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Branding a Winter Sports Country: Why Finland's Tourism  
needs a strong Brand?

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# Introduction



Finland and Lapland have an image of being cold places. This is actually no wonder because the image is not exactly new, as can be seen in these words in Haydn's *Jahreszeiten*, which had its first performance on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 1801 in Palais Schwarzenberg in Vienna.

“From **Lapland's** caves approaching  
Harsh winter chills the land  
Before its footsteps, nature  
Is held in fearful stillness”

*(Hanne in Haydn's Die Jahreszeiten,  
Introduction of Winter, no.33 Recitative)*

The original text in English was written already by James Thomson the Elder (1700 – 1748) in 1726!

In the summer and autumn of 2002 a survey was carried out on the most important markets in Europe to find out what the image of Finland was. The data comprises 2001 interviews with randomly selected people over 15 year of age.

The interviews were made in the city centres of several cities of each country in the respondents' mother tongue.

The two main questions were:

"When you hear the word "Finland", what does it bring to your mind?" and

"How would you describe Finland as a tourist destination?"



## Main results

1. The most common image of Finland is nature-dominated, concentrating on wintry conditions and a northern location. The most common association is **"Cold"**
2. Finland is still a relatively unknown country. Finland is best known in Russia and Sweden, least known in the UK and Italy.
3. The image of Finland varies between those who have been in Finland and those who have not. Naturally a visit in Finland broadens the horizon. **"Cold"** is replaced by **"Lakes"**, **"Forests"**, **"Friends"** and **"Sauna"**.

4. In neighbouring Sweden the image is much more concrete, more associated with culture and people
5. Finland's reputation as the "The Country of Thousand Lakes" is not any more self-evident. Italians and Britons hardly mentioned this. Germans, Dutch and Swedes have the clearest idea about the "Thousand Lakes".
6. Only 19 % of the respondents said that they could **not** imagine travelling to Finland. The remaining 81 % does not, however, constitute a "hard potential" since many of the answers were of the type "Why not".
7. The respondents had difficulties in describing Finland as a tourist destination.



8. Finnish brands or known sportsmen are mentioned very seldom contrary to what was expected.

# Ten most common associations in connection with Finland in the different countries:

## Germany:

1. Lakes
2. Forests
3. Cold
4. Snow
5. Nothing
6. Animals
7. Sauna
8. Country
9. Reindeers
10. Nature

## The Netherlands:

1. Cold
2. Lakes
3. Nature
4. Forests
5. Scandinavia
6. Beautiful
7. Nothing
8. Sauna
9. Water
10. Space,

## United Kingdom

1. Cold
2. Nothing
3. Snow
4. Forests
5. Scandinavia
6. Alcohol
7. Sports
8. Another country
9. Lakes
10. Friends

## France

1. Cold
2. Snow
3. Scandinavia
4. Reindeers
5. Northern
6. Country
7. Fjords
8. Another country
9. Animals
10. Forests

## Italy:

1. Cold
2. Snow
3. Reindeers
4. Nothing
5. Country
6. Santa Claus
7. Forests
8. Scandinavia
9. Northern
10. Beautiful

## **Sweden:**

1. Sauna
2. Finland Boats
3. Lakes
4. Sports
5. Alcohol
6. Friends
7. Language
8. The Moomins
9. Forests
10. Helsinki

## **Russia:**

1. Country
2. Snow
3. Positive people
4. Forests
5. Lakes
6. Cold
7. Santa Claus
8. Water
9. Mountains, hills
10. Positive

These two examples shows that Finland and Lapland have a very strong wintery image. This means also that there are good possibilities to market Finland as a winter destination, although on the whole Finland is not very well known as a tourist destination.

Lapland in itself is often listed as a “country” of its own in tour-operators brochures and not as a part of Finland. This shows that Lapland to some extent is a brand of its own.

