

**An Investigation into the Role of Ski Tourists' Level of  
Awareness of Responsible Tourism Issues in Determining  
Destination Choice**

**By  
Veronica Tonge**

This paper is an abridged version of the results and conclusions of a post graduate research project conducted in association with the International Centre for Responsible Tourism

The full document is available at  
[www.icrtourism.org](http://www.icrtourism.org)

For further information please contact:

Veronica Tonge

[veronica@vritassociates.com](mailto:veronica@vritassociates.com)

+44 (0) 7967 827221

## 1 Aim of the research

The aim of the research project was to investigate the role of ski tourists' level of awareness of Responsible Tourism issues in determining destination choice. In order to fulfil the aim of this research project the following objectives were explored:

- ◆ Understand skiers' motivations in resort selection and their existing levels of awareness about Responsible Tourism issues in taking a ski holiday
- ◆ Understand skiers' levels of awareness of actions taken to mitigate Responsible Tourism issues in a leading resort and whether personal experience and information provision will influence future choice
- ◆ Understand key ski informants' perspectives on issues, levels of awareness of actions taken to mitigate Responsible Tourism issues in a leading resort, and whether there is a desire for better information provision.

Lech in the Vorarlberg in Austria was selected as a case study since it is seen as one of the best mountain resorts managing to balance their tourism business with the protection of the community and the environment. An analysis of the destination management strategies in place in Lech was conducted and is available separately at [www.icrtourism.org](http://www.icrtourism.org)

As part of the research project, an extensive literature review was conducted to review the concepts surrounding winter sports tourism but also to bring together all the current scientific research into the impacts of skiing on the environment where much confusion exists. This is also available separately at [www.icrtourism.org](http://www.icrtourism.org)

## 2 Method

The research was organised into four areas in order to derive the information to fulfil the aim of the project:

**Skier Pre-Trip Questionnaire:** A quantitative questionnaire for British skiers conducted pre-trip in the UK investigating skiers' motivations in destination choice and awareness of the impacts of skiing. The questionnaire was conducted in person in airport check-in queues on flights to Austria during the ski season.

**Skier On-Trip Questionnaire:** A second quantitative questionnaire for British skiers conducted in a resort, focussing on the motivations in destination choice and awareness of responsible destination management strategies in the resort. This was conducted in the resort of Lech and was a self completed questionnaire.

**Resort Key Ski Informant Interviews:** A set of key informant interviews conducted in Lech to understand how the resort is being managed responsibly. The information derived would provide the facts for both the Skier On-Trip Questionnaire and the UK Key Ski Informant Interviews. These were semi structured interviews carried out in person. The informants included the head of the local tourism office, the head of the ski lift company, the mayor, the developer of the Oberlech tunnel system and representatives from the Biomass plant, organic purification plant and lift manufacturing companies.

**UK Key Ski Informant Interviews:** A second set of key ski informant interviews were conducted in the UK to investigate perceptions of skiing and awareness of ski resort practices. These were semi structured interviews and were conducted over the telephone. The informants were tour operators who featured Lech, journalists and ski travel agencies. The interviews sought to discover whether the key informants believed there were any negative impacts associated with skiing and whether they were aware of the destination management strategies adopted in Lech. The remainder of the interviews focussed on the role of the informant in disseminating this information.

### 3 Results & Discussion

#### 3.1 Skier Pre Trip Questionnaire

##### 3.1.1 Sample and Demographics

213 Skier Pre-Trip Questionnaires were completed and the respondents were evenly split 49% male and 51% female. This information was analysed against all other results to determine whether opinions differed between men and women however it was found that there were **no** significant differences in their responses. The figures below outline the demographics of the sample.

Figure 1 - Age Profile of Respondents

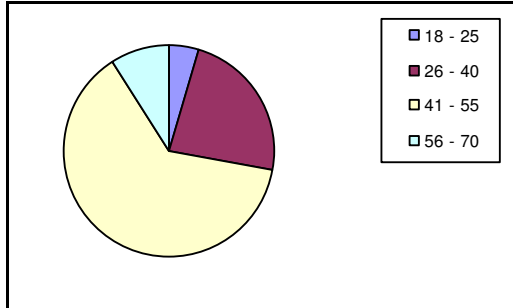
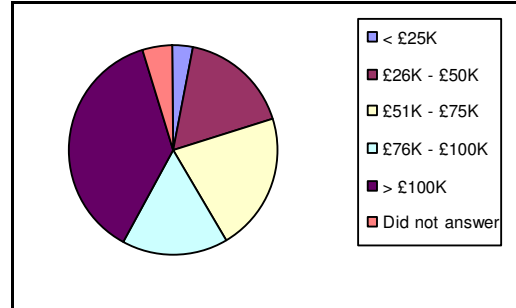


Figure 2 - Household Income Levels



The age profiles and household incomes of respondents may have been influenced by the fact that the surveys were conducted at half term and that most groups were families. However, no differences were found in the opinions of respondents from different age ranges or income brackets.

##### 3.1.2 Skier Information

Skier skill level was ascertained by asking the number of times they had been skiing to understand whether the sample was representative of the UK ski market and whether skiers of different skill level showed different priorities in destination choice. This sample was found to be representative of the mature British ski market. The only area where a notable difference was found due to skill level was in answers such as the importance of 'Off-piste skiing' and 'You like to try new resorts' and 'You have been to the resort before', clearly these were inappropriate for beginners and first timers.

