

## Chapter 3

# Is the Tourism Destination a Core Attribute in the Choice of Cruise Consumers?

**Donata Vianelli**

*University of Trieste, Italy*

**Manuela Valta**

*University of Trieste, Italy*

### **ABSTRACT**

*In the last 10 years, cruise tourism has been frequently analyzed in the academic literature on leisure tourism. However, analysis of consumer behavior and the consumer-buying process is still limited, especially if the European market is taken into consideration. To address this gap in the literature, the authors analyzed how different attributes are evaluated by consumers in their decision-making process. In particular, the authors identified the role of the tourism destination among the different attributes that influence cruisers' choices. Using primary survey data from a sample of 4,002 German, Spanish, Italian, and French consumers, the analysis identifies the existence of consumer segments that give different levels of importance to the numerous attributes, including the tourism destination.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, an increasing number of studies on the topic of cruise tourism have been conducted both in mature and emerging markets (Kester, 2003; Forgas-Coll, Palau-Saumell, Sánchez-García, & Maria Caplliure-Giner, 2014; Fan, Qiu, Hsu, & Liu, 2015). Many reasons justify this increasing attention in the literature (Vianelli, 2011), the first of which is that the industry is still growing. In the last 20 years, the number of passengers has been steadily increasing from nearly four million at the end of the 1980s to approximately 24.7 million in 2016 (Clia, 2017). Another aspect that makes analysis of the cruise market interesting is the growing diversification of the supply and demand, which must meet the consumers' needs from both the functional and emotional perspectives (Camilleri, 2018a, b). Furthermore, in contrast to other tourism products, cruise evaluation is based on a complex bundle of different characteristics, where the destination is fundamental to clients' choices, but it is only one attribute of the product. Finally, the cruise business has a significant impact on port economy through embarkation and disembarkation (Braun, Xander, & White, 2002; Chase, 2002; Douglas & Douglas, 2004). In fact, cruise passengers might return to a port of disembarkation for a more in-depth exploration of a tourist destination that they briefly saw during their cruise (Gabe, Lynch, & McConnon Jr, 2006).

Despite the growing attention on cruise tourism in the academic literature, consumer research mainly examines purchase and post-purchase evaluations, whilst studies on consumer decision-making and on cruise destination remain very limited. The aim of this research is to analyze consumer behavior of European consumers of four different nationalities in the decision-making stage of a cruise product. The authors will capture consumers' choices in terms of attributes of the cruise service. More specifically, the role of the tourism destination in influencing consumers' decisions will be analyzed in comparison with other attributes of the cruise product. Moreover, numerous studies on cross-national differences in consumer behavior in different consumption sectors have underlined that cultural differences can have a strong influence on consumer behavior (Alon, Jaffe, Prange, & Vianelli, 2016). In our research context, we want to analyze if the tourism destination plays the same role in the choice of consumers of different nationalities, underlining the existence of a European consumer, or if some differences can be identified.

This chapter follows a twofold structure. It first reviews cruise tourism literature and relates it to past research to explain the European context of cruise demand. In developing the literature review, relevant insights into international research are provided, by reporting the most important attributes of a cruise product that have been investigated as well as those needing further analysis. Then, the study presents the empirical findings of 4,002 European consumers from Germany, Spain, Italy, and France, surveyed in five ports of cruise embarkation. The results

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