

Harmonization of Family Holidays with Contemporary Requirements

Elena Alexandrova*

Summary:

The intensive competition on the current tourist market and tourists' increasing demands require that the tourist base should undergo differentiation and specialization, and that young guests are offered attractive services for, which will facilitate their long-term connection. Families traveling with children have specific needs which are reflected in the way they travel and in their choice of accommodation facilities. However, their preferences vary depending on the young tourists' age. Young guests are offered a number of memorable experiences, such as original racing games with attractive prizes and attractive award ceremonies, which in turn reaffirms the exceptional position of the brand in the child's mind.

Key words: family holidays; traveling with children; kids' hotels

JEL Classification: M390

Tours with children have been continuously growing in number. Attracting loyal customers begins in infancy. In this context we can define children as future guests that will help fill the capacity of the existing hotels and guarantee the incomes of hoteliers. Furthermore, they are important with regard to ensuring the

income of the industry through their parents. Thus the family as a market segment has considerable potential, which is the cause for the current problems of those examined.

The more impressed the kids are by the holiday, the easier it is to establish and maintain their relationship with the service provider – making them loyal future tourists. Ensuring the loyalty of the guests towards the brand, or the destination, is one of the biggest challenges that the tourist industry is facing today, because new tourist destinations are being created continuously and a modern base built. Even so by winning over the children, the hotel often gains the approval of the parents as well. When young visitors are happy, the satisfaction that adults gain from the holiday increases and they are will be willing to visit the hotel again or may choose to stay in a hotel of the same brand during their next trip. Of course this requires an extensive analysis of the tourists' desires, as well as good knowledge of the diverse needs and distinct branding by the hotel.

Families' holiday motivation includes a desire to return to nature, to spend more time with the people one loves and the sharing of experiences. Of great importance is also expanding one's horizon and opportunities to visit popular attractions and events.¹ It is important to note that the bigger number of family members requires that more demands

* Associated Professor, PhD; International Business School - Botevgrad; e-mail: alexandrova_el@yahoo.com

¹ www.wordltourism.org [Accessed November, 10th, 2014]

should be met compared to tourists traveling without children. Thus businesses have to respect and take into account a number of criteria related to the characteristics and quality of family holidays, which have to be subsequently applied in practice. This implies a higher degree of specialization of service providers related primarily to the development and supply of specific offers oriented toward the selected target group.

In addition, it should be pointed out that the preferences of the traveling families vary greatly depending on the age of the children. For example, the age difference between the youngest and oldest determines the different interests and needs, which are reflected in the various types of tourist behavior.

Thus there is no common division and clearly defined age limit for this clientele given that each provider has different priorities and focuses on different services in order to differentiate their offers and win a competitive position in the expanding market for family holidays. Therefore a comprehensive analysis of the needs of the young audience is an essential prerequisite for the construction of attractive hotels. These will attract more families, children and young people, which will in turn ensure future visits.

This argument is highlighted as it is an essential factor for successful positioning in family tourism. Thus we consider that nowadays the market offers an opportunity to create a product orientated towards families and especially children, which should not be ignored if hotels want to ensure the difficult specification and differentiation they need today.

A variety of workshops, such as cooking workshops can be organized, where kids have

fun while their parents relax. Many spa hotels are also oriented towards offering holidays for the whole family. A swimming pool area will be directly connected to the children's playground, with a mini wave pool, a water run and small extra equipment suitable for children. What was unthinkable in many spa and health centers in the past has now become a fact – spas for children (i.e. children's sauna, children's pool with a variety of attractions and 24-hour baby sitting).

Family holiday specifics

In scientific literature family tourism refers to a broad range of services, which means that there is no clear differentiation yet. To a certain degree this is due to the subjective necessities of each tourist and the individual expectations attached to family holidays. In addition, age brackets, motives and destinations vary widely. What is more, the terms such as holiday, tour, relaxation or rest do not have the same meaning.² Hence the difficulties related to defining of a specific term.

