

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS FOR THE ARCTIC COAST WAY

## FINAL REPORT 2019



Visit North Iceland  
THE ARCTIC NORTH

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# A

# ABOUT THE REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT



### 1 CONTEXT

This report is a compressed summary of the process of experience development for the Arctic Coast Way in the North of Iceland, carried out in five stages from November 2017 to October 2018. It is based on the cooperation of Markaðsstofa Norðurlands and the project steering group with Blue Sail from the UK. The report concludes Blue Sail's work supporting the Arctic Coast Way experience development programme and sets Blue Sails conclusions and recommendations in the wider frame of the project.

Blue Sail's role has been to work alongside and be a sounding board for the Arctic Coast Way Project Manager and Steering Group, providing an external perspective and an international market focus. Blue Sail's work included desk research, workshops and feedback sessions for stakeholders, site visits and conversations with providers. The report summarises only the period of cooperation with Blue Sail, not the entire process for experience development for the Arctic Coast Way. This period is seen as the introduction and starting phase of the entire programme as experience development is a permanently ongoing process for the Arctic Coast Way. In addition to this report a Tool Kit for Businesses was developed

as an outcome of the cooperation. The Tool Kit is a practical tool for all providers along the Arctic Coast Way to help them develop their experiences as best fitted to the brand of Arctic Coast Way.

**This report is addressed to the project sponsors, stakeholders and members of the Arctic Coast Way. The project appreciated the financial support from Uppbyggingarsjóður Norðurlands vestra - and eystra and Matarauður Íslands and we thank all of the 170 participants in the workshops for their commitment, creativity and time. We also thank the 37 providers we visited on site and the 25 providers who granted Blue Sail the interviews.**

# ABOUT THE REPORT

## 2 TARGETS FOR THE ARCTIC COAST WAY

Markaðsstofa Norðurlands hosts the project of the Arctic Coast Way. At an early stage of the conceptual phase, the project manager and the steering group decided that the project wanted to invest in the experience development process to reach defined targets of the Arctic Coast Way which are:

- Create a new attraction for the North of Iceland
- Increase dwell times in the North
- Distribute visitors to more peripheral areas
- Implement sustainability
- Extend the travel season
- Create visibility on the international and national market



# ABOUT THE REPORT

## 3 REASONS FOR EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT FOR THE ARCTIC COAST WAY

The Arctic Coast Way is not planned to be merely a new driving option but to become an experience route. Therefore, the process of experience development is a crucial part of the project development. The route itself is planned as a magnet to guide visitors to peripheral areas along the coast, and varied experiences help keep visitors in the area and have the power to extend the travel season and implement sustainability. This is the right tool to reach the defined targets for the Arctic Coast Way as:

- The project follows an international trend in tourism. International tourism is undergoing a transformation and visitors are no longer satisfied by simply visiting places. Instead, they want to connect, to engage and search for memorable experiences.
- Thus the project invests in the quality of offers along the route where distinctive experiences will help to achieve visibility and “cut-through” in the crowded international marketplace
- Distinctive experiences attract visitors and motivate them to choose this destination over competitors
- Experiences will strengthen the Arctic Coast Way’s unique brand and the shared story to tell
- The project gives providers the opportunity to learn about this new international trend and to incorporate it in their private enterprises for business development and diversification
- Experiences encourage visitors to stay longer and spend more
- Experiences provide reasons to travel outside peak times and explore beyond the “honeypots”
- Experiences lengthen the season and encourage visitors to take advantage of services on offer

# ABOUT THE REPORT

## 4 AIMS OF WORKING WITH A CONSULTANCY

The steering group undertook a thorough evaluation of the needs and challenges of experience development for the Arctic Coast Way and finally decided to run the process in cooperation with an external consultancy. The reasons were:

- The entire process is more efficient in time and quality if an experienced consultancy guides the steps which need to be done
- Assistance in finding a creative methodology to find the USPs, sections, themes, experiences and stories for the Arctic Coast Way.
- Gaining an external perspective on the project.

The strongest outcome is the combination of local insight and a view with “visitors’ eyes”

- Support in developing a strategy for motivating and engaging businesses and local partners
- Learning how to develop a “meaningful experience” connected to the chosen themes
- Options to strengthen the western and eastern regions of the Arctic Coast Way and options to extend the season
- Gaining a better understanding of how to sell the experiences on the national and international market.

The steering group decided to cooperate with Blue Sail from the UK. Blue Sail, being a destination consultancy, are specialists in destinations and visitor markets. Blue Sail specialise in tourism development, management and marketing and are among leaders in their field. Since they set up in 2007, they have helped over 200 places and partnerships – from emerging destinations to some of the biggest tourism brands. Blue Sail have a significant experience working along far-flung coasts; they are the company that created the Shared Story™ for destinations – bringing tourism stakeholders together to find the stories they want to tell and to develop experiences that deliver those stories.



“ Great customer experiences are designed from  
the ‘outside in’ rather than the ‘inside out’ ”

Colin Shaw  
*Revolutionise your Customer Experience*

## ABOUT THE REPORT

### 5 SCHEDULE AND PROGRAMME FOR THE EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The cooperation with Blue Sail in the experience development process included 5 stages:

**1st Stage November 2017:** desk research and kick-off meeting

with Blue Sail and the steering group of the Arctic Coast Way to get to know each other and discuss the starting process.

**2nd Stage March 2018:** workshops for stakeholders and companies along the Arctic Coast Way

Three workshops were held in Sauðárkrúkur, Akureyri and Ásbyrgi. These sessions were organised to bring people together, learn about Arctic Coast Way and the trend of experience development and to adopt a fresh perspective on the route and explore and identify the unique experiences it can offer in interactive exercises.



## ABOUT THE REPORT

### **3rd stage July 2018:** On-site visits and interviews

conducted by Blue Sail and the project manager. These visits and interviews were organised to reflect outcomes from the workshops and to gain deeper insights as to what is on offer, clarify Blue Sail's understanding, or gather further ideas and check experiences on-site.

Out of the workshop exercises, the USPs for the route were taken and the already existing concept of the proposition was revised, and possible sections of the route considered and analysed. Furthermore, the first selection was made of existing and new experiences emanating from the workshops that delivered best on the proposition.

### **4th stage September 2018:** Food-workshop and final workshop

This stage was about sharing the emerging thinking of stage 3 with the wider stakeholder group, getting their input and commitment and securing their understanding of the approach. Furthermore, the draft of the tool kit, as an important tool to help providers develop experiences for their businesses, was tested and evaluated.

### **5th stage October 2018:** Final materials

Blue Sail, the project manager and the steering group finalized the analysis of outcomes from the workshops and on-site visits. The brand promise and positioning were revised and finalised. All results are summarised in the Final Report 2019. Furthermore, the results were used to design a Tool Kit for Businesses to develop experiences along the Arctic Coast Way.

B

## EXISTING EXPERIENCES ALONG THE ARCTIC COAST WAY – A VIEW FROM OUTSIDE

## EXISTING EXPERIENCES ALONG THE ARCTIC COAST WAY – A VIEW FROM OUTSIDE

As one of the first steps Blue Sail looked at what is being said about the north coast of Iceland by travel writers, for example Lonely Planet, Rough Guide, Fodor's and Frommers, Conde Nast and CNN Travel, by the travel trade, and on TripAdvisor.

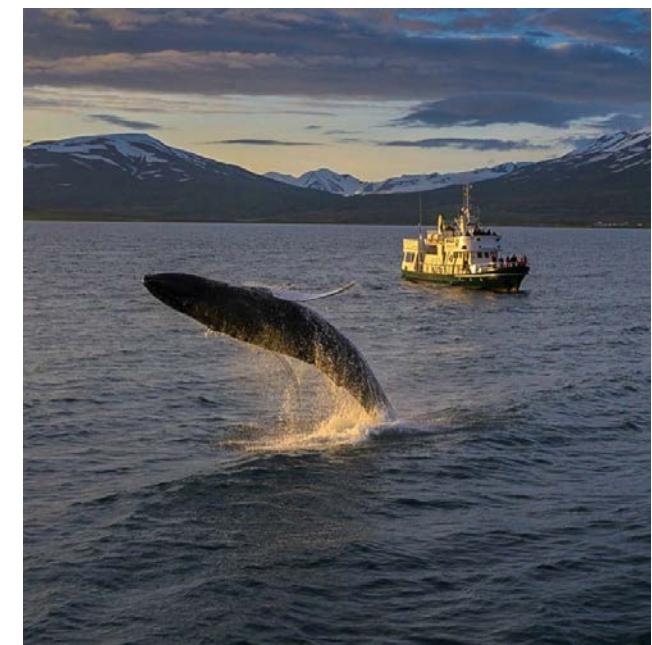
A handful of places frequently featured are: Akureyri as the capital of the north (often described as “thriving” or “buzzing”) and the main place for accommodation and food; Húsavík and Eyjafjörður for whale watching; Grímsey for its location inside the Arctic Circle and for its bird population.

