

From island mass tourism to rural tourism In Madeira: Is there a place for a re-definition of islands' image?

António Manuel Martins de Almeida

amma@uma.pt

Universidade da Madeira

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Resumo. Existe amplo consenso que a manutenção da capacidade competitiva de destinos turísticos maduros assenta no desenvolvimento de nichos de mercado alternativos como no caso do turismo rural. Outros mercados alternativos, como o eco-turismo e o segmento do turismo rural também têm sido objecto de atenção por parte dos gestores destes destinos turísticos. O turismo rural é um nicho de mercado, recente mas em crescimento, com crescente importância em áreas periféricas com história no turismo de massa ou oferecendo produtos turísticos standard. Devido à relativa 'juventude' do sector na Madeira, esta comunicação visa providenciar um melhor entendimento da imagem percebida do sector, baseado numa amostra de 150 turistas. Análise estatística multivariada é aplicada para construir a imagem do sector, com base na avaliação de uma série de itens como é usual neste tipo de estudos. Este estudo proporciona a oportunidade de preencher um vazio na literatura devido à identificação dos factores condicionantes da imagem, para além de incluir uma série de recomendações em termos de gestão do destino.

Palavras-chave: Meio ambiente - Tutela ambiental - Direitos fundamentais - Sociedade do risco - Princípio da prevenção - Desenvolvimento sustentável.

Abstract. It is now well acknowledged that the competitive edge of islands' mature tourist destinations relies on the development of new niche markets such as the rural tourism sector. Further, alternative market segments such as the eco-tourism and the cultural tourism have been targeted by most Destinations Management Organisations on islands. Rural tourism is a very recent but growing market niche in peripheral areas offering mass tourism products. For that reason the aim of this paper is to provide a better understanding of the image of this emerging industry here in Madeira based on a sample of 150 visitors.

Multivariate descriptive analysis is applied to 'built-up' the image of the rural tourism according to socioeconomic, travel-related features, and cognitive and emotional factors as it is usual in the destination image literature. This paper fills a void in the literature concerning the rural tourism sector as the factors attracting tourists to the emerging rural tourism industry in Madeira and policy recommendations put forward.

Keywords: rural tourism; destination image; Madeira Island; PCA.

1. Introduction

Islands face unique challenges to achieve economic and environmental sustainability based on the tourism industry (Butler, 1997; Correia et al, 2008) as most mature island destinations in the Mediterranean and Atlantic area are facing increasing competition from more remote, cheaper and 'exclusive' destinations (Hui and Wan, 2003; Lichrou et al, 2008). Nowadays, the standard European "tourists seek variety and prefer to visit new destinations" (Bigné et al, 2001, pg. 614). As a consequence of the increasing number of tourism development projects in remote areas "the destination choices available to consumers continue to expand" and the industry actors in mature destinations have been working hard to maintain their competitive edge based on 'recreated' images and new market niches (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, pg. 37; Hui and Wan, 2003).

In the pursuit of consistent growth, the rural tourism segment has been included in most 'innovative' development programs intended to reverse the trend of decline or stagnant demand. According to Mossberg and Kelppe (2005 pg. 494) countries, regions and cities are "spending large amounts of money on destination promotion", which also includes the rural tourism sector. However, due to the scarceness of studies and analyses on the subject of rural tourism on islands, we really don't know how effectively the tourism sector in mature destinations is recovering from stagnant or declining demand based on new market niches. The data available concerning Madeira Islands suggests that the contribution of the rural tourism segment to the number of overall arrivals less than 1%. As a consequence, we are particularly interested in avoiding "generalisations" about the rural tourism sector based on an automatic transfer of the theoretical achievements focused in the development of the industry in traditional settings in Europe.

Given the newness of the sector, statistical data on demand is only available from 1999 onwards, the importance of key 'attributes' in the visitors' decision making is actually unknown and the real importance (from a qualitative point of view) of the sector has not been yet assessed. Our research aims at providing interesting insights concerning the conditioning demand factors and the way visitors perceive the rural tourism segment in Madeira. Further, we try to understand the nature and extent of

the relationship between the current state of affairs in terms of the accommodation offer and de visitors' demands.

This paper is organized in the following way. In section 2, we provide a brief review of the evolution of the rural tourism sector in Madeira. Section 3 reviews previous studies on the rural tourism concept based on the concept of destination image. In section 4 the methodology is described and Section 5 discusses the results and main conclusions of this study.

