



8th World Congress on Snow and Mountain Tourism

Mountainlikers: New trends in mountain summer tourism

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Organized by



Conclusions

Mountain tourism is one of the most important forms of leisure tourism. It is often the only alternative for growth and development in poor mountain economies. The stagnation of summer tourism in important mountain destinations is therefore a major problem which was analyzed and discussed at UNWTO's 8th World Congress on Snow and Mountain Tourism. The main conclusion of the Congress, which attracted almost 500 participants from 31 different countries, was that new trends offer many new opportunities for the growth of summer tourism in mountain regions if a framework of tourism-friendly conditions allows innovative entrepreneurs to target new markets with new products.

1. From old-fashioned to state-of-the-art summer tourism in mountain regions

There is an ongoing shift from mass tourism to multi-niche tourism in mountain summer destinations.

Summer tourism will remain as one of the most important forms of leisure tourism in developed countries but it is slowly being diversified to such an extent that fewer families with children and the elderly are spending three or more weeks of their summer holidays in the mountains. Furthermore, the number of repeaters in these

market segments is declining. Mountain summer tourism is no longer mass tourism in the traditional mountain countries. It has become sort of a multi-niche tourism that still maintains traditional leisure tourism activities such as hiking and new ones such as mountain biking.

There are well known reasons for the structural change in mountain summer tourism.

Summer tourism in mountain destinations is in strong competition with other destinations such as beach resorts which are often cheaper, more accessible and have better weather conditions. Nowadays, there are many options for spending summer holidays with the family. Mountain summer tourism has a weaker unique selling position than beach destinations. Two thirds of the French summer tourists indicated recently in a survey that they prefer to spend their holidays in coastal destinations rather than in the mountains. The strategic mountain summer tourism products such as alpinism or hiking are mature and form part of their attractiveness.

Summer tourism is becoming an option for visitors who like spending their leisure time in mountains

Mountain regions as a destination for families and older people have lost part of their charm and a new clientele needs to be addressed. The future visitor is identified as a “Mountainliker”, as the theme of the 8th World Congress on Snow and Mountain Tourism suggests, by taking Facebook as a reference with its communities of “likers”. With a new form of summer tourism is emerging with the proliferation of new leisure sports and Alpine wellness activities, there is something offered for everybody during the mountain season. The ongoing change from the old to the new model of mountain tourism is sustainable as it is based on sustainable growth in quality. The growth rate of visitors might not be as extensive but in terms of returns it is substantial and will therefore help to avoid the negative consequences of mass tourism.

2. Favorable trends for mountain summer tourism

Summers are becoming warmer and lasting longer in mountains.

Global warming is changing the mountain climate. It makes mountain summer stays more pleasant with its moderate and fresher temperature in comparison with other

destinations. Summer tourism in mountain regions is exhibiting more and more of a “beach character”. Palm trees in public places where people drink coffee will contribute to creating a new mountain atmosphere. Its fresh and open-air character can be enjoyed by visitors. Moreover, swimming in the clear waters of mountain lakes is becoming an alternative to the overcrowded beaches of coastal destinations.

There is a growing demand for nature near mountain sports and Alpine wellness areas.

The urban lifestyle creates a demand for placing nature near leisure experiences, which boosts outdoor sports and recreation. The increasing number of younger people looking for mountain adventures in a secure environment as well as older people in search of Alpine wellness is a clear consequence of this trend and becomes an important factor for stimulating the demand for summer tourism in mountains.

Summer mountain tourism is continually becoming more diverse.

Alpinism and hiking are becoming fashionable again. These activities, with protected climbing routes and high-end offers of comfortable mountain accommodations augment the demand for outdoor activities. Their recognition is increasing as observed in corporate sponsorships, products and events, such as Red Bull’s climbing events and Prada’s line of hiking shoes. In Korea, hiking is the most popular outdoor sport with 12% of its population practicing it. New adventure and niche sports such as river rafting, canoeing or paragliding are becoming popular nowadays. Mountain biking of all forms has become the second pillar of mountain tourism activities after hiking. These new leisure sports are more than just a hype triggered by the sporting goods industry. The range of people who like the “adrenaline kick” in their summer holidays is growing and turns mountain regions into a competitive summer destination.

Stays for leisure and work in pleasant mountain places is becoming more popular.

Many potential mountain tourism visitors are no longer dependent on the summer school holidays. The demographic problems in most developed countries have led to a smaller share of children and teenagers whereas the share of the older generations is constantly growing. The new working and leisure time mix in the era of “work-life-

balance” has further effects on flexibility in choosing the right time for holidays. Shorter but more frequent mountain stays in spring and fall when mountain nature shows its most beautiful colours have become a growing trend. There is also a rising number of people who profit from the quiet mountain atmosphere to work. They benefit from the improving accessibility of mountain resorts and from the well-developed standards of modern information and communication technologies.

The ongoing globalization process has led to an internationalization of mountain tourism.

An increasing number of visitors from emerging countries are visiting the peaks and mountain landscapes of developed countries. Investors from emerging countries finance the rejuvenation and the modernization of hotels, spas and other mountain tourism facilities. Their investment ensures the long-term development of summer tourism in mountain areas.

