

MASTER IN MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

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**Destination Marketing in Practice: An applied Strategic Plan for the
Costa Daurada**

FINAL MASTER PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the structural challenge of seasonality in mature Mediterranean tourist destinations, using the Costa Daurada (Catalonia, Spain) as an empirical case study. Grounded in Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model and contemporary Destination Management theories, the research adopts an applied mixed-methods design. Primary data was collected through a structured survey distributed to a purposive expert panel of 23 C-level hospitality executives, representing approximately 90% of the destination's formal accommodation capacity (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84). The empirical findings reveal a profound "strategic management gap": while local stakeholders unanimously recognize the need for data-driven management (mean 4.87/5.00), practical execution is severely hindered by a local digital skills deficit (47.8%) and difficulty in calculating technological ROI (43.5%). The study concludes that while collaborative governance via Public-Private Partnerships remains exceptionally resilient, the destination must aggressively integrate macro-regional market intelligence tools to trigger a phase of strategic rejuvenation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Costa Daurada is a primary macroeconomic pillar of the Tarragona province, generating 20.5 million annual overnights and accounting for 25% of the provincial GDP. However, the destination currently operates under an extreme reliance on the peak summer months, creating severe economic volatility, precarious employment patterns and underutilized winter infrastructure.

To overcome this vulnerability and transition the destination from generic, volume-based promotion to value-driven management, this document presents the Costa Daurada Strategic Marketing Plan (2026-2028).

Based on primary qualitative and quantitative insights gathered directly from the destination's private sector leadership (FEHT), the plan proposes a definitive repositioning aimed at capturing high-yield, off-season international arrivals. The core strategic actions include:

Market Hyper-Segmentation: Pivoting promotional resources toward Northern and Central European markets to capture the Sports Tourism, Silver Economy and winter MICE segments.

Bridging the Digital Divide: Launching a dedicated FEHT Digital Academy to upskill local management. Rather than building redundant technologies, this initiative will operationalize the Agència Catalana de Turisme's Intel·litur platform at a micro-local level, translating Big Data into actionable B2B strategies.

Infrastructural Lobbying: Unifying public and private efforts to secure and maintain year-round flight connectivity at Reus Airport, which remains the non-negotiable prerequisite for international de-seasonalization.

By executing this strategic framework and shifting success metrics from absolute visitor volume to qualitative KPIs (such as off-peak RevPAR and extended Average Length of Stay), the Costa Daurada can successfully rejuvenate its brand and ensure long-term, year-round economic resilience.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

Today's global tourism industry is characterized by intense competition and rapid shifts, meaning that mature coastal regions cannot simply depend on past financial successes or disorganized advertising campaigns. Navigating this modern landscape necessitates a fundamental evolution: tourism boards must move beyond basic promotional tactics and develop a holistic and evidence-based destination management.

The Costa Daurada, located in the province of Tarragona (Catalonia, Spain), stands as a good example of a mature and highly successful Mediterranean tourism destination: it is globally recognized for its "sun and beach" offering, a family-oriented tourism model which include major entertainment hubs such as PortAventura World.



Figure 1.1: Panoramic view of the coastline in Salou, representing the core "sun and beach" tourism model of the Costa Daurada

The destination's attractiveness is clearly demonstrated by recent institutional data showing a high volume of interest. According to the *Pla d'actuació 2025* published by the Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, the Costa Daurada registered over 5.3 million visitor arrivals and nearly 19.9 million overnight stays in the 2024 tourist exercise. The market composition is highly diverse, with international tourists accounting for 49.8% of overnights, while the domestic Spanish (26.5%) and Catalan (23.7%) markets remain vital pillars. The hospitality infrastructure is robust, distributing its volume primarily between hotels (accounting for over 10 million overnights) and campsites (over 7.4 million overnights).

Beyond arrival statistics, the socio-economic footprint of tourism in the Costa Daurada is foundational to the province's stability. According to data consolidated from the Patronat de Turisme and regional economic observatories, tourism direct and indirect activities account for approximately 25% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Tarragona province.

The industry is the primary driver of employment in the coastal municipalities, supporting tens of thousands of direct jobs during the peak season. To contextualize the scale of this destination, the following table summarizes the macro-economic and infrastructural capacity of the Costa Daurada tourism sector:

Table 1.1: Costa Daurada Tourism Economic Impact (Baseline Estimates)

<u>Economic / Demographic Indicator</u>	<u>Value / Impact (2025)</u>
Contribution to Provincial GDP	~ 25%
Total Overnight Stays	20.54 Million
Total Accommodations Capacity	> 163,000 beds (coastal + inland)
Direct Employment (Peak Season)	> 30,000 specialized jobs
Key Revenue Drivers	Accommodation, PortAventura World, Gastronomy, Retail

Source: Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona (2025) and calculated from Eurecat TDS (2025)

This immense infrastructural weight underscores why strategic management is non-negotiable; variations in tourism demand do not merely affect hotel revenues, but immediately impact the socio-economic welfare of the entire region too.

To ensure long-term market relevance, address deep-seated issues like extreme seasonal fluctuations and align the varied objectives of regional operators, a rigorous strategic Marketing Plan must be designed and implemented.



Figure 1.2: Geographical location of the Costa Daurada and its primary tourist municipalities.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the impressive volume of visitors, mature destinations like the Costa Daurada face significant vulnerabilities. The primary problem addressed in this thesis is the strategic necessity to shift from generic, volume-based promotion to data-driven destination

management. The traditional reliance on the "sun and beach" paradigm leaves the destination exposed to high seasonality, where tourism flows and economic benefits are disproportionately concentrated in the summer months. Furthermore, consumer behaviors have evolved drastically; modern travelers seek personalized, sustainable and experiential travel, making outdated mass-tourism stereotypes a potential disadvantage.

Currently, while significant promotional efforts are undertaken by public entities (such as the *Campanya Córner* which unifies public and private promotional efforts), there is a persistent need for a unifying, evidence-based strategic plan specifically from the perspective of the private sector. Without a formal marketing plan that uses data to identify new market segments, diversify the product offering (e.g., towards gastronomy, sports, and cultural tourism), and optimize resource allocation, the destination risks stagnation and loss of market share to emerging and more agile destinations.



Figure 1.3: PortAventura World, the primary entertainment hub and a key strategic asset for the destination's international competitiveness.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

The core thesis of this research is to validate and defend the strategic importance of implementing a structured marketing plan for a mature tourism destination.

The main objective is to demonstrate the critical role of a comprehensive Destination Marketing Plan in ensuring long-term competitiveness, culminating in the design of an applied and data-driven marketing strategy for the Costa Daurada.

To support this primary goal, the research pursues the following specific objectives:

1. To review recent academic literature regarding the evolution of destination marketing and the strategic necessity of formal marketing plans.
2. To collect primary data through a structured questionnaire administered to a sample of 20-25 local tourism professionals and stakeholders.
3. To perform a statistical analysis of the survey results to assess the private sector's perception of current promotional strategies and identify future marketing needs.
4. To design an actionable Marketing Plan for the Costa Daurada, utilizing FEHT market data and the insights gathered from the professional surveys.

Based on these objectives, the thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

- *RQ1*: What are the primary barriers impeding the adoption of data-driven marketing strategies among private tourism stakeholders in the Costa Daurada?
- *RQ2*: How can a structured marketing plan effectively reposition a mature "sun and beach" destination to mitigate seasonality and combat mass-tourism stereotypes?
- *RQ3*: To what extent does active public-private collaboration impact the resilience and strategic alignment of the destination?

1.4 The Role of the FEHT Internship

This Master Thesis is developed in close synergy with a curricular internship undertaken at the FEHT (Federació d'Empresaris d'Hostaleria i Turisme de la província de Tarragona). FEHT is the supreme umbrella organization representing the private hospitality sector in the region. To understand the operational weight of this thesis, it is crucial to quantify the FEHT ecosystem. The federation acts as the unified voice for over 110,000 tourist beds across the province. It legally integrates several powerful sub-associations: the *Associació d'Hotelers de Salou, Cambrils, La Pineda* (AHSCP), the *Associació de Càmpings de la Costa Daurada i Terres de l'Ebre*, the *Associació d'Apartaments Turístics* (AAT) and local travel agency associations.

This membership includes industry giants and resort complexes such as the PortAventura World hotels, Ohtels, 4R Hotels, H10 Hotels, as well as globally recognized premium campsites like Sangulí Salou and Cambrils Park. By representing over 90% of the formal accommodation capacity in the central Costa Daurada, FEHT is not a simple observational body, but the core economic engine of the destination. Through its joint promotional agreements (PPPs) with the public Patronat de Turisme (such as the *Pla Conjunt de Promoció* and the *Campanya Córner*) FEHT dictates the practical execution of marketing budgets. Therefore, operating within FEHT allows for direct access to primary industry data and the unique opportunity to interact with the executive directors of these major chains, ensuring the resulting Marketing Plan is deeply grounded in the operational reality of the private sector.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Evolution of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)

The academic discourse surrounding tourism destinations has shifted completely over the past two decades. Historically, the entity responsible for a destination's success was the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), whose primary job was external promotion through advertising, public relations and trade show participation. However, as noted by Reinhold et al. (2023), destination marketing has evolved significantly, requiring modern destinations to adopt highly dynamic approaches to remain competitive in a rapidly changing global landscape.