According to some authors, a family holiday is defined as an outing or relaxation of the family together.³ In order to clarify its content we will start with the family term. We can agree that these are groups in which children live. Thus formulated the term is pretty close to the classification developed by the family psychologist Claus Schneewind (1993, p. 45), who accepts as a standard the principle of cohabitation.⁴ By introducing psychological aspects, the author also defines adoptive families and unmarried couples who have children as families. Therefore the contemporary family includes numerous variations.

² Lohmann, M. and Lette-Schröder, M. 2003. Neue Perspektiven für den Familienurlaub. fwv Nr. 24/15.10. pp. 95

³ Lang, H. R., Eberle, G. and Bartl, H. 1993. Tourlex – 1700 Begriffe aus der touristischen Praxis. Darmstadt, p. 51

⁴ Schneewind, K. A. 1993. Familien zwischen Rhetorik und Realität. München, p. 45

Articles

The extended formula allows for a group of persons who launch a family trip to be added to the analyzed segment. In this context, potential tourists searching for a family holiday could refer to:⁵

- couples with at least one child living together;
- children with one parent;
- grandmothers and grandfathers with grandchildren.

On the grounds of the analysis carried out we consider family holiday to denote tours undertaken in the company of children. This will make it easier to differentiate family tourism from other forms of tourism, using the travelling child as a touchstone. We know that preparing offers could encounter the difficulties of meeting the different needs and wishes of the children of different ages. Various conflicts could also arise, due specifically to the different ages of the younger guests.

Hence, to elaborate upon the relationship between the children's needs and the hotel equipment requirements we will generalize the development of psychological knowledge regarding children's wishes, which have to be considered when drafting offers for family holidays:⁶

- *babies* (from 0 to 2 years old) and little children (from 3 to 6 years old) – need to be close to their parents. It is typical for this age to have a need to move and a desire to play.
- *grown-up* children (from 7 to 12 years old) – they have various interests (games, music, drawing, reading, sports and many others). They prefer playing with children of the same age rather with their parents. They need playgrounds and being in touch

Harmonization of Family Holidays with Contemporary Requirements

with animals. They like to be separate from their parents while knowing that the adults are close by in order to feel safe.

- *teens* (from 13 to 16 years old) – relations with children of the same age is very important, and detachment from the parents.

According to the age of traveling children, tourists can be divided into:

- tourists traveling with young children (preschool age 0-5 years). It is important to note that according to psychologists for children between 3 and 7 years the most pronounced interest is joint games.⁷ tourists traveling with older children (6 to 13 years); it is assumed that children over 13 years of age should be assigned to youth tourism.⁸ When children are a little older, often the trip is planned as an experience or a form of active recreation. There is great interest to experience holidays in the countryside and cottages.⁹

It should be emphasized that in family holidays "theme shifts the destination",¹⁰ i.e. for children is not as important where you spend the holidays as how much fun you have. Hence there is the need for the specialization of hotel facilities and bringing the services in line with the expectations of a young audience. It is clear that the development of a successful offer for a family holiday requires a lot more work and feeling than the creation of packages for other target groups. Therefore the factors rendering a hotel suitable for families traveling with children can be the following:¹¹

- spacious rooms with separate seating and beds for children;
- means for play and movement (both indoor and outdoor);

⁵ Kagelmann, H. 2006. *Tourismuspsychologie und Tourismussoziologie*. München, p. 23-25

⁶ Kagelmann, H. Ref. p. 36

⁷ Kagelmann, H. Ref. p. 38-42

⁸ www.wordltourism.org [Accessed November, 10th, 2014]

⁹ Gram, M. Family Holidays. 2005. *A Qualitative Analysis of Family Holiday Experiences*. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*/5, pp. 2-22

¹⁰ Ryan, C. 1992. *The Child as a Visitor*. *World Trade and Tourism Review*, p. 135-139

¹¹ Kagelmann, H. Ref. p. 63

Articles

- child-friendly nutrition;
- offering games and activities for the whole family (e.g. family trips);
- parent relaxation offers;
- opportunities for younger guests to meet other children their age.

