

University of Applied Sciences Saarbruecken

# SPORT TOURISM IN THE SAVOIE MONT BLANC REGION

An empirical study focusing on very sports-minded young people

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this empirical study is to analyse the motivation of sport-oriented young people regarding their reluctance in visiting the Savoie Mont Blanc region. A survey applied to 100 participants examined how the destination is perceived abroad and which are the most important criteria in the decision of a holiday resort for this particular target group.

Additionally, the official website<sup>1</sup> of Savoie Mont Blanc was analysed in terms of how the sport-oriented students perceive it.

The main finding of the study is that the majority of the surveyed people has neither heard about the region nor visited it - although the target group would perfectly fit to the sporting variety that the Savoie Mont Blanc region has to offer.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.savoie-mont-blanc.com](http://www.savoie-mont-blanc.com)

# SPORT TOURISM IN THE SAVOIE MONT BLANC REGION

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) the tourism sector is “one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. This growth goes hand in hand with an increasing diversification and competition among destinations.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, regions that depend on tourism have to develop new concepts to survive this challenge.

One way to tackle with the strong competition is to limit the target group you want to reach; this strategy is named niche marketing. According to the Business Dictionary, niche marketing is defined as “all marketing efforts are concentrated on a small but specific and well defined segment of the population”<sup>3</sup>. The advantage of a specific target group is the possibility to adapt to individual desires and to focus directly on customer wishes. Thus, a destination is not only competitive but also an attractive option for the specific target group.

The Business Dictionary also explains that “Niches do not 'exist' but are 'created' by identifying needs, wants, and requirements that are being addressed poorly or not at all by other firms, and developing and delivering goods or services to satisfy them.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is also necessary to create a niche for the Savoie Mont Blanc region.

We, participants from the ACEEPT 2015 project week from Saarbruecken (Germany), decided to take the niche 'sport tourism with the target group of sport-minded young people' since the Savoie Mont Blanc region is known for its great variety of sports. This study was a distinctive opportunity for us to acquire more knowledge about Savoie Mont Blanc.

Therefore, a survey with 100 competitive athletes (22%) and sports students (78%) from the University of Saarland was applied.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> World Tourism Organization UNWTO

<sup>3</sup> Business Dictionary

<sup>4</sup> Business Dictionary

<sup>5</sup> 75% of the respondents were between 20 and 25 years of age, having a total range from 15 to 36 years, men and women mixed.

## KNOWLEDGE OF THE SAVOIE MONT BLANC REGION IN THE TARGET GROUP - IS THE MARKETING SPREAD WIDE ENOUGH TO REACH THIS SPECIFIC AUDIENCE IN GERMANY?

As expected from our niche audience, three out of four participants said that being sportive and energetic have a very important meaning in their life, and for one out of four it was still important. When they were asked about the significance of doing sports during their vacations, 75% stated that sport is important or very important. This shows that the participants are highly interested in sport tourism and therefore this target group is significant for the Savoie Mont Blanc region.

One potential problem for the development of sport tourism in Savoie Mont Blanc is the fact that the region is still unknown. Among the students surveyed, 63% declared that they have never heard about the region before. Only seven percent of the 37% who stated to have at least heard of it have already visited the region, either on holiday (6%) or training camp, which took place there (1%).

The reasons for not having visited or/and not wanting to visit the region are “no time for holidays” (8), “I prefer other places” (7) or “no interest/occasion” (7). Two participants stated that the distance from Saarland is still too far, and some other fear language barriers, miss the sea or the possibility of practicing their sport (e.g. basketball).

The athletes, who already visited the Savoie Mont Blanc region, outlined the mountains, the landscape and the skiing areas as very positive. One person remarked that the food in the ski lodges is quite expensive; the weather was bad during his/her stay and that he/she missed the possibility for après-ski.

## DECISION CRITERIA FOR SPORT DESTINATIONS

There is a wide range of all kinds of exercised main sports, the most being football (33%), volleyball (10%) and handball (8%). Only a few participants practice other sports like swimming, cycling, climbing and winter sports as snowboarding or skiing. Nevertheless, the majority of the surveyed students could think of doing other or new sports during their vacations in the region. As diagram 1 shows, the participants would be interested in doing cycling (77%), climbing (71%), hiking (65%) and winter sports (55%).