Landscape descriptions are dominated by Mývatn and the National Park, with allusions to

otherworldliness and the surreal, primal nature of the scenery. Initial impressions of the north coast are of untouched natural beauty, remoteness and tranquillity.

### **Key assets/attractions mentioned in these sources:**

- Natural beauty
- Northern lights & midnight sun
- Wildlife – whales, seals, seabirds
- Spas – hot pots – geo-thermal swimming pools
- Boat trips & 4x4 tours
- Physical activities – hiking, horse riding, diving/ snorkelling, skiing
- Festivals – music, food
- Micro-breweries





Most visitors cluster in the near northeast region comprising Akureyri, Iceland's thriving northern capital.

*Frommers*



In Eyjafjordur we will visit a family run fishing plant that produces gourmet bacalao and cured shark, both worth a taste! In the afternoon we will visit the village of Arskogssandur, home to famous Icelandic craft microbrewery, Kaldi, started by a local couple. We tour the brewery and enjoy sampling the different beers.

*ProTravel*

... the deeply indented coast offers magnificent views north toward the Arctic, especially spectacular under the summer's midnight sun.

*Fodor's*



a kooky outlier that's rocked the global travel scene. Partly this is down to geography. Iceland bubbles ... And partly it's down to people: a friendly, eccentric bunch who love live music, green thinking and hotdogs with remoulade and raw onions (yep, really).

*Intrepid Travel*

It had to do with finding myself alone with my thoughts in this exquisite Icelandic landscape - this rocky, grassy, misty, snowy mass of geological self-contradiction. *Conde Nast Traveller [Troll Peninsula]*



The northeast corner of Iceland, with its driftwood beaches, sea cliffs, lonely moors, and misty lakes and lagoons, is a wonderful place to forget about hectic, goal-oriented travel.

*Frommers*





# REFLECTING BRAND ELEMENTS

- 1 Arctic Coast Way and its regional and national marketing framework
- 2 Revising brand pyramid and brand promise



# REFLECTING BRAND ELEMENTS

## 1 ARCTIC COAST WAY AND ITS REGIONAL AND NATIONAL MARKETING FRAMEWORK

The Arctic Coast Way was developed with the specific objective of being a unifying proposition for the North Coast of Iceland. In the early beginning of the conceptual phase a first draft of brand elements was determined, for example brand promise and brand pyramid.

Being part of North Iceland the Arctic Coast Way brand equates the brand values of “magic, energy, tranquillity” which were determined in the „Image of North Iceland“ for the whole of North Iceland’s marketing. The Arctic Coast Way proposition also draws on and complements the national “Inspired by Iceland” brand promoted by Íslandsstofa:

### The Inspired by Iceland brand narrative is:

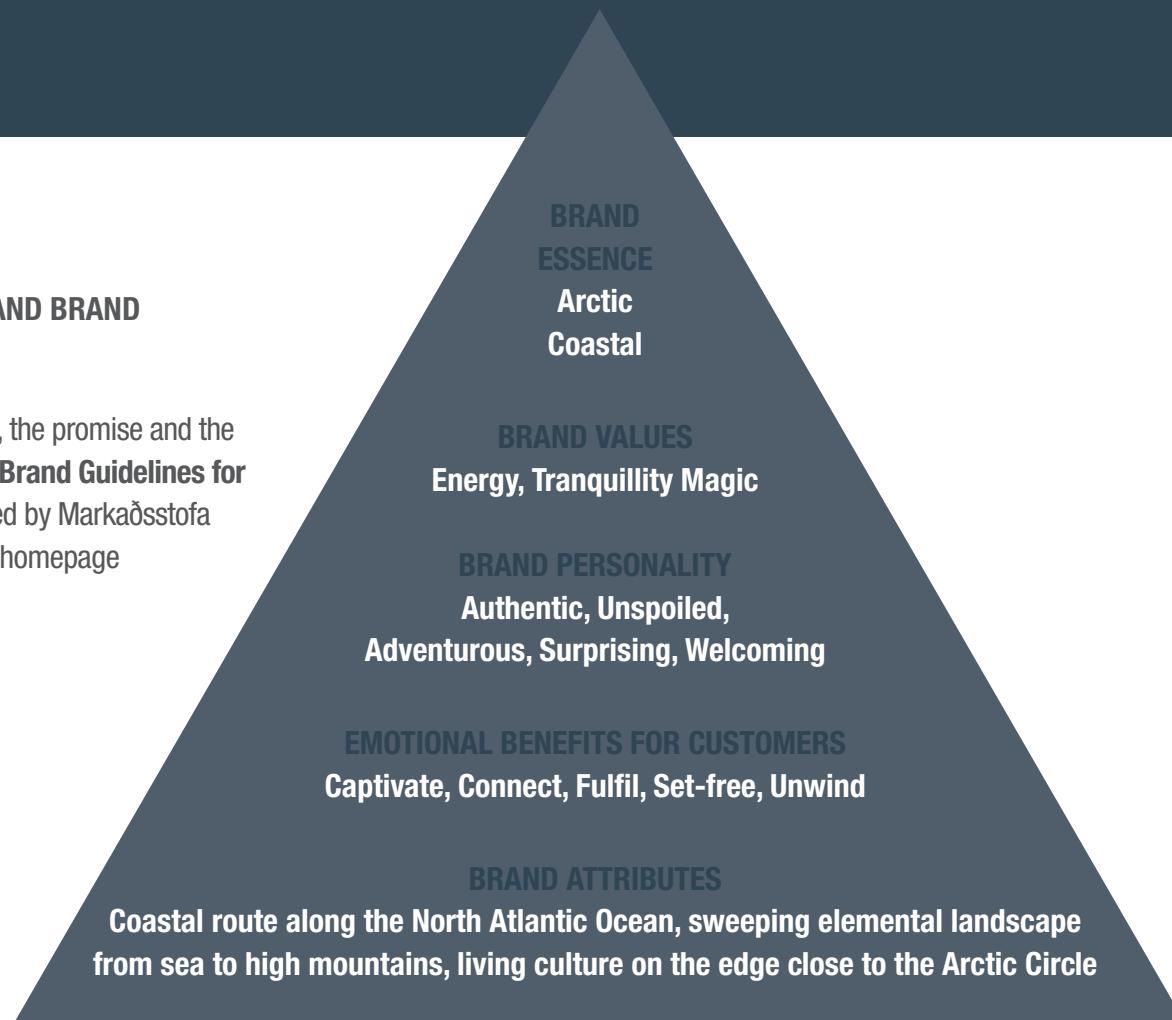
*“It's not for everyone.  
It's not for those who go where everyone else goes.  
It's not for the conservative and expected traveler.  
It's for those who travel the world to experience something different, to come back with stories to tell and secrets to share.  
The stories of Iceland don't stop as winter comes.  
Every season, and in every region, Iceland offers secrets to the adventurous and enlightened traveller.  
So welcome! To all those who travel with the spirit of adventure, exploring and creativity.  
It may not be the first place you think of travelling to this season, but it'll be the first place you tell your friends about.  
Come and be inspired by Iceland.”*

The Arctic Coast Way proposition was developed to fit within this overall narrative and deliver the experiences it promises. With the outcomes of the workshop the existing brand promise and proposition were reflected upon, revised and finalized. The experiences along the Arctic Coast Way should deliver these values and benefits and bring the brand’s essence and personality to life for visitors.

## REFLECTING BRAND ELEMENTS

### 2 REVISED BRAND PYRAMID AND BRAND PROMISE

These developed brand elements, the promise and the pyramid, are part of the general “**Brand Guidelines for the Arctic Coast Way**”, developed by Markaðsstofa Norðurlands and available on the homepage [nordurland.is](http://nordurland.is).