2. The rural sector tourism on islands

Rural tourism is increasingly important to the economy of rural areas to meet the challenge of “declining incomes from traditional sources, ... market failure, market imperfection, and social need” (Cawley and Gillmor, 2008, pg. 316). However, not every region is thriving in the “new rural economy” based on tourism and the endogenous development approach (which includes quite often “small scale tourism development projects”) may not be “suitable for all rural regions” (Fleischer and Felsenstein, 2000, pg. 1021). According to Terluin (2003, pg. 332) the endogenous approach is based on “local development, produced mainly by local impulses and grounded largely on local resource. In contrast to the exogenous model, the benefits of development tend to be retained in the local economy and local values are respected. ... Where rural policies were concerned, the emphasis shifted towards rural diversification, bottom-up approach, support for local business, encouragement of local initiatives and local enterprises, and provision of suitable training”. However, the issue of how much effort is needed to “encourage local initiatives and local enterprises” and to help local businessman to create successful and networked businesses remains quite often unresolved. Saxena and Ilbery (2008, pg. 233) point to the fact that an endogenous approach based on the development of embedded and integrated networks “does not necessarily result in empowerment for all concerned “ as “complex issues of participation and inclusion remain central to the creation of equitable, sustainable, and integrated rural tourism”. Concerning Spain, Perales (2002, pg. 1102-03) also states that “despite recognition of some worthy economic impacts, the traditional tourism on its own often fails to create employment opportunities and business environments attractive enough to retain the host population, which keeps on emigrating. Consequently, at least in Spain, the traditional tourism has failed to nurture and boost a sustainable local development”. Nevertheless, as “tourists ... contributions to the rural economy can be expressed not only in financial terms, but also in the creation of new types of jobs, in addition to injecting new vitality into traditionally weakened economies” (Perales, 2002, pg. 1103), most regions still expect that “well managed and focused rural tourism might become a new source of income and employment and, at the same time, fulfill the broader role of breaking down social isolation and encouraging the repopulation of

such non-urban communities” (Perales, 2002, pg. 1103). However, in many regions, local entrepreneurs have not been able to identify and explore opportunities based on ‘untapped’ local resources and refreshed ‘tourism raw materials’ (Terluin, 2003). Further to this, in most countries in Europe, the development of the rural tourism sector in peripheral areas is primarily linked to the availability of financial support (under the umbrella of the European Program LEADER) channelled to restore “old rural houses in order to make them suitable accommodation” as explained by Molera and Albaladejo (2007, pg. 759). Consequently, rural tourism projects are quite often only based on accommodation offer at expenses of the development of complementary products and services. In the end, even if policy makers understood the rural tourism segment as a panacea for all economic problems of depressed areas, we should take into consideration the specific economic circumstances of each area to avoid exaggerated expectations.

Despite the shortcomings pointed out in several studies, the rural tourism sector seems well placed to allow the development of small scale businesses in unspoilt areas offering unique settings to nature based activities. Further, the rural tourism segment also offers a close look at pretty towns with interesting local culture and buildings to be explored and farming activities to be experienced. However, despite the increasing number of studies available on the subject of the rural tourism, most DMOS are still struggling to understand how to best promote rural areas abroad.

Even if most regions are trying to fine tune the development strategy at work, the literature provides us with interesting insights about the conditioning demand factors and preferences about activities. Garrod (2006, pg. 19) argues that tourists are attracted to rural areas to enjoy a satisfying experience based on a set of features (termed by the authors as countryside capital). The natural environment factor (enjoying the natural environment and landscapes) and well being motivations are the key factors attracting visitors to rural areas (Cánoves et al, 2005) Molera and Albaladejo (2007, pp. 758) highlight the culture factor, plus “contacts with nature, the sensation of space and freedom, the need for peace and tranquillity, the search for authenticity and tradition, the possibility of enjoying family vacations in a calm atmosphere, etc”, besides the natural environment factor. Other authors highlight motivations such as travelling in small groups, opportunities for children, contacts with the local residents and recreations of ‘genuine’ rural life experiences (Molera and Albaladejo, 2007; Perales, 2002). In terms of activities, Molera and Albaladejo (2007, pp. 758) lists hiking, horsing, fishing, historical visits to natural parks, buildings or typical constructions. Perales (2002, pp. 1108) suggests that visitors are eager to experience activities such as “trekking, excursions on bike and 4*4 Jeep”. However, the main reason to visit a rural area is related to stress management strategies: seek tranquillity in connection with nature, experience nature and enjoy a relaxed pace of life. In terms of preferences, the desire to disconnect from work worries, to discover new but somehow familiar places in a safe setting, to rest and relax, to spend and enjoy time with friends and family members and to visit