Figure 3 – Skill Level of Skiers

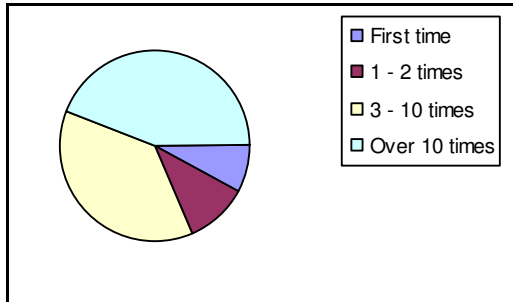
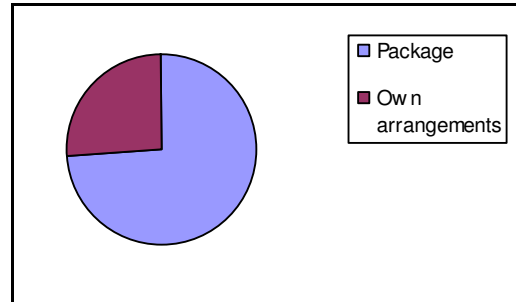


Figure 4 - Type of Holiday



The type of holiday was obtained to ensure that the sample was representative of the British ski market and check whether people who arrange their own holiday have different priorities to those who purchase a package. It is arguable that the independent sector was under represented, however, **no** differences in opinions were found between skiers on a package or independent skiers.

Out of the 213 respondents only 30% had visited the Austrian Alps in summer. This question was included to enable analysis to see whether those who had visited in summer had different opinions on Responsible Tourism features since it is arguable that the impacts of skiing are more visible in the summer than the winter. However, despite analysis, there seemed to be **no** difference in the opinions of those summer visitors. Thus, this statistic can be used merely to show the marketing opportunity for promoting Austria in summer to all those winter skiers who have not visited in summer!

### 3.1.3 Destination Choice

Destination choice was one of the key questions on the Skier Pre-Trip Questionnaire and respondents were asked to indicate the level of importance of a number of destination features in their ski resort choice. The results were assessed in three different ways; firstly, the overall percentage of importance attached to a feature (all those who classed it 'Very important', 'Important' or 'Fairly important' as opposed to those who said it was unimportant), secondly, the index or relative importance of each feature and thirdly, the percentage of people who classed a feature as 'Very important'.

Table 1 - Percentage of Respondents who attach some Level of Importance to a Feature

Destination Feature	%
Pistes for your ability	96
Beauty of scenery and resort	89
Transfer time	87
Reputation of resort	85
Price	80
Km of piste	79
Traditional village	79
Previous snow record of resort	78
Après ski	66
You like to try new resorts	66
Artificial snow coverage	60
Facilities for children	53
Recommendation of friends / family	49
You have visited the resort before	43
Activities for non skiers	42
Glacier availability	31
Environmental record of resort	29
Off-piste skiing	28
Car free village	21
Snowboard park	16

Table 2 - Relative Importance of Features

Destination Feature	Index
Pistes for your ability	3.39
Transfer time	2.70
Previous snow record of resort	2.67
Reputation of resort	2.65
Km of piste	2.64
Beauty of scenery and resort	2.57
Price	2.53
Traditional village	2.37
Facilities for children	2.14
Après ski	2.08
You like to try new resorts	2.08
Artificial snow coverage	2.07
Recommendation of friends / family	1.89
Activities for non skiers	1.74
You have visited the resort before	1.69
Glacier availability	1.56
Off-piste skiing	1.52
Environmental record of resort	1.41
Car free village	1.35
Snowboard park	1.20

Table 3 - Top three features classed as 'Very important'

Destination Feature	%
Pistes for your ability	53
Facilities for children	27
Km of piste	26

In all three measures the same feature came top – 'Pistes for your ability' – with 96% of respondents attaching importance. As mentioned earlier, the majority of the respondents were intermediate or advanced skiers, and this emphasises the notion that skiers are skilled consumers requiring continual stimulation as identified in Richards' study (1996). If the pistes are inappropriate for the skiers, they will become bored since, as skilled consumers, they require new challenges. To further this point, in the index table the features that came third and fifth related to ski specific features; 'Previous snow record of resort' and 'Kilometres of piste', the latter of which was also the third highest feature classed as 'Very important'.

Another item which was listed third in overall importance (87%) and second in relative importance was 'Transfer time' - purely related to the convenience of travel to the destination. This is an interesting item since it is arguable that this is a priority based on past experience, (formerly tour operators largely used the main 'hub' airports such as Munich to reach Austria and this could result in coach journeys of 4 hours), rather than a current concern since smaller regional airports are now used. Additionally, since many of the respondents were families, this feature is of increased importance since families with children want to keep the journey as short as possible. Another family related item was 'Facilities for children' and this was the second highest feature rated 'Very important' with 27%. This item had polarised results with it being rated 'Very important' or 'Not important'/'Not applicable'. Again, the combination of Austria being a 'family' destination and it being half term is likely to have raised the importance of this factor.

'Reputation of resort' came third in both overall importance (85%) and the index of relative importance. This has important implications for the marketing of resorts since skiers seem to be very aware of what they read and hear about resorts. For those resorts that have a clear heritage/history or existing awareness due to a race for example, such as St Moritz or Kitzbühel, it is very important that the product matches the reputation. For other resorts, it is clear that if they can build a reputation, attract the skiing journalists and present a specific unique proposition, there is gain to be made since it is very important in skiers' decision making.

