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MAURITIUS: A SUNNY HOLIDAY DESTINATION FOR FINNISH PEOPLE

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Title

Mauritius: A Sunny Holiday Destination for Finnish People

Commissioned by

DIK Travel & Tours

Abstract

The tourism market of Mauritius is booming as tourists are nowadays coming from many countries, thus improving the economy of the island. However, few Finnish tourists travel to Mauritius as it is still not well-known among Finns.

The aim of this study is to find out how Mauritius can be promoted as a holiday destination in Finland. This study was conducted via an analysis of the tourism business environment and interviews. The analytical tools used were a SWOT analysis and Porter's five forces. The interviewees were staff members of travel agencies in Finland and Mauritius and the Air Mauritius Company.

The results of the analysis of the tourism business environment and interviews were that Mauritius can be promoted by starting co-operation with Finnish travel agents; Mauritian travel agencies should participate in tourism trade fairs organized in Finland and by understanding Finnish tourists' perceptions. The results of this study will help the commissioner of this study to identify how, as a travel agency, it can use its resources to promote Mauritius in Finland.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The tourism sector is an important and growing industry that contributes to improving the economy of a country (Chou 2013). Mauritius, after its independence in 1968, has developed itself as a tourism destination. Tourists mainly come from Europe, although it is facing an economic crisis (Statistics Mauritius 2014). Finnish tourists tend to travel a lot, and a recent study showed that Finns take an average of 7.5 trips per year (Magrath 2014). The trends of discovering new destinations and new experiences is common among Finnish travelers, but still Mauritius is not in the most common country that Finnish people visit (Statistics Mauritius 2015). Normally, a country promotes itself as a tourism destination using different methods such as developing new marketing plans, promoting travel agencies to participate in tourism trade fairs, and others.

The tourism sector is the third pillar that contributes to the economy of Mauritius (ABZ Travel 2016). Even though Mauritius receives most of its tourists from Europe, it is still not a so popular destination among the Nordic countries. There might be several factors which contribute to the low number of Finnish tourists coming to Mauritius every year, for example the lack of direct flights, expensive travel packages and long flight time (Bholah 2016). There might be other reasons which when combined together discourage Finnish travelers from going to Mauritius for holidays.

Travel agencies play an important role in promoting a country as a holiday destination. DIK Travel & Tours, the commissioner of this study, aims to find out how it can use its existing resources to attract more Finnish tourists to Mauritius.

1.2 Aim of study

The aim of this study is to find out how Mauritius can be promoted as a holiday destination in Finland.

1.2.1 Explanation of the aims of the study

The commissioner of this study is DIK Travel & Tours, a travel agency in Mauritius. This travel agency would like to explore the possibilities of promoting Mauritius as a holiday destination in Finland. With the fierce competition in the tourism market, travel agencies are facing much pressure in maintaining competitive prices and bringing new holiday destinations to their customers. It is crucial that travel agencies diversify in different destinations by planning and creating a proper destination image of Mauritius for customers.

DIK Travel & Tours did not recognize Finland as a new territory for new tourism ventures. In fact, according to the marketing manager of DIK Travel & Tours, the Nordic countries have not still been explored as a potential tourist catchment area for Mauritius. With new technologies such as social media advertising, DIK Travel & Tours is more than determined to analyze possible new markets such as Finland.

1.2.2 Research questions

1. How can Mauritius be promoted as a holiday destination in Finland?
2. What can DIK Travel & Tours do to attract more Finnish tourists to Mauritius through its agency?

1.3 Company introduction

DIK Travel & Tours is a family-owned business situated in the capital city Port-Louis in Mauritius. DIK Travel & Tours is a travel agency established in January 1998 (Company files). DIK Travel & Tours stands for direction, information and knowledge to travel. The main branch of DIK Travel & Tours is in Port-Louis and it has a small branch in the north of Mauritius, namely Goodlands.

DIK Travel & Tours is categorized as a small company which employs eight people, six employees in Port-Louis branch and two people in Goodlands branch. The main field of operation of DIK Travel & Tours is focused on travel and tourism. DIK Travel & Tours is specialized in providing inbound and outbound services at competitive prices to its customers (DIK Travel & Tours 2002). The travel agency has many agents abroad and organizes packages for its customers in Mauritius to visit abroad and for its foreign customers to visit Mauritius.

DIK Travel & Tours uses the Amadeus system to make ticket reservation. It has also adopted the Galileo system for e-ticketing, which is a close competitor of Amadeus. DIK Travel & Tours has the International Air Transport Association (IATA) certificate of accreditation. It is a profitable travel agency with an annual turnover of MUR 15 million which is approximately EUR 360,881 (The exchange rate of 1€ = 38.664 used based on that of 01 April 2016, according to the Oanda currency convertor).

1.4 Methodology

The principle method used for this study is a qualitative method. The empirical information was collected through interviews in order to have appropriate information on the operations of travel companies and to understand the point of view of the travel companies when deciding on organizing packages. The secondary information was collected by looking for reliable online sources, published books and articles, existing studies and the commissioner's documents and files.

Interviews were conducted both in Finland and Mauritius. In May 2016, the author interviewed the travel agencies CWT Kaleva Travel, Aurinkomatka and Jet24. The interviews dealt with the promotion of Mauritius as a holiday destination in Finland. The experts who participated in the interviews were:

- Anna, leisure department staff from CWT Kaleva Travel
- Sanna, customer service department of Aurinkomatka
- Joonas, marketing department of Jet24

The interviews in Mauritius were conducted in February 2016 to understand how Mauritius is promoted in foreign countries. The author conducted interviews with:

- Menisha Bholah, the marketing manager of DIK Travel & Tours, on 24 February 2016.
- Medha Veeren, the clerk in the sales department of DIK Travel & Tours, on 24 February 2016.
- Ishika Hurrinag, the customer assistant in the marketing department at Air Mauritius Company, on 25 February 2016.

1.5 Reliability and validity

The research done for this study is a qualitative one where the author has found information for promoting Mauritius in Finland. The author had ample amount of knowledge when conducting the interviews, and the questions asked during the interviews were adequate and relevant. The interviews were conducted with experts in the travel and tourism industry, and the responses received from the interviewees are valid and reliable. The responses from the interviews accurately reflect the findings for this study.

The interviews were conducted with the employees of the travel agencies both in Finland and in Mauritius who are experts in their fields of work. The interviews conducted by the author were well analyzed for this study and presented accordingly. The interviews have been added to by implementing the SWOT analysis and the recommendations.

1.6 Outline of the report

The thesis consist of five parts, which are Mauritius as a holiday destination for Finnish tourists, tourism marketing, the tourism business environment of Mauritius and Finland, recommendations and conclusions.

Firstly, the study introduces Mauritius Island. After the description of the Mauritian tourism market, the Finnish tourism market is analyzed to understand the customer behavior attitudes of Finnish tourists.

Tourism marketing is implemented by tourism destination marketing and tourism marketing mix. The tourism marketing mix helps in identifying the pricing method used by travel companies. The ways of promoting the destination and the effect of media in tourism marketing are also analyzed.

The tourism business environment is overviewed by identifying the role of travel agencies in Mauritius, the role of travel agencies in Finland, the SWOT analysis in Mauritius and competition in the tourism market through the Porter's five forces.

Finally, recommendations which help to conclude the study by answering the research question are made.

2 MAURITIUS AS A HOLIDAY DESTINATION FOR FINNISH TOURISTS

2.1 Introduction to Mauritius

Mauritius is a volcanic island formed in the Indian Ocean. The Dutch first came to Mauritius in 1638 to colonize the island. At that time, Mauritius was totally uninhabited. The Dutch brought slaves from Africa and sugarcane to cultivate but then they left Mauritius in 1710 (Advameg 2016). After five years, the French came to Mauritius to rule the country as they were also ruling Reunion Island, which is not far from Mauritius. The French then named Mauritius Île de France and brought slaves from Africa (The Commonwealth 2016).

In 1810, the British won a fight against the French and then captured Mauritius (The Commonwealth 2016). In 1834, slavery was abolished and indentured laborers were brought to Mauritius from India to work in the plantation fields (The Commonwealth 2016). Later on, Chinese traders also joined in (The Commonwealth 2016).