beautiful places, rank high. For that reason all those factors were included in the survey. However, demand is not homogenous even if most visitors share common interests. Frochot (2004, pg. 340) based on activities preferences, socio-economic and behavioural profiles, identifies 4 clusters of rural areas visitors: actives; relaxers; gazers; and rurals. The active group “had a general interest in all benefits but also the only cluster to score positively on the Sports dimension”; the second group was mainly attracted by the relation dimension; the “Gazers” were particularly interested in outdoor attractions; the “Rurals”, were mainly focused on the rural element and eager to experience “rural life” activities and rural areas culture (Frochot, 2004, pg. 340-341).

A quite detailed socioeconomic profile of the rural tourism visitor is available in the literature. Most studies point to young or middle age individual living in an urban area, with a high socio-cultural status (above average level of education and professional categories), medium to high income and with a positive attitude towards countryside activities (eg. rural life activities, farming). Royo-Vela (2008, pg. 5) dresses a profile of a literate (university degree or a high-school degree) young adult or middle-aged adult. Even if most visitors are relatively affluent, the cost factor is also important for a high number of visitors, and the endowment with rural tourism raw materials is not a sufficient conditions to guarantee high growth rates as can be seen below.

3. The rural tourism sector in Madeira

Although Madeira Island is a well known tourism destination, the rural tourism segment ‘started’ only a few years ago as data concerning the development of the sector in Madeira is available from 1995 onwards. The sector has experienced an interesting development in the 90s. Based on data provided by the Regional Statistic Office, we compute 19 rural houses in 1998 and 49 in 2009. However, the rural tourism sector accounts only for 0,8% in terms of overnights and guests (the sector represents less than 1% of the local tourism industry) and as can be seen in Figure 1, there are signs of a flattening pattern in the guests’ variable. The rural segments experienced all the Butlers life cycle stages in less than a decade and reached the maturation phase in 2004.

There is strong evidence of a seasonal pattern in terms of tourists’ visitation and the occupancy rate is only 21% (See Figure 2). For that reason the sector offers tremendous scope for growth without further investment. However, as the rural sector seems to mimic the traditional sector in terms of patterns of demand (and seasonal fluctuations in terms of arrivals) further research is needed to assess the sector real development prospects.