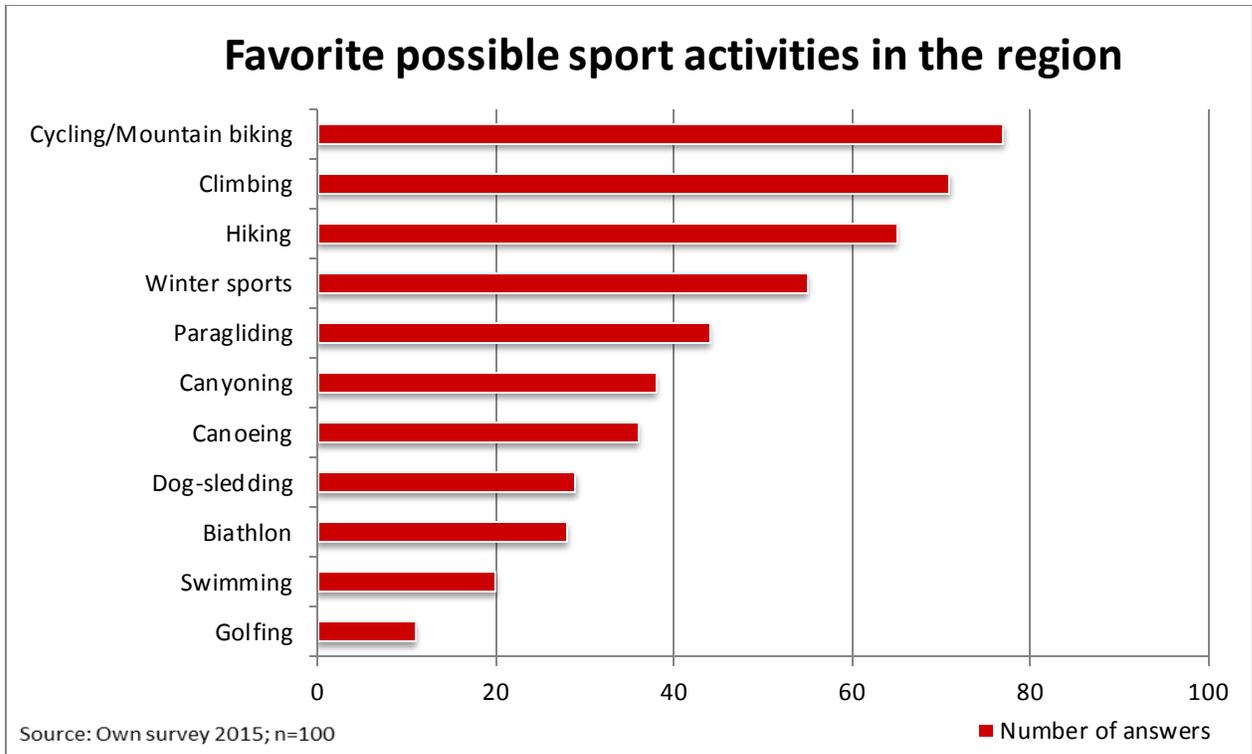


Diagram 1: Favorite possible sport activities in the region

After having explained to the participants where Savoie Mont Blanc is located (south-east of France and borders to Swiss and Italy), 71% related the region to sports as follow: skiing and snowboarding (35%); cycling, mountain biking and Tour de France (18%); hiking (13%), climbing and canyoning (10%).