Mauritius got its independence on 12 March 1968 by an Indian immigrant named Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam and adopted the British constitution for parliament (Maurinet 2016). Equal voting rights were legalized by Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, who then became the Prime Minister. After 15 years of hard work, Mauritius achieved a stable economy and became a republic on 12 March 1992 (Maurinet 2016). Mauritius is both a member of the commonwealth and the Francophone. Mauritius has also been a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) since January 1995 (WTO 2016).

Mauritius is famous for its crystal blue ocean and shining golden sandy beaches. Mauritius is surrounded by coral reefs. The famous American writer, Mark Twain quoted a century ago that “Mauritius was made first and then heaven, heaven was copied from Mauritius” (Edwards 2013). The main economy of Mauritius is dependent on agriculture, textiles, the tourism industry and financial services. (CIA 2016). Mauritius aims at exploring its fishing industry by creating a fish hub (CIA 2016).

2.2 Mauritian tourism market

The tourism market of Mauritius is vast as it plays a major role in the economy of Mauritius. According to Statistics Mauritius (2015), the highest number of tourists that travel to Mauritius are from France and secondly from Reunion Island. Moreover, with the advanced health treatment in Mauritius, the idea of improving medical tourism destinations is also being discussed for Mauritius to implement its medical hub (Roychowdhury 2015).

Mauritius has its own airlines, Air Mauritius, which has regular flying routes across the world. The main routes Air Mauritius does are Africa, Reunion Island, India,

France, United Kingdom, China, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Australia, Italy and Germany (Figure 1).

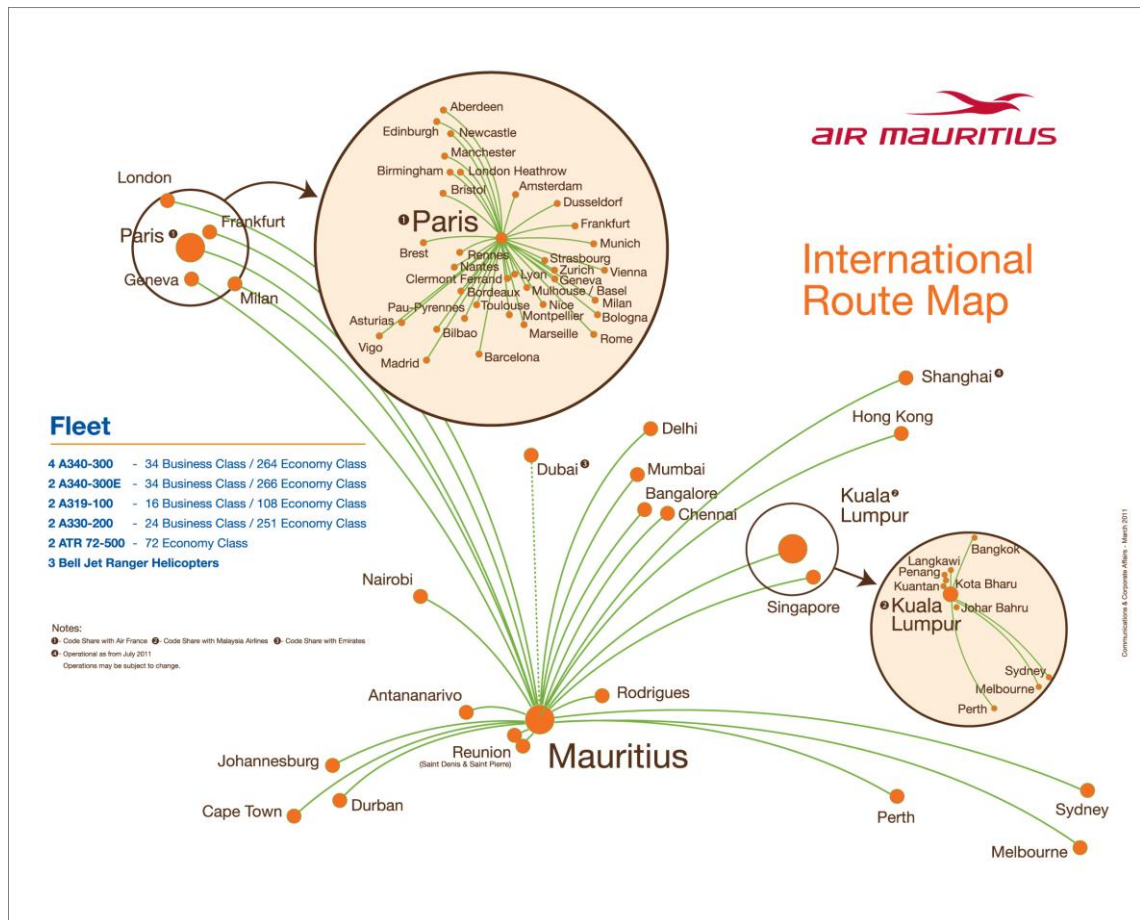


Figure 1. Air Mauritius Routes Map (2015).

The travel and tourism sector contributes largely to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Mauritius (Figure 2). Figure 2 shows the direct contribution, the indirect contribution and the induced contribution of travel and tourism.

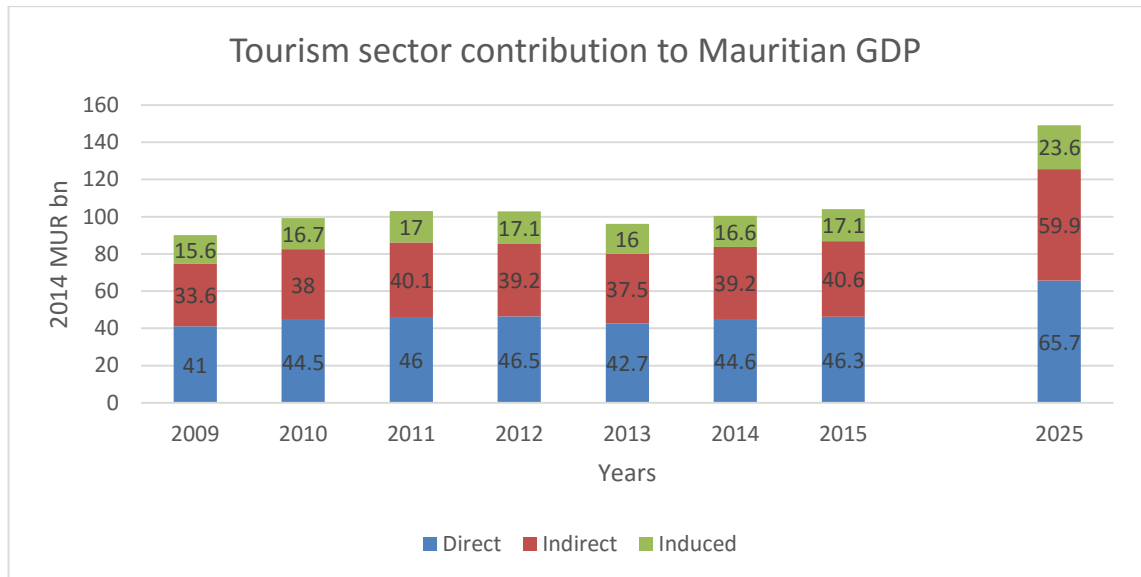


Figure 2. Tourism sector contribution to Mauritian GDP (Source: Economic Impact 2015).

The direct contribution of travel and tourism refers to the total spending within a country on tourism which includes (Economic Impact 2015):

- Commodities – accommodation, entertainment, transportation and attractions.
- Industries – accommodation services, transportation services and foods and beverages services.

The indirect contribution of travel and tourism refers to the total indirect spending on tourism and it includes (Economic Impact 2015):

- The investment spending on Travel & Tourism (T&T).
- The Government collection of T&T spending.
- The impact of purchases from suppliers.

The indirect contribution is calculated:

Domestic supply chain + capital investment + Government collective spending – imported goods from indirect spending

The induced contribution refers to the spending of the direct and indirect employees in the tourism sector. The induced contribution includes foods, clothing, housing and household goods (Economic Impact 2015).

