduction of potential tourists visit Vietnam. Another weakness of current situation is Vietnam has no representative office abroad which can be in charge of giving help-

ful information, hence, the availability of access information is lower than other Asian destination like Thailand.

Recently, Vietnam tourism policy is more open to the world to increase the level of accessibility to Vietnam. For instance, more flight from Finland to Vietnam (more frequent, cheaper and direct) and exemption of tourist visa for travellers who are stay less than 15 days. They are also active in joining travel fair; organizing different cultural events and exhibitions in this market. The weak of using ICT in marketing can be enhanced without difficulty while Vietnam is an emerging developing country in technology. Beside those opportunities for developing Vietnam tourism destination, those issues such as low awareness from community of environment, intense competition with neighbouring markets (Thailand, China, Cambodia, etc.) are threats that Vietnam is facing.

This research also found the major segments of Finnish tourists for more effective marketing. Finns who are from the age 25 to 44 are the most frequent people make trips to travel abroad. The next potential group is persons who are from 45-64. In other terms of segment, Finnish market in tourism is divided into three major groups that are family, small group of singles and empty nester. However, in overall, they prefer making trips abroad with average 4-7 days and less than 15 days for long distance trips. There are six highlighted features that Finnish tourists are looking for when selecting a destination for their journeys. They are culture and local people, climate, cleanliness, active holidays, shopping and food cuisine. Regarding to both attribute based image and holistic image, Vietnam has fully potential to meet the tourist demand because those are also most advanced factors Vietnam is current highly evaluated by international tourists.

Noticeably, about 70 percent of Finnish tourist use intermediaries such as tour operators and travel companies to organize their trip. Majority of the trips are booked online because Finnish people are heavily user of ICT. The internet is the most important source of information that they take into account when making decision of destination. Other information sources effecting on decision making of tourists are brochures, tourist agencies and media like newspapers, TV programs, guidebooks and magazines.

Discovering experiences in managing tourism from other popular destinations that are also neighbours like China and Thailand would help Vietnam to build better strategy to attract more Finnish tourists. Both China and Thailand have offices abroad which can be entirely responsibility of implementing promotion in target countries. From the national management to private sectors is well-collaborated and functioned. Particularly, they have better cooperation with Finnish tourism. For example, they already have cooperation with Finnair and other Finnish travelling companies to produce appropriate tours with reasonable price.

From this research combined with theoretical base, the writer suggest the management of Vietnam tourism as well as SaigonTourist Company is better cooperate to produce sound slogan and logo consistently for promo-

tion campaign. Vietnam must invest to improve the quality of service and hospitality to retain customer. Moreover, it is important to exploit fully current high position of destination image in media which is beneficial for marketing tourism. Company itself is required to be proactive in target market. It is necessary to discover and continuously development product to renew the image positively and draw tourist repeat their travel. The most important issue is to understand own advantage competitive factor according to customer perception and target segment. In addition, Saigon-Tourist should consider company website play a very important role on their expanding plan of marketing strategy. So, they must improve it in better organized, more coherent, updated information and adding booking online function on their website. Lastly, possibility of building partnership with Finnish travelling companies, initially by joint marketing is also a prospective solution to save budget. It is also a faster way to be more visible in Finnish market and attract Finnish tourist.

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