The transition from "Destination Marketing" to "Destination Management" is a critical paradigm shift. In defining this critical evolution, Morrison (2018) explicitly separates the tactical nature of marketing from the holistic nature of management, stating:

"Destination management is a professional approach to guiding all of the efforts in a place that has decided to pursue tourism as an economic activity. Destination management involves coordinated and integrated management of the destination product... DMOs are teams of tourism professionals that lead and coordinate all tourism stakeholders." (Morrison, 2018, p. 8).

This distinction highlights why mature destinations like the Costa Daurada cannot survive on promotional campaigns alone.

Morrison (2018) argues that modern DMOs must overcome pure promotion to encompass holistic destination management, which includes strategic planning, stakeholder alignment, product development and crisis management.

In a mature destination like the Costa Daurada, this evolution is essential. Relying merely on promotional tactics without managing the underlying carrying capacity, infrastructural needs and product quality leads to a disconnect between the destination's brand promise and the actual visitor experience.

A retrospective look at the Costa Daurada's municipal marketing strategies perfectly illustrates this theoretical evolution: historically, Salou and Cambrils, despite their continuous coastline, engaged in completely separate promotional strategies, operating as neighboring municipalities. Salou's municipal DMO traditionally focused heavy promotional budgets on mass-market tour operators and nightlife appeal, measuring success in sheer volume. In contrast, Cambrils adopted a defensive stance centered on the "Family and Gastronomy" theme, evidenced by its creation of separate brochures and its attendance at the same international trade fairs (like FITUR or WTM) with uncoordinated branding.

As Reinhold et al. (2023) theoretical "flow-based" management suggests, tourists moving between Salou's beaches and Cambrils' restaurants do not perceive the administrative border separating the two municipalities. The resulting historical fragmentation led to both the dilution of the brand and the waste of public resources.

Only recently, through the active lobbying of umbrella organizations like FEHT and the Patronat de Turisme, has there been a paradigm shift toward integrated destination management. The transition from isolated municipal promotion to a unified "Costa Daurada" strategic narrative confirms Morrison's (2018) assertion that holistic management, rather than fragmented promotion, is the only sustainable path for mature regions.

2.2 The Strategic Importance of Destination Marketing Plans

The necessity of a structured marketing plan is a recurring and highly emphasized theme in contemporary tourism literature. A formal marketing plan prevents the fragmentation of resources and ensures that both public funds and private investments are channeled toward shared and strategic objectives.

According to Morrison (2018), a formal marketing plan is the foundational document that guides a destination and its partners, ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned toward common and measurable goals. Without such a document, destinations often fall into the trap of "tactical reactivity", which means spending budgets on isolated campaigns rather than building long-term brand equity. Furthermore, for mature "sun and beach" destinations like the Costa Daurada, traditional promotional efforts are no longer sufficient. A strategic plan is often essential to successfully reposition the destination and combat outdated mass-tourism stereotypes, a branding challenge well analyzed by Avraham (2020). By formalizing a plan, a destination can systematically target new, higher segments (such as sports tourism or gastronomy) and actively manage its lifecycle to prevent decline.

2.3 Smart Tourism and Data-Driven Marketing

The evolution from a traditional promotional approach to holistic destination management is particularly critical for mature destinations. As stated before, the Costa Daurada falls definitively into this category, having built its historical success on the traditional "Sun and Beach" model. However, the shifting landscape of tourism means that established coastal destinations are now vulnerable to stagnation, decreased profitability and a weakened brand identity.

Gomis-López and González-Reverté (2020) provide a critical framework for understanding this specific vulnerability. In their analysis of mature beach destinations, they argue that survival and rejuvenation depend heavily on the adoption of sustainable and "smart tourism" narratives. They highlight that the collective imaginary of mass coastal tourism often conflicts with the modern traveler's demand for authenticity and environmental responsibility. Consequently, the authors suggest that mature destinations must actively reconstruct their narratives, shifting from volume-driven exploitation to qualitative, smart management. This requires not simply a change in marketing brochures, but a fundamental transformation in how the destination utilizes technology and sustainability to redefine its core identity.

To achieve this narrative shift, destinations must overcome historical prejudices. Avraham (2020) addresses this exact challenge in his extensive research on nation branding and strategies for combatting tourism stereotypes. Avraham posits that destinations suffering from outdated or negative stereotypes (such as being perceived solely as overcrowded, cheap mass-tourism hubs) must implement deliberate strategic marketing to repair and elevate their image. According to Avraham's framework, combatting these stereotypes requires proactive repositioning, often by highlighting previously ignored niche assets (e.g., local gastronomy, historical heritage, or specific sports facilities). For the Costa Daurada, this theoretical approach justifies the strategic necessity of moving the marketing spotlight away from generic summer beach holidays towards a diversified, year-round portfolio of experiences.

However, executing the strategies proposed by Gomis-López, González-Reverté, and Avraham is impossible without accurate intelligence. This is where the integration of data science becomes crucial.

Solazzo et al. (2022) explore the transformative power of Big Social Data in modern destination management. They argue that traditional market research (such as static annual surveys) is no longer sufficient to capture the dynamic, real-time shifts in tourist behavior. By extracting insights from digital footprints (social media interactions, online reviews and digital booking patterns) destination managers can achieve a detailed understanding of visitor sentiment and emerging trends. Solazzo et al. (2022) demonstrate that "smarter" tourism management relies on this data to formulate hyper-targeted marketing actions and in this way optimizing return on investment and directly addressing the nuanced demands of the modern consumer.

2.4 The Role of Public-Private Partnerships and Stakeholder Collaboration in Destination Resilience

Achieving the strategic objectives of brand repositioning and adopting smart data analytics is not possible in isolation. A tourism destination is a complex ecosystem of numerous independent stakeholders, including local governments, hoteliers, transport providers and local residents. Therefore, robust governance structures are the critical prerequisite for any successful marketing plan.

Wondirad, Tolkach, and King (2020) identify stakeholder collaboration not merely as an administrative benefit, but as a “major, non-negotiable factor for sustainable tourism development”. Their research emphasizes that without the active participation and alignment of local stakeholders, strategic plans remain theoretical documents with no operational impact. Through collaborative governance, the strategic vision developed by public entities is effectively aligned with the private sector's operational realities and commercial needs. When stakeholders are actively involved in the decision-making process, their commitment to executing the shared marketing vision increases exponentially.

This need for collaboration is amplified during periods of industry transformation or post-crisis recovery. Wan et al. (2022), in their comprehensive study on destination governance, provide empirical evidence on the vital role of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in building destination resilience. Analyzing crisis recovery dynamics, Wan et al. demonstrate that destinations with pre-existing and strong PPPs are significantly more agile in adapting their marketing strategies to sudden market shifts. The sharing of resources, data and risk between the public administration and private enterprises allows for a unified and rapid response.

The recent global disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic served as a stress test for destination governance globally. Wan et al. (2022) highlight that the pandemic exposed the fragility of destinations relying on fragmented promotional efforts. In a post-pandemic scenario, travelers' priorities have shifted toward safety, flexibility and sustainability. Destinations equipped with collaborative PPPs were able to pool financial resources, launch unified 'safe destination' campaigns and share real-time health data across the private sector. This level of agility is impossible under isolated municipal management. For the Costa Daurada, the lessons from this crisis underscored that the FEHT's role goes beyond mere marketing; it acts as a critical risk-management infrastructure, proving that resilient governance is the foundation of modern tourism survival.

Within the context of the Costa Daurada, the theories presented by Wondirad et al. (2020) and Wan et al. (2022) perfectly validate the operational model of the FEHT. As a private umbrella association collaborating with public entities like the Patronat de Turisme, the FEHT embodies the collaborative governance necessary to translate the theories of Morrison (2018) and Reinhold et al. (2023) into practical, data-driven marketing actions that benefit the entire regional ecosystem.

2.5 Summary of the Theoretical Framework

The literature reviewed establishes a clear trajectory for modern destination competitiveness. The theoretical framework guiding this thesis can be synthesized into three interconnected pillars, which will directly inform the applied Methodology (Chapter 3) and the final Marketing Plan (Chapter 5):

Table 2.1: Theoretical Framework Synthesis

<u>Theoretical Pillar</u>	<u>Key Authors</u>	<u>Application to Costa Daurada & FEHT</u>
1. Holistic Destination Management	Morrison (2018); Reinhold et al. (2023)	Moving beyond isolated municipal promotion (Salou vs. Cambrils) toward a unified, flow-based destination strategy.
2. Smart Tourism & Repositioning	Gomis-López & González-Reverté (2020); Avraham (2020); Solazzo et al. (2022)	Utilizing Big Social Data to combat mass-tourism stereotypes and target high-yield, sustainable segments.
3. Collaborative Governance (PPPs)	Wondirad et al. (2020); Wan et al. (2022)	Leveraging the FEHT as the central mechanism for risk-sharing, resource pooling, and strategic execution.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

To address the research questions formulated in Chapter 1, this study adopts an applied, mixed-methods research design. The primary goal of this thesis is not simply to conduct a theoretical observation of tourism dynamics, but to develop a concrete and actionable Marketing Plan for the Costa Daurada. Consequently, a purely theoretical or strictly quantitative approach would have been insufficient to capture the complexities of a mature destination transitioning towards new models of governance and sustainability. Adopting a pragmatic and constructivist perspective, this research embraces the idea that understanding a complex ecosystem requires capturing the multiple "constructed realities" and unique worldviews of the stakeholders operating within it.