# Development of Winter Tourism to Finland



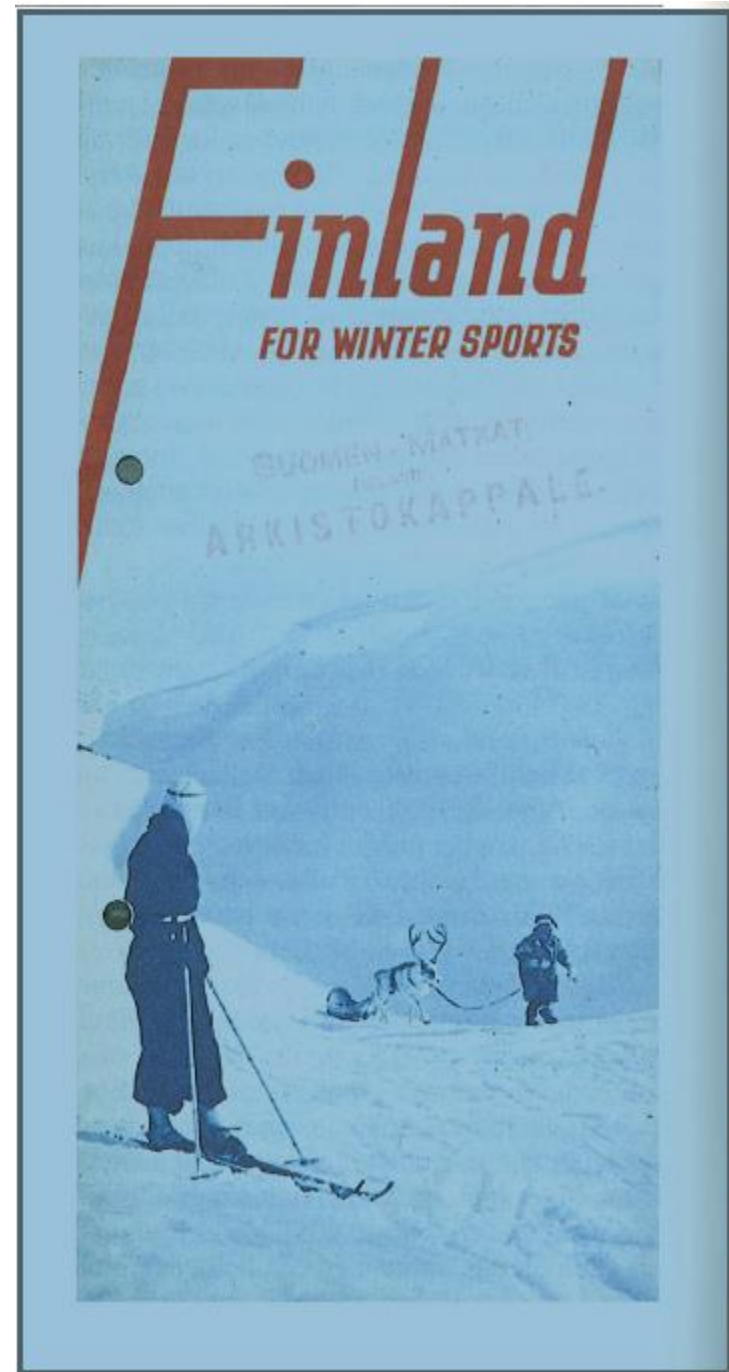


Marketing of winter tourism to Finland and Lapland started already in the Thirties as can be seen from this ad.

The volumes of winter tourists were, however, very small.

Tourism statistics from these times are rather scarce, but we know that in April 1929 Finland was visited by 198 “Tourists” and in November and December 1929 they were 340 and 355 respectively.

Source: Börje Sandberg: Finlands första turiststatistik, Helsingfors 1930.

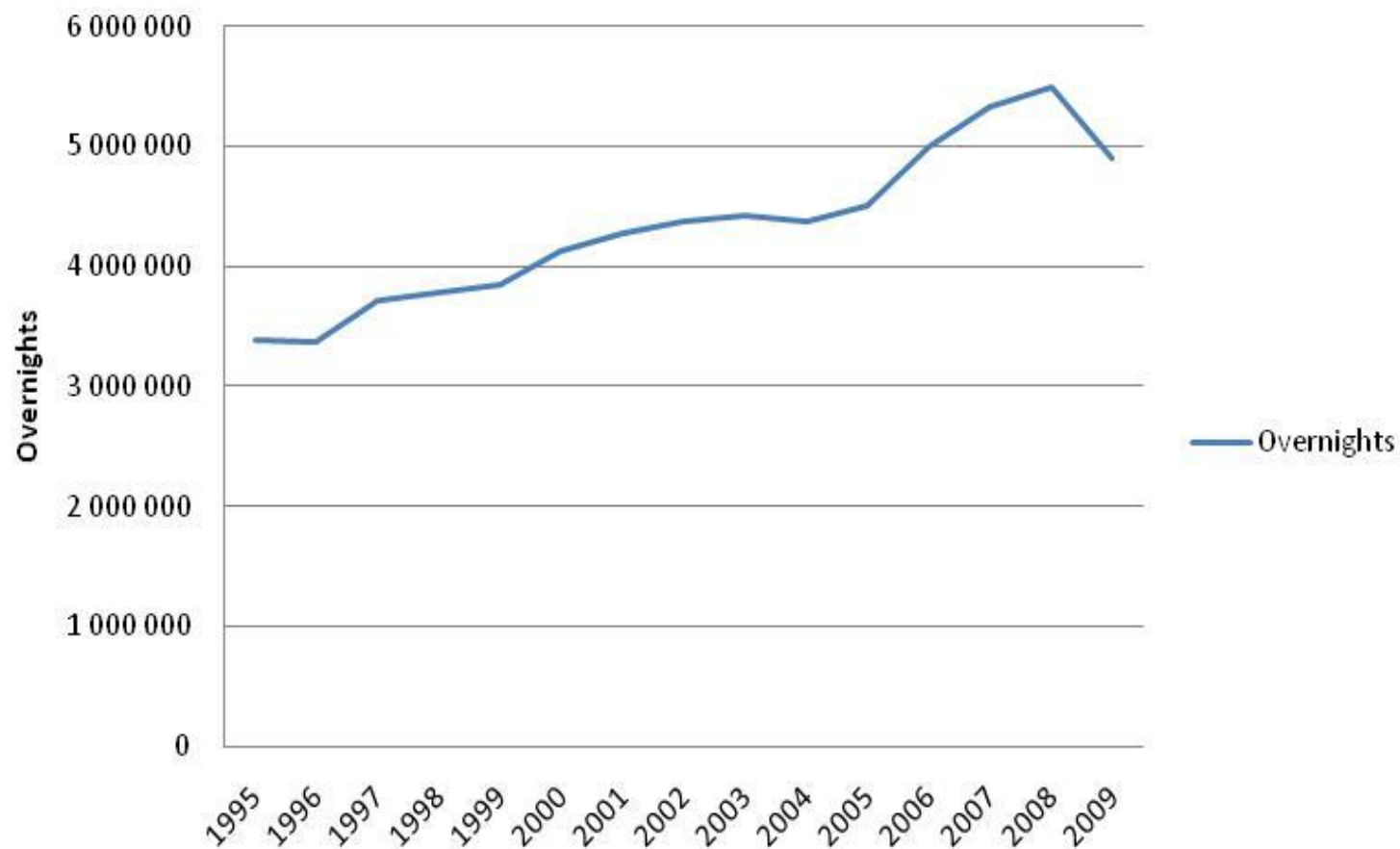


A systematic marketing of winter tourism started in 1990 with the Snowball project (1990-92). The aim of the project was to bring together both small and big players and to market the versatile Finnish winter products on a bigger scale in Central and Southern Europe. One aim was also to get tour operators to include Finland in their programs.