Figure 1: Key statistics about the rural tourism sector in Madeira Island

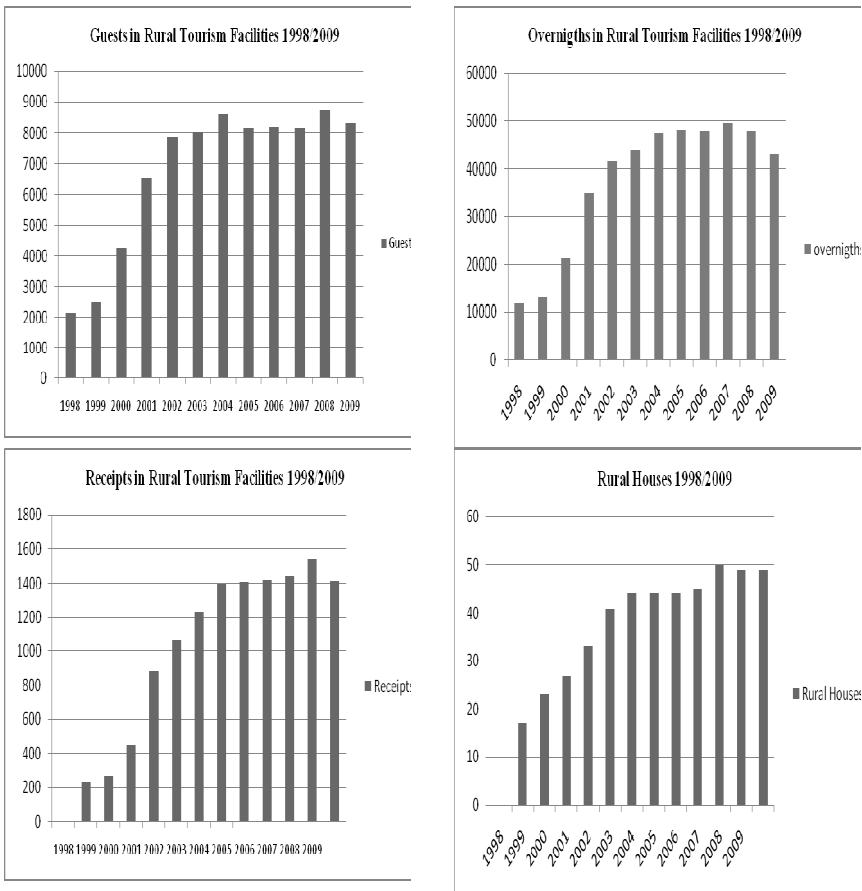
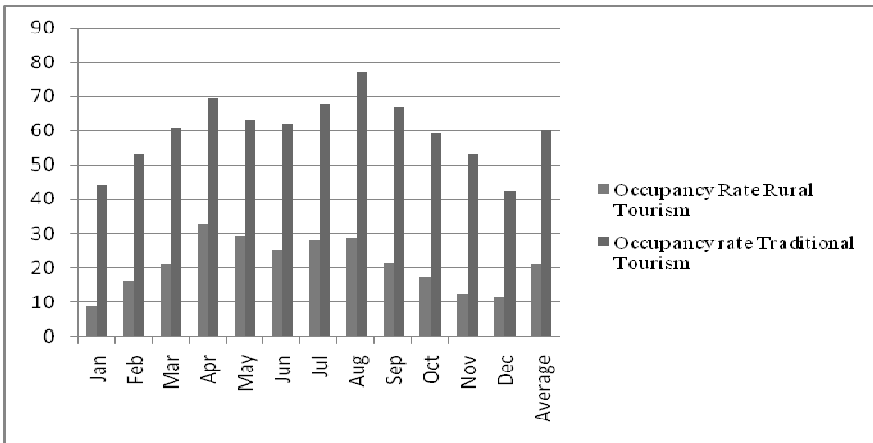


Figure 2: Bed occupancy rate in Rural Tourism (2009) and Traditional Tourism (2007)



Most rural houses are located in the North Coast, far away from the epicentre of the tourism industry at Funchal. However, as Madeira Island is well endowed with a modern road network and every attraction in the island is reachable in less than 1 hour. For that reason, it matters to understand the rather mixed results in terms of demand growth and development prospects.

4. Methodology and results

The present study was conducted in the autumn/winter of 2009 (November to February) in more than 40 rural houses all around the island. We opted for a quantitative survey due to the newness of the sector and our interest in getting a broader picture of the demand. The questionnaires were left with the managers at the rural houses facilities and the support of the Madeira Rural Association was deemed necessary. The questionnaire included four sections. The first section aimed at collecting data on visitors' travel experience and their previous stays in rural areas plus the activities undertaken, the benefits they sought besides the number of repeated visits and the length of holidays. The second section asked about visitors overall image of Madeira Islands and sources of information. The third section investigated visitors' motivations to stay in Madeira. The last section was focused on socio-demographic details.

The socio-demographic portrait of our sample is quite similar to the socioeconomic profile dressed in section 3. Most visitors are well paid professionals, with above average income and travelling with their family and

friends. They are in their forties, and are visiting the island to relax and gaze at beautiful landscapes as can be seen in Table 1.

As can be seen, items related to the nature factor (“natural parks, gardens and wilderness to enjoy”, “scenic beauty”, “pleasant whether”) are highly influential in terms of the decision making process. However, most visitors are dealing with stress coping strategies (“No crowded area”; No crowded área “Feeling disconnected, like in a really different and refreshing place”; “To alleviate stress and tension”;) and akin to enjoy a “relaxed pace of life”. At the same time they seem really interested in exploring learning opportunities, as the items “Discovery new things (new cultures ways of life)”, “Pretty towns and interesting places to visit”, “Feeling an authentic experience” and “Learning about an island” **are also well ranked.**

Table 1: Factors impacting the decision making process (and the perceived performance)