'Price' was only listed seventh in relative importance and no differences were found in opinions towards this across all the income bands. Thus, 'Price' comes below the ski related features, reputation and the beauty of the resort. This, again, supports the notion of skilled consumption and the fact that skiers wish to improve their skills and will ski annually with less consideration for price than other tourist segments.

Turning now to the features focussed towards Responsible Tourism, 'Beauty of scenery and resort' was the second highest feature in overall importance with 89% attaching importance to this factor and sixth highest in relative importance with an index of 2.57. The results show clearly that skiers, whilst they require the features to ensure that the skiing is stimulating, also wish to stay in and enjoy beautiful surroundings.

79% attached importance to a 'Traditional village', and this was rated eighth in relative importance with an index of 2.37 and this was often accompanied by respondents saying "I like to stay in a proper village". 'Environmental record of resort' and 'Car free village' were two of the three lowest features in relative importance. The former attracted the highest number of responses saying 'Information not available to aid choice', therefore skiers could not utilise this in their decision making since they did not have access to the information. Indeed, as noted earlier, no tour operators currently feature this information and the Ski Club of Great Britain website is the only one that provides any real information along these lines. This was also accompanied by comments such as "Hadn't really thought about it" which was similar to the type of response received by Hudson & Richie in a separate study. It seems that people had not really considered either of these features and did not link them with 'Beauty of scenery of resort'. These opinions were supported by the tour operator and travel agent key informants, all of whom said that they had never received any questions from skiers about Responsible Tourism regarding skiing or about the environmental record of ski resorts.

### **3.1.4 Impacts of Skiing**

Respondents were asked whether they believed there were any negative impacts associated with ski holidays...

**63% of respondents believed there were no negative impacts  
(some mentioning that they thought there were only positive impacts)**

**17% of respondents believe the only negative impact is the flight**

**81% of respondents believe there are no negative impacts whilst in resort**

It is arguable that the focus given to the flight was as a result of the recent media attention to flying and carbon emissions.

#### **3.1.4.1 The Views of UK Key Ski Informants**

The UK key informants were also asked about the negative impacts of skiing to understand whether they had a greater understanding of the issues. NB: Key informant reference numbers are in parentheses and can be referred to in the full document.

- ◆ Tour operator (4) believed that, aside from the media attention given to flights at the moment, she felt there were no negative issues with ski holidays and that the positive impacts economically were very important.
- ◆ Tour operator (1) believed there were possibly negative impacts regarding piste development but did not pinpoint anything specific but stated that many countries, particularly Austria, worked hard to prevent any damage.

- ◆ Journalist (13) had skied for 20 years but the environmental impacts of skiing had never crossed his mind until recently. Aside from the flight he sees no negative impacts and believes skiers are more aware of the environment as they ski so close to it.
- ◆ Ski agency (8) had worked a ski season in the past and also did not believe there were any negative impacts associated with skiing.
- ◆ Tour operator (7), who is originally from Switzerland, believed that all tourism has a positive and negative effect but that there were no negative impacts particular to skiing. His main concern was overdevelopment since he had seen resorts deteriorate due to lack of planning control and emphasised how resorts need to retain control from the bankers and real estate agents.
- ◆ Tour operator (3), who lived in Switzerland, noted that pistes were visible in summer, looking different to the surrounding vegetation, but was keen to point out the economic benefits that he had witnessed in Serbia from the development of skiing.
- ◆ Tour operator (6) seemed the most aware of what many of the negative impacts could be and listed; increased development higher and higher up the mountain in more fragile environments, the deforestation to create pistes, the infrastructure required on the mountain, the damage caused when building the lifts and pollutants entering the watercourses.
- ◆ Journalist and avid skier (12), was keen to state that, even though there were certain impacts stated in the media, it was “not a black and white issue” and that differing policies in different countries led to the overall confusion as to whether something was or was not a negative impact. This is possibly the most accurate in relation to some of the research studies detailed in the Literature Review where findings were very inconclusive.
- ◆ Journalist (12) commented on the former differing approaches to snowmaking between Europe and North America. In North America, they have always made as much snow as possible early in the season to guarantee their season, whereas historically in Europe, they made it to fill in the gaps when the season was poor. The former uses both water and energy, the latter can allow damage to the landscape through poor snow cover. Europe is now following North America and he believed this was a good thing, though wondered if there was negative impact on water drainage patterns and the impact of increased and different type of water on the mountainside.

Thus the responses of the survey respondents are largely in line with the responses of the key informants, either believing there were none or few negative impacts, and a general confusion as to whether impacts were indeed positive or negative.

### 3.1.5 Future Decision Making

Nonetheless, despite the large number who believed there were no negative impacts,...

**63% of respondents said that their destination choice would be influenced if they had more information on “what the destination is doing to protect the village, benefit the local residents and protect the environment”**

#### 3.1.5.1 The Views of UK Key Ski Informants

The skier opinions contradict some of the tour operator key informants who believed skiers were not interested in information regarding responsible destination management.

- ◆ Tour operator (4) did not believe skiers were interested in this type of information
- ◆ Tour operator (7) said that if he put the information on his website he doubted whether skiers would look at it
- ◆ Ski agency (8) thought that people may be interested but it would always come second to the ski facts about a destination in determining their choice
- ◆ Tour operator (1) thought more customers would be interested in this information in future
- ◆ Tour operator (6) believed that if the information was available it could influence choice
- ◆ Tour operator (3) believed that customers would be interested and would consider rating resorts accordingly
- ◆ Journalist (12) initially believed there was no market value in providing this information, believing that skiers may have a passing interest but it would not affect their choice in any way since he believes that people are essentially selfish in their priorities for selecting their holiday. However, when it was proposed that resorts that manage the destination

responsibly can actually result in a better holiday for the customer, he then adjusted his viewpoint and said in that case there may be interest.

