

The Development of Trail Tourism

Vodka and Manor Houses in Estonia

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Abstract— This study examines the economic and social variables required to develop a “Vodka Trail” which is an association of enterprises promoting the history and cultural stories about vodka in Estonia. The trail is proposed within the context of historic Manor Houses that were the site of the earliest formalized vodka production in Estonia. The research findings are based on interviews by the author with representatives of a number of stakeholders in the Estonian vodka and tourism trade.

Keywords—Trail Tourism, Economic Development, Estonia

I. Introduction

Vodka, and vodka tourism has had a lengthy history in Estonia, one that has had a positive economic impact on tourism, but arguably a negative impact on country image. The focus of this study is to examine a case study of the development of Trail Tourism (henceforth TT), within the guise of heritage tourism, in the Baltic Republic of Estonia.

The aim of this research is to examine the feasibility, both from an economic and social perspective, of the revitalization of the Estonian manor house “vodka kitchen”. This study draws on empirical findings from multiple perspectives, including the Estonian tourist, the manor house owner/operator, to the governmental agencies involved in tourism and trade, as well as alcohol and regulated goods marketing groups.

II. Background

Vodka has a long and storied history in Estonia. The earliest mention of distilled alcohol in Estonia was in 1485, and by the late 1800’s production of vodka exceeded 8 million litres, an amount similar to today [1]. More recently, Estonia received an official decree by the European Union that Estonian vodka would be the geographical name of vodka, solely produced in Estonia [2]. Vodka is a product that is arguably a key component of many aspects that define Estonian culture (along with other cultural identifiers such as language, the role of song, story telling, and Estonian food).

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III. Vodak Tourism

In terms of “vodka tourism”, alcoholic beverages such as vodka has constituted between 10-20 per cent of Estonian exports since 1995. A search of the literature noted that in 1971 an article in the NY Times appears to be the first mention in an English language publication of the concept of “Vodka Tourism” and Estonia. In this case it related to a noticeable trend of Finnish tourists travelling to Estonia to purchase low priced vodka [3]. More recently with the accession of Estonia to the European Union in 2004 limits on the importation of vodka for personal use was eliminated. Statistics suggest that 80% of all Finnish tourists to Estonia bring back alcohol, and concerns about this practice have been voiced [4]. Tallinn tourist publications continue to highlight the costs savings of vodka in Estonia in comparison to Finland, thus what other options are available to make up any shortfall in tourism spending from a curtailing of “vodka tourism”?

A. Heritage Tourism

Estonian Manor Houses also have a strong historical tie to Estonian culture and commerce [5]. Tourists have a desire to experience the authentic, and locally produced vodka, which was a tradition of the Estonian Manor House, could represent such a product [6]. The heritage educational aspects of the sites could be linked with the entertainment value of seeing the product being made, bottled etc. [7].

IV. Research Methodology and Findings

In order to explore the possibility of an Estonian Vodka trail, interviews were conducted by the author with three owners/managers of a convenience sample of three Manor Houses. The interview questions related to tourism in Estonia in general, as well as the features and attractions of the specific Manor House. There were questions asked about the value of a “Manor House Trail”.

With respect to Estonian Manor Houses and trail development, there is a definite link with the role of culture that needs to be made, and that there is the possibility of aligning a culturally identifiable product such as vodka. With respect to trail development, there was consensus that it was an opportunity to explore further, but there was less consistency in what type of trail would be the most beneficial.

References

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