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Abstract

These days, the number of travel destination alternatives is overwhelming and competition among destinations is constantly increasing. Thus, an understanding of how travellers make decisions related to travel is of great importance to destination marketing organisations.

The purpose of this study was to examine Italian travellers and their intention to visit Finland and the other Northern European countries. To fulfil this purpose, the following questions needed to be answered:

- What are the general characteristics of the respondents?
- How is Finland perceived as a holiday destination in comparison with the other Northern European countries and what attributes are associated with Finland in particular?
- How do situational factors relating to travel costs influence the intention to visit Finland and the other Northern European countries?

In addition to Finland, the countries included in the study were Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Island and Ireland since they are considered as Finland's major competitors in the Italian travel market. The theoretical framework of this study was based the general model of traveller destination choice presented by Woodside and Lysonski.

In order to answer the research questions, quantitative approach was selected. The research for the thesis was carried out in co-operation with the Finnish Tourist Board and data for this study was collected in January and February 2007. The data collection was carried out electronically and a structured questionnaire was e-mailed to a sample of registered Vacanze in Finlandia website users and additionally an Internet survey was conducted with the same questionnaire in the official Visit Finland website. In total, 445 completed questionnaires were returned.

In this study, the emphasis was not placed on the actual destination choice but on the factors affecting it. The results showed that the respondents' awareness of Finland was clearly the highest compared to the other countries included in the study. Finland was also perceived as the most interesting and attractive destination for a near future holiday and the respondents' intention to visit Finland was the highest compared to the intentions to visit the other countries. As expected, the respondents preferred to travel to Northern Europe with low-cost flights. The findings confirmed the presupposition that the high airfares and expensive travel in general act as constraints in the final phase of the destination choice. These conclusions suggest that the travellers in general are likely to travel to the destination which is perceived as interesting but also reasonable in terms of the travel costs.

Key words	Tourism, Italy, Scandinavia, Finland
Further information	