

Visit Arctic Europe project aims to create up to 100 000 new sleepovers in the northern region

Visitors increasingly wish to see multiple destinations during their trip to Scandinavia. Visit Arctic Europe project joins the forces of three countries in order to market the northern regions of Finland, Sweden and Norway as a crossborder Arctic destination.

Since its launch in autumn 2015, Visit Arctic Europe project (VAE) has signed co-operation agreements with several European tour operators. The target of this co-operation is to create up to 100 000 new sleepovers in the region this winter.

Participating tour operators currently have about 23 000 plane seats reserved. One visitor stay is estimated to be 4-5 nights, on average.

Tour operators believe that in the future more and more visitors will want to combine multiple destinations in their trips. Participating countries share a number of common attraction factors, but they also have regional, unique strengths.

"Nature, purity, the Northern Lights, midnight sun and northern lifestyle are common to all participating countries. In addition, Finnish Lapland has an extensive variety of tourism activities, as well as Santa Claus. Sweden can offer high end -accommodation, such as the Tree Hotel and the Ice Hotel. Norway has fjords, whale safaris and red king crabs", **Rauno Posio** from the Finnish Lapland Tourist Board lists.

The project aims to prolong the conventional operating period, as tour operators have committed themselves to a 3-year co-operation agreement to sell and market activity packages, also for shoulder- and low seasons.

Cees van den Bosch from Voigt Travel says crossborder co-operation is vital for the sustainable development of year around travel in the northern region.

"A strong image of the destination is very important. Developing seasons and regions can never be done by a tour operator alone on any market. Especially for a niche destination on a highly competitive market like the Netherlands."

A strong focus has also been placed on accessibility. Companies and tour operators are especially concerned about the logistics within the region. VAE plans to carry out investigations concerning accessibility issues, such as the demand for direct flights.

"From our perspective, the focus on accessibility across borders and the removal of bottlenecks is a very good thing", **Hans Paul Hansen** from Scandic Northcape admits.

VAE aims to market the northern regions of Finland, Sweden and Norway, in co-operation with national and regional destination marketing organizations. Partners include Northern Norway Tourist Board, Swedish Lapland Visitor Board and Finnish Lapland Tourist Board, which is also the lead partner of the project.

VAE is funded by EU / Interreg Nord -program, the public sector and 90 companies in three countries. The duration of the project is 2.5 years and the budget 6.4 million euros.

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