## OUR PROMISE TO VISITORS

### THE ARCTIC COAST WAY IN ICELAND'S FAR NORTH

**captures you with its rugged, untouched nature and takes you through vast otherworldly landscapes between sea and mountains.**

**It connects you to its authentic coastal villages and people, whose stories and culture are shaped by life on the edge, so close to the Arctic Circle.**

**It surprises you with its ever-changing moods of remote tranquillity, vibrant energy and magical light all year round.**

**You are set free to slow down, to discover a different way of life.**

**And you will leave uplifted, refreshed, fulfilled – with unique memories of this awe-inspiring place.**



# UNIQUE SELLING POINTS AND SECTIONS



## UNIQUE SELLING POINTS AND SECTIONS

In the conceptual phase in 2017, the steering group had already started to work on route zones for the Arctic Coast Way and was able to use the outcomes of the cooperation with Blue Sail to finalize this part of the concept for the Arctic Coast Way. While working on this project, the word “zones” was used – but in response to Blue Sail’s recommendations the wording was changed to “sections”. This can be targeted towards individual consumers as well as the entire industry.

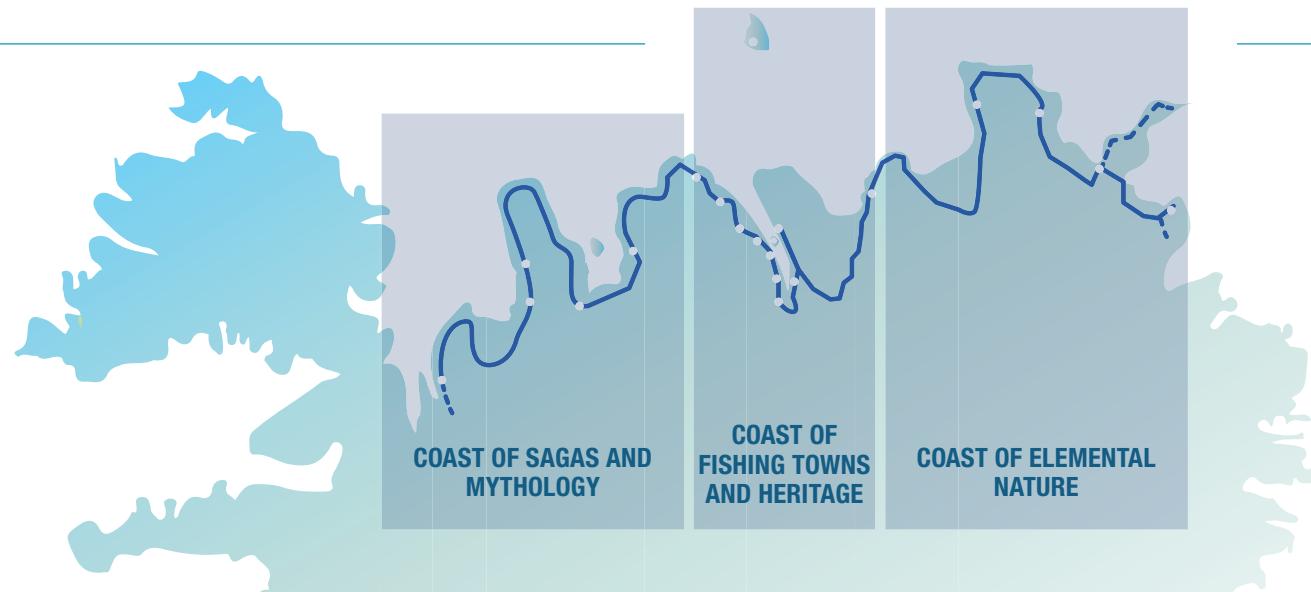
Dividing the Arctic Coast Way into sections for visitors will make it easier for them to imagine and plan a trip. This division of the route should encourage visitors to explore further afield, by promoting the variety of landscapes and experiences to be found and including ‘must-see’ features that can only be found in that specific section.

- Markaðsstofa Norðurlands and the Arctic Coast Way Steering Group should encourage investment in experiences that support the propositions and bring out the distinctive characteristics of each section.
- The distinctive features/Unique Selling Points (USPs) are things that make each section stand out from the others, so they are not comprehensive lists – they are additions to the characteristics and features that can be found right along the Arctic Coast Way.
- To avoid over-complicating things for visitors, and to find sections large enough to have distinct characteristics, Blue Sail recommend no more than three sections, as shown below.

Following the defined USPs selected in the brainstorming exercises during the workshops, three sections were extracted. Out of the most distinctive features of each section the final names were created.



## SECTIONS OF THE ARCTIC COAST WAY



### COAST OF SAGAS AND MYTHOLOGY

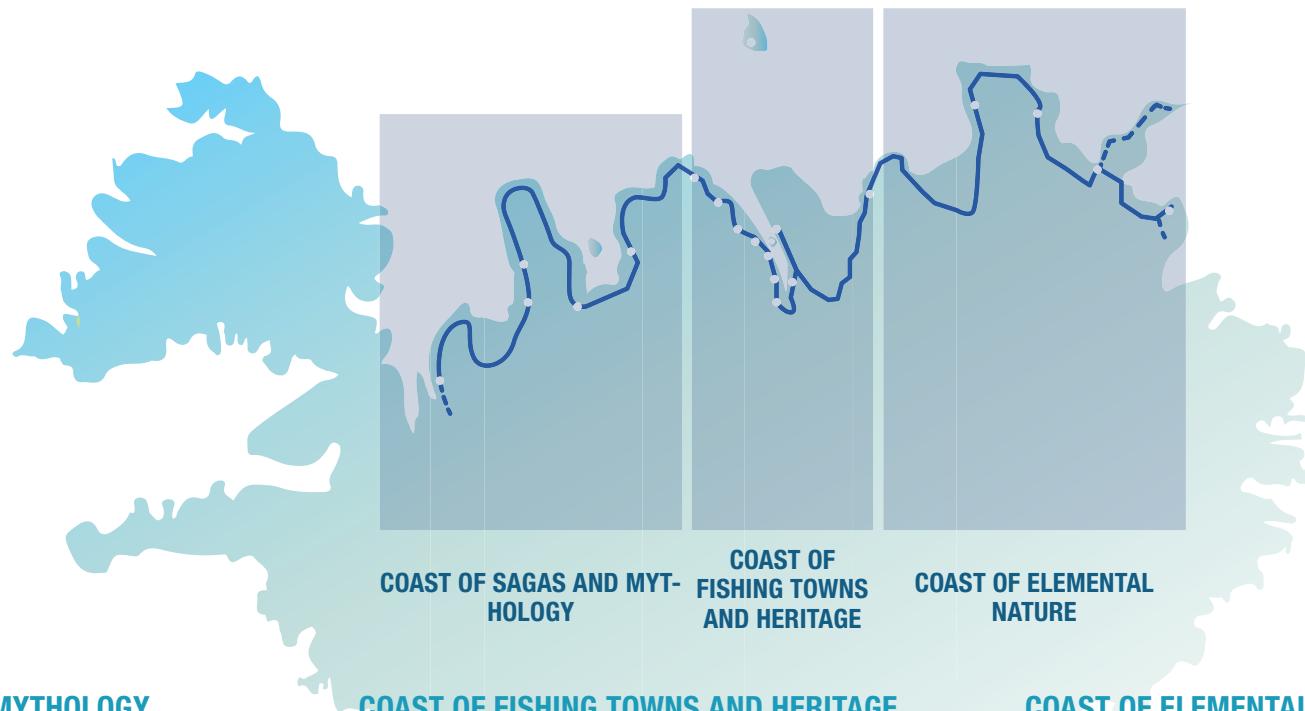
The western part of the Arctic Coast Way is an area with an atmospheric coast and high mountains offering excellent habitats to discover Arctic Wildlife with seals and birds. Here Icelandic horses roam in a fertile land of stories, sagas, myths and histories. You follow footprints of ages and experience collective memories generations deep.

### COAST OF FISHING TOWNS AND HERITAGE

At the heart of the Arctic Coast Way is a coastline rich with culture and activities – the capital of North Iceland and a string of fishing towns, harbours and ports are linked by a breathtaking route of cliff roads, mountain tunnels, glacial river, ferries and bridges across fjords. This is the gateway to Grimsey Island and the Arctic Circle.

### COAST OF ELEMENTAL NATURE

Leave the tourists behind and become a traveller through this compelling, mysterious landscape that changes dramatically with the seasons – from its summer residents and millions of birds to the emptiness, darkest skies and absolute silence of winter. Whenever you come you'll find deep peace, solitude and contemplation inspired by distant views and the echoes and footprints of Nature and history.