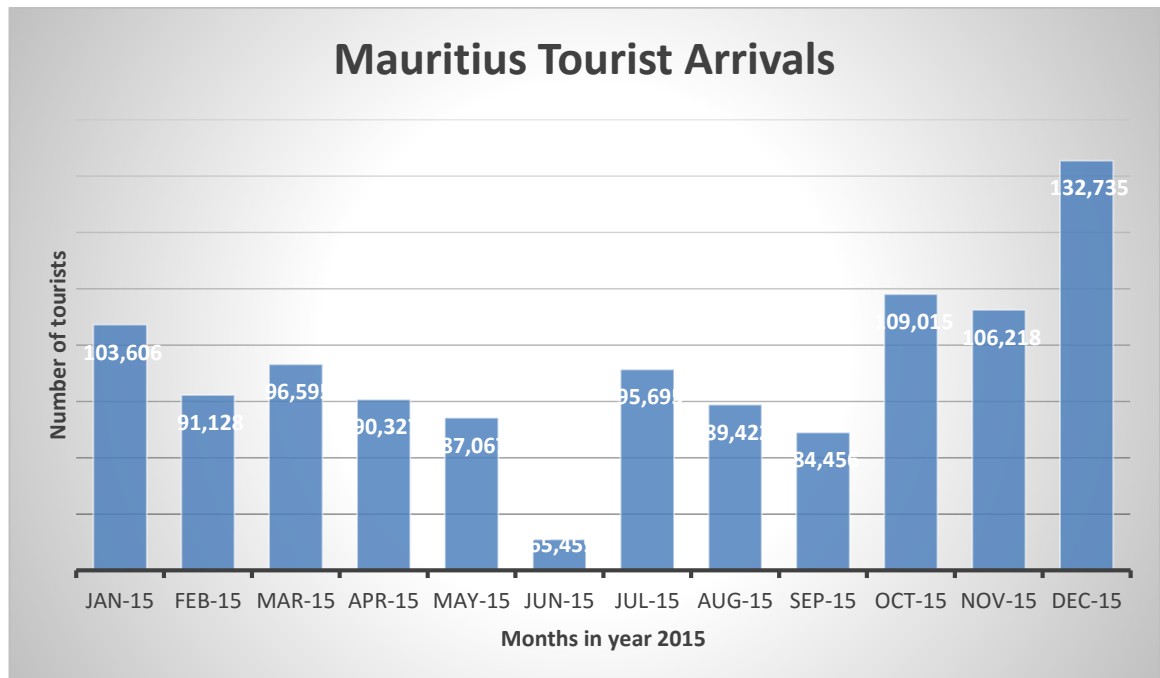


Figure 3. Arrival Statistics of Mauritius Tourists (Source: Statistics Mauritius 2015).

Tourist arrivals fluctuated from January 2015 to December 2015 (Figure 3). The high seasons are therefore from October to January, with December 2015 having the highest number of tourist arrivals in Mauritius. The low seasons are from April to September where the number of tourists decreased.

Mauritius is a multi-cultural country with Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Tamil and Chinese religions. The different cultures that exist on the Paradise Island attract many tourists who get the opportunity to explore different cultures. There is also a holy lake in Mauritius which is the main tourist attraction.

Tourists have many water sports to partake in during their vacations to Mauritius. Figure 4 shows some of the main water sports practiced by tourists, including water skiing, parasailing, sea kayaking and windsurfing (ABZ Travel 2016). Other water activities are undersea walks, swimming with dolphins and fishing (Indian Ocean 2014).



Figure 4. Water sports in Mauritius (Indian Ocean 2014).

The number of hotels and hotel rooms in Mauritius has increased tremendously during the past decades (Source: Tourism Strategy 2010). Hotels provide special packages with many facilities to help tourists to have an enjoyable vacation in Mauritius.

Mauritius has created a good destination image in countries such as France, the United Kingdom, Africa and Asia. In order to create an attractive image of Mauritius, tourist satisfaction and loyalty must be connected with destination image and perceived value (Seebaluck & Naidoo 2015).

The attributes of visitors in Mauritius is a key factor that is considered by the Tourism Authority of Mauritius. The positioning of Mauritius as a destination image in the tourism market helps in understanding the behavior of visitors and their expectations. Marketing efforts must be mostly exercised on the cultural aspects of Mauritius with the image perceptions (Woodside 2011).

The Tourist Authorities of Mauritius must always make sure that tourists are safe to enjoy their vacations in Mauritius. Tourist safety must be of high priority so that

a good destination image of Mauritius is maintained. Clean, unpolluted environment, crime and robbery prevention must be considered to improve the image of Mauritius (Woodside 2011).

2.3 Finnish tourism market

Finland has a population of around 5.5 million (The World Bank Group 2016). The official languages in Finland are Finnish and Swedish. About 83% of Finnish people belong to the Lutheran Church and 1.1% belong to Finnish Orthodox Church (This is Finland 2015).

Finland has an ageing population and therefore it is advantageous in the tourism market, as retirees have more time and money to travel. Promoting Mauritius as a holiday destination for the ageing population will attract many Finnish customers to enjoy the warm tropical island. However, the lack of knowledge of English among many elderly people in Finland creates a language barrier for them to travel to other countries.

The tourism market in Finland is a potential one as many Finnish people like to travel to warm countries especially during the winter in Finland. Motivational factors like pull and push factors play a major role in the Finnish tourism market. The external motives can influence the tourism in Finland and pull them towards the motivation of sun to make their decision to travel. The motivation factors of tourism include Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Figure 5) to define the travel career ladder (Woodside & Martin 2008). Older tourists aim at achieving self-actualization whereas younger tourists aim at achieving psychological needs when travelling (Woodside & Martin 2008).

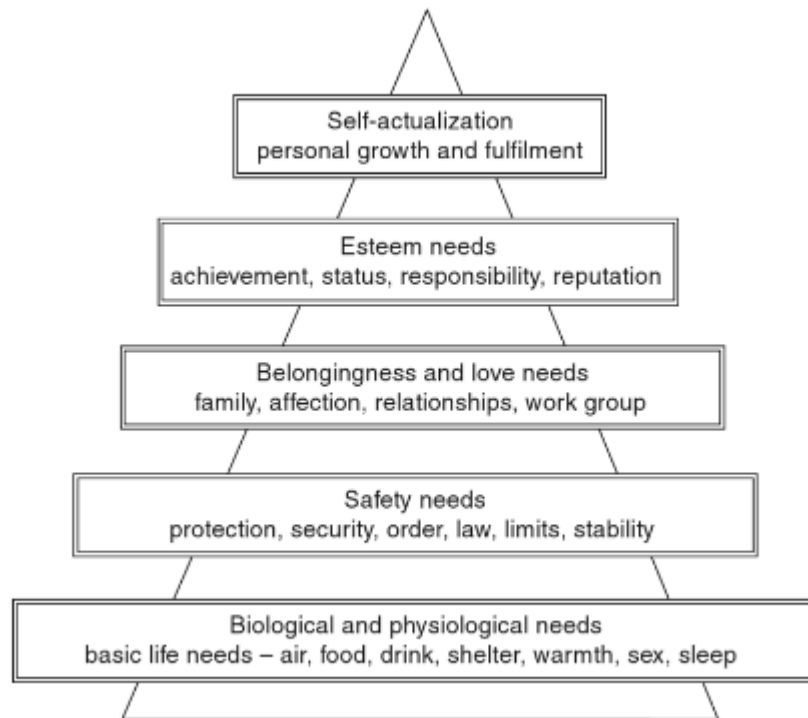


Figure 5. Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (Source: Woodside & Martin 2008).