3. New solutions for promoting mountain summer tourism

A new summer tourism boom in mountain areas can neither be expected nor excluded.

The actual structures of summer tourism in mountain regions were created by pioneering independent innovators almost two centuries ago who profited from the first run to the Alps of visitors from the upper classes of that time. This “belle époque” of mountain tourism ended with the beginning of the First World War. After a long period of restructuring, an unexpected second boom of summer tourism in mountain regions began due to paid leaves and individual mobility. Families with children and older people replaced the former upper class visitors. A third summer boom in mountains is likely if innovative entrepreneurs take advantage of the new trends and if authorities are able to stimulate private sector initiatives by mountain tourism-friendly business environments.

There is a need for new mountain summer tourism strategies in mountain countries.

The long lasting stagnation of mountain summer in leading mountain tourism countries should motivate the authorities and the private sector to jointly develop new strategies for reinventing summer tourism in mountains. It is not possible to act

contrary to the big trends which influence mountain tourism there is actually a need to join forces to continue in a targeted way the ongoing process of specialization and differentiation of Alpine summer tourism. The fact that mountain tourism offers two different seasons with different strategic products is a competitive advantage. Since summer mountain tourism often starts in the spring and ends in the fall, it can be considered as a form of tourism which encompasses all the seasons.

Mountain summer tourism has to reinvent and reposition its marketing strategy

It is important to promote and market among visitors the unique attractions of mountains with their majestic peaks, their outstanding and picturesque panoramas and their wild nature. Icons such as the Dolomites have to communicate an ideal setting to convey that leisure sports activities are better practiced outside of home. The mountain environment stimulates the pleasure of sports activities. The objective should be to successfully transmit the fact that summer tourism facilities such as cable cars, panorama platforms, cliff walks and suspension bridges make mountains easy and accessible for everybody.

New mountain outdoor activities must be accompanied by modern infrastructures and attractive tourism facilities.

It is important to build, maintain and promote hiking trails in attractive mountain landscapes. It is likewise necessary to create around those trails catering and lodging facilities. A good example is the mountain lodges built, maintained and managed by Alpine Clubs which is a private association with volunteering members. The Swiss Alpine Club called its lodges and huts in the high mountains the “Highest Mountain Hotel Chain”.

New information and communication technologies can help to make the mountain experience more exciting and safer.

A “Smart Mountain Country” or an intelligent mountain region means that the new ICT technologies are being used to analyze and track visitors’ flows in order to constantly adapt the provision of services to the needs of the visitor. Augmented reality with its digital layer can enhance the mountain experiences of individuals who can simultaneously share them through innovative communication channels with their network. This can eventually trigger the desire for mountain tourism activities. Smart information systems and applications can further help visitors to geo-localize and

avoid risky situations or facilitate quick help in case of emergencies. Making mountains safer is crucial to success to facilitate access for potential visitors.

The guests who visit mountains in most of the traditional mountain countries during the summer are aging.

The aging of the repeaters is a serious problem for small enterprises which operate in the field of mountain summer tourism. The trend towards new adventure and leisure sports activities helps to rejuvenate the image of mountain resorts. These new disciplines need in general sophisticated equipment and techniques which lead to important investments in sports material and in training facilities for their practitioners. These leisure sports activities create new employment in resorts for teachers and guides and likewise increase the return of the sports goods manufacturers and its shops in the resorts.

Mountains are increasingly becoming a place for health and wellbeing.

Mountains have for a long time attracted many guests for their climate and thermal water resources. Health tourism is still an asset for mountain tourism. Alpine wellness is a holistic concept which rejuvenates traditional climate and spa tourism in the mountains. Mountain regions are often very successful in attracting visitors with their soft and recreational tourism which is mostly combined with the visit of unique cultural and natural monuments.

Mountain resorts have to offer and create a new atmosphere through a more diverse range of events and activities.

Mountain resorts often do not succeed in creating a holiday atmosphere as is the case in many beach resorts which are their competitors. It is no longer sufficient to embellish balconies with flowers. A new summer atmosphere with open air cinemas or restaurants in public places should be created. Cultural events, entertainment and nightlife can stimulate social life in mountain resorts and attract not only visitors but also owners of secondary homes who decide to stay there more frequently.

The changing mountain weather makes it necessary to offer indoor facilities.

Mountain tourism resorts have to respond to the risks of changing weather conditions. Mountain climate is characterized by sudden changes in temperature and rainfall often in the form of snow even during the summer season. It is therefore

necessary to offer visitors a number of indoor facilities which they also enjoy in their daily life environment, particularly in the field of mountain sports and culture.

The most spectacular mountain resorts are often “cities over the clouds”.

Modern mountain resorts with a wide range of modern urban amenities are successful since the contemporary visitors are urban dwellers. Most of them want to live in a city atmosphere and appreciate at the same time the beauty and the silence of nature. Mountain resorts which combine urban life with the mountain resources are particularly successful. Their size allows them to offer many natural and cultural attractions. Lifestyle, shopping and events in such places make them the prototypes of modern four season mountain resorts. The vision of the government of the Principality of Andorra which aims to attract a year-round tourism corresponds to this type of destination.

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