### COAST OF SAGAS AND MYTHOLOGY

- Cultural heritage – Sagas, Viking battles, Viking fortress, first Christian missionaries' monument, Þórdís the Prophetess, Rósa the Poet, Burial Rites locations, Emigration Centre,
- Drangey and Málsey Islands – sheer cliffs, rich bird life, personal challenge, locations from the sagas
- Icelandic horses – horse round-ups, black sand riding, horse farming
- Textiles/creativity – fish leather, knitting festival, puppets, historical tapestry
- Fishing – in rivers and on the shoreline
- Seals – Icelandic Seal Centre, seal-watching trips
- Höfðós – the most beautiful swimming pool in Iceland

### COAST OF FISHING TOWNS AND HERITAGE

- Akureyri – regional capital – gateway and vibrancy – cultural hub – food & drink
- Fishing communities – Dalvík Fish Festival, Sigló's Herring Museum, Fisherman's Day in all towns, Whale Museum in Húsavík, Hjalteyri fish factory, Fishing Exhibition in Grenivík
- Special energy – Hrísey, eo-thermal chimneys under water
- North Iceland's longest fjord and highest mountains
- Whale-watching 'hub'
- Ski centres and winter sports
- Location of TV's "Trapped"
- Museums – including Gásir – Historic Site & Festival

### COAST OF ELEMENTAL NATURE

- Furthest village in Iceland from Reykjavík
- Furthest point north on mainland Iceland – nearest point to Arctic Circle on mainland
- Abandoned villages, farms etc. – folk museum
- Driftwood coast – fossils – cliffs & sea stacks, whales & birds
- Panoramic views across sparsely populated landscape, Arctic Henge
- Geology – fault lines – glacial rivers – lava fields – rift valleys
- Ásbyrgi – Sleipnir's hoofprint, Earthquake Centre Kópasker

E

# TARGET MARKETS AND SEGMENTS

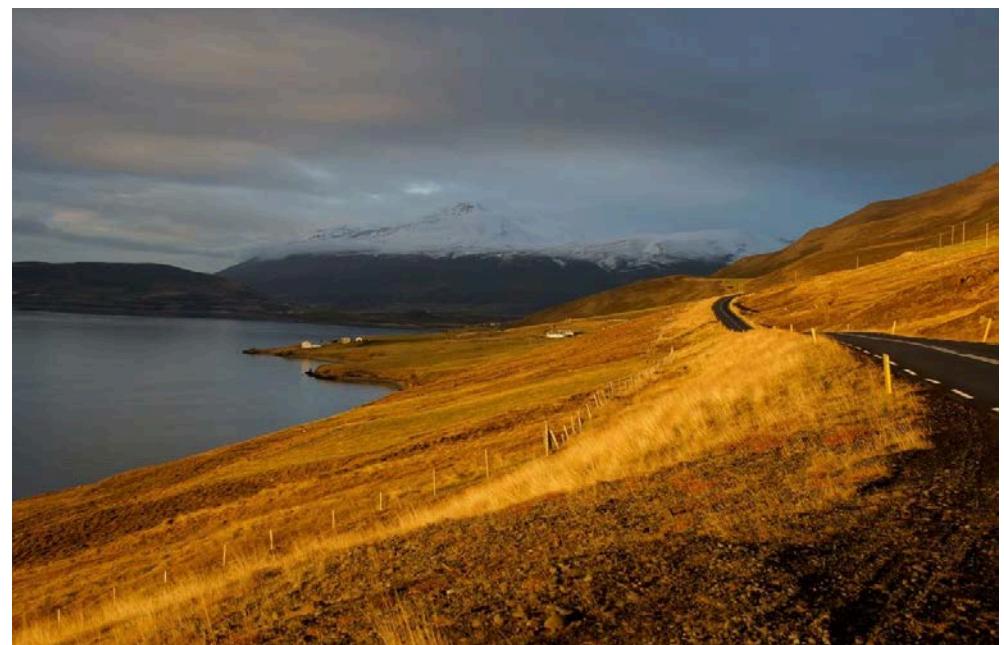
1 Countries  
2 Segments

## TARGET MARKETS AND SEGMENTS

The Arctic Coast Way is not for everyone. In order to address the project to the right market segment, Blue Sail helped with market analysis and selected the best prospect target segments for the Arctic Coast Way based on:

- Segmentation research done by Íslandsstofa
- Review of available visitor data to Iceland and North Iceland
- Product-market-fit analysis
- Views of businesses and partners at workshops and meetings.

During the workshops, participants became familiar with these target segments and several exercises helped to understand who potential visitors for the Arctic Coast Way are and how to best reach their needs. The Tool Kit for Arctic Coast Way Experiences helps providers to adapt their experiences to the target groups.



# TARGET MARKETS AND SEGMENTS

## 1 COUNTRIES

There is a real opportunity for North Iceland to attract a greater proportion of Iceland's inbound tourism market. The biggest markets are currently the USA, UK and Germany. The fastest growing (2016-17) are Canada, USA, Spain and China – but all Iceland's markets are growing, apart from the arguably mature markets of Norway and Denmark.

Markaðsstofa Norðurlands have identified the USA, Germany, Great Britain and Scandinavia as offering the most potential for North Iceland and being, therefore, the primary target markets. The Arctic Coast Way is an excellent motivator to encourage visitors from these countries to visit and stay longer.

## 2 SEGMENTS

All three of the segments identified by Íslandsstofa as having the potential for Iceland also present an opportunity for Arctic Coast Way. The choice of target visitors for the Arctic Coast Way is guided by the research of Íslandsstofa on target groups for Iceland and adapted to the specific character of the Northern Coast of Iceland. The Brand Guidelines of the Arctic Coast Way anticipate the character of potential visitors:

The Arctic Coast Way is not for everyone. It's for those who feel good about striking out from the confines of common routes and becoming travellers in a spirit of adventure and exploration. It's for those who are open to the challenges of elemental nature and remote areas in the far North of Iceland. It's for those who appreciate slowing down to connect with nature, culture and people.

It's for those who love to travel independently or in the company of small groups

It's for those who travel the world to experience something different

### PRIMARY SEGMENTS

Following the reflections from Blue Sail about the brand proposition and already available experiences along the Arctic Coast Way, we selected our primary segment because this is currently the best fit: Independent Explorers

### SECONDARY TARGET SEGMENT

The secondary segment – because there is likely to be interest, but currently fewer experiences fit along the length of the Arctic Coast Way – is:

- Fun-Loving Globetrotters.
- Cultural Comfort Seekers.

# TARGET MARKETS AND SEGMENTS

## THE THREE SEGMENTS FROM ISLANDSSTOFA

### INDEPENDENT EXPLORERS

- 35-65 years
- Average income, average education
- From USA, Germany, Scandinavia, Britain, France, Iceland
- Reliable, responsible and rational
- Not particularly sociable but interested in authentic connection
- Active travellers – seek out new and exciting places
- Want to travel off the beaten track
- Love the outdoors
- Respectful of nature and the environment
- Love learning about local culture
- Travel in smaller groups
- Travel all year but up for coming in winter
- Not big users of social media

### FUN-LOVING GLOBETROTTERS

- 20-50 years
- City dwellers
- Average income, average education
- From USA, Germany, Scandinavia, Britain, France, Iceland
- Very sociable, open-minded, independent – don't want to follow the herd
- Active travellers who travel all year round
- Interested in culture, ideas, other lifestyles
- Want to travel to new and exciting destinations
- Respectful of nature and the environment
- Look for new challenges but need guidance in situations that are unfamiliar.
- Higher than average users of internet, mobile and media
- Love to share their stories on social media

### CULTURAL COMFORT SEEKERS

- Primarily female
- 45 years +
- Average education
- Above average Income
- From Germany, Scandinavia, Britain, France, Iceland
- Active travellers all year round
- Seek new and exciting destinations
- Careful adventure seekers
- Very interested in culture, ideas, other lifestyles
- Seek comfort rather than challenge when it comes to outdoors and travel
- Like to live in the 'now'
- Active on conventional social media platforms
- Enjoy lifestyle media

# F

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

- 1 Brainstorming about new experiences**
- 2 Themes for experiences**
- 3 Recommendations for the experience development process**
  - 3.1 Getting the basics right**
  - 3.2 Strengths and Challenges**
  - 3.3 Ongoing business engagement**
  - 3.4 Extending geographically and seasonally**
  - 3.5 Importance of stories**
  - 3.6 Selection of best fitting new experiences**

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

In stage 2 of the experience development process, the project invited people to three workshops with Blue Sail along the Arctic Coast Way. The workshops were held in Sauðárkrúkur, Akureyri and Ásbyrgi to give all stakeholders and providers a good opportunity to take part and learn about experience development. In July stage 3 was implemented with on-site visits from Blue Sail and the project manager to check existing experiences with good potential for the Arctic Coast Way and to fill gaps in the analysis from desk research and workshops.