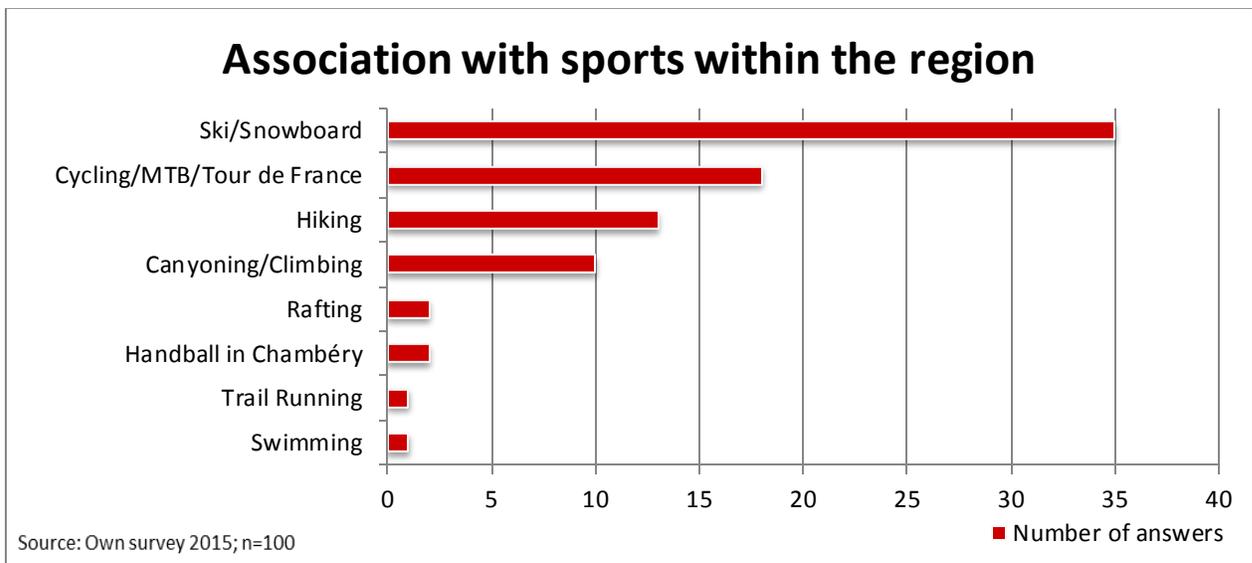


Diagram 2: Association with sports within the region

Moreover, the region was associated with mountains and the Alps (34%), with the Mont Blanc as the highest mountain in Europe (7%), and with winter sports (27%). Besides, the French culture and cuisine like wine or cheese (12%), places like Chambéry, Annecy and the river Ardèche were also associated to the region.

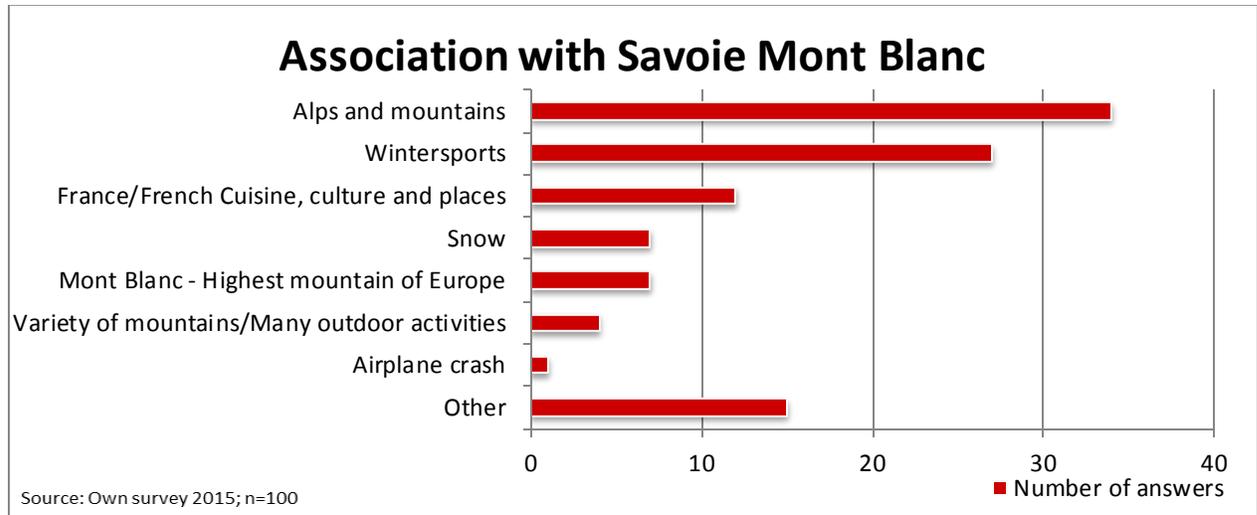


Diagram 3: Association with Savoie Mont Blanc

Additionally, the most important aspects for sportsman to consider when choosing a destination were investigated. According to diagram 4, sport opportunities and facilities play a significant role as well as the weather condition; other aspects such as landscape, ocean, destination diversity, and infrastructure were also mentioned by the participants. To find out to what extent this may also apply to the Savoie Mont Blanc region it needs further researches.