Itens	Factor	Performance	Dif.
Natural parks, gardens and wilderness to enjoy	4,48	4,35	-0,13
Scenic beauty	4,3	4,48	0,18
Pleasant weather	4,09	4,02	-0,07
Welcome and local people friendless	4,03	4,22	0,19
Relaxed pace of life	4,03	4,06	0,03
No crowded área	3,79	3,65	-0,14
Feeling disconnected, like in a really different and refreshing place	3,73	3,64	-0,09
To alleviate stress and tension	3,73	3,64	-0,09
Discovery new things (new cultures ways of life)	3,7	3,25	-0,46
A safe place to visit	3,69	4,02	0,33
The lodging is rustic and in harmony with the area	3,67	3,68	0,01
Pretty towns and interesting places to visit	3,48	3,74	0,26
Have a good time with family/friends	3,46	3,46	0
Feeling an authentic experience	3,39	3,2	-0,18
Learning about an island	3,36	3,48	0,12
Good infra-structure of hotels and apartments	3,28	3,4	0,11
Traditional gastronomy	3,27	3,34	0,07
Practising outdoor activities (ex. hiking, fishing)	3,27	3,38	0,11
New and exotic atmosphere	3,24	3,49	0,25
Availability of good tourist information	3,15	2,95	-0,2
To seek adventure and pleasure	3,15	3,08	-0,07
Relationships with local residents	3,04	3,38	0,34
Quality of the transport infra-structure	3,03	3,14	0,11
Talk about the destination to relatives and friends	2,99	3,19	0,2
Rural life activities	2,94	2,25	-0,69
To do exciting things	2,84	2,94	0,1
Intellectually enriching	2,76	2,78	0,02
Plenty of activities and sports	2,59	2,64	0,05
Economic development of the Island	2,58	2,94	0,36
A place where you can find good craftsmanship and traditional foodstuffs	2,56	2,87	0,31
Cultural attraction and history	2,52	3,08	0,55
To seek recreation and entertainment	2,46	2,83	0,37
Family oriented destination	2,42	2,75	0,33
Visiting cultural events and festivals	2,28	2,86	0,58
Farming activities	2,28	2,72	0,44
Transport cost to Madeira are low	2,19	2,55	0,36
Opportunities for children	1,95	2,29	0,33
Nightlife/entertainment	1,45	1,61	0,16

A principal component analysis (PCA) was applied to transform the initial set of 30 attributes into a restricted number of underlying dimensions. According to Hill (2000) the minimum number of variables

Seven factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 64,3% of the total variance. The results of the PCA analysis after Varimax rotation are shown I Table 2. As usual, we only consider factor loadings greater than 0.5 and in order to assign a label to each factor we look closely at the items grouped in that factor. The KMO test confirmed the appropriateness of conducting PCA analysis, as the value of 0,842 is above the minimum standard.

Factor 1, which explains the highest percentage of variance, is essentially related to exploring learning opportunities while on holidays. Examples are “Learning about an island”, “Intellectually enriching”, “Cultural attractions (e.g. museums) and history”, ”Discovery new things (new cultures ways of life)”, “Feeling an authentic experience” and “Pretty towns and interesting places to visit”.

The second factor is linked to the family background as it includes items such as “A family oriented destination, “Opportunities for children”, “Have a good time with family/friends”. The third factor is associated with classic factors (conditioning demand in) the tourism industry (“Transport cost to Madeira are low”, “Good price (Madeira with overall cost advantages)”, “Good infra-structure of hotels and apartments”, “No crowded place the area”, “Availability of good tourist information”). The fourth factor is linked to stress management strategies (“To alleviate stress and tension”, “Feeling disconnected, like in a really different and refreshing place”). The fifth comprises 3 items and is related to safety, welcome and gastronomy. The sixth factor lies in the natural beauty of the island and the seventh factor in adventure opportunities.