## 1 BRAINSTORMING FOR NEW EXPERIENCES

Among many others, one important exercise was brainstorming about new ideas for experiences along the Arctic Coast Way. Blue Sail set up eight categories

in which participants could brainstorm for new ideas or improving existing experiences. The results, shown in Appendix 1, combine the outcomes from all three workshops, but might be incomplete as not all handwritten notices on the original paper posters were readable.

## 2 THEMES FOR EXPERIENCES

The Arctic Coast Way is a strong proposition, presenting a concept likely to appeal in the marketplace. It will need a reasonable number of more general experiences to generate interest from potential visitors and provide the reassurance of quality required to warrant a longer stay. A number of themes have been identified for grouping experiences in ways which will make sense to the market and set the Arctic Coast Way apart from other touring routes. Ensuring sufficient experiences

within each of these “thematic collections” will be a matter of priority:

1. By the Arctic Circle – includes being so far north, special light/lights, weather/climate, remote, wild and sparsely populated coastal landscape, the arctic natural world, geology etc.
2. Active outdoors – physical activities in the great arctic outdoors
3. Arctic Wildlife – flora and fauna along the Arctic Coast Way, iconic and lesser known
4. Coastal Culture - includes the way of life in the far north, connecting with locals, joining in, food & drink, traditions/folklore/legend, arts & crafts, origins & history

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

## 3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

After each stage Blue Sail summarised the outcomes in a short report as “food for thoughts” for discussions with the steering group, taking the project into the next stage. After the last workshop in September 2018, Blue Sail worked on their final conclusions and recommendations for Markaðsstofa Norðurlands and the steering group regarding the ongoing development of experiences along the Arctic Coast Way.



## 3.1 GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT

The diagram below shows the elements of a travel experience which visitors need to fully enjoy their trip. While much of the work Blue Sail have been doing is around the “engaging” and “immersive” elements – as these are the ones which make a place distinctive – none of these additional features can be ignored and they need to be in place right along the Arctic Coast Way. Even though there is a strong focus on experience development, it is important to make sure that fundamental aspects of travelling keep pace with visitor expectations when it comes to quality, value-for-money, choice and accessibility. **Of particular importance for the Arctic Coast Way are:**

- distinctive (and quality) accommodation
- good local produce (well-prepared and available)
- facilities and infrastructure (transport)

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

## 3.2 STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Blue Sail have identified four key strengths of the Arctic Coast Way. These should be in the forefront when developing and marketing the offer:

### **STRENGTH 1:**

#### **Simple experiences in stunning settings**

The Arctic Coast Way delivers on the target markets' increasing desire for authenticity, a strong sense of place and somewhere different from home. There is no need for complex, contrived encounters. The place delivers the settings for personal, intimate experiences with a strong sense of nature, landscape, weather, latitude and close-knit self-sufficient communities. It can be hard for locals to appreciate how extraordinary it feels to people from other parts of the world – especially to city dwellers (i.e., the majority of tourists).

### **STRENGTH 2:**

**Off-the-tourist-trail, “road-less-travelled” exploration**  
**Going further, challenging yourself, escaping the crowds, doing something special – these are all things the target markets want from travel.** Iceland has delivered these in the past – and now it is attracting visitors in much greater numbers. So where do people looking for an authentic Iceland experience now? The Arctic Coast Way has the potential to meet the needs of more adventurous, independent-minded visitors who want that authentic Iceland experience.

### **STRENGTH 3:**

#### **Genuine connections with the locals**

The Arctic Coast Way has experience providers who welcome visitors into their lives and homes for a few hours – or even a few days. This is a really important motivator and creates lasting memories.

### **STRENGTH 4:**

#### **Providers and stakeholders with expertise, energy and creative ideas.**

This is a key strength and a critical ingredient for experience development. The drive and commitment to develop immersive engaging experiences must come from local people, not from the public agencies who support them.

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

BUT WHEN IT COMES TO EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT THERE ARE FOUR HEADLINE CHALLENGES FOR OPERATORS ALONG THE ARCTIC COAST WAY:

## CHALLENGE 1: STAYING AUTHENTIC

Popular destinations with growing visitor numbers often become overly commercial and experiences begin to feel “staged”. To sustain the appeal of the Arctic Coast Way, it is important to maintain that feeling of connecting with authentic local lives and to continue to provide personal experiences – keeping group sizes small, providing the warmest of welcomes, and understanding and responding to visitors’ needs.

## CHALLENGE 2: PROVIDING QUALITY AND VALUE

Visitors increasingly expect above-basic levels of hospitality, fresh local food and drink, and vivid stories (about local suppliers, about the place, about the owners and their philosophy etc.). There are some great businesses, but more contemporary quality accommodation and food provision is needed along the route. The Arctic Coast Way will appeal to people

who expect providers to have truly green credentials – sustainable principles and policies, support for local businesses and communities and eco-friendly practices such as recycling and re-use. And Iceland is expensive – so that providing special customer-focused experiences and services seen by the visitor as value for money is of particular importance.

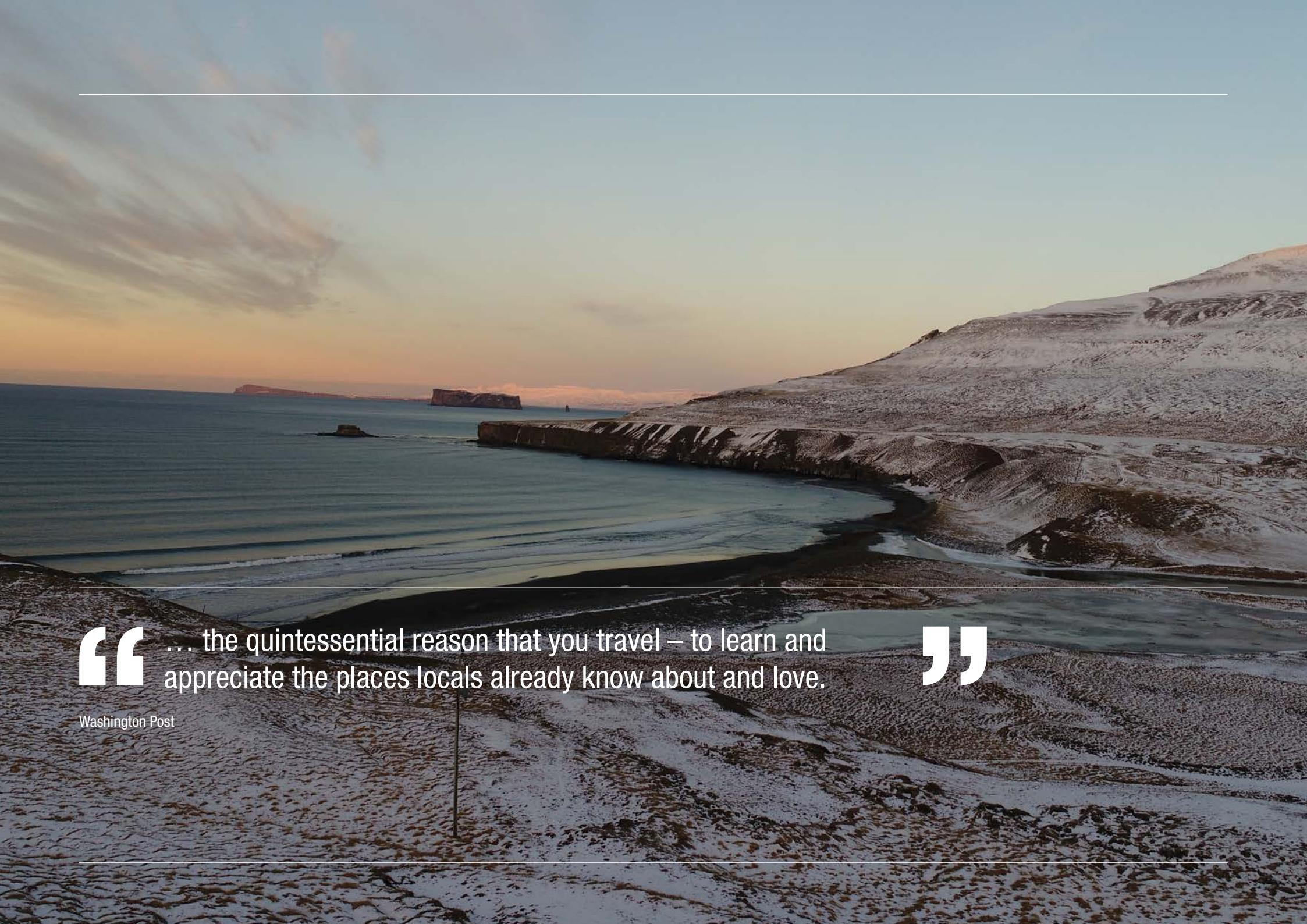
## CHALLENGE 3: MAKING IT EASIER FOR VISITORS

For international visitors, Iceland is difficult to get to grips with at first – largely because of the Icelandic language and place names. That is one of the fascinations of course – exploited by the tourist boards with campaigns such as “the hardest karaoke song in the world”. As well as the information provided by the tourism agencies and municipalities, businesses should help potential visitors to plan itineraries and make advance bookings by ensuring that websites are

up to date with Arctic Coast Way maps and information. Once here, visitors will need help with orientation. The Arctic Coast Way, with its partners, needs to establish the clearest possible communication, orientation and planning tools.