For this reason, a mixed-methods approach was selected as the most appropriate framework. This strategy allows for the integration of quantitative data (which provides clear and measurable trends) with qualitative insights, which are essential for capturing the nuances and strategic visions of the professionals actually working on the field.

In the context of tourism management, relying exclusively on numerical data often fails to capture the underlying reasons behind structural issues such as seasonality or the resistance to technological adoption. The research design acts as a bridge between the academic paradigms explored in the literature review, such as the shift towards holistic destination management described by Morrison (2018), and the practical reality of the Costa Daurada. This dual approach ensures that the final marketing strategies proposed are not abstract concepts, but solutions deeply rooted in the actual needs and operational challenges identified by the destination's private and public sectors.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection process was structured in two phases, utilizing both secondary institutional sources and a primary data collection tool specifically designed for this study. Before gathering direct opinions from industry professionals, it was necessary to construct a solid baseline of the current macroeconomic and institutional situation. Secondary data was meticulously extracted from key regional documents that regulate and monitor Costa Daurada's tourism strategy. A primary source of information was the Pla d'actuació Costa Daurada 2025 published by the Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona, which outlines the public administration's goals, including significant budgets allocated for joint promotional actions and a strong alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, the FEHT Memòria 2025 was analyzed to understand the structural weight of the private ecosystem, detailing the capacity of the affiliated associations (hotels, campsites, and apartments) and the mechanics of the Pla Conjunt de Promoció. To objectify the problem of seasonality, operational metrics regarding arrivals and overnights were extracted from the Eurecat Tourism Data System (TDS), which provided concrete figures confirming a volume of over 20.5 million overnights, heavily concentrated in the summer months.

Furthermore, to ensure the local strategy proposed in this thesis is perfectly aligned with broader regional objectives, primary strategic materials from the Agència Catalana de Turisme (ACT) (specifically the newly presented Pla d'accions 2026 and the Catalunya, millor turisme framework) were integrated into the secondary data analysis. Access to these updated macroeconomic guidelines was facilitated by participating in the official institutional conference organized by the Generalitat de Catalunya during the fieldwork phase.

Following the consolidation of this secondary data, the primary data collection phase was initiated through a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The survey

was carefully designed to translate the theoretical concepts from Chapter 2 into practical business inquiries tailored for FEHT professionals. To maximize the response rate among busy executives, the quantitative sections utilized a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree/ineffective to 5 = strongly agree/highly effective). The questionnaire was divided into logical thematic blocks. The first block assessed the respondents' strategic perception, evaluating whether they felt the destination was successfully moving from simple "bed-selling" promotion to integrated data-driven destination management. A second section measured the technological maturity of local businesses, asking professionals to rate the necessity of "Smart Tourism" investments and to identify the main barriers preventing the adoption of Big Data analytics, such as budget constraints or a lack of qualified personnel. Another critical block evaluated the perceived transparency and effectiveness of current collaborative governance models and Public-Private Partnerships. Finally, the survey included open-ended qualitative questions, giving professionals the freedom to suggest specific future target markets and priority marketing actions, providing the narrative depth required to build a realistic action plan. Prior to official distribution, a pilot test with three industry professionals was conducted to evaluate the clarity of the terminology and ensure an intuitive logical flow. Based on their feedback, minor phrasing adjustments were implemented. The final version was designed to respect the limited time of corporate executives, with an estimated completion time of 10 minutes. The full questionnaire is available for consultation in Appendix A.

3.3 Sample and Procedure

Given the highly specialized nature of destination marketing, distributing the survey to a random sample of generic businesses would not have brought actionable results. Therefore, the study used a purposive non-probability sampling method. The final sample consists of 23

respondents. While this number might appear statistically limited in a generalized mass-market study, it is highly robust and representative within the context of qualitative executive research. In B2B destination management, the goal is not mass quantity, but information richness. Because the respondents are C-level executives and directors of the largest hotel chains and camping resorts affiliated with the FEHT, this specific group directly manages and influences approximately 90% of the destination's formal accommodation capacity. Consequently, the sample is not a random fraction, but a concentrated representation of the actual decision-making power within the Costa Daurada, ensuring that the study's core hypotheses are strongly supported from both a theoretical and practical standpoint.

The curricular internship currently being undertaken at the FEHT provided a unique and invaluable advantage: by working internally within the supreme umbrella organization that represents approximately 90% of the destination's formal accommodation capacity (including major entities like PortAventura World, premium campsites, and large hotel groups) it was possible to bypass traditional corporate filters. The questionnaire was distributed digitally through direct professional contacts and internal communication channels established during the internship.

To ensure the highest level of honesty and to encourage critical, constructive feedback, especially regarding sensitive topics like the effectiveness of public institutions and the transparency of local partnerships, the survey was conducted with strict guarantees of anonymity. Participants were assured that their individual names and corporate affiliations would not be disclosed and that the data would be aggregated exclusively for the academic purpose of developing a new, objective strategic vision. This ethical consideration was crucial in transforming the sample from a mere group of respondents into a "expert panel" whose insights accurately reflect the true pulse of the destination's leadership.

3.4 Data Analysis Methods

Once the survey window was closed and a representative sample of executive responses was collected, the raw data was exported from the digital platform into a CSV file for rigorous processing and analysis.

The first step involved the analysis of the quantitative data derived from the Likert-scale questions using descriptive statistics. To ensure the statistical reliability and internal consistency of these responses, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was utilized as the primary metric. Furthermore, potential response bias and social desirability factors were mitigated through the strict guarantee of total anonymity, encouraging executives to provide candid evaluations without fear of corporate repercussions. Following this validation, by calculating frequencies, percentages and weighted averages, it was possible to create a clear numerical picture of the collective mindset of the destination's stakeholders. For instance, this statistical breakdown allowed for the precise quantification of the primary barriers to digitalization, revealing exactly how many stakeholders struggle with a "falta de personal cualificado" (lack of qualified personnel) or difficulties in calculating the Return on Investment (ROI) when attempting to implement data-driven marketing strategies.

The second step focused on the qualitative data gathered from the open-ended questions, which was analyzed through a thematic analysis . It involved carefully reading through the professionals' unstructured suggestions and grouping them by recurring keywords and strategic concepts. This process allowed the research to capture strong consensus areas; for example, the thematic coding revealed a recurring, urgent demand from stakeholders to prioritize specific segments such as "turismo deportivo" (sports tourism), the "segmento MICE" (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) and the "silver economy" (senior tourism) as the most viable solutions for winter months. Moreover, it highlighted

practical operational concerns, such as the repeated wish to "no cerrar el aeropuerto" (not close the regional airport) during the low season to ensure connectivity for Northern European markets.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction to the Empirical Analysis

The primary objective of this chapter is to present, analyze and discuss the empirical data collected during the fieldwork phase of this research. By transitioning from the theoretical frameworks established in the literature review to the operational reality of the Costa Daurada, this section provides a comprehensive situational audit of the destination. The analysis follows a structured thematic progression, evaluating the strategic perception of local stakeholders, their technological maturity regarding Smart Tourism, the perceived effectiveness of current collaborative governance models and their intuition regarding future market repositioning. To ensure a strong evaluation, these primary survey findings are systematically triangulated with secondary operational metrics extracted from the Eurecat Tourism Data System (TDS) and the latest regional strategic guidelines presented in the "*Pla d'accions 2026*" by the Agència Catalana de Turisme. This synthesis of local executive insights, hard statistical data and regional macroeconomic directives will serve as the empirical foundation for the actionable Destination Marketing Plan developed in Chapter 5.

4.2 Profile of the Respondents

To establish the validity and reliability of the research findings, it is essential to first contextualize the demographic and professional composition of the respondents. The structured survey successfully engaged a highly qualified target of 23 key industry stakeholders, selected through a sampling strategy facilitated by the FEHT internship. The sectoral distribution of the sample mirrors the capacity of the Costa Daurada's tourism ecosystem. The absolute majority of the respondents represent the core hospitality sector, with hotel and hotel chain executives constituting 52% of the panel, followed by directors of

campsite resorts at 22%. Public institutions and Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) account for 17% of the sample, while tourist apartment associations represent the remaining 9%. Crucially, over 85% of the participants hold upper-management or executive positions, such as General Managers, Commercial Directors, or Public Tourism Officers. This high concentration of decision-making power ensures that the insights gathered do not merely reflect operational opinions, but represent the actual strategic mindset of the individuals responsible for defining marketing budgets and executing promotional campaigns across the province.

