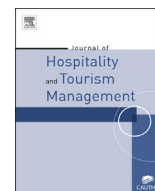




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Tourism in Switzerland: How perceptions of place attributes for short and long holiday can influence destination choice

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ABSTRACT

The motivational characteristics and variables associated with travel destination choice are important to our understanding of destination marketing. For this study, a comparative analysis of short and long holiday attributes for visitors to Switzerland was undertaken to determine which characteristics are valued to meet personal requirements and how these might influence holiday destination choice. A total of 158 completed questionnaires from these visitors enabled us to distinguish differences between two groups of attributes. The findings provide a fresh insight into short and long holiday attractiveness attributes where destination attractiveness attributes can differ between short and long holiday requirement. It also provides some insight into how destinations may influence evaluation and choice.

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1. Introduction

The importance of tourism to destinations is well documented in the literature (Colman, 1989; Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, Schepherd, & Wanhill, 1998; France, Towner, Evans, & Sowden, 1994; Goodall & Ashworth, 1988; Laws, 1995; Proenca & Soukiazis, 2008; Rita, 2000), but there has been little research into the impact this has on short and long visits (Herington, Merrilees, & Wilkins, 2013). Yet, tourism continues to be one of the fastest-growing industries in both developed and developing countries (Tasci & Knuston, 2004), and tourism competitiveness is considered to be an important economic indicator. Hence, these tourist destinations must develop strategic plans to attract increasingly demanding customers and meet a range of requirements for short and long term visits if they are to make full use of the available attractions and amenities of that place.

Similar to product marketing, the most important element in destination marketing is to understand customer' needs and wants

to be able to match those with the products and services at the destination. So it is important for marketers and planners **first**: to fully understand the destination and what it has to offer, and **second**: to gain knowledge about visitors and how attributes of the destination may influence their selection of a destination for leisure or business activities. This understanding of different consumer or "visitor" requirements helps tourism managers to make better decisions as they communicate and differentiate a destination (Day, 2010), since it allows them to match visitor perceptions to the specific market segments on offer at each destination (Wheeler, Frost, & Weiler, 2011). In other words, marketers need to consider individual visitors' needs and tailor the destinations to meet those needs. For example Herington et al. (2013) argues that the attractiveness of destinations should reflect the needs of target market to ensure visitors arrive on a regular basis. It is therefore relevant to address not only visitor needs but also how they can match destination attributes that become part of the destination brand.

In another context, the destination attractiveness attributes may be different depending on visitor length of stay. Although prior research (e.g., Formica & Muzaffer, 2006; Hanqin & Lam, 1999; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Jang & Cai, 2002; Plog, 2001; Prayag & Rayan, 2011) has investigated travel motivations and destination features Herington et al. (2013) observe that few have studied the factors that influence visitors choice of long and short breaks. They argue that existing models are too broad and general ignoring the

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possibility of differing requirements of tourists at different times in different contexts or for different holiday purposes. Additionally, understanding destination attractiveness attributes in the tourism sector is often limited to research in a US context (Herington et al., 2013). Yet, the findings of these studies are unlikely to be appropriate for generalization into other cultures, systems and service sectors (Hofstede, 1980; Jogaratnam and Ching-Yick Tse, 2006; Tajeddini, 2014; Tajeddini & Trueman, 2014). More specifically, it is important to investigate length of stay in relation to destination branding attractiveness in different locations, countries and cultures to gain a better understanding of push factors (market demand forces) as well as pull factors (supply-side factors) that may create a more competitive environment.

Switzerland enjoys an excellent reputation in the field of tourism and the country has been one of the first to develop tourism as a major industry (Tajeddini, 2010). However there is considerable scope for tourism development, as this country continues to offer natural resources such as snow-capped mountains, high alpine meadows, sunny plateau, tranquil valleys, impressive waterfalls and picture-perfect villages. In fact the World Economic Forum (2013) observed that the number of domestic tourism trips was effectively static and arrivals declined by 4% in 2012. Therefore, the objective of this research is to examine how the needs and perceptions of tourists can be influenced by place brand attributes as they make their choice of destinations to visit, and how these decisions relate to a long or short-term break in countries such as Switzerland. More specifically, this study has three main objectives: (i) To explore destination attributes and destination brands that influence tourists in selecting short and long holidays in general; (ii) To explore destination attributes and destination brands that influence tourists in selecting short and long holidays in Switzerland; (iii) To analyze how the relationships between destination attributes and destination brands may influence tourists in their selection of short vs. long holiday breaks.

