

“Return to Emotion” in alpine tourism, from the “Four E’s” to the “Four I’s”

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Tourism in the European Alps has continuously lost shares of the world-wide market over the past years. In order to put a stop to this trend, the touristic regions will have to lend a greater feel of “experience” to their offer in the future, build up trademarks which rethink marketing structures, and co-operate increasingly with one another. A shift in trend from purely “active experience” to vacations in “mythical places”, in regions with “intact nature” is emerging.

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The European Alps have become a multifarious leisure park. The mountains, once rough and forbidding, are now full of aerial cableways and hotels which were constructed purely for the realisation of tourists' vacation dreams. There are parallels to the professional dreams of many tourism experts. They wanted to create “mountains full of life”, when in reality the hard-fought tourism market created mountains of financial ruin. While world-wide tourism has increased by over 50% since 1988, alpine tourism's share has decreased steadily. Hotel capacity in the alpine regions is at a meagre 30% in many areas. Consequently, tourism in the Alps has still far from completely realised its full potential.

Many tourism operators miss developing with the trends.

“Faced with turbulent changes in the sector, many tourism operators back off and remain with what they have always offered, without trying to go with the new flow. They ignore the three great challenges to alpine tourism, namely: the change in demand, the competition due to the professional leisure economy, and the change from an industrial to an information society!” This harsh judgement was delivered by Hanspeter Doebeli of the Dichter-Institut in Zurich (market and motive research) on the occasion of a seminar on the future of tourism in Liechtenstein.

Doebeli believes that the time allowed for vacations will change in the near future. “More and more people are under time pressure. The vacation as the ‘yearly ritual’ is increasingly losing relevance. The trend is towards short vacations. In the future, you can forget the guest family from Baden-Württemberg who stays for three weeks.” The vacationer of today is more mobile than ever before, even as the desire for the “vacation at the end of the world” is diminishing. Should the trend towards holidays in the vacationer's own region increase, the Alps will have a great opportunity, according to Doebeli.

Trends and counter-trends in the future

The development in the future is not clear. The logical trend after the boom in the 70's and 80's was the trend towards ecological awareness based on the senses and esoteric. The current trend is towards experience and hedonism, with the following components (the "four E's"):

- Extroversion: Many people coming together, importance of being involved. However: counter-development, such as pop concerts which are no longer sold out.
- Extreme: The search for a challenge which one can find and create oneself.
- Eclectic: "Anything goes", no pressure regarding clothing, little control. Counter-trends: etiquette and dance courses are again in demand, certain standards in clothing.
- Exotic: Looking for exotic ways of expression, ethnic fashion, ethnic food.

From the "Four E's" to the "Four I's"

German specialist on tourism and market researcher Romeiss-Stracke urgently recommends pursuing "the mountains as a symbol of intact nature", "the mountains as myth". It will not be possible to develop the mountains much further as sports equipment, and the trend is rather in the direction of mountains as a spiritual place, as a place of space and freedom to be utilised profitably. Thus, the trends move from today's "Four E's" to the "Four I's". In this regard, the mountains will be transformed "from sports equipment into mythical place".

The Alps "from sports equipment into mythical place"

The counter-trends with the search for stability and the senses are:

- Intimacy: Focus on a group of friends who care for one another; love as a contribution regains importance; loving treatment of nature and oneself.
- Introversion: Everything is evaluated through stronger interior searching, wellness and are trendy.
- Intensity: Experience less, but more intensively. Experiencing of the body and the soul will become more intense. One renounces continuous travelling. "Hiking", for example, will be "in" again!
- Integration: A worldly view is recommended, mustering of values.

The reversal of trend away from active experience, from the "Four E's" to the "Four I's", is foreseeable. How should the tourism operator react to these foreseeable trend reversals? On the basis of our experience in consulting, we recommend the following:

1. Use imagination:

Interpret possible future scenarios. Be prepared for developments: "It can happen in any case". Practice broad perceptions, observe other milieus. Develop distrust for political fashions, stay informed.

2. Define more clearly one's own position:

First identify one's own potential for success. What can I do, what not? Admit that one is not suitable for something. Develop visions: include projections for even 10 years in the future. Develop entrepreneurial strategies.

3. Prepare portfolio:

Formulate a strategy: Where do I invest, where not? But remain focussed on "both ... and", on now and the future. Hold your breath.

4. Engage in continuous "updating":

Keep your "antenna in working order", the radar in action, continuously analyse the guest structure as well as the competition, set benchmarks. Maintain the basic attitude of "nothing is final".

5. Nurture and build up the network:

Nurture alliances, even within other branches. Share work with other enterprises, pass on guests. Work sharing: distribute responsibilities downward as well.

Final word for tourism operators:
Develop offers for the emotions of life!
and
Convert trend credibility into trend sensibility!

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