## CHALLENGE 4: FINDING TIME, ENERGY AND RESOURCES

Many providers are one or two-person micro-enterprises and for them it is a challenge to find the time, energy and resources to develop their services. Networks and networking between is even more important – to improve the current experience for visitors, and to inspire new experiences. This is also a challenge for the agencies that provide business support.



“ ... the quintessential reason that you travel – to learn and appreciate the places locals already know about and love. ”

Washington Post

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

## 3.3 ONGOING BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Building awareness and interest in the Arctic Coast Way and its focus on experiences needs ongoing engagement with businesses. The job is unlikely ever to be complete!

The immediate priority for business engagement is the roll-out of the Toolkit to encourage its use and application by business operators. You now have a database of companies and will undoubtedly be emailing them all with a link to the Toolkit as well as publicising it to partners and stakeholders and asking them to disseminate it to their networks.

If resources allow, a series of workshops along the Arctic Coast Way to promote the concept and the use of the toolkit would be ideal. It can be difficult to get businesses to devote time to accessing, working through and applying online toolkits and it is often more effective for them to be guided through these processes at a practical workshop. A similarly supportive approach is for business advisers and others working with tourism enterprises on a group or even a one-to-one basis to use the Toolkit in their advisory or mentoring activity.

Demonstrating success will be important. You should build up a set of case studies using the Hero Experiences, tracking how businesses developed their offer into a hero, what they have achieved (e.g., numbers of customers, value, profile, reviews etc.) and how they promoted it (marketing activity, channels etc.).

Another route to business engagement is to use social media as a business-to-business channel. Using Markaðsstofa's existing channels makes sense; thus, the Arctic Coast Way becomes embedded in the overall priorities of North Iceland.

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

## 3.4 EXTENDING GEOGRAPHICALLY AND SEASONALLY

Visits to North Iceland are highly seasonal – occupancy levels in July and August are almost 90% whereas in December and January they are only around 15%. For the whole of Iceland the pattern is fairly consistent year round, suggesting potential for the Arctic Coast Way to increase off-season visits by growing its share of the Iceland market. Of course, this might be limited by severe weather at certain times.

The main opportunity in the short term will be Spring (April and May) and Autumn (September and October). The key to this will be explicitly promoting and reassuring visitors that the Arctic Coast Way is open for business (and providing reasons to visit at those times) as well as highlighting Hero Experiences which

are available during these months. Tour coaches and guided tours tend to be used more by visitors during the winter in Iceland as a whole, so exploring opportunities for specific collaboration with tour and coach operators for trips along the Arctic Coast Way in the off-season could provide the reassurance required.

There is a concentration of tourism businesses in the centre of the Arctic Coast Way from Siglufjörður to Húsavík, with Akureyri being the key hub as “capital” of North Iceland. This inevitably means that visits will be concentrated along this central coastal section.

To realise the potential of the Arctic Coast Way as a long distance route that encourages people to travel along its entire length and stay for several days will require a special effort in the eastern and western sections. Blue Sail recommend targeting enterprises in these

sections in order to engage them and bring them into the Arctic Coast Way project. Because there are fewer businesses in these areas there are likely to be fewer applicants so you should be prepared to provide additional, tailored support to help suitable candidates become Hero Experiences. A useful approach would be to develop “clusters” of companies to sustain interest and to ensure a critical mass of offers in these more remote areas. By working together, businesses may be able to develop rounded experiences involving different elements which will encourage visitors to stay longer. Accommodation is particularly challenging in certain places, so creative options should be explored such as homestays or temporary accommodation. This special effort may well need additional resources – staff time in particular to work directly with local entrepreneurs.

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

## 3.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES

Stories and storytelling have an important potential role in enhancing visitor experiences – because stories can move us and connect with us at an emotional level. They hook and hold our attention and tap into our senses – so we feel stories, rather than simply hearing or reading them. This makes them powerful and memorable – and easier to share and retell. A visitor experience with a story at its heart is likely to be much more satisfying and memorable than one without.

There is advice about using stories in the **Toolkit under “Telling Your Arctic Coast Way Story”**. Using stories is second nature to some operators – others will need help identifying, shaping and delivering their stories. And businesses need to hear each other's stories so that they can retell them when cross-selling to visitors. Blue Sail recommend a programme of support for entrepreneurs in developing stories to tell orally and in writing and images, as well as opportunities to work together on this, telling each other their individual stories and developing shared stories for their communities.



# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

## 3.6 SELECTION OF THE BEST FITTING NEW AND EXISTING EXPERIENCES

During the course of this project, literally hundreds of ideas have been suggested for developing new experiences or enhancing existing ones. We have grouped the most promising of these – those with a strong brand “fit”, likely to appeal to the target market segments and relatively easy to deliver in the short term – into four categories<sup>1</sup>:

### BY THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

- Night swimming in pools with Northern Lights
- various types of midnight sun activities
- Dark Skies experiences, for example a turning-off-the-lights star-gazing event for islands/settlements
- Discovering Flatey, spend a night there and hear stories about life in remote surroundings; with town hall dance, music, local food
- Midnight sun Festival in Grímsey
- Northern Lights on the Arctic Circle (Grímsey) or on another remote island (Flatey)

### ARCTIC WILDLIFE

- Whale Watching Plus: Enhancing existing tours with additional elements that further connect visitors with the location and the community, for example + mindfulness, +silence, +with microphones in the water, +local culture (food, storytelling, music) + sleeping on board and listening to the sounds of the night
- Snorkelling with puffins
- Stand-up paddling or kayaking with whales, puffins

# EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

## ARCTIC OUTDOORS

- Diving to geothermal spouts
- Arctic swimming under advice of locals
- Horse-riding through shallow seas, for example a horse round-up at Hóp
- Horse riding along locations of the places for “Burial rites”
- Hiking along the postmen’s routes following the Arctic Coast Way
- Boat & hikes: coastal hikes starting from locations only reachable by boat; combine with foraging if season allows, fishing or picnic of local food
- Campfires on the beach with local food

