

Summary:

Norway's image among German tourists

The purpose of this report is twofold. Firstly, it focuses on a theoretical understanding of destination image, which also implies a methodological discussion. Secondly, German tourists' perceptions of Norway as a holiday destination are analysed. The main purpose of the empirical study is to investigate whether repeat visitors' images (primary images) differ from first-time visitors' images (secondary images). Data are based on a small sample of German tourists en route to Norway in the summer months of 1996 who were interviewed and requested to fill out a questionnaire.

Germany is the dominant foreign market for the Norwegian tourist industry. Therefore, a better understanding of their perceptions of Norway will provide important information for the promotion of the destination in Germany. Destination image is in many studies also seen as a very important element in the tourist's decision-making process.

Different approaches to destination image research are discussed. The term image is used to describe both the discursive (comprehension of pieces of information about the destination's individual attributes) and imagery (holistic mental picturing of a destination, including perceptions through all the five senses) modes of information processing, but rarely in the same definition. In order to capture the complex nature of destination image, this report is based on Echtner's and Ritchie's understanding of the concept. According to Echtner and Ritchie, destination image consists of two main components: those that are attribute-based (price level, climate e.g.) and those that are holistic (mental pictures, general atmosphere). Each of these components contain functional (tangible) and psychological (more abstract) characteristics. Images of destinations can also include both those based on "common" traits and those based on more distinctive and unique features.

The formation of destination image is the result of influences of various sources of information. This report argues that there are four main ways of destination image formation. Image is derived through induced (conscious promotion) and organic agents (newspapers, books, education). Further, friends and relatives who have previously visited an area are other image formation agents. Finally, destination image is formed and modified through information acquired through first hand experience with an area.

This report assumes that primary destination images differ from secondary destination images. Echtner's and Ritchie's technique for measuring destination image is based on the assumption that there is a relationship between imagery processing and discursive processing. A complete operationalisation of destination

image involves then measuring both holistic and attribute-based components. In order to examine both components, Echnter and Ritchie suggest a combination of structured and unstructured methods. Open-ended questions reveal the holistic component of a destination image. Scale items based on a set of standardised attributes are quite effective for measuring the attribute-based components of image.

This report shows that German tourists' primary images do not differ much from German tourists' secondary images. A comparison of the holistic and attribute-based components among the repeat visitors and the first-time visitors shows a similar pattern. Both categories focus on fjords, mountains, waterfalls, beautiful landscapes, hikes, friendly and nice population. The tourists imagine several possibilities for adventures and activities in nature. Further, they are also occupied with gazing at scenery and landscape. Both the repeat visitors and the first-time visitors show little interest in Norwegian culture and customs. Even though some of the repeat German visitors have been on several holiday tours to Norway, they have not learned much about the Norwegians, their cultural tradition and history.

Another common characteristic is that both tourist categories focus on tranquillity in nature. The tourists expect to experience beautiful scenery and landscape where they can enjoy solitude alone or with their family. Norwegian daily life is perceived as less hectic, the Norwegian population is smaller and there are fewer big cities compared to Germany. The tourists therefore expect to find many scenic places.

Norway is also associated with natural attractions and different activities like hiking, fishing, bicycle riding e.g. None of the tourists focus on specific attractions. The first-time tourists and the repeat tourists think nature in itself everywhere is an attraction.

The explanation why the primary and secondary image of Norway as a holiday destination among the German tourists differs so little, might be that tourists travelling to Norway are especially interested in learning and reading about the destination. Tourists travelling in Norway are mainly on individual sightseeing trips and they spend an average of 12 nights here. A holiday in Norway is also often perceived as quite expensive. This implies an extensive information search in advance. Both first-time visitors as well as repeat visitors have talked to friends/relatives who have been in Norway. They have also read travel catalogues and brochures before departure. Even though the return visitors' image is a result of personal experience with the destination, the first-time visitors' and the repeat visitors' perceptions are in many ways influenced by many of the same sources.