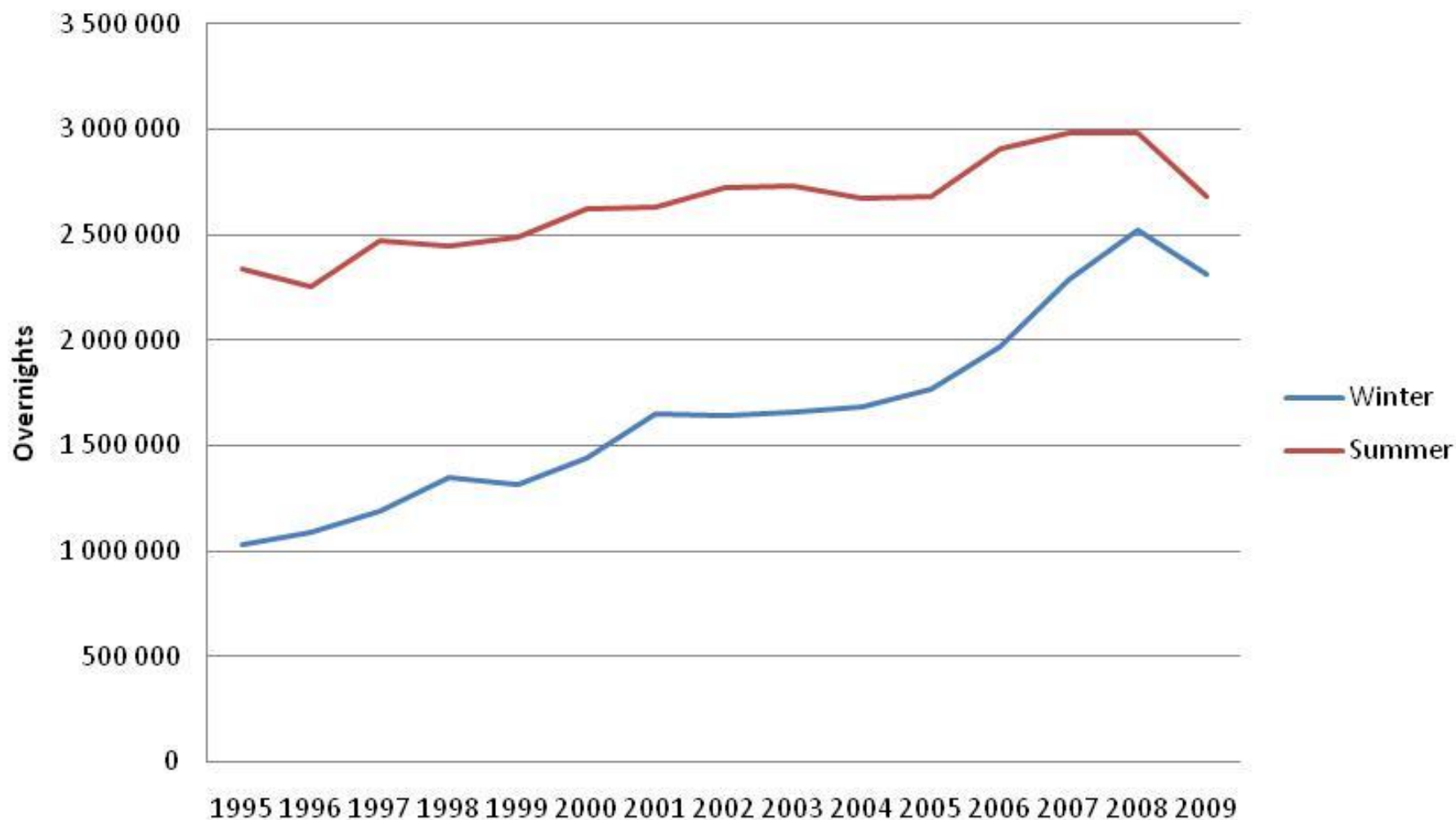
This project was the beginning of a very successful development of winter tourism to Finland.



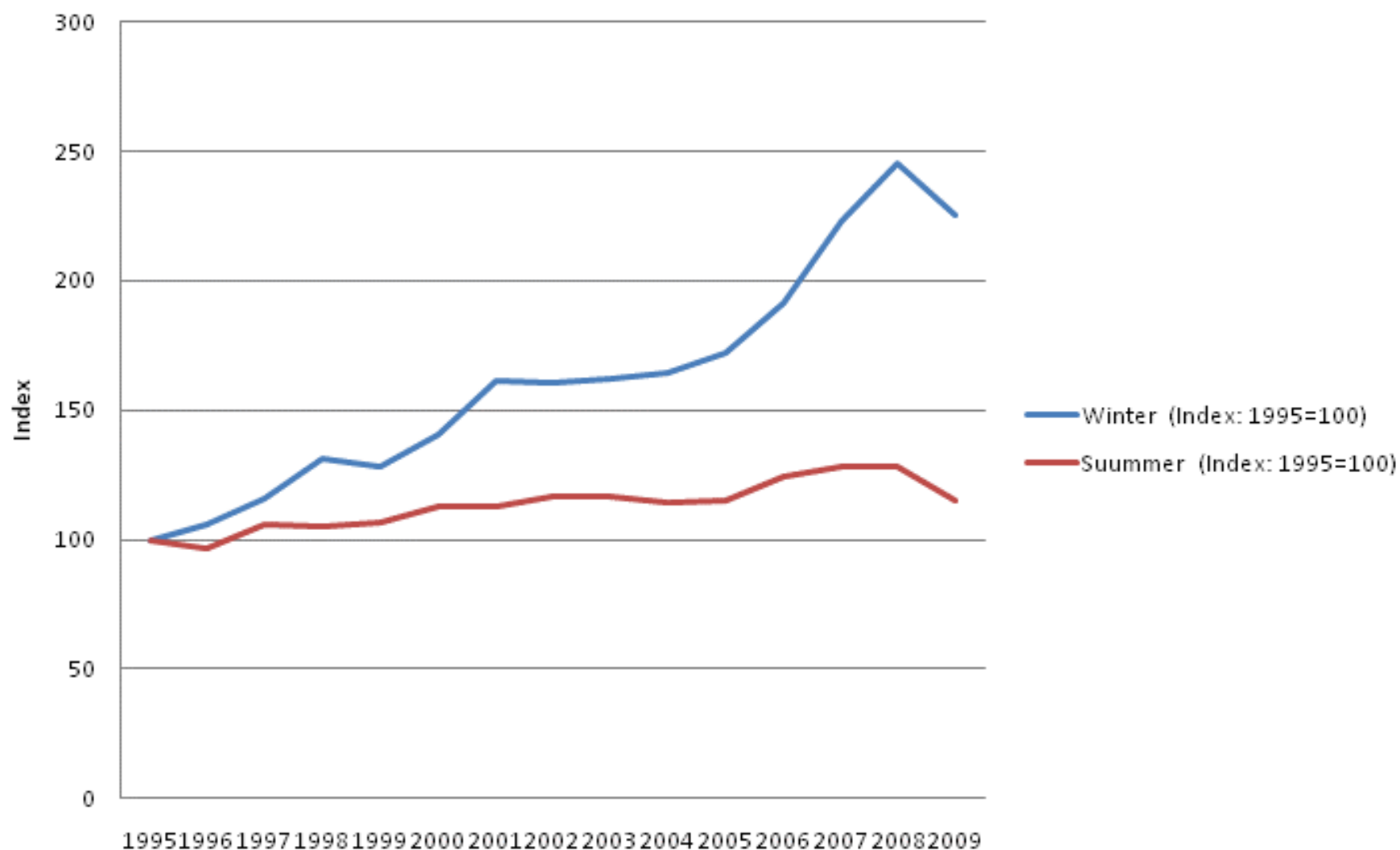
## Foreign overnights in registered accommodation facilities in Finland in 1995 - 2009