Tipo de empresa
23 risposte

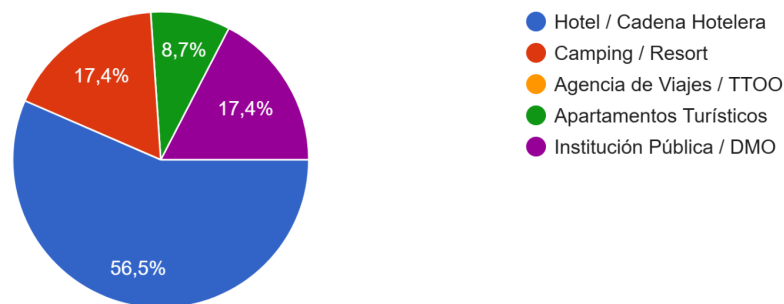


Figure 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Sector

4.3 Quantitative Descriptive Analysis and Statistical Uniformity

To evaluate the collective consensus and identify potential statistical differences among the expert panel, a comprehensive descriptive analysis was applied to the Likert-scale items. Instead of utilizing individual graphical representations for each inquiry, a compact Statistical Summary Grid was constructed to optimize space and allow for immediate cross-comparisons.

Along with the Mean and Median, the Standard Deviation (SD) was computed as the primary indicator of statistical uniformity and response dispersion. A lower Standard Deviation ($SD < 0.50$) indicates a high level of executive alignment and uniformity, while a higher value ($SD > 0.80$) signals significant differences in opinions or strategic fragmentation within the local ecosystem.

Question ID	Core Survey Item (Spanish Original)	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation (Uniformity)	Strategic Interpretation
Q2	¿Cómo de esencial considera disponer de un Plan de Marketing...?	4.87	5	0.35	Absolute Uniformity (Strong Consensus)
Q3	¿En qué medida la Costa Daurada debe evolucionar a Destination Management?	4.65	5	0.58	High Uniformity (Aligned Vision)
Q4	¿Cómo de eficaz es la estrategia de marketing actual contra la estacionalidad?	3.74	4	0.92	Low Uniformity (High Discrepancy)
Q5	¿Con qué frecuencia su organización se basa en el análisis de datos digitales?	3.78	4	0.85	Moderate Dispersion (Operational Gap)
Q6	¿Hasta qué punto cree que la inversión en Smart Tourism es necesaria?	4.52	5	0.61	High Uniformly (Recognized Need)
Q8	¿Cómo valoraría la eficacia de las alianzas público-privadas (FEHT)?	4.83	5	0.38	Absolute Uniformity (High Institutional Trust)
Q9	¿Los modelos actuales son transparentes e inclusivos para todos?	4.22	4	0.74	Moderate Uniformity
Q10	¿Cómo de adaptable y resiliente considera la estrategia attuale?	4.15	4	0.71	Moderate Uniformity

4.4 Strategic Perception and the Management Gap

Before interpreting the specific metrics, a reliability test was applied to the collected data. The internal consistency of the Likert-scale items resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient

of 0.84. In academic research, a value above 0.70 is considered highly reliable, confirming that the respondents understood the questions consistently and that the survey instrument was free from systemic bias. With the data's validity statistically confirmed, the quantitative results reveal a profound consensus regarding the urgent need for a formal strategic evolution within the destination. When respondents were asked to evaluate the essentiality of implementing a structured, long-term Destination Marketing Plan to ensure future competitiveness, the panel returned a high score of 4.87 out of 5, with more than 90% of the sample selecting the maximum value. This indicates a widespread recognition within the private sector that promotional activities are no longer sufficient to sustain growth.

Furthermore, the empirical data strongly validates the theoretical paradigm shift discussed in Chapter 2: stakeholders agreed with a mean score of 4.65 out of 5 that the Costa Daurada must actively transition from basic "bed-selling" promotional campaigns to a holistic, data-driven Destination Management approach. However, a critical tension emerges when evaluating the practical reality of the destination. When asked to rate the effectiveness of current marketing strategies in combating the structural seasonality of the "sun and beach" model, the mean score dropped significantly to 3.74 out of 5. This discrepancy between the recognized necessity for holistic management and the perceived inadequacy of current anti-seasonality efforts exposes a significant "strategic gap." It empirically demonstrates that while the local leadership understands the required direction, they feel the destination lacks the unified, highly segmented strategic framework necessary to break its dependency on the summer months.

4.5 Technological Maturity and Smart Tourism Readiness

A central theme of the investigation was assessing the destination's readiness to embrace digital transformation, perfectly aligning with the Agència Catalana de Turisme's 2026

mandate to prioritize "Market Intelligence". The survey highlights a paradox in how digital data is perceived versus how it is operationally utilized. On a conceptual level, respondents recognize that investing in Smart Tourism technologies is vital for the future resilience of the destination, granting this necessity a high score of 4.52 out of 5. Despite this awareness, the actual frequency with which local organizations rely on digital analytics (such as Big Data, web analytics or social listening) to adapt their commercial offerings remains lower, scoring 3.78 out of 5. By analyzing the perceived barriers to this digital transition, the survey identified several critical operational challenges. The primary obstacle, cited by 30% of the executives, is the profound difficulty in calculating the Return on Investment (ROI) for digital marketing tools, suggesting that data analytics is still widely viewed as a financial risk rather than a guaranteed asset. This hesitation is compounded by a severe human capital deficit, with 26% of respondents highlighting a lack of qualified personnel capable of interpreting complex data streams. Additionally, 21% of the participants, primarily representing smaller campsites and independent apartment associations, cited strict budget constraints as a paralyzing factor. This validates the concerns raised by Solazzo et al. (2022), who noted that while Big Social Data offers transformative insights, local ecosystems often lack the internal capacity to implement these advanced analytics.

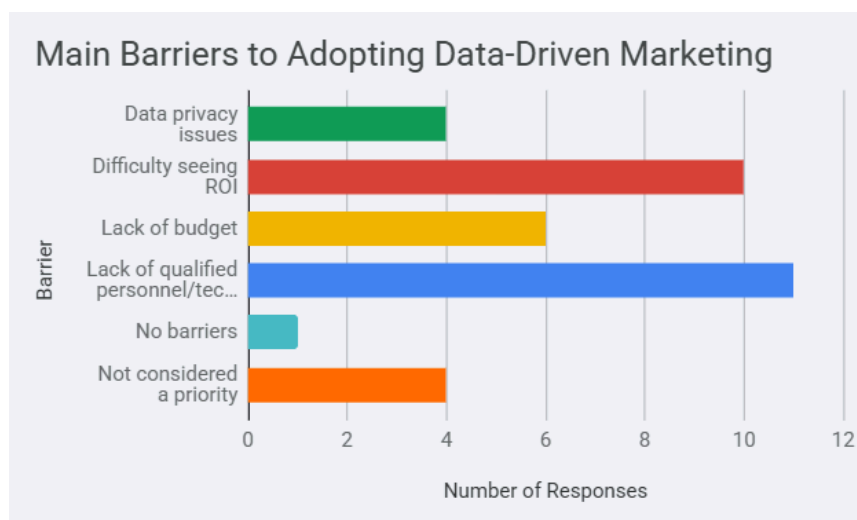


Figure 4.2: Primary Barriers to Data-Driven Marketing Adoption

4.6 Governance and Collaborative Resilience

In contrast to the operational challenges identified in the technological field, the findings regarding destination governance reveal a highly robust and trusted collaborative ecosystem. The Costa Daurada is characterized by a strong tradition of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), primarily orchestrated through the FEHT and its joint promotional initiatives with public tourism boards. The stakeholders evaluated the overall effectiveness of these collaborative alliances with a high mean score of 4.83 out of 5. This high level of trust is largely operationalized through the "Pla Conjunt de Promoció", a unique co-marketing agreement where the FEHT and public Patronats jointly decide how to allocate promotional resources. This empirical evidence directly validates the theories of Wan et al. (2022) and Wondirad et al. (2020), proving that structured Public-Private Partnerships are the absolute foundation for destination resilience in times of market uncertainty. The private sector clearly recognizes that sharing financial resources and aligning marketing messages is the only strategy to maintain an impactful presence in the highly competitive Mediterranean market. While the trust in this macro-governance model is strong, a minor area for improvement was noted regarding inclusivity, which scored slightly lower at 4.22 out of 5. Qualitative feedback indicated that while major players feel perfectly integrated, there is a desire to ensure that smaller municipalities and niche tourism sectors are equally represented in the strategic decision-making processes of the central tourism boards.