Table 2: Factor analysis results

Factors	Attribute	Loading	Mean
Learning oportunities	Learning about an island	,729	3,41
	Intellectually enriching	,706	2,92
	Cultural attractions (e.g. museums) and history	,706	2,72
	Discovery new things (new cultures ways of life);	,701	3,67
	Feeling an authentic experience	,626	3,41
	Pretty towns and interesting places to visit	,522	3,66
	Relationships with local residents	,491	3,02
	A place where you can find good craftsmanship and traditional foodstuffs	,474	2,57
Family reasons	A family oriented destination	,806	2,61
	Opportunities for children	,781	2,18
	Have a good time with family/friends	,676	3,35
Classic factors of the tourism industry	Transport cost to Madeira are low	,723	2,50
	Good price (Madeira with overall cost advantages)	,617	3,24
	Good infra-structure of hotels and apartments	,600	3,44
	No crowded place the area	,572	3,88
	Availability of good tourist information	,548	3,37
Stress management	To alleviate stress and tension	,812	3,86
	Feeling disconnected, like in a really different and refreshing place	,785	3,85
Safety, welcome and gastronomy	A safe place to visit	,648	3,79
	Welcome and local people friendless	,645	4,08
	Traditional gastronomy	,616	3,30
Natural beauty	Scenic beauty	,747	4,42
	Natural parks, nature, gardens and wilderness to enjoy	,720	4,44
	Pleasant weather	,425	4,24
	Relaxed pace of life	,412	4,02
Adventure	To seek adventure and pleasure	,737	3,13
	Plenty of activities and sports	,670	2,69
	Practising outdoor activities (ex. hiking, fishing)	,587	3,40
	To do exciting things	,573	2,98

The mean of almost all items is above 2,5 (except for the opportunities for children item), which suggest a rather positive image of the rural tourism sector in Madeira. As can be seen the item 'Opportunities for children' is below the 2.5 level, (and the Factor 'Family reasons' has the lowest summated mean score) which may

be related to the fact that most visitors (about 90%) are travelling to Madeira without their children. The score attached to the item 'Transport costs to Madeira are low' highlights other striking weaknesses of this destination in particular destination.

Even if the overall image of the rural tourism sector is positive, the industry' actors must bear in mind that sector in Madeira is not attracting families and large groups. Madeira Islands don't lack natural and scenic beauty (but is not well endowed with other rural tourism raw materials besides nature) to be enjoyed and for that reason the island is in direct competition with other destinations in the Mediterranean area. Our findings suggest that Madeira Island is as a tourism destination chosen by all those visitors interesting in stress coping strategies, which should be capitalized on the promotion strategies. The health tourism segment should be developed as the respondents' perceptions about related factors such as safety, welcome and gastronomy are good enough to be included in the marketing mix. Further, as the destination also performs well in the classic conditioning demand factors (good infra-structure of hotels and apartments; availability of good tourism information; no crowded area) the local DMO should also emphasize all these factors (from the destination point of view).

However, it is clear that further research is needed to interpret accurately the importance attached to the factors "Learning opportunities" and "Family reasons" as they come as a surprise. There is a widespread believe that the Madeira's secret is their natural beauty and classy hotels, and that tourism demands, according to Peter Wise, is based on "the affluent over-50s, ["white-haired tourists in straw hats"] taking tea on the lawn" (Financial Times, 9 May 2006). Further, a close look at the differentials between the assessment of the factors impacting the decision making process and their perceived performance suggest that there is room for improvement.

5. Conclusions

As can be seen above the overall image of Madeira Island is positive and the rural tourism segment is well appreciated by the outsiders. Given Madeira Island don't lack natural and beautiful landscapes, and most visitors really enjoy it, the promotion packages should keep advertising the 'green' factor. Further, the visitors assessment of the performance of the relevant attributes is positive and in line with the importance attached to the attribute in the decision making process.

There are plenty reasons to expect an increase in the numbers of visitors if promotion efforts are directed to enhance the 'learning opportunities' of all those visitors who wish to improve their knowledge *about the local natural environment and culture*, even if in a 'soft way'. Thus, the industry must diversify the attractions factors to include an enlarged and rich set of cultural events, organized tours around

the island for adventurous travellers but also for culturally oriented visitors. The challenge lies in integrating the different industry actors in a coherent development plan.

Due to the limited size of our sample and the deliberate focus on the analysis of perception of the island's image, further research is needed to be carried out in future to ascertain the key determinants of Madeira as a tourist destination and to identify the services to be offered to improve the final product. Due to the increasing competition from abroad, the industry actors must find out how to create excitement and emotions for all those repeated visitors.

Staying in Madeira was, for sure, glamorous in the 40s and 50s. To travel between the mainland and the island was to experience something exclusive, rare and exciting. Today the number of island' visitors approaches one million and the destination is well known in Europe. The glamour of the old days cannot be recovered and most visitors' are not ready to pay for 'exclusive holidays'. However, there are still a large number of visitors ready to travel, explore the North Coast, and learn more about the destination.

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