

Savoie Mont-Blanc

Pre-Task 3:

How is the *Savoie Mont-Blanc* region perceived abroad as a tourism destination?



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1.0. Introduction

The Savoie-Mont Blanc region can be perceived as a beautiful and eventful destination of choice for tourism. The dazzling views of the landscapes and cherished nature, along with events and attractions throughout the summer and winter months, enables popularity in the region among a range of tourist markets. In order to manage a sustainable tourism product, the aspect of attracting new segments of markets is important by improving the overall promotion of the destination. This report includes the research of the destination and the investigation into the market of students from Europe, with most being situated in the UK. The knowledge and intention of this market segment towards the Savoie-Mont Blanc region will be highlighted, in order to evaluate and improve the marketing strategies of the destination.

2.0 The Region of Savoie-Mont Blanc

2.1 Resource context

Situated among the French Alps, the region of Savoie-Mont Blanc has many tourist attractions to meet the different interests and preferences of consumers. For instance, its winter sports industry caters for all activities during the ski season. Visitors can take part in skiing, snowboarding and snowshoeing lessons and enjoy the scenic landscape of the mountains at their leisure. The destination also hosts many winter sports events throughout the year for athletes looking to compete in tournaments.

2.2 Snow Sports

Savoie Mont Blanc is perceived as the world's first choice destination for winter sports (savoie-mont-blanc.com, 2015). It is home to over 100 winter sport resorts and villages offering range off-piste difficulties enabling it to appeal to a range of market segmentations. The villages and resorts are also varied in terms of facilities from food outlets to nightlife to events, making the region appealing to all.

Taking this into consideration, Savoie Mont Blanc is appealing to university and college snow sports clubs for potential trips and holidays as the resorts suit all ability of snow sport enthusiasts as well as offering a variety of amenities when not on the slopes. Additionally, many resorts offer alternative ways to enjoy the slopes without having to ski or snowboard, such as sledding/dog-sledding, snowshoeing, ice climbing, and many more options. What makes the region so unique for snow sport activities is the option to travel between off-piste routes and slopes on the linked ski areas. This enables the snow sport enthusiasts to explore new areas away from their resort through the comfort of the sport and not having to travel by public transport. Some linked areas even offer the participant to travel between the French and Swiss borders whilst still on their ski's.

Based on results gathered by Skopedia in 2011 and 2012, Savoie and Haute Savoie ski resorts generate the most income in the whole of the Rhone Alpes region, from snow sport related spending e.g. lift passes, equipment hire, accommodation, food and beverages etc. [see appendix 1]. These results indicate that snow sports are a major contributor to the Savoie Mont Blanc Region's tourism. Another statistic released from the same study suggest that British visitors are the largest spenders in these resorts as they generate more income for the region in comparison to the spending generated from other international or French visitors [see appendix 2].

2.3 Culture

Savoie Mont Blanc is famous for its cultural heritage, in which tourists can participate in a number of festivals and events that take place throughout the year including shows, gastronomic and traditional events, concerts and plays. Visitors also have the unique opportunity to meet local craftspeople and learn the skill of crafting (savoie-mont-blanc.com, 2015). Due to Savoie Mont Blanc's great diversity of castles, museum, gardens or open farms, the region's cultural heritage is recognized to be one of the greatest treasures of tourism travel destinations in France (france.fr, 2015).

2.4 The Opinion of Savoie Mont-Blanc from Chambéry Local Residents

To gain further research from the investigation, two Erasmus students who study in Chambéry were asked to give their opinions on how the region is perceived as a tourist destination.

One student who is from Paris and goes to university in Chambéry believes that the tourism industry promotes the region of Savoie Mont-Blanc as more of a "hub", meaning that visitors usually travel through it to go to neighbouring ski resorts and never stay in the destination for holidays. This evidently results in a lack of tourism in the region as not many people go to Savoie Mont Blanc to spend their holidays. Furthermore, this student claimed that the local people mostly speak French and there is not a lot of British tourism in the region. He argued that Savoie Mont Blanc is a perfect destination for students to spend their Erasmus year if they are studying French as they can practice their fluency in everyday situations.

The region has a predominantly young population because of the many students living there, yet there is not much for them to do. For example, there are only around 20 bars for students to go to at night and not many places to go during the day.