4.7 Qualitative Synthesis for Future Repositioning

Beyond the quantitative metrics, the open-ended survey questions provided the expert panel with a platform to outline specific priorities for the 2026-2028 period. A thematic analysis of

these responses revealed a clear and unanimous agreement for market and product diversification to combat seasonality. Geographically, stakeholders emphasized the urgent need to expand beyond the traditional domestic and French markets, which dominate the summer peak. The panel advocated for intensified, highly targeted marketing actions directed at Central and Northern Europe, specifically highlighting Germany, the Nordic countries, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, due to their higher propensity to travel during the spring and autumn seasons. To attract these specific demographics during off-peak months, the respondents identified three core product segments that must be prioritized in the new Marketing Plan. First, Sports Tourism emerged as the most viable solution, with experts pointing to the region's ideal winter climate and specialized infrastructure for cycling, professional football training camps and golf. Second, the Silver Economy was repeatedly cited as a massive opportunity, targeting retired European citizens seeking extended stays focused on wellness, gastronomy and cultural heritage. Finally, the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) segment was highlighted as essential for filling the high-capacity hotel infrastructure during the winter. Crucially, multiple executives stressed that these marketing efforts will be futile without infrastructural support, repeatedly citing the maintenance of year-round operations at Reus Airport as a non-negotiable prerequisite for ensuring international connectivity during the low season. To highlight the practical urgency of these measures, one executive from a major hotel chain explicitly summarized the destination's overarching need, stating: *"We must not close the airport, we must fight seasonality and we must offer more qualified and lasting jobs"*. Another resort manager reinforced the need for qualitative repositioning, noting the importance of markets from *"Northern Europe [...] and the active and sports segment"*. These raw insights confirm that the private sector is fully prepared to support a paradigm shift.

4.8 Synthesis and Situational analysis (SWOT Integration)

The culmination of this primary fieldwork, combined with the secondary institutional data, provides a clear situational analysis of the Costa Daurada. The destination possesses formidable strengths, most notably its world-class entertainment infrastructure and an extraordinarily unified model of collaborative governance that enjoys the full trust of the private sector. Furthermore, the local desire to transition toward a qualitative, data-driven model perfectly aligns with the new regional "Catalunya, millor turisme" strategy set for 2026, presenting a major strategic opportunity. However, significant weaknesses persist, specifically the structural over-reliance on the summer months and a lack of specialized digital talent required to execute Smart Tourism initiatives. The destination faces the dual threat of rising global competition from emerging Mediterranean markets and the constant operational risk of losing regional air connectivity during the winter. This comprehensive diagnosis directly informs the strategic insights in the subsequent chapter, ensuring that the proposed marketing actions leverage the destination's collaborative strength while directly targeting its technological and seasonal vulnerabilities. Ultimately, this situational audit confirms that the core hypothesis of this research is fully supported both from a theoretical and a practical standpoint. The academic literature's call for a transition toward holistic Destination Management (Morrison, 2018) is not merely an abstract concept, but exactly matches the empirical, practical demands voiced by Costa Daurada's private sector. This perfect alignment between academic theory and operational reality validates the urgent necessity of the Strategic Marketing Plan that will be developed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN FOR COSTA DAURADA (2026-2028)

5.1 Introduction to the Strategic Framework

The primary purpose of this chapter is to translate the empirical findings and theoretical paradigms explored in the previous sections into a coherent and highly actionable strategic Marketing Plan. As definitively identified in the situational audit and the primary data collection (Chapter 4), the Costa Daurada is currently positioned at a critical strategic crossroads. While the region undoubtedly maintains a dominant and highly lucrative position within the Mediterranean "sun and beach" market, its long-term economic resilience depends entirely on its ability to mitigate structural seasonality and embrace a qualitative, value-based tourism model.

This Marketing Plan is explicitly designed to bridge the "strategic gap" identified during the fieldwork. As observed during the FEHT internship, there is a strong contrast between the stakeholders' recognized need for holistic Destination Management and the perceived inadequacy of current promotional efforts. Consequently, the framework proposed in this chapter suggests a gradual shift away from generic, volume-driven advertising. Based on the insights gathered from local professionals, it proposes an approach focused on hyper-segmentation, technological integration and the reinforcement of collaborative governance. Crucially, the tactical actions proposed are strictly aligned with the newly released "*Pla d'accions 2026*" by the Agència Catalana de Turisme (ACT), ensuring that these academic recommendations help support regional cooperation, shared prosperity and better market understanding.

From an academic perspective, the current situation of the Costa Daurada can be perfectly analyzed through Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model. Currently, the

destination shows classic symptoms of the "Stagnation" phase: peak visitor numbers have been reached, infrastructural carrying capacities are stretched during the summer, and environmental/social pressures are becoming apparent. In this critical phase, without a proactive intervention, the destination risks entering a period of decline. Therefore, this Marketing Plan serves as the official strategic catalyst to trigger the "Rejuvenation" phase. By shifting the focus from volume-driven summer campaigns to high-yield, sustainable niche markets, the destination can successfully reinvent its lifecycle curve.

5.2 Comprehensive Situational Audit (Advanced SWOT Analysis)

Before delineating the specific interventions of the marketing mix, it is needed to synthesize the destination's complex internal capabilities and external market environments into an advanced situational matrix. This SWOT Analysis does not rely on generalized observations; rather, it is empirically grounded in the Eurecat Tourism Data System (TDS) metrics, the FEHT internal evaluations and the qualitative insights extracted from the executive expert panel.

5.2.1 Internal Analysis: Strengths and Weaknesses

The Costa Daurada possesses formidable internal strengths that provide a robust foundation for strategic repositioning. Its most prominent asset is the exceptional quality and capacity of its hospitality infrastructure. With over 110,000 formal beds represented by the FEHT, including premium campsites, luxury hotel chains and major entertainment hubs like PortAventura World, the destination has the physical capacity to accommodate diverse, high-yield segments year-round. Furthermore, the empirical research highlighted the destination's unique model of collaborative governance as a monumental competitive advantage. The Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) operating within the region,

operationalized through mechanisms like the "Pla Conjunt de Promoció," enjoy an extraordinary level of trust from private stakeholders (scoring 4.83/5). This unity makes it possible to combine financial and strategic resources in a coordinated way, giving the destination a competitive advantage over many other Mediterranean destinations.

However, these internal strengths are actively counterbalanced by persistent structural weaknesses. The most critical vulnerability remains the severe over-reliance on the summer months, creating a cycle of economic volatility, underutilized winter infrastructure and precarious employment patterns. In parallel, the primary research uncovered a significant "digital skills gap." While executives recognize the necessity of Smart Tourism, the operational implementation of Big Data analytics is severely limited by a lack of qualified digital personnel (cited by 26% of respondents) and a profound difficulty in calculating the Return on Investment (ROI) for technological upgrades (cited by 30%). This technological hesitation threatens to leave the destination underperforming than more digitally mature competitors.

The severity of this structural weakness is visually demonstrated in Figure 5.1, which tracks the monthly distribution of overnight stays. The empirical data confirms an extreme over-reliance on the summer peak, with August alone generating over four million overnight stays. Conversely, the winter volume collapses entirely, paralyzing the local tourism economy and creating unsustainable fluctuations in employment. Overcoming this extreme seasonal fluctuation is the primary directive that drives every subsequent tactical decision in this marketing plan.

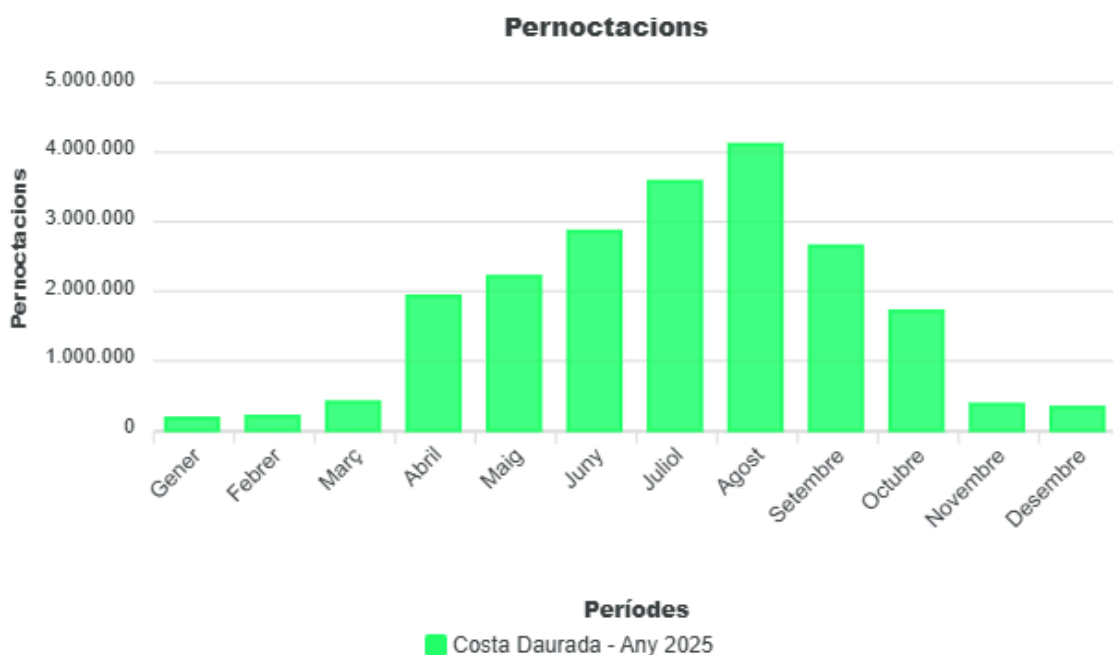


Figure 5.1: Monthly distribution of overnight stays in the Costa Daurada (2025). Source: Eurecat Tourism Data System.