### 3.1.5.2 Where would skiers expect to find such information?

Out of those skiers who said they would be influenced, they identified their reference sources as:

<b>The Internet</b>	<b>63% would refer to the internet</b> <b>47% would rely solely on the internet</b>
<b>The Resort Website</b>	<b>51% would refer to the resort website</b> <b>28% would rely solely on the resort website</b>
<b>The Tour operator</b>	<b>43% would refer to the tour operator brochure</b> <b>21% would refer to tour operator website</b> <b>33% would rely solely on the tour operator</b>

The Ski Club of Great Britain website was mentioned only seven times as a reference source, despite their website being arguably the key resource for snow reports. This perhaps suggests that their site is not considered in the decision making process but only later on to keep an eye on the weather and snow conditions.

Travel Agents were mentioned only seven times, this refers back to the notion of the skilled consumer whereby, as skilled consumers, skiers know far more about the ski product than the average travel agent and therefore do not seek advice from them unless they are specialists.

## 3.2 Skier On Trip Questionnaire

### 3.2.1 Sample and Demographics

87 Skier On-Trip Questionnaires were completed in Lech and the respondents were split 60% male and 40% female. However, since these questionnaires were self completed it is unclear whether responses were individual or joint answers for those sharing the room therefore this may represent a greater number of respondents. As with the Skier Pre Trip Questionnaire, it was found that there were **no** significant differences between the opinions of men and women. The figures below outline the demographics of the sample.

Figure 5 - Age Profile of Respondents

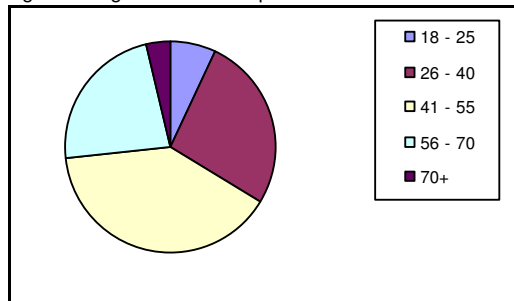
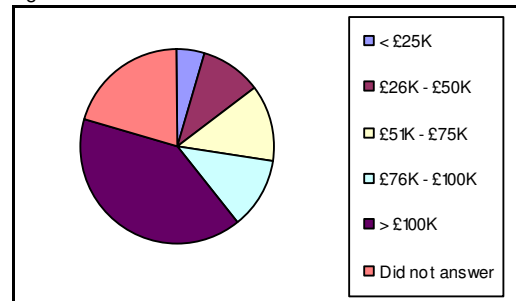


Figure 6 - Household Income Levels



The more even distribution of age profiles of respondents may have been influenced by the fact that the surveys were conducted after half term. Nonetheless, **no** differences were found between the opinions of respondents of different age ranges.

A higher proportion of respondents fell into the highest income bracket than in the Skier Pre-Trip Questionnaire and this suggests that Lech may attract a slightly more affluent clientele than Austria on average, though not all accommodation types were covered. Again, however, these income bands played **no** significant role in influencing the answers given elsewhere on the questionnaire.

### 3.2.2 Destination Choice

The Skier On-Trip Questionnaire contained the identical question about Destination Choice as the Skier Pre-Trip Questionnaire to determine whether any differences in priorities for skiers who have selected a destination that has many responsible resort management strategies in place.

Table 4 - Percentage of Respondents who attach some Level of Importance to a Feature

Destination Feature	%
Reputation of resort	100
Beauty of scenery and resort	97
Km of piste	97
Pistes for your ability	95
Traditional village	94
Transfer time	93
Previous snow record of resort	93
Price	83
Artificial snow coverage	83
Après ski	76
Recommendation of friends / family	69
You like to try new resorts	62
Environmental record of resort	60
You have visited the resort before	58
Off-piste skiing	51
Activities for non skiers	46
Car free village	30
Facilities for children	25
Glacier availability	22
Snowboard park	15

Table 5 - Relative Importance of Features

Destination Feature	Index
Pistes for your ability	3.55
Beauty of scenery and resort	3.34
Previous snow record of resort	3.31
Reputation of resort	3.29
Km of piste	3.11
Traditional village	3.00
Transfer time	2.64
Artificial snow coverage	2.52
Price	2.49
Après ski	2.49
Recommendation of friends/family	2.37
You have visited the resort before	2.10
You like to try new resorts	2.00
Off-piste skiing	1.95
Environmental record of resort	1.83
Activities for non skiers	1.70
Facilities for children	1.36
Car free village	1.32
Glacier availability	1.21
Snowboard park	1.14

Table 6 - Top three features classed as 'Very important'

Destination Feature	%
Pistes for your ability	69
Previous snow record of resort	55
Beauty of scenery and resort	54

Regarding destination choice, the feature which came out top in the overall importance table was 'Reputation of Resort' which was rated with some level of importance by 100% of skiers in Lech (15% more than skiers to Austria). It was rated fourth in the relative importance table. Thus, it seems that Lech has cultivated a strong reputation as already mentioned, as a quality destination and as a skier's paradise and this reputation has reached its' clients such that it is a key factor in decision making for skiers. Indeed, 20% more skiers in Lech said that 'Recommendation of friends/family' had importance in their decision making and 19% more people listed it as 'Very important' showing that the reputation is one that is not only derived from the media but also via friends/family. As noted earlier, skilled consumers can rely less on intermediaries such as travel agents and rely on other skilled consumers for information.

