

Title

Short blacks or flat whites: Australian snowsports; what do customers want? A study into the Australian snowsport guest's heterogeneity, satisfaction, and intention to revisit and recommend.

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Abstract

Snowsports resorts are an essential part of the economy of South East Australia. They make a significant contribution to the Australian tourism industry and provide benefits to individuals and businesses within the resort boundaries and also in the surrounding gateway towns and communities. As a result, many people have come to rely quite heavily on the snowsports industry for employment and local business activity yet little academic research has been undertaken into the preferences and perceptions of guests to Australian resorts. This has diminished our understanding of the Australian snowsports user.

Given the existence of this gap in the research literature, this thesis uses a mixed methods approach where data that resulted from unstructured discussion groups was translated into quantitative variables and used in a customer survey to over 3500 visitors to an Australian snowsports resort. Utilising the understanding that a destination's attributes (the push) help to facilitate consumers specific desired benefits e.g. pleasure, recreation, excitement, family time etc. (the pull), managerial actions are discussed within the context of appropriate strategies to influence the overall satisfaction, revisitation and recommendation of the guests. The analysis suggests that whilst the core attributes of snow quality, number of lifts, and queue wait time etc. are amongst the important attributes identified by users, satisfaction is influenced more by combinations of personal experience, snowsports school, ticketing and hire attributes. Snowsports guests' personal, situational, product (some of which are often referred to as End User History) and destination related characteristics are also shown to influence which attributes are more important, and the degree of satisfaction with these.

With the ever increasing array of tourism products being provided to the consumer, to be successful, managers need to have a greater understanding of the attributes that are important to guests' and how they influence their decision making. To this end, using Importance

Satisfaction Analysis as a tool for prioritising management and marketing decisions, the need to shift resort management focus from satisfaction alone, to identifying those attributes that are most highly valued by customers from the various segments is demonstrated. The findings indicated that Australian snowsport resort managers cannot treat customers the same and are best not to strive to improve mean levels of customer satisfaction without first understanding the points of difference in what is important amongst their own guests. If such differences are not considered, managers may inadvertently identify that some attributes are not relevant or miss others that are important to the customer.

As this is the first time that such an approach has been applied to visitors to an Australian snowsports resort, the comparison of results to other Australian resorts is difficult. This thesis therefore serves as a benchmark in Australian snowsports research and provides an original contribution to the understanding of snowsports in Australia.

Keywords:

attributes, Australian, benchmark, experiences, heterogeneity, ISA, loyalty, management, prioritise, recommendation, revisit, satisfaction, segments, snowsports, value.

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Finally to my fellow PhD candidates, there is light at the end of the tunnel, never give in, no matter how disillusioned at times you may become, the journey and the acquisition of knowledge is well worth the effort and time.

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Abbreviations

Table 1: Abbreviations used in Thesis

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ASAA	Australian Ski Areas Association
CEV	Customer Engagement Value
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
ERASS	Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey
EUH	Experience User History
IPA	Importance-Performance Analysis
ISA	Importance-Satisfaction Analysis
M	Mean score/value
NPWS	NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
NSAA	National Ski Areas Association (USA)
NSW	New South Wales
PCA	Principle Components Analysis
Pearson PmC	Pearson product moment correlation
Q1	ISA Quadrant 1 (Concentrate here)
Q2	ISA Quadrant 2 (Keep up the good work)
Q3	ISA Quadrant 3 (Low priority)
Q4	ISA Quadrant 4 (Possible overkill)
QLD	Queensland
RTA	Roads and Traffic Authority (NSW)
SA	South Australia

SD	Standard Deviation
SIA	Ski Industries Association (Australia)
Sig.	Significance
TAS	Tasmania
VIC	Victoria
VICE	Visitor, industry, community and environment
WOM	Word of Mouth promotion/advertising