Another student from a town near Geneva who also studies in Chambéry had a similar view of life in Chambéry. According to her, French is mainly spoken in the town which is an attractive characteristic for international students to come and practice whilst studying. In fact, the university has good exchanges with other countries including Scotland, America, Netherlands, etc. through Erasmus and ISEP who tend to stick together and not mix much with the home students. On the other hand, as it is an appealing tourist region, there seems to be a lack of English spoken. Although this is apparently much more prevalent amongst older people, many of whom don't speak any other language; it is used unwillingly in tourism transactions only. She states that the university "is an old building" and not very modern. This seems to correlate with the town which is calm and quiet, good for those who do not like big cities, but for younger students does have some element of nightlife. She sees the town as a gateway or 'hub' to the mountains with skiing where people will not stay longer than a day or two but still notes that it has potential to utilize its strengths. For example it is noted that the tourism board should promote more of the Gastronomy of the area and diversify from reliance on skiing and winter tourism by adding more events to attract people to the area. Furthermore she notes that Annecy is successful within tourism and that Chambéry should try and mirror their success by promoting the lake and castle there.

3.0 The Target Market

The chosen target market is students at the age of 17-25 situated in Europe, with the majority from UK. The market is segmented as young, generally fit and healthy – with interests that are closely linked with this description. The target market values being active and taking part in societies, as shown in the survey where 106 answered that they were a part of an active society in University. This could link with their motivation to seek out the products Savoie Mont-Blanc offers. They are time rich (long holidays as students) and generally have low income, although the income they have tends to come from part time jobs and student loans.

Further segmentation shows that the target market can be described as adventurous, risk seeking and open minded who are eager to learn and explore. They value experience and memories, and are often driven by the need to grow and broaden their horizons when it comes to purchasing tourism products. The target market tends to take every presented opportunity when it comes to tourism products, this relates with their values and drives of feeling the need to grow and explore. Their attitudes are generally based on the common “live while you’re young”-statement.

According to ABTA (Association of British Travel Agents, 2015), young people in the age of 16-24 are most likely to book their holiday through an online travel agency. It is also shown that the preferred tool to use when booking is a computer or laptop. Most often students want to explore and experience new cultures and activities without paying much, so by using internet they can seek out the best deals prior to leaving. This target group has more free time than other market groups, and therefore have more time to travel. One factor that is important to remember when targeting students is money, students seeks as much value as possible for their money. Therefore, as well as taking every opportunity they can also be careful with spending their money.

The segmentation of the chosen market can be helpful in promoting Savoie Mont-Blanc as a tourist destination for young, European students because almost 86% of the students had never been to this region, so it could be viewed as new and exciting for young people seeking different experiences. It also links with the target market’s need for being active, as Savoie Mont-Blanc offers many activities perfect for this target group such as snow sports. The region needs to make sure that students have a good reason to go there and put themselves on the map, so that even though the willingness to spend money is low, students still want to go there.

The results of our survey revealed that students in a proportion of 70% have never heard of Savoie Mont Blanc and almost 86% have never been in this region [See Appendix 3]. A majority of students from United Kingdom, aged 17-20 answered to our survey. It is important to state that almost 90% of our answers were from students who are taking an undergraduate degree. When they were asked for what reason they would choose to visit Savoie region they answered in a proportion of almost 44% that they would like to go for snow sports. Many students will choose to go to Savoie region not only for snow sports but also for culture and recreational reasons. Savoie region offers a variety of tourism products that all tourists can enjoy.

3.1 Positive and Negative Aspects of Marketing

3.1.1 Positive

In a study into social media, conducted by Social Media Examiner, 2014, findings show that 72% of young people have prominent presence on social media and use it frequently. Social Media allows an easy entry to a potential new market, it increases traffic to their website and hopefully encourages future visits to the region [See Appendix 4]

Savoie Mont Blanc have understood their target market, by having a heavy presence on all Social media platforms, including Facebook,

Twitter and Instagram. The region is described by locals as being a generally young city, as the University have a major presence and influence.

3.1.2. Negative

However, hand in hand with positive comes negative. Savoie Mont Blanc may have understood that their target market, young people, have a strong connection with social media, but they fail to understand that their target market do not all speak French. According to Ethnologue (2015), French is the 14th most spoken language in the world, falling behind Chinese, Spanish, English and Arabic to name the top four. To be able to maximise and reap the benefits from Social media, Savoie Mont Blanc must tweak the way in which they present themselves online. Most of their Instagram posts and tweets, if not all, are always in French, causing an issue, as this dramatically cuts their target audience down to French speakers. 67% of participants stated that language barriers were not an issue for them when travelling abroad. However, language does pose an issue for them, as they would not come across Savoie Mont- Blanc's social media pages, their main channel for marketing, as there is no other language alternative. Looking at specific destinations within Savoie Mont- Blanc, Chambéry and Lake Annecy have some major strategic differences. Lake Annecy, have a strong media presence on all major social media platforms, and gain traffic by posting frequently, using hashtags and specifically, using English more widely. On their specific city website, Lake Annecy link all their social media platforms, thus encouraging potential visitors to keep "in touch," with the region. Chambéry on the other hand, have very little social media presence, with no twitter account, no Instagram account and a weak Facebook account, which does not post frequently regardless of the fact there are almost 12,000 likes on the page.