Out of the additional features that respondents offered, four of them relate to quality; that of the destination as whole, the accommodation, food and service and the mountain restaurants. This supports the reputation that was listed so highly. Lech has worked hard to maintain quality accommodation and build a reputation for its cuisine. 'Size and scale of resort' was also put forward, which is encouraging as this is something that Lech has sought to manage so carefully.

As with the Skier Pre-Trip Questionnaire, 'Pistes for your ability' came out top in both the relative importance index and as the item most people rated as 'Very important'. The 'Previous snow record of resort' and 'Kilometres of piste' were the other ski related factors that scored highly - in second and third position in overall importance and in third and fifth position in relative importance - and 'Previous snow record of resort' was the feature with the second highest number of people rating it as 'Very important' – 29% more than skiers to Austria in general. Lech alone offers 110km of piste, but together with the rest of the Arlberg ski region offers over 250km of piste and itinerary runs and off-piste skiing – plenty for the most advanced of skiers. Thus for skilled consumers it offers plenty of challenge and new stimulation. Lech has a very good snow record, better than many other

Austrian resorts, due to its altitude and its situation, and it is predictable that this is a key influencer in the decision making of its guests. 'Off-piste skiing' and 'Artificial snow coverage' had a significantly greater level of importance attached to them by skiers in Lech than skiers to Austria in general, with 24% more people attaching importance to 'Artificial snow coverage' and 23% attaching importance to 'Off-piste skiing'. These also contribute to the reputation of the resort as a 'skier's paradise' and Lech has been pioneering in Europe in its use of artificial snow and its use of ski routes to give excitement to advanced skiers. Lech is well suited to offer challenges for the skilled skiers and it is arguable that had the Skier On-Trip Questionnaire assessed skier's ability it is likely, given the responses, that there would have been a higher skill level than in Austria in general.

Once again 'Price' was listed in the middle (ninth) in relative importance similar to the Skier Pre-Trip Questionnaire and thus suggesting it is of similar importance as skiers elsewhere, despite the increased affluence of the clientele.

Turning now to the features focussed towards Responsible Tourism, 'Beauty of scenery and resort' was the second highest feature in overall importance with 97% rating it as having importance. It was second highest in relative importance and the feature with the third highest number of 'Very important' ratings with 54% rating it as such. It attracted 36% more ratings of 'Very important' with skiers in Lech than skiers to Austria. 94% of respondents reported that 'Traditional village' had a level of importance - 15% more overall importance than as rated by skiers to Austria in general - with 21% more people rated it as 'Very important' in Lech. It was also listed sixth highest in relative importance.

This shows very strongly that for skiers in Lech, the beauty of the scenery and resort and, by implication, the traditional architecture is very important in their choosing it for their ski holiday – as much as the ski related features. Lech has managed both these aspects carefully; in the village ensuring that any new buildings are in keeping and reducing congestion and pollution and on the mountain in winter, minimising the impact of lift and snow making infrastructure and protecting the forests. Additionally, of course, it is a real year-round community, thus tourists experience a traditional village. The 'Environmental record of resort' was still rated low down the list although it did feature higher than in the Skier Pre-Trip Questionnaire with 31% more people rating it as having a level of importance. 'Car free village' was rated in third lowest in importance, which was expected since Lech is not car free (!) and, also, this may not be such a high requirement in a village that has controlled the traffic so well. However, it should be noted that Oberlech is car-free in winter and had respondents been sought from that hamlet, the results to this question would undoubtedly have been different.

### 3.2.3 Responsible Tourism Feature Awareness

The next part of the questionnaire introduced respondents to the concepts of Responsible Tourism through a number of features/destination management strategies employed in Lech. Respondents were asked which they were aware of before they arrived and whether they had become aware of them since they had been there.

Lech does attract a high repeat clientele; within the survey sample, 54% had visited previously in winter, 10% had visited in summer and 7% had visited in both seasons. Indeed 18% more people in Lech said the fact that they had visited before was 'Very important' in their decision making. However, whether or not someone had visited before did **not** influence the results in the importance of destination features. However, this was expected to have played a role in the awareness of the resort actions in Lech where it was hoped that the percentage minimum awareness of each item would equal the percentage of people who had visited before in winter (54%); however this was **not** the case indicating that Lech has not promoted such features to guests. One explanation is that the question asked whether, based on the fact that they had visited the resort before, the visit was in summer or winter. It may be the case that someone who answered 'yes' had visited before but had been staying in a nearby resort such as St Anton and had only done a day trip to Lech, however, it is likely that the information is not promoted.

#### Pre-Trip Awareness of Factors

Thus the highest pre holiday awareness was for 'Traditional village architecture' (76%) and 'Permanent year round community' (59%). Out of the twelve Responsible Tourism actions, it is arguable that these two are the only ones likely to be mentioned in the tour operator brochure or websites, thus it is interesting that when they are listed, awareness is raised. Additionally though,

Austria as a whole is well known for the fact that most of its villages have traditional Alpine architecture. The next highest level of pre holiday awareness was for the 'Free public bus service' with 55%. It is notable that this just about matches the proportion of people who had visited before, suggesting that awareness of this was perhaps due to skiers having used it previously. Awareness of all the other resort actions pre holiday was below 40% down to as low as 5% for awareness of the fact that 'Every hotel, mountain hut and restaurant is linked to an organic purification plant'.