We can conclude that when the hotel facilities are tailored to children's needs, this increases the likelihood that they will be happy with the holiday, which in turn increases parents' satisfaction. However, the orientation towards children as a target group should not adversely affect the attention given to adults, i.e. their needs should not be played down, all the more so considering that they are the ones who pay for the stay and the services. It is also noteworthy that the smaller the child, the harder it is for the parents to achieve full satisfaction. This is largely due to the known conflict of interest between parents and children:

- parents want more peace, whereas children want more fun playing;
- children are not much concerned with sights, and accordingly prefer entertainment to sightseeing;
- parents cannot go out because children require constant monitoring;
- parents have time limits set by meal and sleeping times of children.

Thus on holidays the children generally wish to:

- have opportunities to be active;
- be engaged;
- play undisturbed;
- enjoy the company of other children;
- be in touch with animals;
- experience adventure.

It is clear that family tourism includes a wide variety of different services because of the specific characteristics of the different age brackets among children and the

needs of parents, in addition to meeting the specific expectations regarding family holidays. In this regard, it would be good for an in-depth analysis and a good understanding of the needs and desires of families to find expression in specialized accommodation and the development of adequate offers. It is therefore necessary to provide hotel services suitable for children and adults that meet, or even exceed their expectations.

2. Hotel facility specifics for family holidays

Families tend to make multiple outings as short breaks with a stay from Monday to Friday or from Friday to Monday. Services providers are ranked according to their accommodation suitable for children. A variety of entertainments for all family members have to be made available, regardless of weather conditions. Most facilities have to be located in quiet and peaceful areas in nature and have to offer opportunities for activities and total relaxation. Services are to be oriented towards the target group of families traveling with children; sports facilities should be provided and conditions created to spend leisure time pleasantly. Special children's animations are essential.

Frequently family trips are part of other types of holiday, such as cultural tourism or cottage holidays. However, they are not the subject to this analysis; we will focus mainly on characteristics of hotel facilities oriented towards families traveling with children. The reason is that hotels are among the most preferred means of accommodation.¹² There is an interest in "parahotels",¹³ mainly due to the low cost of this type of accommodation, although for families this entails considerable amounts of work in the temporary home.

¹² www.wordltourism.org [Accessed November, 10th, 2014]

¹³ www.wordltourism.org [Accessed November, 10th, 2014]

In analyzing the needs of tourists traveling with children, we assume that the conditions offered by traditional hotels are no longer sufficient to be chosen as destinations for family holidays. Nevertheless we should still pay attention to the fact that many facilities in order to meet the changing requirements of the guest and for capacity utilization try to simultaneously attract different groups of tourists, by offering a playground or open spaces, for example. But this doesn't turn them into family-oriented types of hotels or increase their attractiveness for the target group being analyzed. You might even say that by reason of the clash between the various interests of the guests the satisfaction of outings is reduced, which reflects negatively on the image of the respective hotel. Therefore, to achieve competitive advantage a clear orientation towards the needs of a child audience and interesting animation offers are required.

In this context it should be noted that while families with children as a target group are characterized by significant market potential in many countries, including Bulgaria, there are few hotels that specialize in offering family holidays. We believe that the main reasons for this are:¹⁴

- higher investment costs associated with special equipment;
- higher personnel costs associated with the need for animation and special services;
- reduced revenues for these reasons;

- the average duration of this target group's stay is higher, but average costs are not;
- due to the dependence on school holidays seasonality seems extremely high;
- frequent conflicts with other target groups;
- even within the target group there are often misunderstandings due to differences in the children's ages, which negatively affects the satisfaction of customers;
- the complex set of expectations;
- the neglect of this target group.