4.0 Solutions/Potential Marketing Strategies

In order to develop tourism products within the Savoie-Mont Blanc region and to promote the region as a destination of choice by attracting a range of new markets, issues within the marketing strategy should to be addressed. Firstly, social media is used heavily by the global population and by using promotion through this media all markets can be reached. By increasing the usage of the English and other languages on social media they can extend into international markets almost instantly. Adding to this, the popularity of "hashtag" competitions through social media creates greater promotion for a destination. For example a competition to capture the landscape in its natural beauty at its finest would attract a potential interested market that may be already searching the region online. Research shows that the region is known greatly for its snow sports involvement, however from local perspectives the region has more than this to offer. Another improvement to marketing strategies would be to focus and promoting cultural experiences, as well as the sporting activities and events throughout the year including when winter sports are not in operation. In addition, the destination of Annecy has a thriving tourism industry. Regarded as "the city of the alps", Annecy uses its dazzling features to attract and develop tourism products, such as boat trips in lakes. By hosting many events such as animation festivals, the city attracts a wide range of markets (IPAC, 2008). Therefore, destinations such as Chambéry may benefit by working in partner with Annecy in order to be enlightened by new promotion approaches. Lastly, in the case of demand growing from these mentioned solutions, it is important for a destination to be accessible as this adds to its sustainability. For example, currently there are no flights from the UK to either Annecy or Chambéry Airports through summer months. Regarding winter travel to the region, presently there stands only weekend flights beginning December 13th and ending April 12th. To improve the accessibility to the region, airports should encourage airlines to use them as a destination through strategies such as free landing charges.

5.0 Conclusion

To conclude from the research, only 30% of students surveyed had heard about the Savoie Mont Blanc region, and most of them were from outside the UK. This shows that there is a need for improvement in the marketing strategies towards students. The research shows that students are time rich, and are willing to explore new places without the fear of language barriers. Most students like to be active when travelling and with the Savoie Mont- Blanc region having multiple opportunities to ski and snowboard, it is a surprise that it is not more popular. Their marketing could be improved by having their social media in more languages, as French is currently the only one available. Having competitions to generate buzz by using hashtags would also increase traffic to the site, hopefully resulting in more visitors to the region. An alternative to this would be holding more events, especially ones that are marketed on an international platform. With the world being so technology savvy, working with popular bloggers and YouTubers could also be one technique to generate buzz about their events. Also having more direct flights from the UK to the Savoie Mont Blanc region would help to put the destination on the map, and reinforce that they are a popular tourist destination.

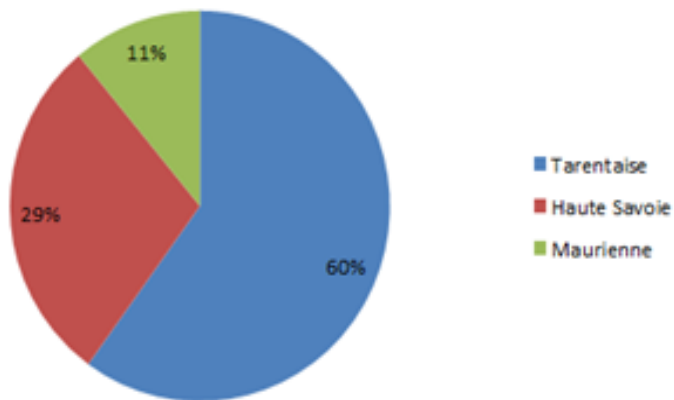
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7.0 Appendices