## COASTAL CULTURE

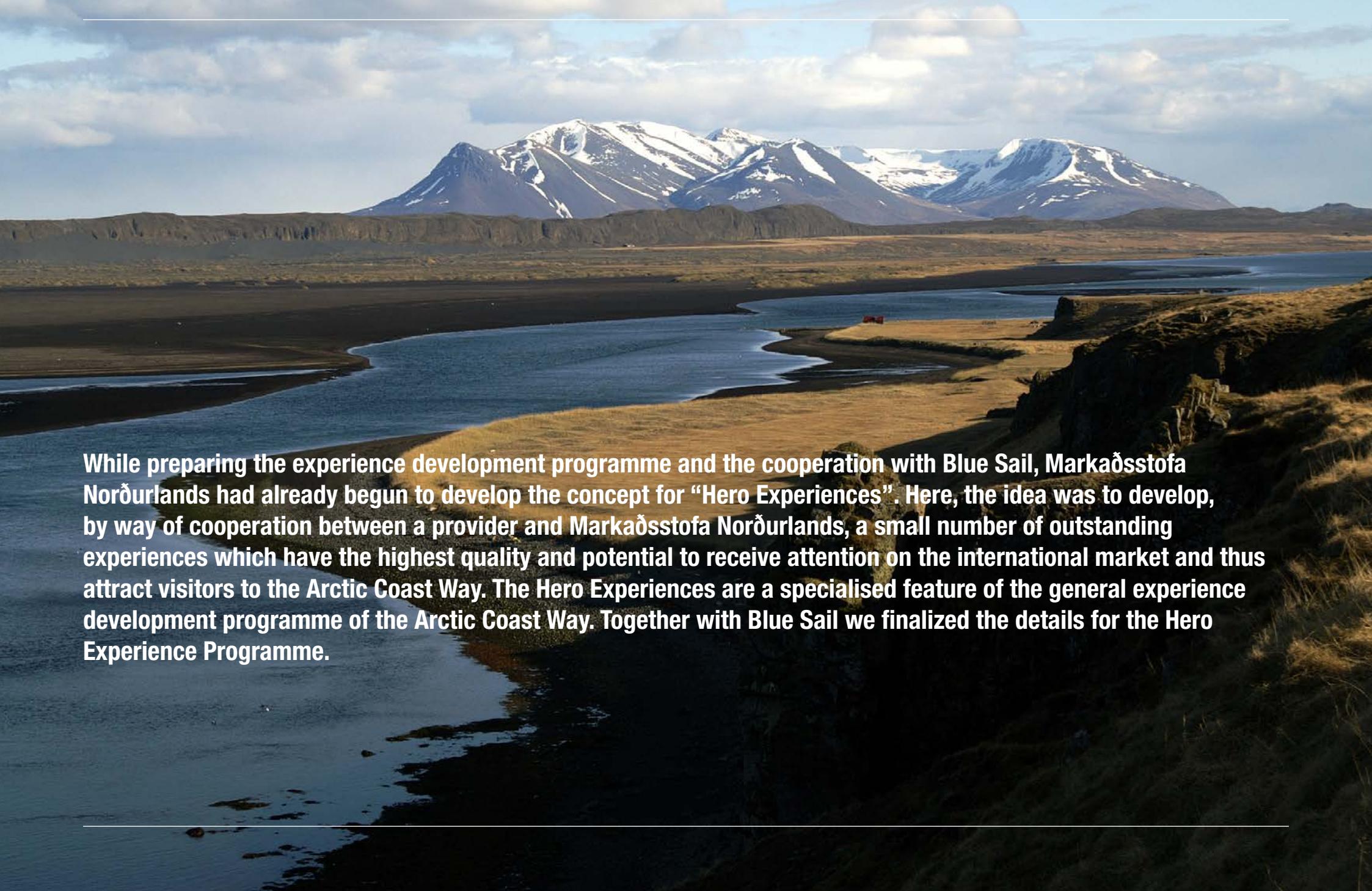
- Visiting sites of true stories and legends – feeling you are “on the spot” where history happened, for example abandoned farms, Viking places, burial rites
- Live a former daily life, for example in turfhouses; costumes, no lights, no electricity, original food or in Gásir; join the mediaeval festival, get a costume and a role, learn about art and handcrafts and food
- Learning everything about herring, for example the Herring Museum: get a costume, learn in the exhibition, taste the herring, learn the processing by taking part, dinner in the museum with dance and music
- concerts, poetry and dinner at the lighthouses
- Learn about bacalao and taste it
- Storytelling by torchlight and walks
- Join in and help with farming, fishing, sailing, round-ups of sheep, and horses

- Learn how to: dry, smoke, cook, bake
- Learn how tan, spin, colour, knit
- Learning and trying traditional skills and tastes
- Meet locals on “secret” hikes, share dinners, join in at festivals & events, for example “the Great Fish Day” or “Fishermen’s Day”
- bird egg collection and tasting



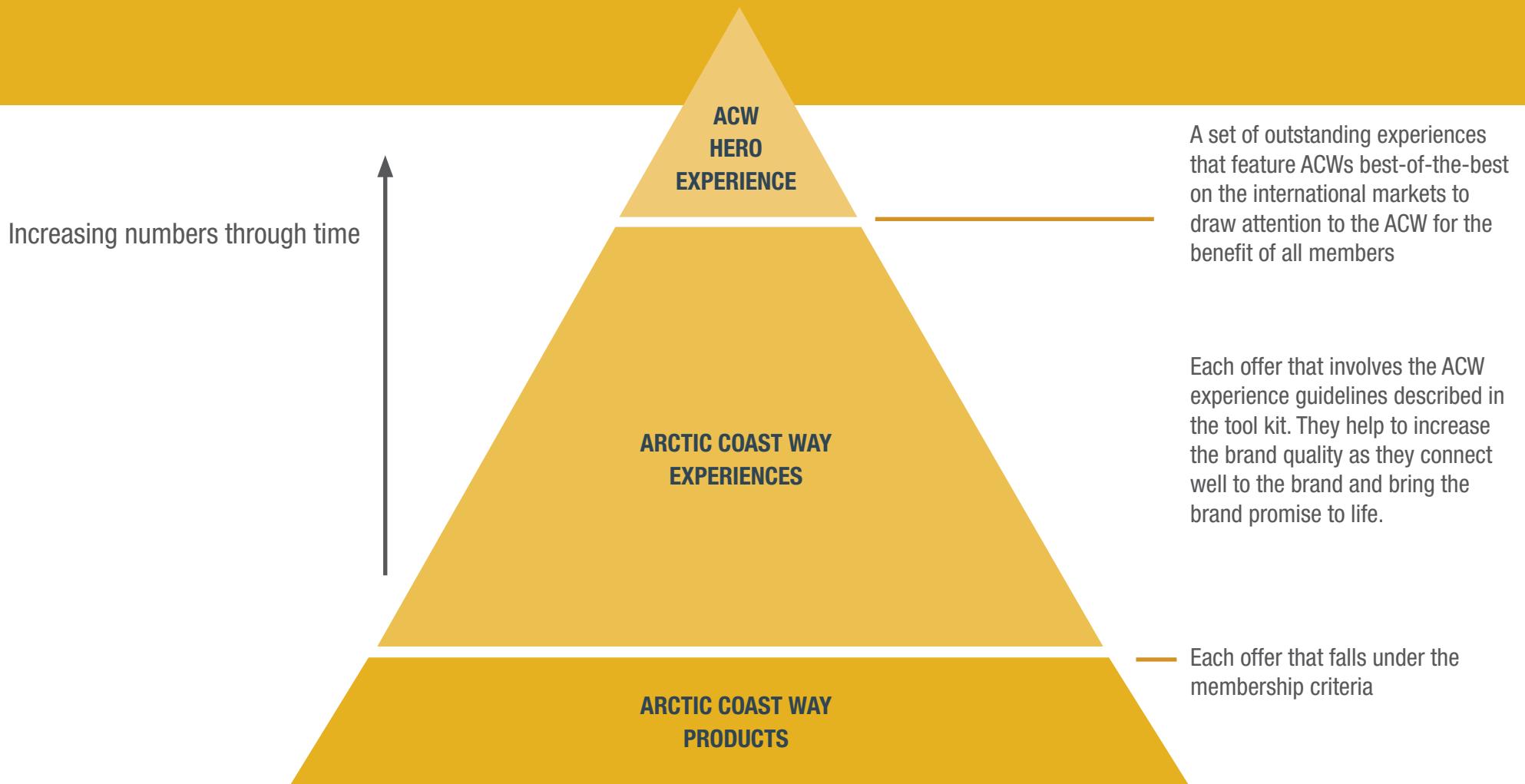
# SELECTING HERO EXPERIENCES

- 1 Definition
- 2 Selection process
- 3 Developing recommendations



**While preparing the experience development programme and the cooperation with Blue Sail, Markaðsstofa Norðurlands had already begun to develop the concept for “Hero Experiences”. Here, the idea was to develop, by way of cooperation between a provider and Markaðsstofa Norðurlands, a small number of outstanding experiences which have the highest quality and potential to receive attention on the international market and thus attract visitors to the Arctic Coast Way. The Hero Experiences are a specialised feature of the general experience development programme of the Arctic Coast Way. Together with Blue Sail we finalized the details for the Hero Experience Programme.**

## SELECTING HERO EXPERIENCES



# SELECTING HERO EXPERIENCES

## 1 DEFINITION

Hero Experiences are the best-of-the-best experiences, capable of motivating international visitors to make the trip to North Iceland. Arctic Coast Way Hero Experiences will go through an application process and will be developed in cooperation with Markaðsstofa Norðurlands. They will then feature in international marketing. Ultimately, Hero Experiences must meet the general guidelines for all Arctic Coast Way Experiences – also the Emotional and Formal Criteria specifically for Heroes – as set out below. In practice, they should simply need to have the potential to meet these in order to be selected. Most experiences along the Arctic Coast Way will not be designated as Heroes but nevertheless of quality and authenticity, forming the bedrock of the visitor's experience.