Essential to the attractiveness of hotel facilities for families traveling with children is location. It has to be good - on the beach, in the city center, near a golf course, the ski slopes, an attractive destination, etc. It is necessary to provide maximum comfort, to have well-preserved nature and diverse cultural attractions and entertainment options nearby, or a convenient means of transport to them. However, being a luxury hotel is not required; what is required is a certain degree of comfort. Thus being cozy, modern and unique and providing:

- a homely atmosphere from the moment of arrival;
- impressive architecture and design;
- natural materials;
- a unique style and atmosphere;
- spacious rooms suitable for families;
- equipment adapted to the children's needs.

We would like to add that in accordance with modern consumer requirements it is

¹⁴ Belz, Ch. and Th. Bieger. 2000. Dienstleistungskompetenz und innovative Geschäftsmodelle. St. Gallen. Thexis, p. 1

Articles

better to use natural cosmetics, healthy products without GMOs and to focus on the environment. In this context, it is also important that the food exceed guest expectations of a perfect holiday. Food and drink should satisfy all senses, hence be:

- delicious;
- healthy;
- various;
- fresh;
- tailored to children's tastes;
- attractive;
- feature local dishes and
- an international and regional wine list;
- be served by qualified, attentive and friendly staff who are always on call;
- come with children's plates, cups and cutlery;
- bibs;
- children's highchairs and
- microwave ovens.

Another significant feature of hotel facilities oriented towards families traveling with children, is offering relaxation, pleasure and inspiration, i.e. spa services and healthy activities such as: sports recreations, spa procedures – a wide range of therapies, a chance to relax, spacious water grounds, various saunas and highly qualified personnel.¹⁵

A hotel needs to provide entertainment for the whole family, such as a variety of sporting activities, special playgrounds, a water run, a kids' club, animation, out-door activities, a zoo ground, horseback riding and so on. These have to be situated in beautiful scenery in order to offer quality experience and a high quality family holiday. The main aim is to earn customer loyalty as

interest in services for children as a target group increases. In order to promote the satisfaction of the analyzed target audience hotels build specific infrastructure. This mainly includes:

- children's playrooms, equipped with children's furniture;
- children's meals, dishes and cutlery;
- a children's cinema, theater;
- playgrounds;
- table tennis, bowling, pool, billiards and other appropriate sports;
- the hiring out of bikes and scooters.

It can be concluded that the orientation towards children is indicative of tourism's attempt to satisfy the needs of modern society.

The top priority is to know the expectations and needs of families traveling with children and to align the offerings with them. In this regard, we will examine some of the major satisfaction determinants of a stay in a hotel facility geared towards families with children. Hotel facilities are appropriate:

- if families feel comfortable in the hotel room and there is enough space to play and enjoy oneself, whereby a pleasant atmosphere is created.
- if animation events and organized games are diverse, unique, exciting and instructive - in the various entertainment programs for children it is important that they meet and play with their peers.
- food should be tailored to the children's needs - children's menus are a must, as are paintboxes, children's highchairs, and a ban on smoking
- if parents can relax and enjoy nature – as the time spent without children is highly appreciated.

¹⁵ Belz, Ch. and Th. Bieger. Ref. p. 29

These factors are very important because families determine the degree of the satisfaction they receive from their holiday, and hence the likelihood of a revisit to the hotel or hotel chain in question. Therefore common problems leading to a negative assessment of hotel facilities include:

- boredom when the weather is bad;
- excessive prices;
- lack of children to play with;
- little fun on the spot;
- lack of comfort in the rooms;
- trouble obtaining a babysitter;
- problems with the food in the hotel.

Finally, it should be noted that accommodation facilities oriented to families traveling with children should be characterized by:

- a balance between services for parents and children;
- employees that identify with family needs;
- intimate knowledge of children's expectations and needs and a corporate philosophy built along those lines;
- the provision of adequate care and entertainment for children as most of these are free;
- easy access to the facility by road;
- proximity to shopping facilities.