2. Background and literature review

The literature identifies several studies on destination choice and destination decision process (Chon, 1990; Ewing & Haider, 1999; Gunn, 1989; Hanlan, Fuller, & Wilde, 2005; Moutinho, 1986; Muller, 1991; Um & Crompton, 1999; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989). Destination attractiveness for tourists is associated with the ability of the destination in delivering its perceived attributes. Mayo and Jarvis (1981, p. 201) view destination attractiveness as 'the relative importance of individual benefits and the perceived ability of the destination to deliver these individual benefits'. Equally, Hu and Ritchie (1993) focus on individuals' feelings, beliefs, and opinions of the destination in satisfying vacation needs. They link the level of destination attractiveness with destination selection. Ragavan, Subramonian, and Sharif (2014, p. 404) commented that 'performance of a destination can be measured through the perception of destination travel attributes to tourists'. They concluded that there is evidently a relationship between destination attributes and selecting the holiday destination.

Aspects of destination attributes have drawn attention to some researchers. For example using a mix qualitative approach entailing some focus group discussions and interviews, Battour, Ismail, and Bator (2010) examined the impact of destination attributes on Muslim tourist's choice. An attempt made to identify tangible and intangible aspects that influence the Muslim tourists in choosing their holiday destination. They found that some aspects such as access to worship places, availability of Halal food were priority attributes, which means that destination marketers would need to address Islamic culture in their marketing strategies.

At the same time, another empirical analysis on factors affecting the selection of tourist destination was conducted in the case of Bangladesh. The study considered the various preferences of tourists and examined the tour intention in selecting different tour destination. Employing a multiple regression model, Ahmed (2010) considered nine factors related to a number of different aspects of tourism. He reported that service quality, natural beauty, security and shopping facility were statistically significant in selecting a tour destination in Bangladesh. A similar result was found in the study conducted by Hsu, Tsai, and Wu (2009) who identified 22 attributes that influence the tourists' choice of destination indicating that visiting friends/relatives and personal safety to be the most important factors for inbound tourists to Taiwan.

Using a preference analysis model for selecting tourist destinations in the case of Keda in Malaysia, Mohamad and Jamil (2012) evaluated critical factors influencing local tourists' destination choice. They focused on internal factors that motivate tourists in selecting their destination where they found that visiting friends and relatives was the most important factor while novelty being the least motivating factor.

Further, Herington et al. (2013) carried out a thorough review of previous literature and synthesized six main components of destination attractiveness features; '(1) actual attractions, which include the nature features of scenery and climate as well as man-made attractions such as historical/architectural attractions, theme parks or cultural/sporting events; (2) service, a component that includes accommodation & food; (3) facilities, including infrastructure, accessibility, transport, shopping; (4) reputation, that encompasses the overall image of the destination, including attitudes to tourists and tourism, that is, how easy it is to be a tourist at the destination; (5) social component, that includes how the destination is 'looked after' by locals; and (6) economic, related to the economic attractiveness of the destination in relation to the value for money and or cost of the holiday' (p. 151).

Moreover, in the World Economic Forum report on Travel and Tourism Competitiveness, competitiveness is based on three main categories or sub-indexes: regulatory; business environment and infrastructure; human, cultural, and natural resources. Those sub-indexes contain fourteen pillars of travel and tourism; Policy rules and regulations; Environmental sustainability; Safety and security; Health and hygiene; Prioritization of Travel & Tourism; Air transport infrastructure; Ground transport infrastructure; Tourism infrastructure; Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) infrastructure; Price competitiveness; Human resources; Affinity; Natural resources; Cultural resources (World Economic Forum, 2013, p. xv).

It can be therefore argued that there is a relationship between the attributes of the destination and travelers' decision in selecting their destination. Yet, most studies, evaluated the attributes without much of a distinction between long and short holidays, a point that was raised by Herington et al., (2013). In the following section the concept of short and long term holiday is reviewed.

3. Short vs. long holiday

Travelers have various reasons for taking a holiday such as relaxation, exploration, taking a break from work, attending family or friends' events. The length of the holiday could be short or long and may be determined by the type of activities chosen. Literature on short and long holidays did not provide clear definitions or an agreed opinion on the length of stay of each type. For example, Herington et al. (2013, p. 152) defined 'short break as being one to three nights away from home and a long break as being four or more nights away'. For the purpose of this research a short holiday is defined as being up to one week while a long holiday being one to

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