#### **On-Trip Awareness of Factors**

The highest on trip awareness was 'Free public bus service' (90%), just ahead of 'Traditional village architecture' (89%) and 'Permanent year round local community' (71%) thus building on the already higher pre-trip awareness for all these factors. The lowest on trip awareness of the remaining factors was at 31% for 'ISO14001 Accreditation for the environmental management of ski facilities'. The greatest increase in awareness was for the 'Free public bus service' (34%) followed by 'Mineral water quality water from the tap' (33%) and 'Compulsory separation of waste' (33%). It is arguable that all guests would have used the bus and guests may have learned from their hotel about the quality of the water and requirements for recycling.

The relatively low awareness level of skiers, despite having spent one or more holidays in Lech is, to a certain extent, unsurprising. The author, obviously already aware of all the actions, sought to see whether she would have become aware of these issues whilst in resort and estimated that 6 out of the 12 items would be almost impossible to identify from being in the resort alone. A leaflet was sent with the author's reservation promoting Lech as the winner of the "Most Beautiful Village in Europe" award and that detailed many of the destination management strategies, and if respondents had also received this leaflet their awareness would have been raised. Otherwise, the respondents may have learned about these actions via information in their hotels or from their tour operator representative. There was no information on the piste map (which in any case was only in German), on signage in the resort or in the resort brochure. It was well hidden on the resort website, again under the competition heading.

#### **3.2.3.1 The Views of UK Key Ski Informants**

The tour operator key informants – all of whom featured Lech – had very low levels of awareness, excepting of course the traditional village architecture and the local ownership of businesses.

- ◆ Tour operator (4) was aware of the free public bus and that there was an overall restriction on numbers, however she was unaware of the other items
- ◆ Tour operator (3) was also aware that Lech restricted skier numbers, but was unaware of any of the other items. She noted that resorts in Austria worked very hard to regenerate the vegetation, and commented how on her recent visit to Lech all the wildflowers were already coming through as soon as the snow melted
- ◆ Tour operator (1) seconded this saying that she was aware of Austrian resorts managing the development of new pistes and attempts to reduce the number of cars, but was unaware of the specific actions in Lech
- ◆ Tour operator (7) was aware there was an active programme in Lech though could not name any specific actions, but stated that generally all the Germanic countries were way ahead of the UK on such matters
- ◆ Tour operator (6) was also unaware of any of the actions in Lech and was fascinated to learn about them
- ◆ Ski agency (8) was aware of the Biomass heating plant and the recycling and also mentioned the focus Austria has on Responsible Tourism and skier management
- ◆ Journalist (13) was unaware of the resort actions in Lech, though pointed out that Switzerland and Austria seem to be leading Europe in Responsible Tourism and their use of renewable energy, recycling, discouragement of the use of cars and promotion of train travel
- ◆ Journalist (12) had actually been invited to Lech to see the research work they had conducted to create seeds that match the native biodiversity and their piste creation management using the 'soil push' method, and was aware of the research that had been conducted into snowmaking in Lech, but was unaware of the other resort actions

### 3.2.4 Future Decision Making

The questionnaire introduced respondents to some of the concepts behind Responsible Tourism, and following that...

**66% said they would seek this information in future**  
**59% stated that it would influence their future decision making**

Where would skiers expect to find such information?

**72% would look for information on the Internet.**  
**12% would rely on the tour operator brochure**

Unfortunately, due to the questionnaire being self-completed, it is unclear which websites would be sought, however based on the answers given in the Skier Pre-Trip Questionnaire, this would probably comprise general internet searches, resort websites, tour operator websites, intermediary websites and Austrian Tourist Board website.

#### 3.2.4.1 The Views of UK Key Ski Informants

The responses from the key informants varied when asked about how they would source such information and about their role in the provision of this information:

- ◆ Tour operator (4) would seek this information from the resort tourist board; however, she did not feel she had a role in disseminating such information. She believed that it was up to individuals to research if they were interested. She would not rank resorts or highlight actions or give opinion since she wanted to be impartial.
- ◆ Tour operator (1) said it would be interesting to get this information and she would also hope to gain such information not only from the local tourist office but also from the ski lift companies and ski schools with whom they already have a relationship. She would want to see a greater demand for this type of information before going out to research this for every resort in order to publish it in the brochure or website, and it would not alter their selection of resorts offered. She also believed ski schools had a role to play in teaching skiers and snowboarders to respect the mountain and the environment.
- ◆ Tour operator (3) would look to the local tourist office to provide the information and would be interested in publishing this information and, indeed, ranking resorts based on it.
- ◆ Tour operator (7) would not expect destinations to publish information about Responsible Tourism. He said he and other tour operators would not object to providing the information, if it was quick and easy and would, for example, put a link from his website but doubted whether skiers would look for it.
- ◆ Tour operator (6), prior to the interview, aimed to research this topic and immediately went to the Internet and conducted a Google search followed by going to the Lech resort website, where she was unable to find any information about responsible skiing. This is a good example of the methods people use. She believed that tour operators have a role providing this information and would consider how this could be done since she believed that it could impact choice. However, they are initially looking to improve their own environmental record as a company internally, by making their offices Carbon Neutral and offsetting their employees' flights and giving customers the opportunity to offset their flights.
- ◆ Ski agency (8) felt that it was difficult for tour operators to do anything about it, since control lay in the destination and he pointed out the difference between developing and developed countries; in a developing country the tour operator is often in a more powerful position and can exert pressure whereas in a developed country such as Austria, the destination retains control. He believed in the free choice of the customer; however, he said that if he knew what a specific resort was doing he would highlight it to the customer.
- ◆ Both journalist key informants clearly felt it was part of their remit and responsibility to disseminate such information and both pointed out that they would rely on local resort contacts and the resort website.