5.2.2 External Analysis: Opportunities and Threats

Externally, the destination has strong opportunities, provided it can adapt its targeting strategy. The most immediate opportunity is the strong institutional alignment with the Generalitat de Catalunya's new "*Catalunya, millor turisme*" strategy. The regional objective of moving from 'volume to value' provides political and financial support for qualitative repositioning. Moreover, there is a rapidly growing European demand for specialized niche tourism , specifically the Silver Economy, Sports Tourism, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions). By using its mild winter climate and existing infrastructure, the Costa Daurada can attract these high-spending, non-seasonal groups from Northern and Central Europe.

Nevertheless, several external threats must be navigated with extreme caution. The potential reduction or suspension of low-season operations at Reus Airport represents a

non-negotiable, catastrophic risk for any international de-seasonalization effort. Without direct, affordable and frequent air connectivity during the winter, the region cannot physically transport the targeted Northern European segments. Additionally, rising geopolitical stability in competing Eastern Mediterranean destinations (such as Turkey, Greece and Egypt), combined with the increasing sensitivity of the domestic Spanish market to inflationary pressures, requires the Costa Daurada to urgently differentiate its value proposition beyond mere price competitiveness.

SWOT ANALYSIS: COSTA DAURADA (2026-2028)

STRENGTHS • Highly professionalized and unified private sector (FEHT). • Exceptional trust in Public-Private Partnerships. • World-class entertainment anchor (PortAventura World) and premium infrastructure. • Established brand recognition within domestic and French markets.	WEAKNESSES • Severe structural seasonality (over-reliance on July-August). • Significant 'digital skills gap' and lack of data analytics personnel. • Widespread difficulty in calculating the ROI for Smart Tourism investments. • Saturated 'sun and beach' perception among international demographics.
OPPORTUNITIES • Total strategic alignment with the ACT's 2026 mandate (Market Intelligence). • Growing European demand for shoulder-season travel (Silver Economy & Sports). • Potential to leverage existing infrastructure for winter MICE events. • Integration of AI for hyper-segmented digital marketing campaigns.	THREATS • Loss or reduction of winter air connectivity at Reus Airport. • Aggressive price competition from emerging Eastern Mediterranean destinations. • Inflationary pressures reducing the disposable income of the core domestic market. • Climate change altering traditional European travel seasons.

To ensure the effectiveness of this marketing plan, it is vital to contextualize the Costa Daurada against its primary international competitors. Currently, the Mediterranean market is experiencing aggressive revitalization from Eastern destinations.

Turkey (Antalya/Bodrum) represents the greatest threat in terms of seat capacity and "ultra all-inclusive" resort models. They compete aggressively on price, capturing a large segment

of price-sensitive European families.

Greece and Egypt have recovered from past geopolitical instabilities and are recording double-digit growth in reservations, offering highly competitive packages combining historical heritage with coastal leisure.

Domestic Competitors (e.g., Costa del Sol), a primary competitor for the winter "Silver Economy" and "Golf" segments, benefiting from an established winter flight network.

The Costa Daurada cannot, and should not engage in a "race to the bottom" price war with destinations like Turkey or Egypt. Instead, this benchmarking confirms that the destination must strictly pursue a "Value over Volume" strategy, leveraging its superior collaborative governance (FEHT), safety and advanced Smart Tourism integrations to justify a premium positioning.

5.3 Strategic Vision, Mission and Core Values

Before defining the operational tactics, it is necessary to establish a clear corporate identity for the destination's strategy, aligning the public and private sectors under a shared philosophy. The mission of this Marketing Plan is to manage and promote the Costa Daurada as a highly competitive, year-round Mediterranean destination, coordinating the efforts of public and private agents, such as the FEHT and the Patronat de Turisme, to generate sustainable wealth and improve the quality of life for the local community. Looking towards the 2028 horizon, the strategic vision is to be recognized globally as Europe's leading coastal destination for quality, sustainable and innovative tourism, prioritizing qualitative value over pure visitor volume. The execution of this plan is strictly guided by three foundational values: deep cooperation and cohesion to ensure unified territorial messaging; data-driven innovation utilizing Smart Tourism technologies and integrating the regional Intel·litur B2B platform to

base all marketing decisions on objective market intelligence, perfectly aligning the local execution with the macro-regional *Pla de recerca 2020-2028*; and a commitment to sustainability where tourism acts as a regenerative force for the local ecosystem. To successfully operationalize this vision and navigate the complexities identified in the SWOT analysis, the strategy pursues three primary SMART objectives.

1. The De-seasonalization Objective: To increase the volume of international overnights during the shoulder and low seasons (defined as March to May, and October to November) by 15% by the end of Q4 2028, primarily through the aggressive promotion of Sports and Senior tourism.
2. The Digital Transformation Objective: To bridge the "Smart Tourism gap" by implementing targeted training and shared data platforms, ensuring that at least 60% of FEHT-affiliated organizations actively utilize Market Intelligence dashboards for their commercial decision-making by mid-2027.
3. The Market Diversification Objective: To reduce the historical dependency on the domestic and French markets by increasing the arrival share from high-yield Central and Northern European countries (specifically Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and the Nordic region) by 20% over the next three years.

5.4 Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning

The transition from a generic promotional model to targeted Destination Management requires a profound shift in how Costa Daurada identifies and communicates with its consumers. The STP framework developed here is directly informed by the qualitative mandates of the expert panel surveyed in Chapter 4, moving away from mass marketing toward hyper-segmented niche targeting.

5.4.1 Market Segmentation and Targeting

The empirical research highlighted an urgent need to diversify the destination's portfolio to attract visitors outside the peak summer weather window. This urgent need to diversify the destination's portfolio is not merely a demand-side issue, but a critical supply-side vulnerability. As illustrated in Figure 5.2, the daily average of available accommodation places drastically descends from a peak of nearly 160,000 beds in the summer to fewer than 40,000 during the winter months. To prevent this massive closure of physical infrastructure and secure year-round profitability, the targeting strategy will move away from generic summer demographics and focus intensely on three primary consumer segments capable of traveling during the low season.

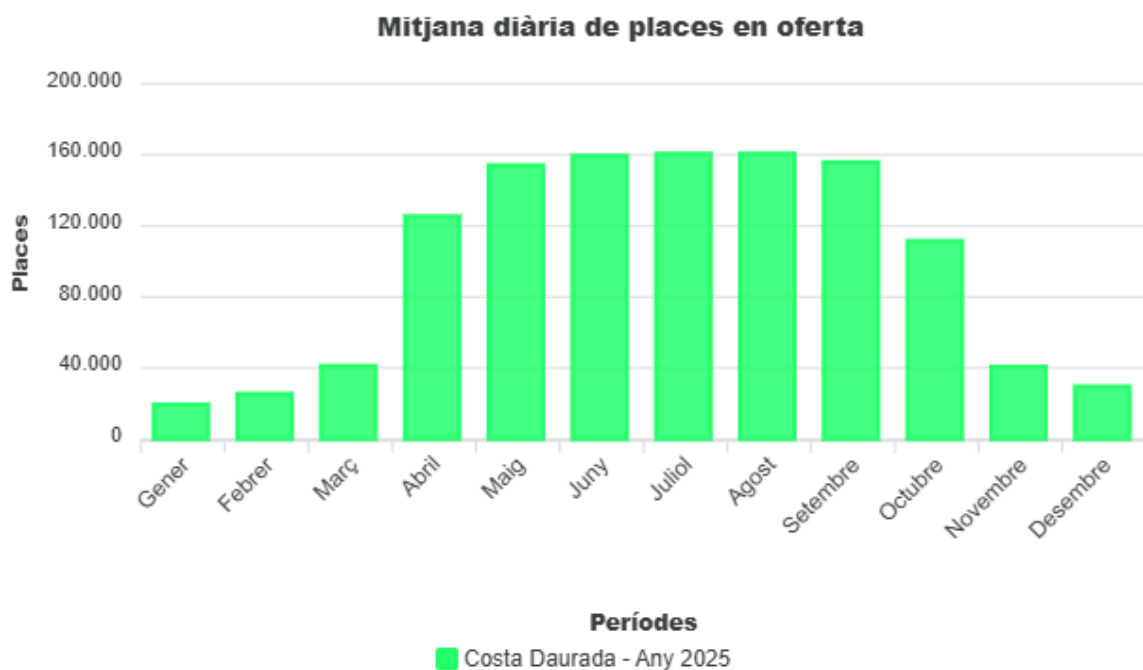


Figure 5.2: Average daily accommodation capacity offered throughout the year (2025). Source: Eurecat Tourism Data System.