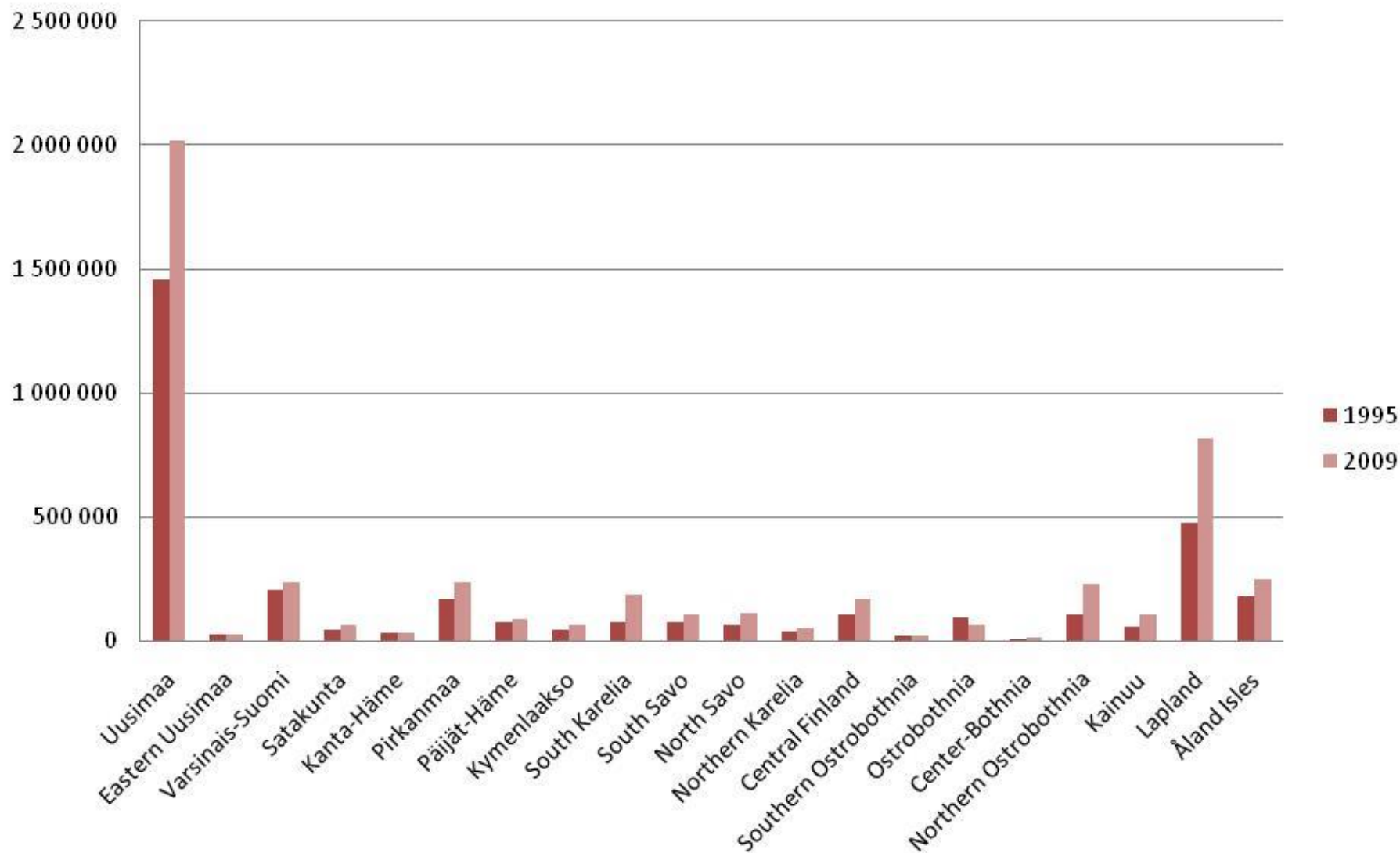
# Foreign Overnights in Accommodation Facilities in Finland during Summer (May - October) and Winter (November - April) 1995 - 2009