From the responses given in this survey, skiers do look to a variety of sources to gain information to help them determine their destination choice, and it is apparent that tour operators, journalists and tourist boards all share the responsibility to disseminate information on Responsible Tourism.

## 4 Summary

This research has illuminated some interesting facts regarding skiing and Responsible Tourism, and some new information about skier attitudes. Firstly, it has shown that ***it is possible for skiing to operate on a sustainable basis minimising the negative environmental, social and economic impacts.*** The case study of Lech demonstrated that there are many destination management strategies that can be adopted to balance the needs of tourists, stakeholders and the environment. The Literature Review (available separately) outlined how much of the research into the specific impacts of skiing is inconclusive, nonetheless, it is undeniable that changes are made to the environment and vast amounts of energy utilised to run ski facilities.

However, as demonstrated in Lech, ***lift facilities can be run off renewable energy*** and continue to be made quieter and more efficient, and the ***visual impact reduced*** by new types of lifts such as detachable chairlifts, and by housing much of the machinery underground. ***Artificial snow can be made with renewable energy*** with the snow itself made with ***pure water and air*** and ***water usage carefully monitored.*** The artificial snow does not appear to have a negative impact on the landscape but may in fact protect it from skiers at times of low natural snow cover and protect the plants themselves from harsh frosts. Its use only needs to be restricted where an increase in water or nutrient levels would have an impact on specific plant varieties. Pistes can be made where necessary by carefully removing the top layer of soil, ***machine grading underneath and relaying the 'turf'*** on top such that it is invisible to the naked eye where the changes were made and biodiversity is not disturbed. ***The need for pistes can be reduced with the use of ski routes*** which offer the skier challenge and do not require preparation. Reseeding where necessary may be done with seeds that ***replicate the natural biodiversity*** which will be successful rather than by using non-native single species seeds which invariably fail. Mountain facilities can all be linked to organic purification plants to ***eradicate pollution on the mountain and in the water courses.*** Forests and wildlife can be protected by carefully managing the skiers and skiing. Looking at the non-ski specific areas, Lech has been successful in managing traffic through the ***promotion of public transport*** and making part of the village car free and ***reducing local pollution through the use of biomass.*** ***Local ownership and local sourcing*** are standard practice and occupancy levels kept high through the careful planning regulations and the matching of supply and demand.

Lech is undeniably one of the best resorts in Europe at managing the destination and the skiing responsibly, but it is unfortunately the case that ***many resorts do not act in this way and the skiing and tourism is detrimental to the local community and the environment.*** Elsewhere, chemicals can be added to the artificial snow and natural water courses disturbed, the fuel consumption and consequent CO2 emissions high and pistes created with harsh machine grading and unsuccessfully revegetated. There is often traffic congestion and the associated pollution, trees cut to create pistes and overdevelopment resulting in inflated local property prices, a secondary foreign owned property supply and a mismatch in supply and demand and highly seasonal demand.

However, this research has found that most skiers to Austria and the ski industry, as represented by the key informants, are ***unaware of the fact that there are any possible negative impacts to skiing*** – and out of those who believed there was a negative, listed the flight as the only impact, ie, not a resort based impact and undoubtedly due to recent media focus. Skiers have the impression that since their sport is taking place close to the natural environment, they do not think it causes any negative impacts and have not given it any previous thought.

Indeed, even the ***skiers in Lech had low awareness and low knowledge of the measures that had been taken,*** even having spent one or more holidays there. This was despite the fact that many of those measures directly had an impact on the quality of their holiday experience, showing that a successful resort like Lech has much to do in the way of promoting its activities.

Nonetheless, a positive message was clear with a ***majority of skiers both in Lech and to Austria in general wanting more information to be provided on Responsible Tourism in relation to skiing,*** and two thirds of people identifying that their ***future decision making would be influenced*** by this information.

Currently their decision making was found to be ***influenced largely by ski related factors*** such as pistes for their ability, kilometres of piste and the previous snow record, but ***also the beauty of the scenery and resort, the traditional village atmosphere and the reputation of the resort.*** This shows that, despite the fact that skiers are essentially going on holiday to further their skills, they are

**very concerned about the environment in which it takes place**, therefore demonstrating that this set of tourists is likely to be **predisposed to resorts that manage the environment and the destination well**, particularly when it has a direct link to the quality of their holiday experience. They will **seek out this information from a number of sources** - many from the Internet - referencing resort websites, tour operator websites, Tourist Board websites and intermediary ski websites and also from the tour operator brochures.