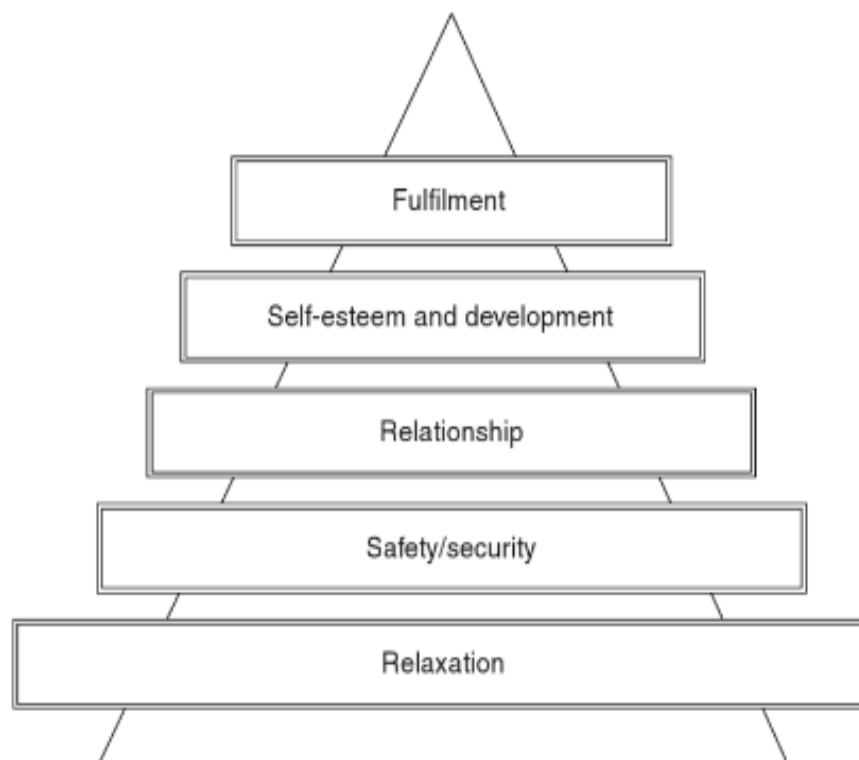


Figure 6. Travel Career Ladder (Source: Woodside & Martin 2008).

The travel career ladder proposes five layers of holiday motivations which can influence the decision of tourists in Finland (Tourism Theories 2014). According to the travel career ladder, travelers' needs and motivations are defined in a ladder with fulfilment being the most important part and relaxation being the lowest one (Figure 6). Tourist motivation to travel changes according to tourist travel experience.

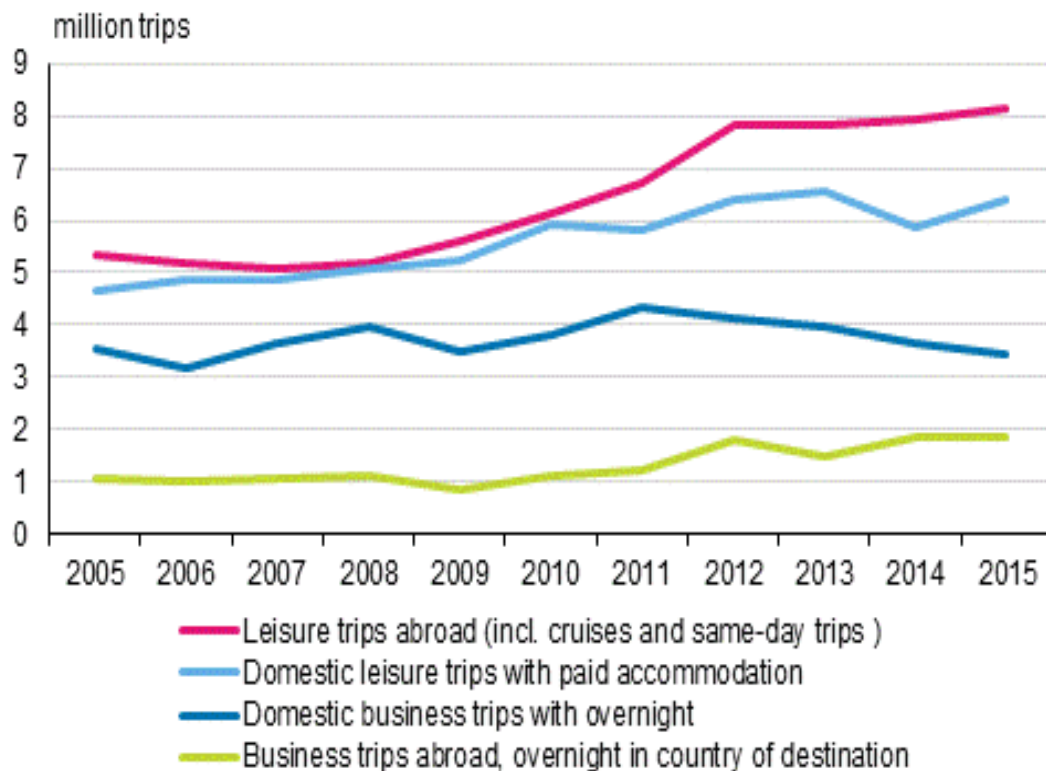
The idea of the travel career ladder is that a tourist's travel motivation changes with his travel experience (Woodside & Martin 2008). Many elderly people in Finland will incur difficulties when travelling abroad compared to families and youngsters because of the language barrier. Many elderly people have difficulties in speaking and understanding English.



Figure 7. Finland – International tourism, number of departures (Source: Index mundi 2016).

The number of departures of Finnish tourists in Finland from 1995 to 2012 has increased tremendously (Figure 7). The main reasons are that the new generations learn English language from their childhood and are more likely to travel and explore new countries.

Finnish people travel mainly for leisure compared to other purposes (Figure 8). Mustonen (2012) stated that travelling is a substitutes for spare time, and Finns travel for touristic reasons or to visit families and friends. Finnish people made 8.1 million different leisure trips abroad, and the trips were made mainly to Central Europe and Asia which are becoming more popular nowadays (Statistics Finland 2016). The types of trips done by Finns people are shown in Figure 8.



The data collection methods of the survey were changed in 2010 and 2012. Figures prior to the break in the time series are not fully comparable with newer ones.

Figure 8. Finnish travel in 2005 to 2015 (Source: Statistics Finland 2016).

According to Figure 8, Finnish people travel mostly for leisure, where there is a continuous increase from 2005 to 2015. Finns are travelling to Estonia on same-

day cruises for cheap trips, which eventually decreases the overnight trips in cruises. The increase in domestic leisure trips with paid accommodation has a direct impact on the trips to Estonia as many Finns prefer to travel around Finland. Domestic leisure trips with paid accommodation has increased slightly from 2014 to 2015. The same applies for business trips abroad, which have increased constantly from 2009 to 2012.

Domestic business trips have fallen from 2011 to 2015 because people are travelling less during the recession. Finnish people are travelling abroad for more international business opportunities to be able to survive in the poor economic situation in Finland. This has resulted in a slight increase in overnight business trips abroad. The economic downturn has therefore a direct effect on the tourism market where people are travelling less or spending less on travel.

The main countries Finnish people are travelling to for leisure are Estonia, Spain and Sweden (Figure 9). Finns travelled more to Estonia than to Spain in 2015 because of the cheap cruise trips to Estonia. Therefore, despite the economic crisis in Finland, people are still travelling for vacations. Figure 9 shows that Finnish people are travelling to nearby countries because of low costs.