## Development of Foreign Overnights in Accommodation Facilities in Finland during Summer (May - October) and Winter (November - April) 1995 -2009 (as indexes)

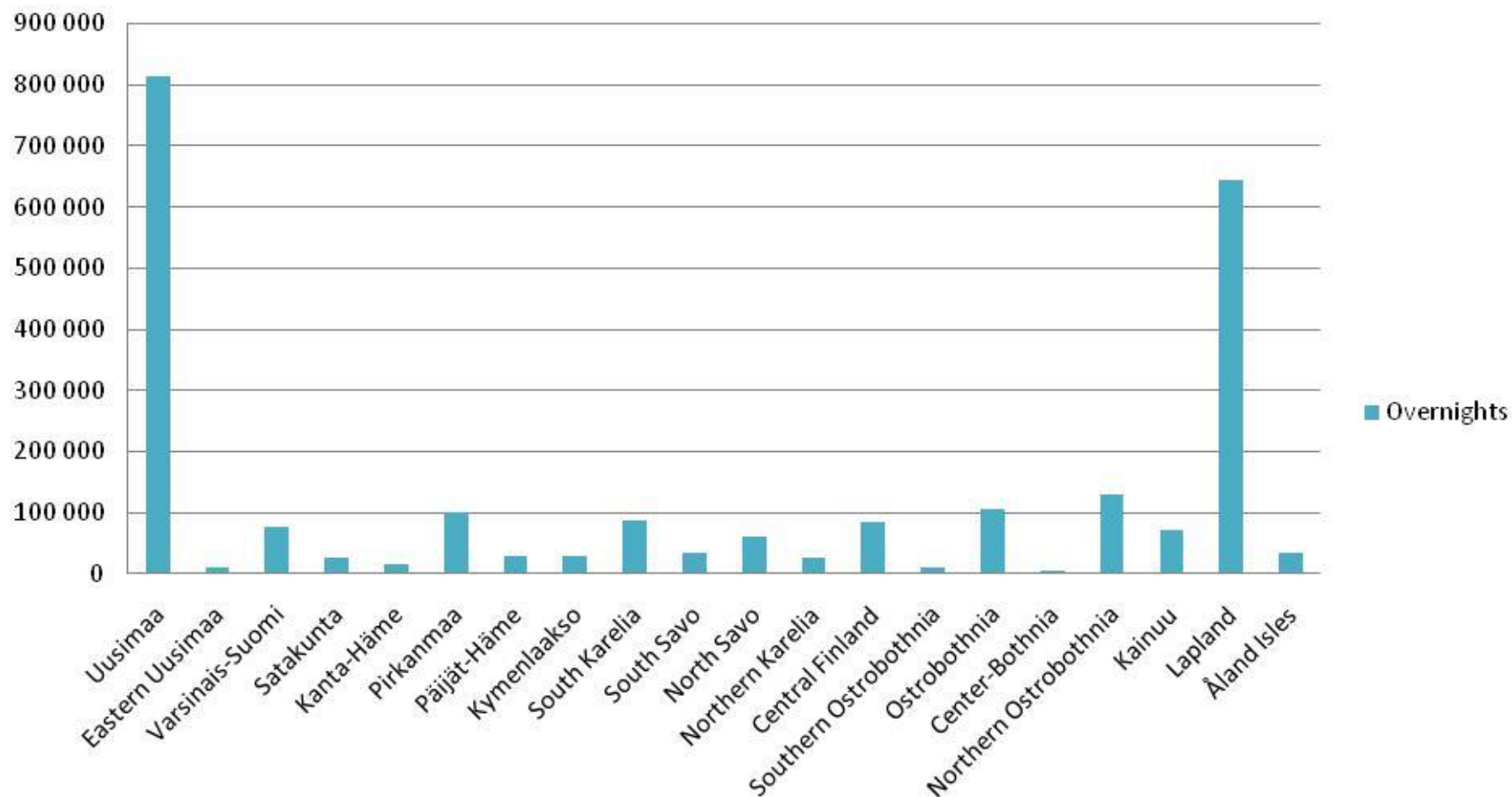


## Foreign Overnights in Accommodation Facilities in Finland in 1995 and 2009 per Province

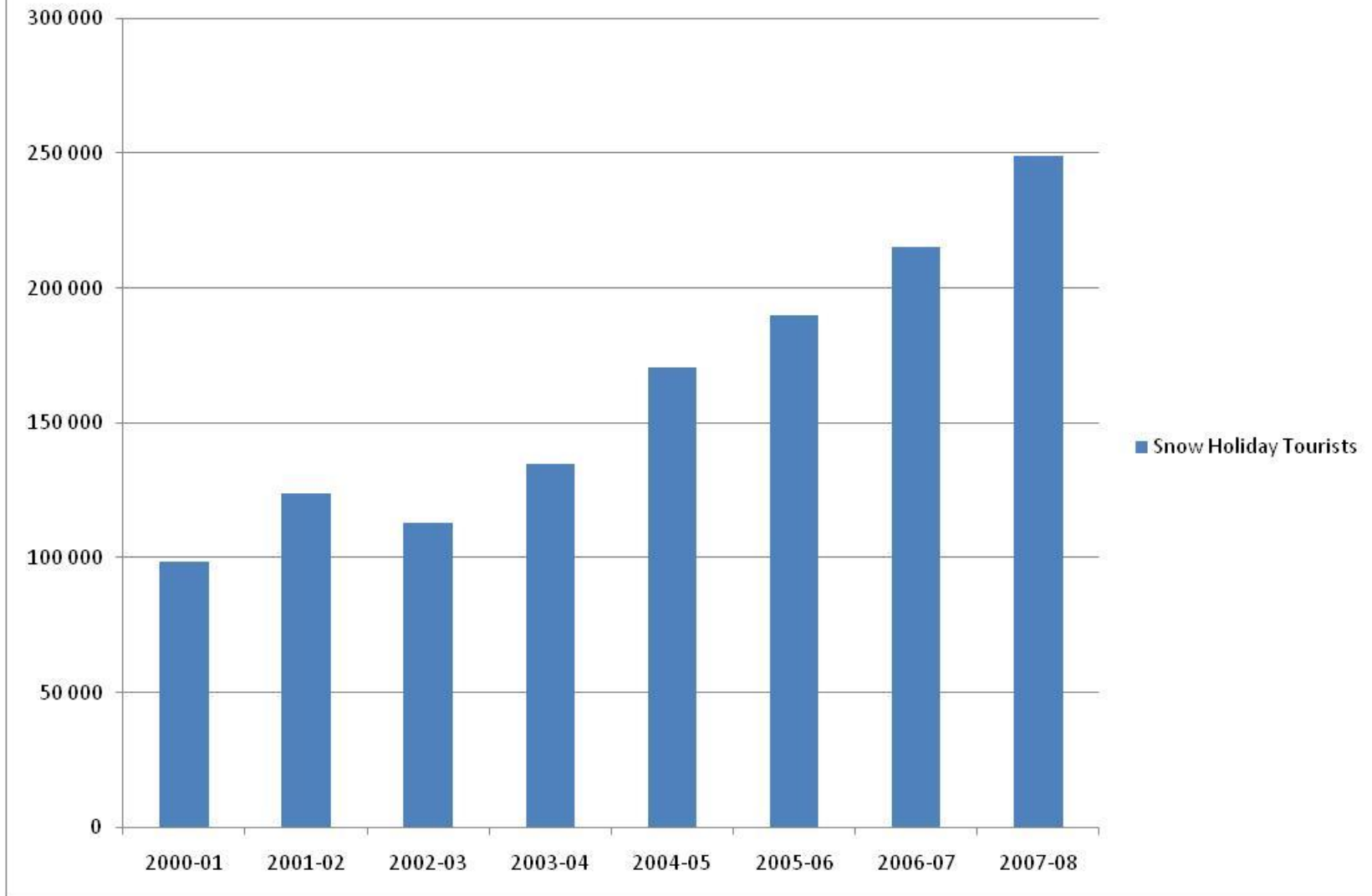




## Foreign Overnights in Accommodation Facilities during the Winter 2008/2009 (November - December) per Province

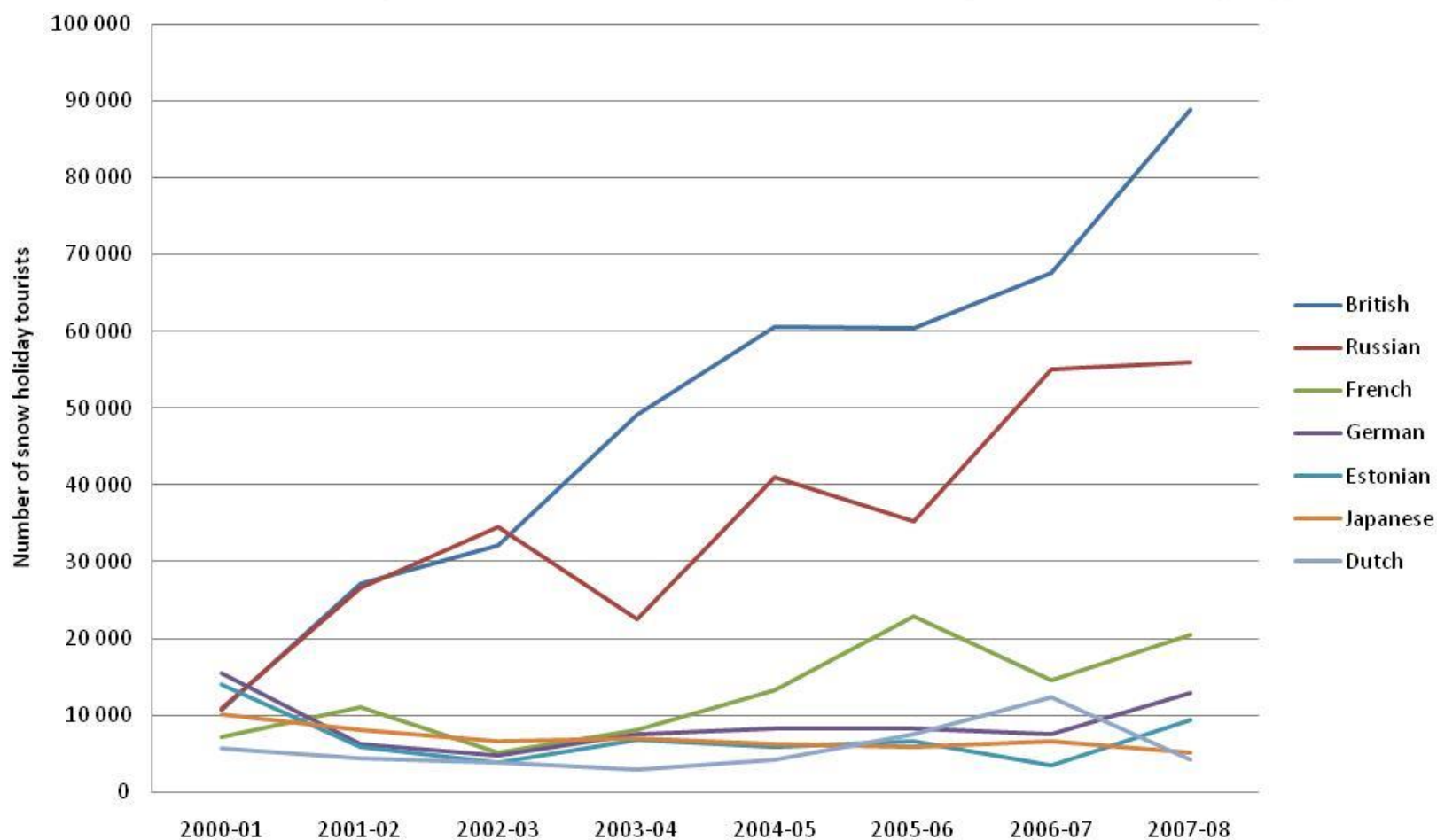


## Foreign Snow Holiday Tourists\* in Finland during the Winters 2000/01 - 2007/08 (November - April)

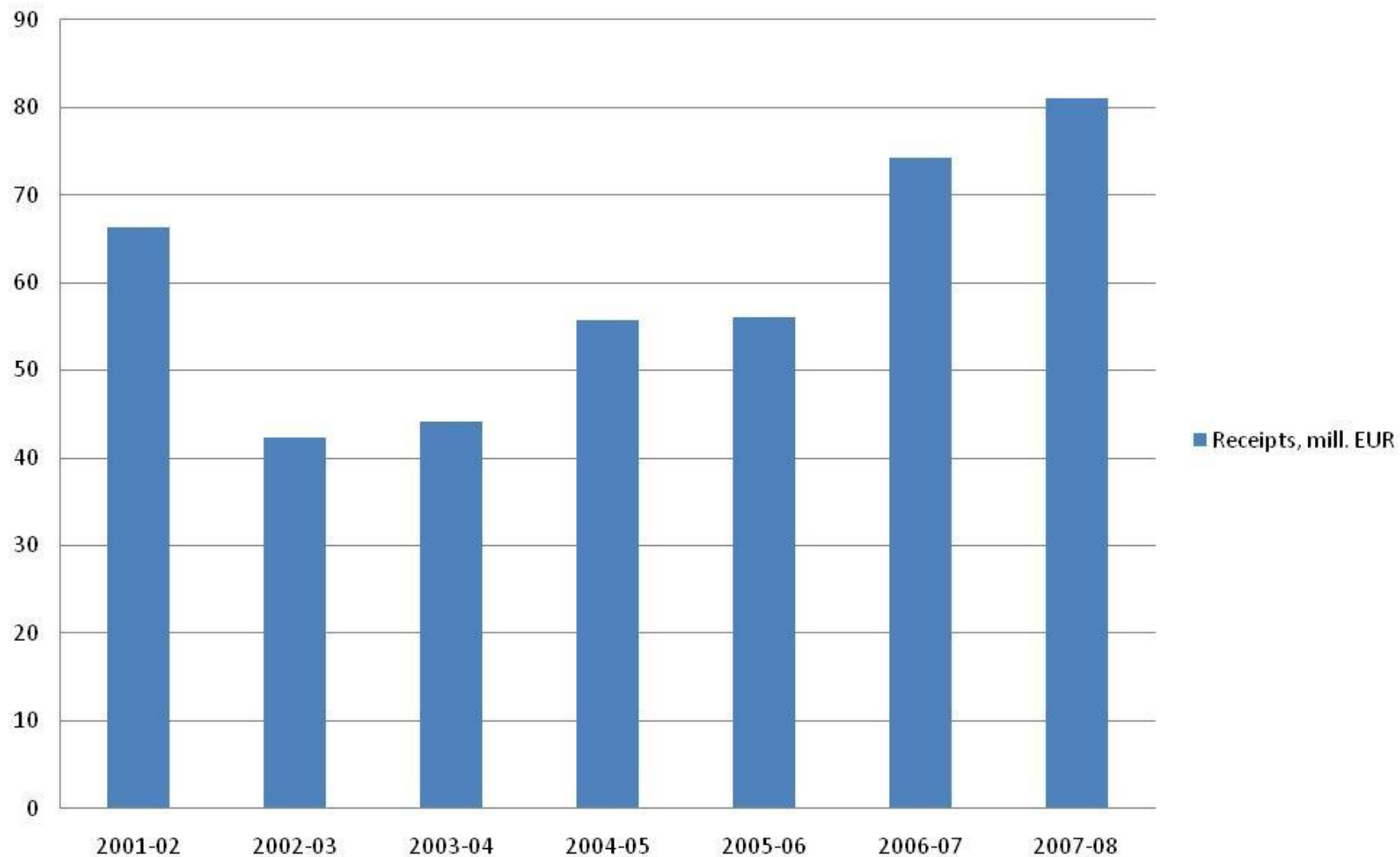


\*Holiday trips (excl. VFR) in commercial accommodation, participation in at least one winter outdoor activity