Appendix 1

Ski Turnover, Rhone Alpes, 2011/12

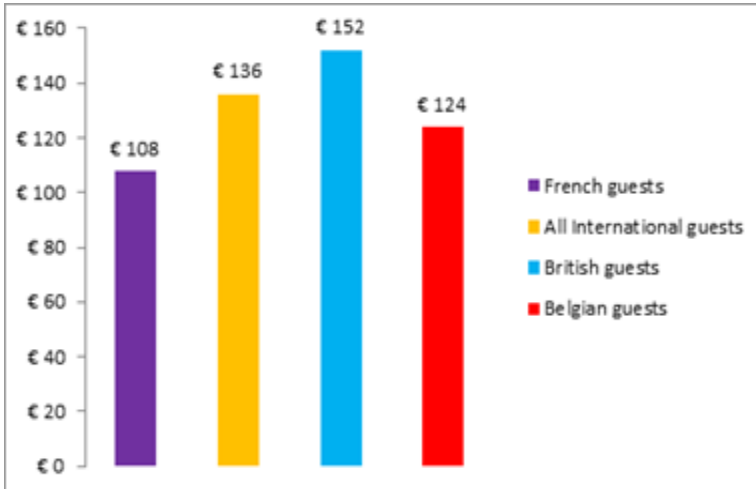


Tarentaise (Savoie Region), Haute Savoie, Maurienne (Savoie Region).

Source: Iain (2015)

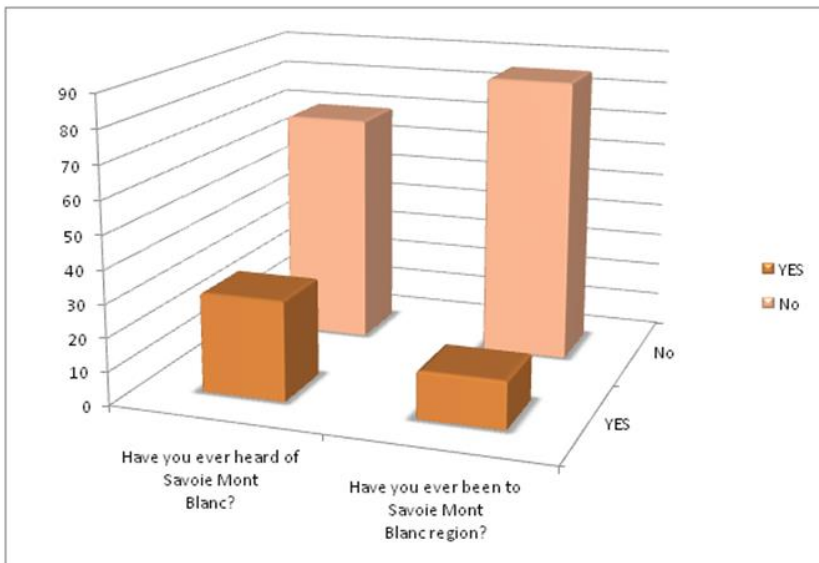
Appendix 2

Average spend per person per night, Rhone Alpes, 2011/12



Appendix 3:

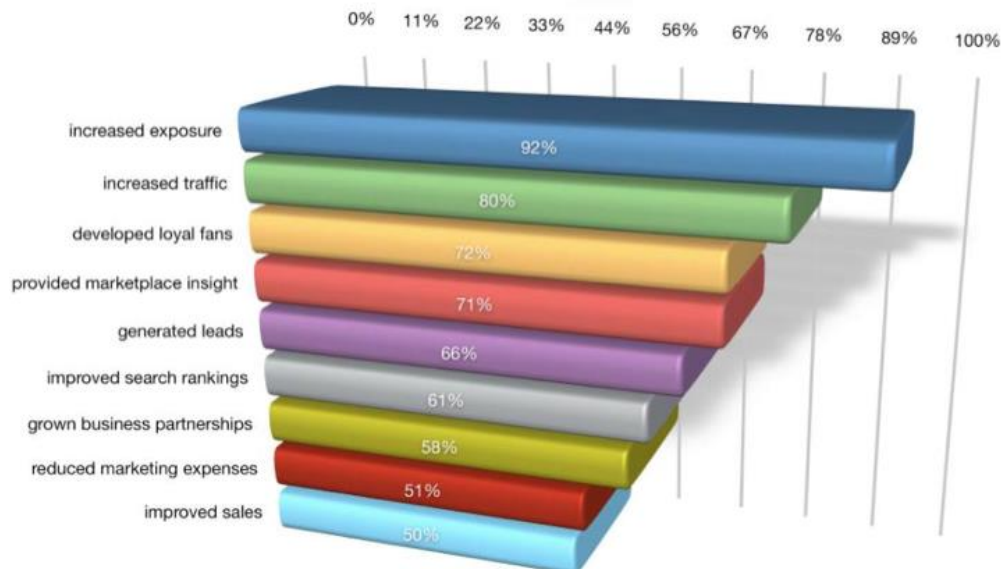
Percentage of students that have heard about Savoie Mont- Blanc



Source: Survey Monkey (2015)

Appendix 4:

Benefits of social media marketing



Source: Social Media Examiner, 2014