- The Sports Tourism Segment (Active Travel): This segment targets amateur and semi-professional athletes, particularly from Northern Europe, where winter weather

prohibits outdoor training. The primary focus will be on cycling (leveraging the region's diverse topography and specialized road networks), golf (utilizing the existing high-quality courses), and football training camps (leveraging the Mediterranean Sports Hub). This demographic travels primarily in early spring (February-April) and late autumn (October-November), directly combatting seasonality. They require specialized infrastructure (secure bike storage, tailored nutrition) which the local hospitality sector is already highly capable of providing.

- The Silver Economy (Senior Tourism): With the demographic aging of Europe, the "Silver Economy" represents a massive, highly lucrative and profoundly non-seasonal target. This segment comprises retired or semi-retired individuals (aged 60+) from Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries. They possess high disposable income, immense time flexibility, and seek extended stays (often 2 to 4 weeks). Their primary motivators are mild winter climates, high-quality gastronomy, cultural heritage (such as Roman Tarragona and the Reus Modernism) and wellness facilities. Targeting this segment requires a shift in messaging from "excitement" to "comfort, security and cultural enrichment."
- The MICE Segment (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions): To fully utilize the massive hotel capacities of Salou, Cambrils and Vila-seca during the absolute low season (December-February), the destination must aggressively pursue the corporate market. The region offers world-class convention centers (such as the PortAventura Convention Centre) and the capacity to host thousands of delegates. The target audience includes European corporate event planners, medical associations and tech companies seeking cost-effective, high-quality alternatives to saturated hubs like Barcelona or Madrid.

5.4.2 Strategic Positioning

The Costa Daurada should aim to guide its brand positioning from "an affordable, mass-market family beach holiday" to "a diverse, year-round Mediterranean hub for active leisure, corporate excellence and cultural wellbeing." Aligning perfectly with the ACT's new macro-strategy "*Catalunya, millor turisme*", the destination must focus on attracting the Visitant Conscient (conscious visitor). This specific visitor persona values experiences aligned with sustainability, minimizes negative impacts and acts as a regenerating agent for the territory. Furthermore, to consolidate this premium positioning, the destination should leverage the legacy of Catalunya being the "World Region of Gastronomy" in 2025. By integrating the "turisme enogastronòmic" into the active and Silver Economy packages, the Costa Daurada can offer a value proposition where natural environments, elite sports facilities and premium local gastronomy are seamlessly connected by collaborative governance.

5.5 The Evolved Marketing Mix (The 7Ps Framework)

To execute the STP strategy effectively, the traditional 4Ps of marketing must be expanded into the 7Ps of service marketing, providing a comprehensive operational roadmap for the FEHT and public DMOs.

5.5.1 Product: Experiential Diversification

The core "Product" must evolve from selling hotel beds to selling integrated, specialized experiences. For the Sports segment, this involves creating certified "Active Tourism" itineraries, mixing accommodation with route mapping, physiological testing facilities and specialized nutrition. For the Silver Economy, the product must integrate health, wellness and

culture; for instance, creating "Winter Wellness" packages that combine long-stay premium apartment rentals with spa access, guided tours of the Priorat wine region and medical security guarantees. Within the MICE sector, the product is smooth corporate event delivery, requiring the destination to provide complete solutions that include airport transfers, large auditoriums and exclusive gala dinners in historic venues.

5.5.2 Price: Value-Based Architecture

To align with the ACT's 2026 mandate of shared economic prosperity, it is recommended that the Costa Daurada gradually transitions away from strict cost-based competition. Pricing must reflect the newly added qualitative value. During the shoulder seasons, instead of sharply reducing room rates to boost demand, the hospitality sector should adopt 'value-added pricing'. This means keeping healthier profit margins on room rates while including attractive extras in the package, such as free green fees for golfers, complimentary spa access for the Silver segment, or upgraded technological bandwidth for MICE delegates. This strategy protects the destination's brand equity while stimulating off-peak conversion.

5.5.3 Place: Distribution and Accessibility

Digitally, while Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) remain important, the destination should encourage direct bookings to improve local profit margins. Physically and commercially, the strategy proposes investing heavily in B2B partnerships through the *Pla Conjunt de Promoció*. As planned for the upcoming years, the FEHT should continue executing targeted trade missions and workshops in key markets like the UK (Manchester, Leeds) and France (Lyon), alongside major fairs like WTM in London and FITUR in Madrid.

5.5.4 Promotion: Data-Driven and Surgical

The promotional strategy should undergo a progressive digital transformation. Traditional mass-media advertising should be increasingly complemented by targeted digital campaigns. Utilizing the Market Intelligence mandated by the ACT, promotional budgets (such as those managed under the *Pla Conjunt*) could be allocated toward advanced Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and highly segmented social media campaigns on platforms like Instagram and Facebook (@costadauratravel). For example, the DMO could run targeted social media campaigns in the UK during November, pushing dynamic content that highlights the sunny and gastronomic offerings of the Silver Economy packages.

5.5.5 People: Addressing the Human Capital Deficit

As explicitly identified in the survey (where 26% cited a lack of qualified personnel as a primary barrier), the ultimate success of this plan depends on human capital. The "People" pillar mandates a comprehensive upskilling initiative. The FEHT, in collaboration with local universities (URV) and public institutions, could launch targeted training academies. These programs should focus on two critical areas: first, digital literacy and data analytics for middle management, empowering them to interpret Big Data and calculate ROI effectively; second, specialized customer service training for frontline staff, equipping them with the linguistic and cultural competencies required to serve the high-yield Northern European and MICE segments.

5.5.6 Process: Streamlining the Visitor Journey

The operational processes of the destination must become completely frictionless, embodying the true essence of Smart Tourism. This involves integrating digital solutions across the entire visitor journey. From a B2C perspective, this means developing unified destination apps that

allow tourists to book restaurants, access public transport and buy attraction tickets via a single, integrated platform. From a B2B governance perspective, the "Process" involves the establishment of a centralized "Market Intelligence Dashboard" shared among FEHT members and the Patronat. This dashboard will aggregate real-time data on booking curves, flight capacities and social sentiment, allowing the entire destination to react dynamically to market shifts rather than relying on delayed historical reports.

5.5.7 Physical Evidence: Sustainable Infrastructure

The physical environment of the Costa Daurada acts as the ultimate proof of its brand promise. To appeal to the environmentally conscious Northern European markets, the destination must aggressively showcase its commitment to sustainability. This goes beyond basic recycling; it requires the widespread implementation of circular economy practices in hotels, the preservation of coastal ecosystems and the promotion of green mobility (such as extensive electric vehicle charging networks and safe cycling lanes). Furthermore, the aesthetic modernization of public spaces in mature municipalities like Salou and Cambrils must continue, ensuring that the physical reality of the destination matches the premium, high-value positioning projected in its marketing campaigns.

5.6 Implementation Roadmap and Collaborative Governance

A strategic plan is only as effective as its execution. The implementation of this framework relies entirely on the continued strength of the destination's Public-Private Partnerships. The FEHT and the Patronat de Turisme must act as the central orchestrators of this transition. The execution will follow a phased chronological roadmap:

Phase	Timeline	Key Strategic Actions	Primary Responsible Parties
Phase 1: Foundation & Alignment	Q1 2026 (March)	• Official presentation of the new strategic positioning to the private sector during the "TurisMarket 2026" event at FiraReus. • Launch of targeted digital upskilling workshops for local hotel management. • Intensive lobbying and negotiation with airlines to secure winter routes for Reus Airport. • Integration of the ACT 2026 Market Intelligence protocols into local DMO operations.	FEHT Board, Patronat de Turisme, Generalitat (ACT)
Phase 2: Product Launch & B2B Expansion	Q3 2026 - Q2 2027	• Official launch of the integrated "Silver Economy" and "Sports Tourism" seasonal packages. • Execution of specialized trade missions to the UK, Germany, and the Nordic countries. • Deployment of the centralized Data Analytics Dashboard for private sector stakeholders.	FEHT Commercial Committees, Hotel Chains, Specialized B2B Agencies
Phase 3: Digital Scaling & Optimization	Q3 2027 - Q4 2028	• Full transition of promotional budgets to programmatic and predictive digital advertising. • Hosting major international MICE events and winter sports tournaments to solidify brand positioning. • Comprehensive ROI evaluation of digital campaigns and adjustment of targeting parameters.	DMO Marketing Teams, Digital Agency Partners, Local Municipalities

5.7 Budget Allocation and ROI Measurement

A strategic marketing plan cannot exist without a realistic financial framework. Based on the official *Pla d'Inversió i Promoció Turística 2026*, the overarching promotional budget for the joint Costa Daurada strategy is estimated at 900,000 euros. To definitively combat seasonality and trigger the destination's rejuvenation phase, this budget will not be spent on generic summer mass-media, but distributed strategically to support the new product lines. Specifically, it is recommended that thirty percent of the funds (270,000 euros) be allocated

to digital and programmatic advertising targeting the United Kingdom, Germany, and Nordic countries during the low season. Crucially, to maintain baseline revenue and secure the destination's core market share, twenty percent (180,000 euros) must be dedicated to defensive marketing and loyalty campaigns within the consolidated markets (Domestic Spain and France). Another twenty percent (180,000 euros) should be directed to B2B trade missions and physical presence at global fairs (e.g., FITUR, WTM). Furthermore, fifteen percent (135,000 euros) will support direct co-marketing campaigns with specialized Tour Operators, while the remaining fifteen percent (135,000 euros) is reserved for knowledge management and digital skills development. Rather than building expensive proprietary data dashboards from scratch, this budget will be used to actively operationalize the existing Intel·litur regional platform at a local level. By hosting targeted training sessions in synergy with the Intel·litur on Tour initiative, the FEHT will directly address the digital skills gap identified in Chapter 4, training local hotel managers to practically apply macro-regional Big Data to attract specific off-season segments.