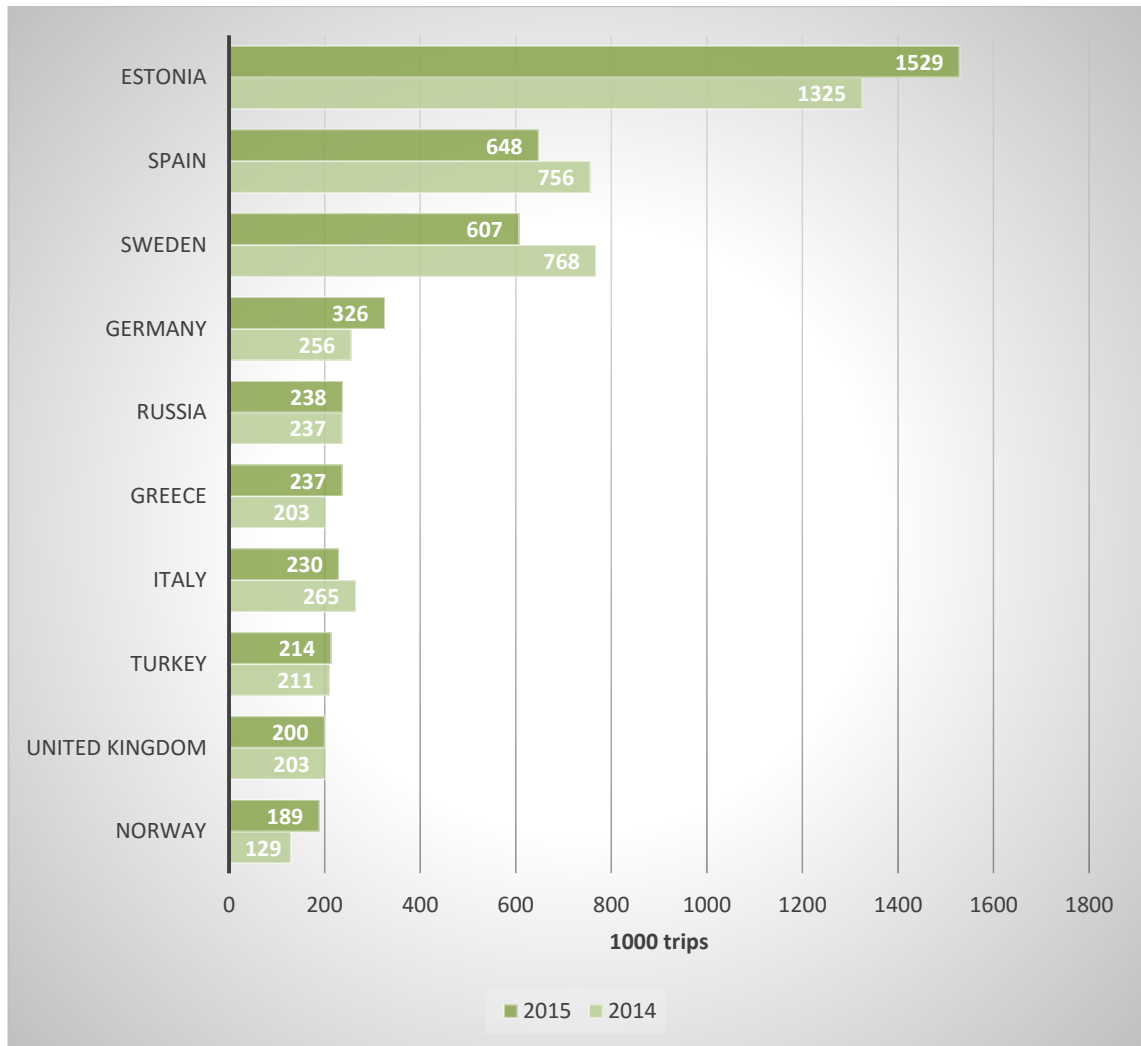


Figure 9. Finnish residents' most popular destinations for leisure trips with overnight stay in the destination country in 2015 and 2014 (Source: Statistics Finland 2016).

Finnish people like to travel to exotic places when it is winter in Finland. As Finland is an expensive country, Finnish people prefer to spend their vacation abroad in warm countries. Finland is ranked as being the third most expensive country offering hotels and restaurant services (Figure 10). Estonia is among the cheapest countries in EU and a near country to Finland, which motives many Finnish people to go for holidays.

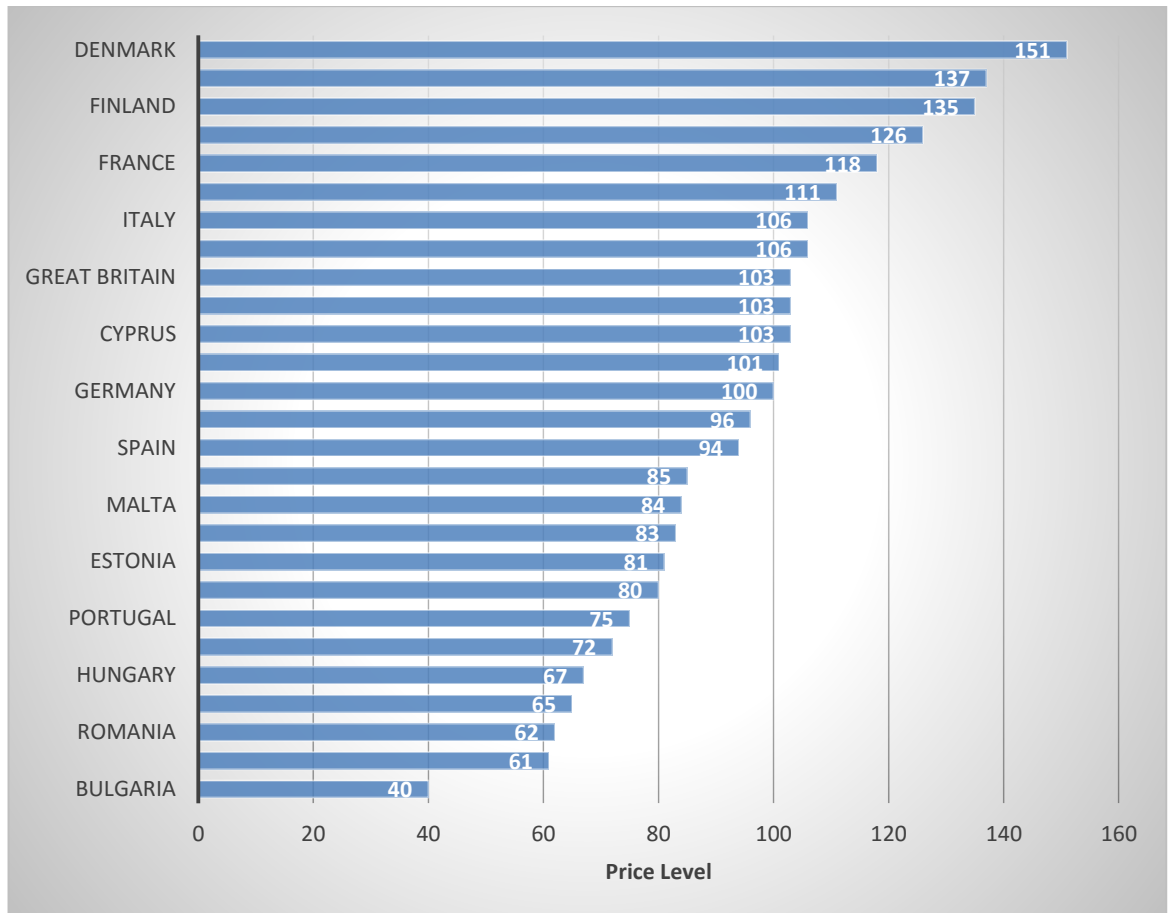


Figure 10: Hotel and restaurant services' price levels in the EU countries in 2008 (EU27=100) (Source: Finland's Tourism Strategy 2016).

3 TOURISM MARKETING

3.1 Tourism destination marketing

When a travel company is marketing a destination to a customer, the work of the travel company starts when the customer makes a reservation and continues until the trip to the destination is completed (Bennett & Strydom 2001). The customer therefore assesses the experience of using the service paid for giving his feedback. The best customer service is required to be provided in the tourism sector to create a positive atmosphere for planning a destination. This can be done by providing new and interesting packages, by providing enough information to customers about the country they are planning to visit.

Marketing a destination is the key role in the travel business and adopting the right marketing strategy helps in achieving the goals of a company (Kotler 2010). Investing in the destination marketing will help for long-term success, thus claiming a large share in the travel industry (Briggs 2001).

Travel agencies must use the essential marketing tools to attract more customers, and the main marketing tools (Lee 2012) that can be used are:

- E-marketing such as Mail Chimp and A/B testing.
- Personalized email such as using Gmail which is simple and easy to use with many facilities like blog and Google plus.
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) such as ClientBase Windows, ClientBase Online and ClientEase.
- Improved website with facilities like live chat.

3.2 Tourism marketing mix

The marketing mix consists of 4P's, which are product, price, promotion and place. In the context of tourism, the concept is the same but it is applied in the term of services offered to customers. The marketing mix for the travel agency involves pricing, promotion, distribution and customer service (Palo Alto Software 2016).

It is often found that travel companies prefer to market their services according to a business' point of view instead of the customers' point of view, which results in customers not being completely satisfied with services in the market. Travel agencies must therefore have different communication forms used for a marketing strategy to reach customers (Palo Alto Software 2016). The main communication forms are:

1. Internet site,
2. Magazine advertising,
3. Email and newspapers,
4. Keeping updated database on market segments.

The main tasks involved in marketing management are planning, implementing and controlling (Briggs 2001). Planning helps in identifying the strong points when marketing the destination and identifying the risks. Implementing the marketing tasks refers to organizing the marketing activities and acknowledging the results. Controlling the marketing destination involves proper measures taken for a successful marketing strategy (Briggs 2001).

3.2.1 The destination product

Tourism products are rather considered to be the services provided to customers. The services provided to tourists consist of different packages for travelling. Quality control is a difficult task to achieve, unlike with products.