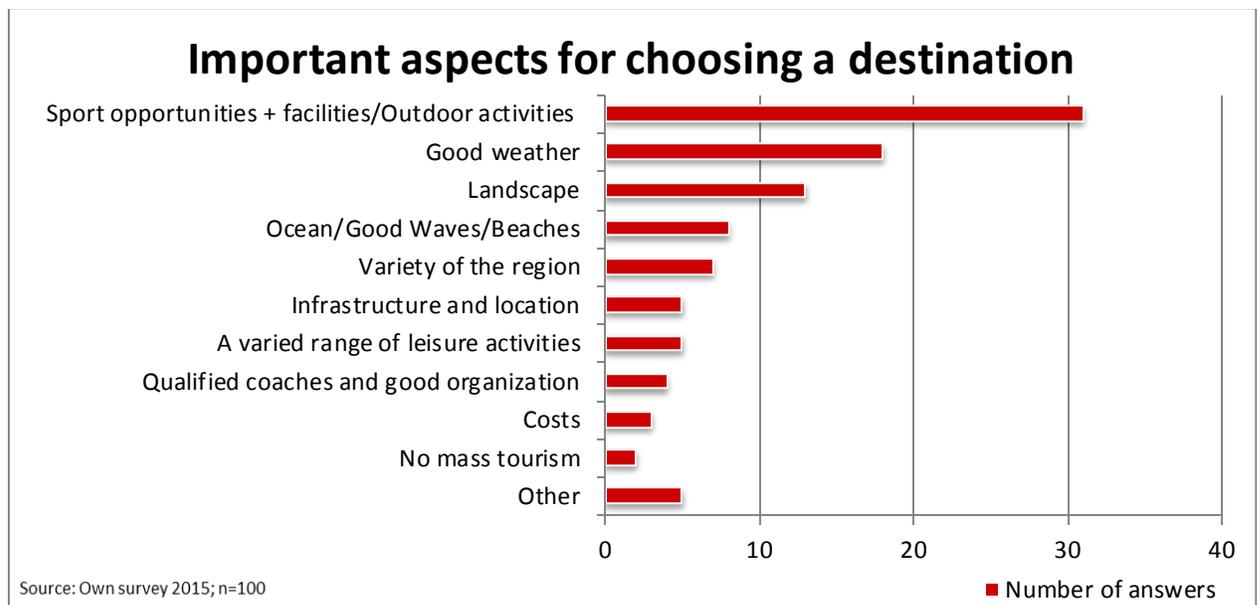


Diagram 4: Important aspects for choosing a destination

Finally, the participants were asked to outline how significant the following elements are when choosing a destination: value for money (83%), good sport facilities (72%), good location and connection (61%), food (56%), accommodation (52%), variety (49%), country (21%), language (18%) and experience (17%).

By gathering this information, it can be seen that competitive athletes and students attach great importance to their expenditures for vacations, a great infrastructure on site and balanced food. In addition, in deciding their destination for ski holiday, criteria such as snow assurance, possession of snow parks and good amount of slope kilometers are also considered.

The Tourism Analysis carries out, annually, a study identifying the Germans favorite destination abroad for spending their holiday. According to the recent tourism analysis from 2014, Spain ranked first, followed by Italy, Turkey and Austria. Surprisingly, France appeared only in the ninth position (cf. Tourism Analysis 2015).

It was interesting to find out if the target group has the same favorite destinations abroad for their sports vacation. However, during the data's analysis process, a different pattern was observed. Thus, the most visited countries for practicing sports by the participants were Austria (25%), France (17%) and Spain (11%). This shows that France has a high appeal for competitive athletes and sports students. Therefore, it is very likely that Savoie Mont Blanc has a great potential to become one of the main leading destinations for sport vacations at least within France. South-east France has a very pleasant climate for practicing a variety of physical activities all year around. The region is not only perfectly qualified for mountain sports, but it is also very suitable for watersports due to its numerous lakes. Not to mention the beautiful landscape for cycling or doing more extreme sport like paragliding.