# Development of the number of snow holiday tourists from the UK, Russia, France, Germany, Estonia, Japan and the Netherlands in Finland during the winters 2000/01 - 2007/08 (November - April)



## Receipts from Snow Holiday Tourism during the Winters 2001/02 - 2007/08, mill. EUR



Snow holidays in Finland is not only skiing. The strength of Finland as a snow holiday destination is the versatile offer which besides cross-country skiing, downhill skiing and snowboarding also include dog sled safaris, reindeer safaris, snowmobile excursions, snowshoe walking, icebreaker mini cruises, winter driving and winter fishing. The you also have the Northern Lights and something very unique in the northernmost part of Europe, the Sami culture.

Tourist are quite actively carrying out activities as can be seen from the following figures:

Of a total of 2,6 million visitors in Finland during the winter of 2007/2008:

- 74 000 did cross country skiing
- 87 000 did down hill skiing
- 33 000 did snowboarding
- 146 000 drove a snowmobile
- 159 000 made a dog sled safari
- 141 000 made a reindeer safari
- 36 000 did winter fishing and
- 158 000 made a walk of at least three hours

All in all, 22,2 % of all visitors took part in outdoor activities on snow, i.e. 568 000 persons.



## Branding Finland as a Tourism Destination





## Tourism Country Brand

The Finnish Tourist Board (MEK) was assigned with the primary responsibility for creating the tourism country brand for Finland.