In the destination product, customers pay a high price before using the service. Therefore, customers must be confident that the services provided by travel companies are genuine, enjoyable and reasonable. Word-of-mouth plays a major role in deciding which destination product to choose.

3.2.2 The pricing method

Travel-trade is a 'cost-effective marketing method' which concentrates on many tourists travelling with families or with tour groups (Briggs 2001). Travel-trade provides destinations at affordable prices with discounts and commissions and it often uses off-peak seasons when less tourists travel (Briggs 2001). The idea behind travel-trade is that being in groups, the decision to pay extra for additional services is flexible within the groups.

The three main pricing methods related to the tourism market are:

- The hedonic pricing method (HPM)
This type of pricing method is best used for houses with disturbances due to noises from aircraft. The sale of these houses is low with low market value (Williams 2004).

- Travel cost method (TCM)
TCM applies mostly to coastal recreational use, and its main use is for managing the strategies (Bennett 2011).
- Contingent valuation method (CVM)
CVM refers to the 'valuation of natural areas for preservation' as its aim is to charge maximum amount from tourists for visiting natural places (Dwyer 2007). CVM is calculated by adding total tourists value with non-tourists value.

3.2.3 Promoting the destination

Promoting the services provided by travel agencies is vital in the travel company's operation as it is mainly through advertisements that the target customers will be aware of the new packages in the tourism market. The commissioner must invest in advertising campaigns to increase Mauritius' destination image in the Finnish tourism market. DIK Travel & Tours can advertise the main and famous travel destinations in travel brochures and provide travel guides to customers.

3.3 The effect of media in Tourism destination

Tourists are often uncertain about their decision to travel to a chosen destination. The decision lies mainly on the destination image and tourists' expectations. Holiday destinations are promoted through television, radio, magazines and the internet. By maintaining a sustainable tourism marketing through the media, customers will be satisfied with the services provided in the market (Bennett 2012).

Social media is becoming common among tourists who search online forums and share their opinions or ask for suggestions about their holiday destinations. Facebook and Twitter act like a way of advertisement for many tourists by gaining more details about tourism destinations. These online means can attract Finnish people to visit tropical countries such as Mauritius.

4 TOURISM BUSINESS ENVIRONMENTS OF MAURITIUS AND FINLAND

This part of the thesis shows how the tourism business environment in Mauritius works in promoting Mauritius as a holiday destination. This is also a crucial part which supports the whole research. The role of the commissioner is explained in this part of study, and the business dimensions of the commissioner and of Finnish tourists are analyzed through Porter's five forces. The tourism business environment must consider the trends in tourists' attitudes:

- Environmental issues, which have a high impact on the decision of tourists.
- Customer group fragmentation to understand the ageing population countries and their importance in tourism markets.
- Increasing internet users due to globalization.

4.1 Role of travel agencies in Mauritius

Travel agencies are the main intermediaries that bring services to tourists. Their roles are "to sell holidays to the public acting as retail distributors for tour operators and carrier" (Briggs 2001, p5). The main field of operation is to earn "commission and overrides" (Briggs 2001, p5) by making reservation for air tickets and hotels bookings. Nowadays, many travel agents are also diversifying by organizing packages for visitors when doing agreement with foreign agents.

Travel agencies have some risks when promoting the destination in the market which must be considered:

- They must understand the fierce competition in the market and be prepared to compete with other travel agencies for similar destinations.
- They must design the proper marketing segment and target the customers by properly positioning the destination in the market.

- They must have the expertise to be able to compete with experienced travel agencies and offer the same value of destinations.
- They must have enough capital to invest in new destinations and planning new marketing campaigns.

Information for the role of travel agencies is collected through interviews. The interviews were designed and conducted by the author in Mauritius with the two representatives of the commissioner and the representative of Air Mauritius.

The first interview was conducted on 24 February 2016 with Menisha Bholah, who is the marketing manager of DIK Travel & Tours. The second interview took place on 24 February 2016 with Medha Veeren, who works as clerk in DIK Travel & Tours. The third interview took place on 25 February 2016 with Ishika Hurrynag, who works as customer assistant in the department of marketing at Air Mauritius. All the three interviews were conducted face-to-face.

According to Menisha Bholah (2016), the main focus for promoting Mauritius is mainly its location with its beaches. With the tourism hub expanding in Mauritius, she explained that it is advantageous for them, as more tourists have knowledge about the Paradise Island and the growing diversity of tourists in Mauritius. The tourism hub refers to the greater concentration of hotels, beaches and entertainment, such as the northern part of Mauritius, mainly Grand Baie, which is known to be the major tourism hub in Mauritius (Grihault 2016). Menisha Bholah (2016) stated that DIK Travel & Tours have agents from France, South Africa, Reunion Island, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Dubai, London and Kwanzoo in China.

Menisha Bholah (2016) agreed that the low cost of living in Mauritius is the main reason for tourists coming to visit the island. The sandy beaches and the location of Mauritius make it a preferred holiday destination for tourists. It is also surrounded by coral reefs, making the island safe to perform water activities. The low cost of accommodation and hospitality of people are other aspects.

The target market is Europe, Asia and South Africa, where there is a rise in tourist's inflow and packages are being organized. More sales are made during summer and school holidays. The peak seasons are from November to January, April

and from June to August. During peak seasons, profits are high compared to off-peak seasons.

The future plans for Finland are to cooperate with Finnish agents and offer interesting packages to them and even invite them to visit Mauritius in order to advise their Finnish customers afterwards about the island. In order to promote Mauritius, brochures about special packages will be provided to Finnish agents and a list of competitive prices will also be provided.

Competition is becoming very fierce, especially within the tourism hub, which has recently been introduced in Mauritius to encourage more tourists to visit the island. With the global economic crisis, the travel agency is competing by looking for new innovative ideas and implementing them in its packages. Together with other travel agencies, DIK Travel & Tours is facing competition with airlines such as Air France, Emirates Airlines and Air Mauritius who sell directly to customers.

Online advertising is the most effective way to attract the target customers according to Menisha Bholah (2016), and every week DIK Travel & Tours advertise in newspapers. Being the marketing manager, Menisha Bholah (2016) analyses the sales list and identifies where sales have dropped. In this way, she decides on providing discounts and some benefits. Recently, Air Mauritius was advertising about Travel Vaganza (Air Mauritius 2015), and travel agencies with high sales are provided with special benefits from Air Mauritius. DIK Travel & Tours was making sure that best prices are being offered for Travel Vaganza (Air Mauritius 2015). The travel agency has a close follow-up of the promotions available and markets its services to the target customers. The main marketing plan was not clearly discussed as it is the key success of the commissioner. The competition among travel agencies is a daily challenge to face when deciding on the pricing method.

Medha Veeren (2016) was interviewed for the sales department to understand as an employee how she promotes the travel company. She explained that she normally promotes the packages by designing them with pictures and sticking them in the office window to make them clearly visible to people passing around and by promoting them in social media. She stated that the challenges she faces

in daily operations are that customers look for group tours and want to pay low prices for quality hotels. When organizing packages for foreign visitors, she has to modify many packages according to foreign agents' expectations. Discounts are provided mainly for group tours and destinations facing low demand.

Ishika Hurrinag (2016) stated that the climatic season is taken into consideration when promoting Mauritius to foreign agents from Africa, Asia, Europe and Australia. According to Ishika Hurrinag (2016), tourists like visiting Mauritius because it is a multiracial country where many religions and cultures can be discovered, it has low exchange currency, it is beautiful with its natural parks and marine life in the blue ocean and it is a peaceful country with political and economic stability. Ishika Hurrinag (2016) described peak season during school holidays and festive seasons. When it is off-peak season, demand falls and even promotional fares are not so commonly provided by travel companies.

Air Mauritius sells tickets almost all over the world on its travel routes. Air Mauritius has no such plan to cooperate with Finnish travel agencies because of the long travel journey and expensive ticket prices. The close competitor of Air Mauritius is Emirates Airlines, which provides competitive prices and makes it often hard for Air Mauritius to compete on the same level. The exchange rate fluctuation is a daily challenge in their daily operations

Air Mauritius does marketing for the promotional fare through newspapers, online websites, and brochures and to travel agencies which promote their promotional prices like in the case of the Travel Vaganza (Air Mauritius 2015).