Therefore, whilst existing awareness of the potential negative impacts of skiing was low, there are many positives to take from this research;

- ◆ **One of the key influencers to decision making for skiers is the beauty of the scenery and resort**
- ◆ **Skiers want to know more about Responsible Tourism and will seek out and be influenced by this information in future**
- ◆ **It is possible for skiing to be managed responsibly so that it protects the village, benefits local residents and conserves the environment**

## 5 Recommendations

The research has important implications for the ski industry both in resort destinations and in the UK. The first area to be addressed is the complete lack of knowledge of the possible negative impacts of skiing amongst both skiers and the UK ski industry. **A campaign to raise awareness is evidently required**; much like Responsible Tourism in general, carbon emissions or recycling, it is only through education, that people will gain understanding. **This campaign clearly needs to start with the UK ski industry and the media.** However, comments such as “spare a thought for the environment, skiing is one of the least ‘green’ activities...” as quoted in The Times 20/10/06 are guilt-ridden, negative and one sided. Skiers and much of the ski industry do not even believe there are any potential negative issues; therefore such text only succeeds in alienating skiers. **Skiers will not stop skiing but they will change their habits.** The **skiing public is receptive to receiving information, will actively seek it and ultimately be influenced by it**, therefore it is imperative that this campaign for responsible skiing begins whilst the movement towards Responsible Tourism is gaining so much ground.

However, it is very important that this message is not totally negative - inspiring guilt - but presents options; skiing does not have to be ‘bad’ for the environment and can have many benefits; **with knowledge skiers can make informed choices.** Therefore, whilst education needs to partly focus on the impacts, it is also **important to start identifying the resorts that are managing their destination responsibly.** This way the skier can understand how impacts are mitigated in the ‘better’ resorts and why they should be selected over the poor resorts. The fact remains that many ski resorts are far ahead of towns in the UK in managing their environment and resources responsibly and tourists could be more ‘green’ on holiday than at home. Nonetheless, whilst Responsible Tourism and skiing do not have to be mutually exclusive, in many cases they are. Therefore, at the same time, **the ‘poor’ resorts need to be highlighted**; those that damage the environment and do not protect the village or benefit the local community. It is by highlighting the poor resorts that pressure will be raised to improve performance. The power of consumer and industry pressure should not be underestimated.

It is the **responsibility of the destinations themselves to gather this information** and for the local tourist office to disseminate this via their local office and their website. **They are seen as the key reference source** by the media, the tour operators and the skiing public.

The Responsible Tourism information firstly needs to be presented in terms of **how the actions taken will result in a better skiing experience** since, ultimately, skiers are ‘skilled consumers’ wanting to further their technique and enjoy greater challenges, thus the ski related features will always feature highly in their decision making.

Secondly, the information can be presented in terms of **how the beauty of the scenery and the resort itself are improved or maintained by the actions taken**, since skiers place a high priority on this alongside their skiing. These two areas can then be joined together to emphasise how it results in **a better holiday experience for the customer.** It is important that all the aspects of Responsible Tourism are represented, and not just the environmental side, in order to present a **balanced perspective** and also, since consumers are aware already of the potential economic

benefits, to ignore them would distance the customer from the message. Thirdly, there is great opportunity for resorts to use this information **to build a reputation for their resort**. Skiers are enormously influenced by the reputation of a resort in their decision making and this influence comes from a variety of sources, including the media and tour operators. The **resorts that successfully manage the destination and build their reputation will have market advantage over those resorts that cannot or choose not to engage**. That reputation will attract more skiers who seek and expect a better holiday through responsible destination management, which will in turn create more demand and more pressure on the poorly managed resorts to improve. The resorts, in addition to presenting the information on their websites and brochures for future decision making, also need to ensure that **in and around the resort they raise awareness** in order to ensure that the **skier associates their actions and management with the success of their holiday** and look for this in future.

Informing the skiing public falls to a number of people; the resorts, as mentioned above, but also tour operators, the media, intermediary websites, ski magazines and guide books. **The tourist office is of key importance** in disseminating information to the media, who clearly see their role in passing this on to the skiing public. **Tour operators are used by over half of the market and their websites and brochures are important communication methods**. The information currently in the brochures caters very well to provide information to skiers about the ski facts, but little about the aspects of Responsible Tourism. Once again it is important to **present this information as to how this will result in a better holiday for their customers**. As skiers become more aware, pressure will increase for all resorts to manage their operations in a responsible manner. It is preferable that consumer pressure moves the agenda forward such that individual resorts take action individually, rather than ski resorts paying 'lip service' to an external scheme such as the Sustainable Slopes Program in the USA which has largely resulted in unchanged resort performances.

Lastly, and most importantly, it should be noted that Responsible Tourism is not only about making better holidays. It is also equally about making better places for people to live. The existence of many thriving mountain communities has largely been due to winter sports - however, the community should not be sacrificed for winter sports. The **community needs to retain control of the destination and understand that success and economic benefits can go hand in hand with the management of the environment and the social fabric of the resort**.

Those who live in the mountains, and the skiers who love the mountains, have a self interest in protecting skiing and the magical environment in which it takes place. The **negative impacts of skiing can be mitigated**, so the skiing public and the ski industry need to be made aware of what the negative impacts are, in order to **understand how they can make better choices**. It is very **important that this education campaign begins now, starting with the ski industry and the media**, since they are the key intermediaries who will pass this information to the skiing public. This will benefit the 'good' resorts that manage their destinations responsibly and place pressure on the 'poor' resorts to improve their performance and engage with Responsible Tourism; thus local people will benefit, the villages will be protected and the environment conserved for future generations.

**It is imperative that skiing continues to prosper for the sake of the communities who depend upon it, but not at the cost of the environment on which it, and everyone, relies so heavily.**