A Working Group comprising MEK, Helsinki, Turku, Tampere, Lakeland, Lapland and Ruka as well as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs was appointed in spring 2007.

Academic research is an essential element in the country branding process.

Research contribution provided by Finland's leading experts in country branding and place branding, Teemu Moilanen and Seppo Rainisto.

An in-depth theoretical review and case analyses of foreign successes and failures have been conducted and an operational programme has been formulated.

Starting from the brand promise, the attributes that are considered true and positive about Finland as a tourist destination were explored.

More than a hundred attributes were shortlisted down to four. All (by chance) begin with the letter C.

These were adopted as the cornerstones of Finland's tourism country brand.

The four C's will are not as such used in marketing communication.

# The Four C's



**Visit Finland**

## **Creative**

Technologically, academically and culturally attractive; architecture and design; with a touch of creative madness



**Visit Finland**

## **Cool**

Nice, happening, trendy, refreshingly crisp .



**Visit Finland**

## **Contrasting**

Seasons, east/west, cold/warm, midnight sun/winter darkness, sauna/ice swimming .



**Visit Finland**

## **Credible**

Efficient infrastructure, services, safety and security, and technology.



# SITUATION ANALYSIS

Problem:

Travel marketing is a highly competitive business.  
How can we stand out?

Answer:

Travel marketing communication is full of clichés concerning both visual style and content. This gives Finland a chance to differentiate by applying the challenger brand approach – not doing what everyone else is doing.

Problem:

As a travel destination, Finland is rather unconventional. Finland is not automatically taken in consideration when making travel plans.

Answer:

Our aim is to change the attitude that Finland not being a typical tourist destination, is actually a strength. The brand level message is based on the true strenghts of Finland. It emphasises that Finland is something special.

Problem:

Finland does not please everyone. Some people prefer palm beaches no matter what we do.

Answer:

It's OK. We are not trying to reach or please everyone. Instead, we are trying to activate those people who share values and attitudes that they can experience and reach easily travelling to Finland.

Problem:

Why aren't we using a similar kind of approach as before?

Answer:

It did not work effectively enough. We want to raise interest, to differentiate the country and to get more people visiting Finland.

# The Core of the Visit Finland Brand

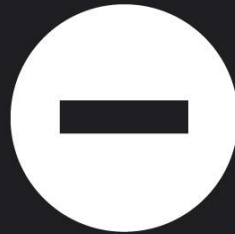
# The True Strengths of Finland

The Visit Finland brand is based on

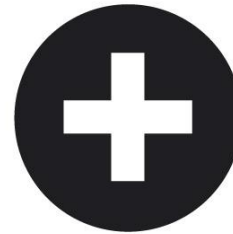
- true strengths in the context of travel marketing and in relation to other countries
- that Finland represent real exoticism
- a differentiation from usual visual clichés in travel marketing
- managing expectations and creating the right kind of mindset among travellers

Compared to most other countries, Finland is something else. A country full of contrasts that create a nice mixture and make it individual and even a bit eccentric. It is a welcome alternative to places crowded with tourists. Finland is not something for everyone, Finland is something special.

The following pairs represent the **mindset** of Finland – what the strenghts of Finland are and what they are not.



**Something for everyone**  
**Noise and hassle**  
**Packed**  
**Sweltering**  
**Superficial**  
**About complex cultural codes**  
**For masses**  
**Polluted**  
**Formal**  
**Artificial**  
**Bling bling**  
**A place to show off**



**Something special for the ones that think they have seen it all**  
**Peace and quiet**  
**Spacy**  
**Fresh**  
**Holistic**  
**Straight-forward**  
**For individuals**  
**Clean**  
**Inventive**  
**Natural**  
**Authentic**  
**A place to be yourself**



# VISIT FINLAND BRAND ATTRIBUTES - 4

## Cs

# CREATIVE



# COOL



# CONTRASTING





# CREDIBLE



## Selected Target Group

Visit Finland appeals to 15 % of the world's travelling people

The likelihood of travelling to Finland is related to people's values and attitudes

Marketing of Finland as a snow holiday destination in the context of the overall country branding activities is at present in its very beginning. Looking at the history of the image of Finland and the versatile Finnish Winter, it is quite evident that Snow Tourism in Finland is absolutely a product which has a very good future!



# S

## Snowmobile

THE MODERN ENCYCLOPEDIA

A snowmobile is a vehicle traditionally used in northern Finland for high speed travelling on snow, during the autumn, winter and spring. More rarely in the summer. It's often combined with other leisure winter sports such as skiing, snowboarding, dogsleds etc.

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# C

## Cross Country Skiing

THE MODERN ENCYCLOPEDIA

Throw your skis forward and push your poles back. The only sound is "sshhh sshhh sshhh" in the snow. You can hear your thoughts in this silence. Or empty your mind of thoughts, meditating on the quietude here on top the world. Until you come to a cabin, stamp the snow off your boots, and warm yourself with hot cocoa by the fire.

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# D


## Downhill

THE MODERN ENCYCLOPEDIA

For some, it's like a dance, creating patterns in the snow as they glide down the slope. For others, it's a hesitant snow-plow, ski poles like chicken wings pointing at the sky. And for others still, it's the joy of speed under control. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Phasellus interdum mi vel neque. Duis neque lorem, egetas ac, imperdiet vel, viverra sit, dui. Suspendisse venenatis, tellus ac egestas ultricies, ipsum sapien mollis metus, sed consequat odio ipsum vitae est.



VisitFinland.com

A scenic photograph of a winter landscape at sunset. The foreground is covered in a thick layer of snow, with several evergreen trees heavily laden with snow. The sun is a bright, glowing orb in the upper right corner, casting a warm, golden light across the entire scene. The sky is a mix of orange and yellow, with some clouds visible near the horizon. The background shows a vast, snow-covered valley with more trees and distant hills. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

Thank you for your attention!