According to the interviews conducted in Mauritius, it is found that DIK Travel & Tours has plan to promote Mauritius in Finland and relies on having agreements with Finnish travel agencies to promote Mauritius. Air Mauritius, however, has no plan to promote Mauritius in Finland as it has no route to Finland.

4.2 Role of travel agencies in Finland

As DIK Travel & Tours is a small company, it needs high investments in marketing campaigns. The solution is to have joint cooperation with travel companies in Finland. This joint cooperation will help to carry out a proper marketing activity for destination packages, trade shows and organizing campaigns to attract more customers. Customers will therefore be easily aware of the interesting packages organized for holiday destinations.

The author contacted about ten travel agencies in Finland and six travel agencies in Sweden to understand how the travel agencies in Nordic countries operate. According to Medie Ministeriet report (2011), “Nordic countries are found to be the third largest outbound travel market in Europe”. Nordic travelers like to travel in search of leisure and culture. The first most potential tourism market for Nordic countries is Sweden with the highest population, followed by Denmark, which is second on the list, and Finland is third on the list.

The CWT Kaleva Travel is one of the largest travel agencies in Finland. It offers travel services for all kinds of customers and for any purpose of travelling, whether it is for business purpose or for leisure (CWT Kaleva Travel 2016). Established in 1935, CWT Kaleva Travel proves to be a highly experienced travel agency offering tour packages according to themes or religion (CWT Kaleva Travel 2016).

When the author contacted CWT Kaleva Travel in Joensuu in May 2016, Anna (2016) from the leisure department participated in the interview. She explained that CWT Kaleva Travel promotes its holiday packages in its website and by sending direct email to its frequent customers. CWT Kaleva Travel also advertises its holiday packages on social media like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. CWT Kaleva Travel does offer packages to Mauritius and offers tailored-made packages, which include flights, accommodation and airport transfers. The holiday package of Mauritius is also promoted in the company’s website and social media.

According to the record of CWT Kaleva Travel, mostly families like to travel to Mauritius for vacations. Anna (2016) also mentioned that CWT Kaleva Travel often organize group tours to Mauritius during Christmas time and wintertime in Finland. The substitutes of the Mauritius holiday destination are mainly other islands in the Indian Ocean such as Seychelles and Maldives. Moreover, South Africa and Asian countries such as Vietnam and Thailand are also substitutes of Mauritius. The criteria that Finnish tourists choose to travel to for holiday destinations are:

1. Special promotions on hotels and flights
2. Sunshine and exotic places to visit
3. Good foods and different cultures to explore
4. Word-of-mouth from friends and families

Sanna (2016) from the customer service department of Aurinkomatka Company, stated that Aurinkomatka often promotes its holiday packages in radio, TV and on its website. Unfortunately, she does not have any packages for Mauritius because they deal only with Finnair flights. She also mentioned that in her records, mostly couples travel to exotic countries. The commonly exotic countries that her clients travel to are the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Vietnam. Clients often travel to exotic countries for sun and good food.

The author also contacted Jet24 Travel agency and Next Travel, which are both located in Helsinki. While interviewing Jet24 Travel in May 2016, the marketing staffer Joonas (2016) stated that his company sells only air tickets and does not organize any packages. They mostly sell air tickets to families who travel for vacations to Asian countries such as Vietnam and Thailand. The families who travel to Asian countries are ethnic people who go to visit their home countries. They rarely get Finnish people who travel to Asian and African countries.

The author also contacted other travel agencies in Finland, but they refused to participate in the interviews. The interviews conducted in Finland were helpful in finding that many Finnish travel agencies do not promote Mauritius as the island is not well-known in Finland and due to high prices for the trip to Mauritius. Many

Finnish travel agencies also do not have any packages organized for Mauritius unlike CWT Kaleva Travel which has tailored-made packages.

4.3 SWOT Analysis of Mauritius

The SWOT analysis of the Mauritian tourism market presented helps to have a picture in the advantages and disadvantages of promoting Mauritius as a holiday destination in Finland. The SWOT analysis is based on the interviews and the author's work experience in tourism.

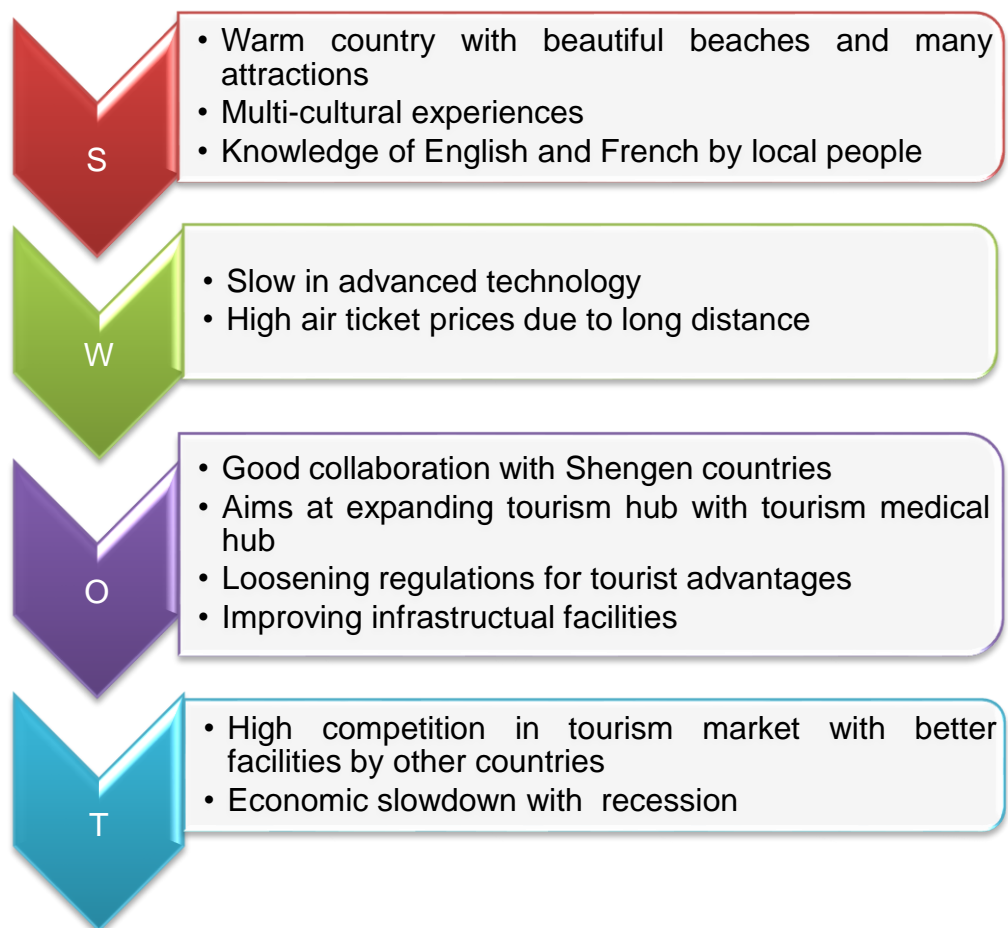


Figure 12. SWOT Analysis of Mauritian tourism market.

The strengths (S) of promoting Mauritius in Finland:

Mauritius is a warm and tropical country with beautiful beaches. Mauritius is a multicultural country where Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Chinese live in harmony and celebrate their festivals with great joy. Mauritians speak many languages, and the main languages used are French and English, which help to communicate easily with tourists.

The weaknesses (W) of promoting Mauritius in Finland:

Mauritius is a developing country which is slow in advanced technology. This leads to a lack of modern accessibility in the country. The long distance from Finland to Mauritius makes the air ticket prices to be relatively high compared to other warm countries like Spain and Thailand.

The opportunities (O) of promoting Mauritius in Finland:

Mauritius has good collaboration with Schengen countries, making it easy for inbound and outbound tourists. By expanding the tourism hub, Mauritius is also implementing the tourism medical hub, which encourages elderly tourists to visit the island and use the modern medical facilities when needed. The new roads built and the plan to introduce trains in Mauritius will help greatly in tourists travelling easily across the island.

The threats (T) of promoting Mauritius in Finland:

Competition is high in the tourism market of Finland as there are many warm countries already offering better facilities to tourists at affordable prices. The recession is having a direct impact in the tourism market where Finnish people are travelling to countries with low air ticket prices.

