

Nordic Tourism
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Northern climates and environments offer unique opportunities and challenges for tourism management, marketing, and development. The Nordic Council was established in 1952 (Nordic Council, 2011:9) to promote cooperation in region amongst six countries: Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland. "Nordic" has primarily been used in relation to the Scandinavian countries of Europe (Hall et al, 2008). The word 'Nordic' however simply means 'of the north' or 'northern'. Many of the physical, economic, and natural conditions which affect tourism management in the classic Nordic countries also apply to other northern countries and regions such as the Baltic states (Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia), Canada, Russia, and Alaska (USA).

The Canadian author Margaret Atwood (1972) identified 'survival' as a dominant theme in these northern environs. 'Survival' provides a national myth that for the purposes of tourism can be marketed as the rugged outdoors, closeness to nature, natural, and independence from the strict norms of urban life. The north combines beauty and danger; it can be hostile and inhospitable or relaxing and soothing. The sense of solitude and space of the north are captured musician Glenn Gould's audio-documentary "The Idea of North" (1967). "The north" is as much a state of mind as it is a physical location.

Nordic tourism activities typically will include outdoor sports, especially snow and ice-based sports such as skiing and skating, as well as other outdoor pursuits like hiking [Figure 1]. Lakes, rivers, and shorelines offer water-based activities in summer months in the form of boating. Natural hot springs and saunas are popular tourism and domestic activities. Hunting and fishing are also available. Nordic tourism especially attracts niche and adventure travellers (Mykletun, 2018). Eco-friendly, 'slow', and wellness tourism options are well represented (Hjalager and Flagestad, 2012; Varley and Semple, 2015).

Figure 1 A husky ride through the winter snow in Lapland, Northern Finland



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The Northern Lights are not a new phenomenon but in last decade mass marketing meant that more tourists are attracted creating a special form of tourism as a trip of a lifetime (Figure 2). Several countries which lie between the Northern Lights zone of latitudes of 65 to 72 degrees are now competing for light lovers during the season from late November to March, as the Aurora Borealis goes viral. Northern Lights holidays usually include daytime snow and Lappish wilderness adventures such as snowmobile driving, husky sleigh rides, cross-country ski, guided snowshoe walks. Long winter nights offer fantastic opportunities to observe the Northern Lights with flickers of dancing colours before the Aurora becomes more pronounced and lights up the sky.

Figure 2 Aurora Borealis



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Notwithstanding the dominance of nature themes in Nordic tourism marketing, these countries also feature more densely populated cities and urban regions (Jansson, and Power, 2006). Urban tourist pursuits are complemented by, for example, theatre, art and design in Stockholm, and music and architecture in Helsinki. Nordic tourism offers much more than snow sports and ice hotels. The long summer days have also helped to create a vibrant urban outdoor café culture and a wide range of arts festivals. Nordic countries benefit from a history of political neutrality and relative isolation from military conflicts. As a result, the Nordic region has developed expertise and capacity to host a wide range of diplomatic, academic, and scientific conferences, and related business tourism such as trade exhibitions. The region's reputation as a safe, peaceful, and neutral part of the world helps it to attract a large number of international conferences and conventions especially in Helsinki, Stockholm, and Copenhagen (ICCA, 2020). The combination of political neutrality and natural environment has allowed the region to host several summer and winter Olympic Games:

Lillehammer, Norway – 1994 (winter)
 Calgary, Canada – 1988 (winter)
 Helsinki – 1952 (summer)
 Oslo, Norway – 1952 (winter)
 Stockholm, Sweden – 1912 (summer)

Nordic and northern countries are characterised by sparse population densities spread across expansive geographic areas. Consequently, transport infrastructure can be costly to construct and supply chains expensive to maintain. High standards of accommodation and food quality are reflected relatively high prices. High taxes in the classic Nordic countries have helped to infrastructure and encouraged technological innovation. However high taxes also discourage investment in staffing, a central component of tourism service (Walmsley et al. 2020).

Nordic tourism is a high-value proposition that requires significant upfront capital investment in order to attract higher-spending segments of the tourism market. Meanwhile, Nordic social values of cooperation and self-reliance (Bendixsen et al, 2017) have prevented the development of a service-oriented ethos. Nordic reservedness stands in contrast to the more loquacious warmth associated with the Mediterranean region, for example. The high cost of Nordic tourism compared to the increasing availability of comparable options in the Baltic states and eastern Europe, for example, presents a challenge to Nordic tourism forms and policymakers.

Climate change presents a significant threat to tourism in the Nordic and northern regions.

Rising temperatures are cutting short ski seasons and rising water levels threaten coastal areas. Political disagreements over commercial (e.g. fishing, mining) and military use of arctic waterways threaten the peaceful image and future development of the north (Brosnan et al, 2011; Timothy et al, 2016).

Looking to the future, Nordic and northern tourism offer timely opportunities as travellers and tourists increasingly seek out more unusual, adventurous, and nature-oriented options. Nordic tourism offers a unique range of experiences, fascinating research opportunities, and scope for further growth and development. Key challenges include environmental protection, high costs, and increasing competition.

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