Therefore, hotels need to offer attractive landscapes and interesting programs for the child target group. However, due to increasing similarity the products offered often appear interchangeable. It is therefore essential that businesses accentuate their offers to make them stand out from the usual offers and thus rank successfully. Conducting events and

organizing specific projects is important in marketing children's and youth travel, maybe even more so than expensive image advertising. The analysis of children's and young people's needs is an essential prerequisite for the creation of attractive offers. So that in future, existing and new highlights of hotels can be sold better and properly focused. Accommodation, targeted at a young audience, providing adequate infrastructure, nannies, and the opportunity to hire children's products such as toys, strollers and beds greatly facilitate young families' stays, which increases their satisfaction gained from the vacation. We can conclude that the family-oriented hotel facilities must be fully specialized in offering products and services that satisfy the needs of children as a target group, taking into account the different ages' needs, but also complying with the parent's requirements. Skillful use of marketing communications reflects very favorably on the popularity and image of the hotel chain.

Thus children are a target group of the future. They are of great importance not only now, but have a strong market potential for the coming decades, both in domestic and international tourism. It is therefore particularly important to meet as fully as possible the younger tourists' needs in order to bind guests to the service provider for the longest possible period of time. Therefore, in order to satisfy visitors, service providers should be well aware of the requirements of the target group and its various expectations well, which will in turn help to vet a hotel facility's equipment and offers. A

Articles

focus should be laid on providing care and babysitting, interesting animations and clubs, where younger guests can be pampered all day long and take part in organized activities, with sufficient space for all of these activities being provided.

References

- Krasteva, N., Mileva, S. and Alexandrova, E. 2005. Teoria na marketinga v turizma. Sofia. Avangard Prima.
- Ribov, M. 2003. Turizmat v novoto hilyadoletie. Sofia. Thrace - M
- Ribov, M. et al. 2005. Konkurentni strategii v turizma. Sofia. Thrace - M
- Ribov, M. and Tadarukov, D. et al. 2007. Osnovi na turizma. Sofia. IM Economy
- Belz, Ch. and Bieger, Th. 2000. Dienstleistungskompetenz und innovative Geschäftsmodelle. St. Gallen. Thexis
- Blichfeldt, B. S. 2007. A Nice Vacation: Variations in Experience Aspirations and Travel Careers. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 13
- Carr, N. A. 2005. Comparison of Adolescents' and Parents' Holiday Motivations. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*/6
- Decrop, A. 2006. Vacation Decision-Making. Oxfordshire. England: Cabi International
- Dehoga, E. 2011. Kinder als Gäste – kindgerechte Angebote in Hotels und Restaurants. Bonn
- Gram, M. 2005. Family Holidays. A Qualitative Analysis of Family Holiday Experiences. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 5
- Kagelmann, H. 2006. Tourismuspsychologie und Tourismussoziologie. München
- Kotler, P., Bowen; J.T. and Makens, J.C. 2010. Marketing for hospitality and tourism. 5th edition, Pearson Prentice Hall. Upper Saddle River. New Jersey
- Lang, H. R., Eberle, G. and Bartl, H. 1993. Tourlex – 1700 Begriffe aus der touristischen Praxis. Darmstadt Lohmann, M. and Lette-Schröder, M. 2003. Neue Perspektiven für den Familienurlaub. fwv Nr. 24/15.10.
- Opaschowski, H. W. 2000. Qualität im Tourismus. Erwartungen, Angebote und Realität. Hamburg
- Ritchie, J.-R. B. and Crouch, G. I. 2011. The competitive destination: A sustainability perspective. *Tourism Management*, 1
- Ryan, C. 2002. The Child as a Visitor. *World Trade and Tourism Review*
- Schneewind, K. A. 1993. Familien zwischen Rhetorik und Realität. München
- www.tourism.info [Accessed November, 10th, 2014]
- www.unwto.org [Accessed November, 15th, 2014]
- www.wordltourism.org [Accessed November, 15th, 2014]