

How can a mountain resort differentiate itself and readapt to consumer trends



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December 2013

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Introduction

Nowadays, winter resorts have to face an important crisis. Snow coverage is not always guaranteed and due to climate change, snow scarcity is increasing, particularly in the low-altitude resorts (Steiger, 2011). As mountain resorts have been considered, since the half of the 20th century as being a perfect location for winter sports and activities (Bourdeau, 2009), the necessity of finding a solution to rejuvenate winter resorts is very important. Mountain resorts need to reposition themselves in order to reduce the effect of snow scarcity and the decline of the actual “Skiers” (the number of people skiing is constantly decreasing).

Mountain resorts also need to readapt the offer because of the changing in customer behaviour. In fact, there is a new type of tourist that has emerged: more experienced, more independent and more aware of the quality and especially harder to satisfy his needs (Peters, Steinhauser, & Jochum, 2003).

Summary of the results of the studies

To rejuvenate a winter destination and adapt to new tourists expectations, resorts need to create tailor-made activities that correspond to customers' desires to explore new types of winter activities (other than skiing). This creation of new activities will adapt to the lack of snow and the ski lifts will become of secondary importance (Bourdeau, 2009), because you do not always need ski lifts for snow activities. Tobogganing for example, does not need railway infrastructure as people walk up to the ice tunnels. Ice skating also does not need the implementation of ski lifts to allow the activity. The shift will be beneficial to mountain resorts because consumers' behaviour is changing to having a "sports image" into having a "play image" (Bourdeau, 2009).

Therefore, the attenuation of climate change is based on an offer of implementing new recreational activities in a mountain resort (Bourdeau, 2009).

At the same time that resorts should implement new winter activities, they should also considering that the population is ageing. In the close future, we might see an increase in the frequency and intensity of elderly people travelling (Peters, Steinhauser, & Jochum, 2003). This increase will also have need for changes in the mountain resorts. Resorts should consider medical tourism as a new possible product.

Wellness has been defined as "the adequate method for health prevention and preservation in an aging society" (Peters, Steinhauser, & Jochum, 2003). This definition could perfectly fit for development in mountain resorts. This means that wellness could be a good tourism product for elderly people, because it is good health prevention.

Five alpine provinces in Austria (Voralberg, Tyrol, Upper Austria, Salzburg and Carinthia) have presented their alpine wellness products. The scientific study made on the products shows several proof that attest that alpine wellness has medical benefits on elderly people: "a stay in the Alps can activate metabolism, reduce body fat, enhance the quality of the red blood cells and improve the neuropsychological values" (Peters, Steinhauser, & Jochum, 2003). This study shows that the benefits of alpine wellness are huge and could be an interesting new product to attenuate the effects of climate change on mountain resorts.

Relevance for Swiss winter resorts

The relevance of these studies for Switzerland is obvious because most of the tourism comes from the winter resorts and winter sports (incoming tourism as well as domestic tourism). Switzerland has many mountain resorts, Zermatt and Davos – Lenzerheide for example. These resorts are also experiencing the snow coverage crisis and the whole Swiss tourism industry is implicated in this decrease. The Canton of Valais is the only one since the beginning of the year that is experiencing a decrease in overnights (-1.9 %). The other Cantons are enjoying a slight growth since the beginning of the year (Canton du Valais, 2013).

As its direct competitor (Austria) is already a step ahead of Switzerland and has already introduced alpine wellness, Switzerland has to focus on rejuvenate its mountain resorts. This can be done by having alpine wellness products to attract elderly people (that will be increasing since Switzerland has an ageing population) and to create new snow products such as Tobogganing, Ice skating, snowmobile tours or even dogsled tours to reduce the effect of snow coverage due to climate change.

Sources

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