Since the Savoie Mont Blanc region has perfect conditions to this target group, it is coherent to approach them with special offers fulfilling their needs and/or requirements.

## CASE STUDY - WEBSITE SAVOIE MONT BLANC

In addition to the survey, a case study with four students, who are studying leisure, sports and tourism management in the first semester of the master program at the University of Applied Science Saarbruecken, was performed. All of them have already studied sports management and due to this particular background they were asked to give their personal and professional feedback at the official website<sup>6</sup> of Savoie Mont Blanc. The purpose was to find out how the website is perceived by the target group. Aspects considering what they found interesting, what they liked or not and what they suggest to improve in the website was observed.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.savoie-mont-blanc.com](http://www.savoie-mont-blanc.com)

On one hand, all participants agreed that the website is clearly structured and convinces through a very nice and appealing design. The stunning photos and videos, which appear right at the beginning, stimulated the desire to travel immediately to the region. It is clear that Savoie Mont Blanc promotes uppermost winter sports, however, other sport activities are also represented and illustrated nicely.

On the other hand, some participants experienced some irritation, especially considering the language settings - no possibility to display the website in German - and the appearance of automatic pop up previews when navigating across the website. Furthermore, opening an offer was quite confusing because it came into view too big and with too much information on one site. Therefore, to find some specific information, for example a ski rental, was difficult. Not only, the participants felt disturbed about the automatical pop-up of some videos, but they also reported that website's loading was slowed down significantly.

Interestingly, one student associated the map of the region with the airplane crash of the Germanwings Airbus in March 2015. This was not the first time that one participant combined the region with this tragedy.

As a suggestion for improvement, someone mentioned that the website could have a function to display the offers according to the age group. For example, if a young person looks for a hotel, only the hotels fitting this age group would show up and no family hotels with a wide kids program.

Two of the master students were asked to find out how easy (or complicated) it is to book an accommodation. The „around me“-function and the possibility to get to know the location of the lodging directly when moving the mouse over the interested hotel were experienced positively. It quickly shows all relevant information you need for the booking. The only problem during the booking process was that the students do not speak French and that it was not possible to book the accommodation over the Savoie Mont Blanc website in English. By selecting a hotel, normally it leads to the original hotel websites which are mainly in French. Sometimes the problem occurs that the websites of several hotels are not working properly and therefore no booking was possible. Additionally they would have preferred a „book now“-button or something that allows them to book immediately.

Finally, they were asked how they usually collect information about the region for vacations. Some of them affirmed that the experiences and advices of family and friends were taken into consideration. However, all of them outlined the same typical pattern for nowadays – looking for online information. Consequently, it is fundamental that the website is well structured, understandable and has a user-friendly surface. Moreover, the participants want to get information as fast and clear as possible, as well as the various offer of activities that can be done in the region.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the Savoie Mont Blanc region is not well known among young sportive people in Germany, which is a mischance since the region has so much to offer considering outdoor sports activities. The finding that the majority of the

surveyed people did not know Savoie Mont Blanc is relevant to the region and may serve as an incentive for improving and investing in its international marketing in Germany. As highlighted in diagram 2, the target group is very interested in the offers already provided by Savoie Mont Blanc. The main problem is that they have not heard about these opportunities before.

Likewise, it is important to make clear to tourists that visiting the region without speaking French is not a problem. The first step is to make sure that the website as well as the accommodation booking pages are completely, at least, in English.

Furthermore, it was not surprising to find out that the participants set a high value on good conditions and facilities for practicing their favorite sports. As demonstrated, most of them attach high importance to the value for money. Thus, affordable offers for students are also a pre-requisite for gaining this target group.

To put it in a nutshell, the niche 'sport tourism with the target group of very sports-minded young people' fits perfectly to the Savoie Mont Blanc region and could be a successful specific segment in the tourism branch.

## FEEDBACK

We would appreciate if you could provide us with a feedback concerning our paper. Therefore please follow this link:

<http://accept-team-germany.jimdo.com/feedback-pre-task-3/>

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