To overcome the critical barrier identified in Chapter 4 regarding the difficulty of calculating the return on investment, local stakeholders will leverage the Intel·litur intelligence system to monitor real-time visitor behaviors and definitively prove the financial viability of Smart Tourism investments.

Consequently, this plan requires replacing the traditional measure of tourist arrivals with qualitative key performance indicators. Financial performance during shoulder seasons will be assessed using RevPAR and TrevPAR. Simultaneously, the Average Length of Stay (ALOS) will be a critical metric for the Silver Economy segment, aiming to increase the regional average to extended stays of ten to fourteen days during the winter months. Finally, the plan will use advanced attribution models to track Digital Cost Per Acquisition (CPA) for campaigns in Northern European markets, clearly demonstrating the financial viability of

Smart Tourism investments to hesitant local stakeholders.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary of the Findings

This thesis is set to validate the strategic importance of transitioning from generic, volume-based promotion to a data-driven destination management framework within a mature tourist destination. Through a comprehensive literature review and an applied empirical analysis conducted during an internship at the FEHT, the research confirmed its core premise. The findings clearly demonstrate that the Costa Daurada is currently facing the vulnerabilities typical of the stagnation phase in Butler's destination lifecycle, primarily characterized by an extreme structural seasonality and an over-reliance on the summer months. The primary data collected from local hospitality executives revealed a significant strategic gap; although there is a near-unanimous consensus (validated by a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.84 among private stakeholders regarding the necessity to embrace holistic destination management, practical implementation is often limited by important challenges, particularly the lack of specialized digital skills and the difficulty of measuring the return on investment (ROI) of technology-based marketing campaigns. Consequently, the applied Marketing Plan developed in Chapter 5 serves as the necessary bridge to overcome these barriers, proposing a strategic repositioning focused on high-yield, off-season segments such as sports tourism, the silver economy and the MICE sector.

6.2 Strategic Recommendations for FEHT and Local Stakeholders

Based on the empirical findings and the structured marketing mix developed in this study, several critical recommendations are directed toward the FEHT and the associated public

institutions. First, the destination must aggressively defend and expand the cooperative governance model embodied by the *Pla Conjunt de Promoció*. This public-private partnership has proven to be the most resilient tool for resource allocation and must be maintained to fund the proposed B2B trade missions and programmatic digital campaigns. Secondly, to combat the digital skills gap and the hesistation to invest in smart tourism, the FEHT should take a leading role in operationalizing the macro-regional *Intel·litur* platform at a local level. By organizing targeted training sessions, such as the *Intel·litur on Tour* initiative, local hoteliers can acquire the necessary skills to translate big data into actionable insights. This will enable them to measure qualitative key performance indicators like RevPAR, TrevPAR and digital acquisition costs, therefore focusing less on visitor numbers alone. Furthermore, this technological transition must be supported by strengthening the destination's scientific and academic alliances. The FEHT should leverage its structural proximity to Eurecat (the Technological Centre of Catalonia) to drive data-driven innovation and technological development. Simultaneously, active collaboration with academic institutions, such as the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV), is essential to continuously translate advanced theoretical tourism models into concrete, operational practices for the private sector. Finally, from an infrastructure perspective, local stakeholders need to work together and lobby to ensure that Reus Airport remains open year-round, since winter international connections are essential for attracting the Northern European markets targeted in the new strategy.

6.3 Limitations of the Study and Future Research

While this thesis provides a data-driven action framework for the Costa Daurada, certain methodological and scope limitations must be acknowledged. The primary data was collected through purposive non-probability sampling of twenty-three FEHT executive professionals.

Although this group offered valuable insights grounded in the destination's operations (covering about 90% of formal accommodation capacity)the small sample size limits the extent to which the results can be generalised to other Spanish or Mediterranean destinations. Furthermore, the focus of the research was strictly confined to the supply side and the managerial perception of local stakeholders, without directly surveying the end consumers or international tour operators regarding their perception of the proposed brand repositioning. Recognising these limitations, future research should focus on assessing the actual effectiveness of the marketing actions planned for the 2026–2028 period. Specifically, subsequent researchers could track the evolution of the region's winter accommodation capacity and analyze whether the integration of the *Intel·litur* intelligence platform successfully bridges the digital divide within the local private sector, ultimately observing if the destination successfully enters a phase of strategic rejuvenation.

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APPENDIX A: Survey Instrument (original Spanish version)

Target Audience: Executives and Professionals affiliated with the FEHT (Federació Empresarial d'Hostaleria i Turisme de la província de Tarragona). Estimated completion time: 10-12 minutes. Privacy: All responses were strictly anonymous and collected solely for academic research purposes.

Sección 1: Perfil de la Empresa

1. Tipo de empresa u organización: ☐ Hotel / Cadena Hotelera ☐ Camping / Resort ☐ Apartamentos Turísticos ☐ Institución Pública / DMO ☐ Otro:

Sección 2: El Rol Estratégico del Plan de Marketing

Por favor, valore las siguientes afirmaciones en una escala del 1 al 5.

2. ¿Cómo de esencial considera disponer de un Plan de Marketing de Destino estructurado y a largo plazo para asegurar la competitividad de la Costa Dorada? (1 = Nada importante ... 5 = Fundamental) ☐ 1 - ☐ 2 - ☐ 3 - ☐ 4 - ☐ 5

3. ¿En qué medida está de acuerdo con que la Costa Daurada debe evolucionar de hacer "campañas de promoción simples" a un enfoque integral de "Destination Management" basado en datos? (1 = Totalmente en desacuerdo ... 5 = Totalmente de acuerdo) ☐ 1 - ☐ 2 - ☐ 3 - ☐ 4 - ☐ 5

4. En su opinión, ¿cómo de eficaz es la estrategia de marketing actual para combatir la estacionalidad de nuestra oferta de "sol y playa"? (1 = Muy ineficaz ... 5 = Muy eficaz) ☐ 1 -

[2] - [3] - [4] - [5]

Sección 3: Smart Tourism e Insights basados en Datos

5. ¿Con qué frecuencia su organización se basa en el análisis de datos digitales (Big Data, analítica web, escucha en redes sociales) para entender al turista y adaptar su oferta? (1 = Nunca ... 5 = Siempre) [1] - [2] - [3] - [4] - [5]

6. ¿Hasta qué punto cree que la inversión en tecnologías de "Smart Tourism" es necesaria para la resiliencia futura de la Costa Daurada? (1 = Nada necesaria ... 5 = Totalmente necesaria) [1] - [2] - [3] - [4] - [5]

7. ¿Cuál considera que es la principal barrera para adoptar estrategias de marketing basadas en datos en las empresas del destino? [] Dificultad para calcular el Retorno de Inversión (ROI) [] Falta de personal cualificado [] Limitaciones de presupuesto [] Otro:

Sección 4: Gobernanza y Colaboración Público-Privada

8. ¿Cómo valoraría la eficacia de las alianzas público-privadas (por ejemplo, a través de la FEHT) para alinear los intereses de las empresas y las entidades públicas en la región? (1 = Muy ineficaces ... 5 = Muy eficaces) [1] - [2] - [3] - [4] - [5]

9. ¿En qué medida considera que los modelos actuales de gobernanza del destino son lo suficientemente transparentes e inclusivos para todos los actores locales? (1 = Nada transparentes e inclusivos ... 5 = Totalmente transparentes e inclusivos) [1] - [2] - [3] - [4] - [5]

10. Ante cambios dinámicos del mercado (ej. nuevas tendencias post-COVID), ¿cómo de adaptable y resiliente considera que es nuestra estrategia de marketing colaborativa actual? (1 = Nada adaptable ... 5 = Muy adaptable) [1] - [2] - [3] - [4] - [5]

Sección 5: Visión de Futuro

Por favor, desarrolle su respuesta brevemente.

11. Pensando en el crecimiento futuro y la desestacionalización, ¿en qué segmento específico o mercado internacional cree que debería centrarse prioritariamente la Costa Dorada? (Espacio para respuesta abierta)

12. Si usted tuviera el poder de decisión, ¿cuál es la acción de marketing más importante (o prioritaria) que el destino debería implementar en los próximos 3 años? (Espacio para respuesta abierta)