

Interview with the director of Vallnord, Josep Marticella ▶ Balance of the winter season and f



VALLNORD
The general manager of Vallnord, Josep Marticella.

Josep Marticella

General Manager of Vallnord

«I don't know if Vallnord will end up being Grandvalira, but we do want to operate under a single ski pass»

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Josep Marticella has been the general manager of Vallnord-Pal Arinsal for seven years. He has a degree in Economics, as well as Business Administration and Management. He also has a postgraduate degree in Marketing and General Management. His more than 20 years of experience in the world of entrepreneurship, sports and the economy have directed his activity towards the world of snow and mountains.

-What have been the main challenges this winter?

-The season started in a rather uncertain way. At first, the situation of the pandemic was more serious, and many travel restrictions were being implemented. At the same time, we had to deal with evacuation campaigns. However, we set ourselves the goal of starting the season and ending it, and we did it in a very brave way. So, bottom line is that we're really looking forward to two

seasons, one that we haven't finished and the other that we have only done for the local public. After two very complex years, re-creating a winter season with similar characteristics to a regular period was a challenge. In this sense, we are pleased to be able to regain pre-pandemic references such as those we are achieving so far. That's all we want to highlight this season, which as I said earlier, started with a very fragile balance.

-The average expenditure per customer has increased this year, what has this consumption consisted of?

-We cannot specify this, as it is the average of the global expenditure that we have in different business areas of the station. In the end, what we've seen is that the type of customer who has come this year has generated more expense, basically because he's a different tourist than we've been so far. On the other hand, the tour operation, as can be seen, has fallen by 1%, partly due to school groups, in which their ab-

sence has had a minimal impact on the average expenditure of the season. But this does not mean that in the end we have not compensated for this lack of customers who have come directly, as it has been precisely this direct tourism that has allowed us to consider the increase in average spending in different areas of the resort.

-Do you think that local tourism has made a difference this season?

-More than the local tourism, it has been the fact that the figure of the private client has appeared. Local tourism has helped us a lot, as it is clear that this year we have not received all the international markets we wanted to cover. Next year we will not receive all the foreign audiences we would like for obvious reasons related to the current war, but it is clear that this winter many visitors have come who did not know us before, and the current context has made it easier for them to rediscover our station and the country. On the plus side, this

customer has rated the season's satisfaction surveys with a very good score, which will probably ensure that they keep coming back in the coming seasons.

-Are Russian tourists missing?

-We missed the Russian tourists, but also the Ukrainians, who usually come at the end of the season and also the Israelis, among the other markets that could not come. The good news is that the English and Irish markets have worked very well, and French, Spanish and Portuguese tourists have also accounted for a large percentage of employment. In the end, it is these niches that have sustained the results.

-The summer season will open with the opening of the Comapedrosa Refuge and also the Bike Park and Mountain Park.

-We have to see how the current economic situation evolves, but it seems a bit daring to set a clear goal for this summer season, given that the consequences of the pandemic

and the war translate into very significant inflation in the economic field. In addition, the cost of energy, both electricity and fuel is very considerable and therefore it is worth being careful, let a few weeks pass and when we do the summer presentation we will redirect the goal we want achieve. We did this with the World Cup, as it was decided how it would go forward with a very limited period in time.

-Will there be anything new in the summer offer?

-Yes, there will be news, some of them together with our partner, Soldeu-El Tarter.

-Is the annual ski pass helping to build customer loyalty?

-Clearly, both for the winter season and for the summer season. In this way, we have more interaction with the customer and at the same time, we develop our strategy 365. The profile of the customer who uses the annual ski pass usually uses many of our different busi-

ness units, and this also helps us a lot to increase the average expense generated.

-Will Vallnord host other sports competitions this summer, apart from the two World Cups already planned?

-Yes. We collaborate with La Massana municipality in other events, such as the Volta als Ports, for example, the Ironman or the Mountain Festival. This year, we are proud to announce that we will be hosting two World Cups and a World Cup. As for the BTT World Cup, there will be events such as Short Track, Cross Country and Downhill. We will also host the Comapedrosa SkyRace, which will be scored as a World Cup; and the Junior World Skyrunning Championships will be held. It should be noted that the month of July will be very busy and powerful in the parish of La Massana.

-What has the integration of Setap meant for EMAP and its finances?

-Today it is still too early to make any assessment because it is obviously an agreement that has been made in recent months. What

is clear is that the short-term integration strategy is already underway, and the synergies resulting from economies of scale, as well as collaborations with cooperatives such as Ensisa will be seen in a clear form in the coming months. In addition, it is also necessary to analyze the direct involvement of the customer on the new products and marketing that can be created.

-La Massana municipality will invest 36 million euros in Pal Arinsal, what will this investment consist of?

-This reform is linked to Setap, and is part of the agreement signed between the companies on the extension or ski connection between Arinsal and Pal. The investment includes the adaptation or improvement of different tracks, the renovation of mechanical widgets and construction. This is the main goal of Setap to integrate these domains, which are currently only connected by a cable car.

-Will Vallnord end up being Grandvalira?

-We don't know at the moment,



«The refurbishment of La Massana municipality in Vallnord will serve to adapt the tracks, renew the mechanical widgets and build»

«This season has been dominated by private customers, who have positively assessed satisfaction surveys»

but we are working very actively for the joint marketing of snow tourism, and what we want is to one day operate in the country with a single ski pass. It is a purpose that remains on the table and I think we can all say that it is a recurring theme of the various actors. For now, it is necessary to know how to find a global agreement that allows a joint improvement of this product in order to provide improvements for all the entities involved.

-Are you worried about climate change and the fact that snowfall is getting thinner?

-Compared to the penultimate season, the thickness of the tracks has increased. It is clear that it has not been a constant, but it has snowed a lot at the beginning and at the end. However, in the period 2018-2019, we also had less crop snow production and the track openings were higher. The important thing is to look at the long term, as different meteorologists tell us that by 2050, stations above 1,800 meters should be able to generate a quality product through their production, and this is the case for our sta-

tions. Therefore, this should allow us to deal with this climate situation.

-What do you think, as Vallnord's general manager, about the installation of the cable car at Pic del Carroi and how do you think it would affect the tracks?

-It is a subject that is not on the table. It is clear that the best way to develop this project is to rethink. Currently, we have a priority, which is the ski connection between Arinsal and Pal, and focus on the investment projects we have in the new integration of Setap. Regarding the installation of the cable car, I hope that we will be able to analyze it in a more understandable way with the participants in case a contest ends.

-What are Vallnord's future projects?

-The future projects are to market our sector together, a fact that applies not only to EMAP, but also to the stations and economic agents that could join in a global offer; and comply with the investment plan we have set in Setap, which should allow EMAP to deal with the ski union and Ensisa to continue to improve its products at the Soldeu-El Tarter resort. ≡

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