4.4 Competition in the Finnish market

To analyze the type and level of competition in the Finnish tourism market, the author has used Porter's five forces analytical tool. The competitive environment in the Finnish tourism market will help to understand the demand conditions of holiday destination to warm countries.

4.4.1 Threat of new market entry

The threat of new market entry is high for Finland with many warm countries like Seychelles, Maldives, Reunion Island and Cyprus. Finnish travel agencies often promote Turkey, Spain and Greece as destination holiday. Mauritius will be a new market threat in the Finnish tourism market especially for those Finnish travel agencies which have no packages organized for Mauritius.

4.4.2 Threat of Substitutes

With the high inflation and taxation rate in Finland, most Finnish tourists prefer to plan their holidays themselves and book cheap accommodation to spend the least amount of money as possible. Backpacking is also popular in Finnish culture; it costs less and is more enjoyable for people who like adventures. Finnish tourists also have more alternatives than choosing Mauritius as a holiday destination such as Cuba, Vietnam, Turkey and Spain. Many Finns travel to Estonia on cruises.

4.4.3 Bargaining Power of Suppliers

The suppliers of the tourism market are airlines, hotels, restaurants, and entertainment and historical places. In the case of travel agencies, the bargaining power of suppliers is high as travel agencies are heavily dependent on the suppliers for their companies to be profitable.

Airlines such as Finnair and Thompson Airline normally adopt forward integration where they sell tickets directly to customers at competitive prices. Airlines increasing their prices because of peak seasons or because of rises in prices in fuel directly impacts the sales of travel agencies. Finnair however does not have

direct flights to Mauritius, unlike Thompson Airline, which has direct flights to Mauritius only during Christmas times with high air ticket prices.

When concerned about accommodation like hotels and resorts, the travel agencies have no such option if hotels are selling at high prices especially during peak seasons. However, due to globalization, it is easier nowadays to look for good deals of hotels or resorts offering good quality of services. Online websites like Airbnb, trivago.com, bookings.com and hotels.com help Finnish tourists to choose accommodation at good prices. This therefore helps in choosing the right holiday destinations where the total price of air tickets with accommodations are reasonable and affordable.

4.4.4 Bargaining Power of Buyers

If customers are not satisfied with a package price, they will not hesitate to switch to other holiday destinations that will offer them better prices than their competitors. Therefore, the bargaining power of buyers is high as travel agencies cannot afford to lose any customers. Customers easily become loyal with a travel agency when their first experience of travelling was nice and memorable.

In the daily operations of travel agencies customers often suggest that they are receiving better prices from other travel companies. Based on this, travel agencies must change their packages and meet customers' expectations. Having a high number of competitors is one of the main reasons behind the high bargaining power of customers in the market. Bargaining power also arises where adequate information is gathered by buyers through online websites or through brochures of other travel companies. Finnish tourists normally look for affordable holiday trips and choose the travel agency offering the best sunny holiday offer. The bargaining power is therefore high for buyers.

4.4.5 Rivalry among existing tourism markets

With the high number of travel agencies in Finland, competition is high to promote attractive sunny countries at affordable prices. The main countries Finnish travel agencies promote are Vietnam, Thailand, Seychelles, Cuba and South Africa.

According to the interviews, Mauritius is not promoted by most of the travel agencies, and many travel agencies do not have any packages organized for Mauritius.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Mauritius would adopt a concrete marketing plan to improve its image as a holiday destinations in international markets. The marketing plan can be designed by travel companies by following the five main steps of the marketing plan (Morello 2016):

1. Review the existing marketing methods used with the new trends. This will help to identify what has worked and what needs to be improved to attract new markets.
2. Carry out new research on new markets and compare the findings with competitors to avoid any mistakes.
3. Identify the strategies to be used when marketing for the new market and distinguish clearly between B2B and B2C marketing.
4. The objectives of promoting Mauritius must be clearly described by travel companies with the long term marketing investment plan.
5. A proper schedule of marketing must be prepared, as timing is important in promoting a country in different tourism markets.

The initial priority of the marketing plan is to create an independent image of Mauritius as a tourism brand. The aim of the Mauritian tourism market must be to promote Mauritius as a trademark in order to be identifiable and known as a brand in Finland and in other Nordic countries (Hungarian Tourism 2014). An international image campaign for Mauritius must be organized to address the primary customers (Hungarian Tourism 2014).

Mauritius must aim at having a professional agreement with Finland. Understanding Finnish tourist's attitudes is important to design the proper marketing campaigns for Finland and improve product-based marketing communication in Finland.

Mauritius must also participate in trade fairs and trade shows in Finland to bring awareness to Finnish tourists regarding the special holiday offers Mauritius provides. Some upcoming trade shows in Finland are Caravan Finland in Lahti, Arena in Helsinki and Elma in Helsinki (Tentimes 2016). Matka Helsinki (2016) also provides the opportunities for international travel agents to meet business associates and make agreements with them.

DIK Travel & Tours must invest in improving its website by providing more up-to-date information about its packages and make the website more attractive as online channels are becoming very popular nowadays due to globalization. This can be done by adopting the essential marketing tools.

Mauritius must improve its quality of service and must bring more advance technologies in the tourism sector to attract more tourists into the island. DIK Travel & Tours must also be proactive in marketing its packages and in negotiating with more foreign agents for the target market. Mauritius can also compare itself with other potential islands, for example, Maldives and Seychelles to understand where it is going wrong in promoting itself as holiday destinations.

By cooperating with Finnish travel agencies such as CWT Kaleva Travel, the commissioner will gain new expertise in the travel packages and be more exposed to the Finnish culture and Finnish holiday destination preferences. This can help DIK Travel & Tours to propose better tour packages according to Finnish tourists' preferences and expectations.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The tourism sector in Mauritius is becoming more and more competitive. The tourism hub implemented in Mauritius is a good opportunity for DIK Travel & Tours to look for different and rare destinations to promote its services. Therefore, it will be advantageous for Mauritius to be promoted as a holiday destination in Finland. This will bring new market entry and new holiday packages in the Finnish market. The SWOT analysis helps to understand the Mauritian tourism market for inbound tourists.

Word-of-mouth therefore plays a major part in promoting a country, as much can be learned from families and friends about visiting a country. Travel agencies of different sizes adopt the same marketing strategies to promote Mauritius but many have not recognized promoting Mauritius in Nordic countries, a new and potential market for Mauritius. The Mauritian travel industry must therefore participate in trade fairs and shows organized by Finland to increase Finnish people's awareness of the tourists facilities Mauritius offers.

Visitors who come to Mauritius are mainly from France, the United Kingdom, Africa, India and Reunion Island. Mauritius can therefore be promoted in the Finnish tourism market by adopting the appropriate tourism marketing plans and marketing tools to create a good brand in the international tourism market.

DIK Travel & Tours can attract more Finnish tourists to Mauritius through its agency by starting professional co-operation with Finnish travel agencies and by improving its website. The representatives of DIK Travel & Tours must actively participate in workshops, trade fairs and shows in Finland to gain more business opportunities. DIK Travel & Tours must understand Finnish tourists' perceptions and therefore organize packages according to Finns' preferences and promote them in Finnish online networks and media.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions: Mauritian Travel agency and Air Mauritius

1. What is the main focus when promoting Mauritius as tourist destinations?
2. Which countries do you have agents?
3. What do you think attract customers to choose Mauritius as holiday destinations?
4. What according to you make Mauritius a preferred destination for holidays?
5. Which country to do sell tickets the most?
6. In which season do you make more sales?
7. How do you describe peak season and off-peak season? Does peak season and less peak season affect your daily operations?
8. What are your future plans in having cooperation with Finnish agents?
9. What plans you have in promoting Mauritius as a tourist destinations for Finnish people?
10. How fierce is competitions among travel agencies in Mauritius? Who are your close competitors?

Marketing Questions:

1. How do you advertise your company and your packages?
2. How do you decide on which package to provide discounts?
3. What marketing plan do you adapt?
4. What main challenges do you often face in your daily operations?

APPENDIX 2

Interview Questions: Approach to Finnish Travel Agencies

1. How do you promote holiday packages?
2. Do you do packages to Mauritius? If yes, how do you promote it?
3. Who are these people travelling to exotic countries?
4. What countries do you think are the substitutes of Mauritius holiday destinations?
5. What is the main criteria for Finnish customers to choose holiday destinations?