## 2 THE SELECTION PROCESS

The Toolkit includes an Application Form to be designated a Hero Experience, guidance and examples of best practice for providers. But – in order to ensure a spread of types, locations and times of the year – Markaðsstofa Norðurlands and the Steering Group should be proactive in identifying potential Heroes and encouraging and supporting their development. It will be important to maintain exceptionally high standards for Heroes: the aim should be quality not quantity. A completed Application Form alone is not enough. The Steering Group will set up a Panel (a sub-group of the larger Group) that will verify the details on the Form, interview the applicant and do site visits. The Panel needs to assess potential, identify gaps/weaknesses, and gauge the provider's capacity and commitment to developing and delivering a Hero Experience. When selecting the Panel, the Steering Group needs to make sure that there are no conflicts of interest.

## 3 DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATION

Blue Sail point out that a good and varied collection of Hero Experiences will be crucially important for the early marketing. Being a Hero Experience will require commitment both in time and money from providers, and the selection process is quite demanding. The Arctic Coast Way will have to actively encourage participation – especially once the project has secured the first wave of those who are particularly keen. Some sales effort might be required!



# GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA FOR EXPERIENCES AND HERO EXPERIENCES

# GUIDELINES & CRITERIA

## EXPERIENCE GUIDELINES

1. Provides a **coastal experience** highlighting nature and culture, that fits at least one of the Arctic Coast Way Themes
2. **Delivers the Arctic Coast Way Promise**, in all of these ways:
  - Connects – the visitor to place, the local community, maybe to other like-minded visitors
  - Captivates – creates memories and positive feelings that endure
  - Surprises – sparks creativity and/or provides a sense of personal achievement
3. **Feels authentic** – tells true stories, does not feel contrived or staged just for tourists
4. **Stimulates the senses** – not just sights, but ideally sounds, smells, tastes, textures too (food & drink should have a strong local element)
5. **Is engaging & involving** – requires active involvement, possibly participation or learning or hands-on
6. **Feels personal** – is for individuals or small groups, not a mass market experience, offers personal connection and storytelling
7. **Is targeted** – will appeal strongly to at least one of Arctic Coast Way's priority target markets

## ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES FOR FOOD & DRINK EXPERIENCES

1. Uses local food (ACW or Iceland) prepared in interesting and appealing ways
2. Provides engaging information - eg sources, producers, environmental influences, traditional methods etc

## GUIDELINES & CRITERIA

### ADDITIONAL HERO CRITERIA – FORMAL

1. Is **well-planned, tested and expertly delivered** – has qualified guides and/or experts and meets all official regulations
2. Is **bookable** – so visitors can plan a trip around it and operators can plan specific date but does not have to be regular or frequent
3. Will be **available for at least 3 years** (in cooperation with MN)
4. Must **not be a pre-existing hero experience**
5. Provider has been **in business for at least 1 year**
6. Minimises negative **environmental impact**
7. Provider meets all **legal requirements** and is adequately **insured**

### ADDITIONAL HERO CRITERIA – EMOTIONAL

1. Has a **strong sense of place** – uses the setting and/or cultural heritage in thoughtful and imaginative ways
2. Has a **rarity value** – numbers, dates, special access; lifts a widely available experience (e.g. whale watching) out of the ordinary with something special

# I

# FOOD EXPERIENCES

- 1 Context**
- 2 Existing food experiences along the Arctic Coast Way**
- 3 Food trends**
- 4 Development of food experiences**
  - 4.1 Towards a narrative**
  - 4.2 Distinctive features and strength**
  - 4.3 Ideas for new experiences**
  - 4.4 Challenges for food experiences**
  - 4.4 Arctic Coast Way Menu**
- 5 The Narrative**

# FOOD EXPERIENCES

## 1 CONTEXT

During the conceptual phase of the Arctic Coast Way the idea came up to invest specially in food experiences as part of the general experience development programme for the Arctic Coast Way. The project was fortunate to win Matarauður Íslands as sponsor for this idea. There were several reasons to take a special look at food as experience for the Arctic Coast Way:

- People are increasingly looking for distinctive food and drink experiences as a key part of a trip. Food and drink can transform a visitor's experience of a place, providing the chance to "taste the place" and connect with locals and their culture, as well as social bonding with other visitors over a shared experience.
- Food-experiences open up best opportunities to become familiar with an area through all the senses by learning from someone (e.g., farmer) and doing something (e.g., cooking together) and smelling and tasting (e.g., having a dinner)
- The culinary aspect of travelling can lengthen the stay in a destination and increase revenues for both the food and the tourism industry.
- A well-focused experience development on "food" would encourage companies to invest in this field
- The experience development along the coast of North Iceland is a pilot project for the whole North. Afterwards results from the Arctic Coast Way can be better adapted to the whole North, for example, as well the food-experience approach

# FOOD EXPERIENCES

## 2 EXISITING FOOD EXPERIENCES ALONG THE ARCTIC COAST WAY

Markaðsstofa Norðurlands conducted a brief desk research study to help Blue Sail form a picture of existing food experiences along the Arctic Coast Way and also to assist companies in developing their own food experiences.

Traditional „food-events“ during the year:

January-February: Þorrablót; Sólarkaffi

February: Bolludagur, Sprengidagur

Eastern: stór páskaegg

Christmas: 23.12.: Þorláksmessa

### TRADITIONAL FOOD PRODUCTS

CATEGORY	PRODUCT
Bakery Product	Bankabygg, rúgbrauð, flatbrauð, laufabrauð, ástarpungar, kleinur
Milk products	Skýr, AB mjólk, súrmjólk, mysa
Vegetables	Greenhouse vegetables, potatoes, beetroot, rutabaga, carrots, cabbage
Fruits & Berries	Rhubarb, blueberries, crowberries, strawberries,
Fish	Various types; plokkfiskur, fish liver and roe, caviar, smoked fish, lobster, dried fish, salted fish (Bacalao), fermented shark, skate
Meat (always from tail to nose!)	Lamb meat, slátur, goat meat, horsemeat, wild geese, guillemots, salted meat, smoked meat
Foraging	Wild mushrooms, seaweed, birds' eggs, angelica, Iceland moss,
arctic thyme, birch leaves	

Existing Food Experiences along or close to the Arctic Coast Way (apart from restaurants and cafés)

- Food Festival Akureyri
- The great Fish Day Dalvík
- Matarkistan Skagafjörður
- Ekta Fiskur
- Akureyri Food Walks:
- Culinary tours in Skagafjörður: Surf & Turf Tour
- Sea bird egg collection Grímsey

Inspirations apart from the Arctic Coast Way

- Bread with geothermal energy: [www.fontana.is/en/fontana/rye-bread-experience](http://www.fontana.is/en/fontana/rye-bread-experience)
- Food on a farm: [www.facebook.com/vellir/](http://www.facebook.com/vellir/)
- Cowshead Café: [www.kaffiku.is/](http://www.kaffiku.is/)

## FOOD EXPERIENCES

### 3 FOOD TRENDS

Current food trends that are particularly relevant to providers along the Arctic Coast Way are:

**Local sourcing** – which responds to visitors' increasing desire to reduce their environmental impact and support local communities; as well as practising and developing local sourcing, providers need to communicate this to visitors, for example by developing "field to fork" (limited food-miles) menus and telling the stories of local producers.

**Foraging** – including foraged ingredients on menus – confirms the food's local, natural and fresh qualities; providing visitors with the chance to accompany locals on foraging trips gives them a hands-on learning experience that connects them with the place and people in a deeper way.

**Food heritage** – there is an increasing interest in preserving local and regional food cultures and traditions; visitors' experience will be enriched if you provide opportunities for them to try and buy traditional food, learn about local cuisine, meet the makers, and join in with festivals and other activities connected with food production and traditions.

### 4 DEVELOPING FOOD EXPERIENCES

#### 4.1 TOWARDS A NARRATIVE

Among a number of creative exercises, Blue Sail asked participants at the general workshops to describe the Arctic Coast Way in terms of "taste". The results are shown as a word cloud above – the larger the word, the more often it was mentioned.



And we asked stakeholders at the specialist Food Experiences Workshop to describe the region's food in only one word (right). In addition to workshops and conversations with stakeholders, we reviewed how food is described and positioned by tourism agencies, by travel writers and in consumer reviews.

# FOOD EXPERIENCES

## 4.2 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES AND POTENTIAL STRENGTHS

Some features and strengths were determined in the workshop and during the research for food experiences along the Arctic Coast Way:

- Food that has strong links with place and past
- The chance to consume food and drink close to the source and the story
- Extraordinary settings for food and drink – including picnics and barbecues in stunning coastal landscapes and remote places, meals in atmospheric buildings with a story (e.g., period farmhouses, former industrial buildings), food and drink in restaurants and cafés right on the shoreline with amazing views of marine life

- Sustainable food production – using renewable energy, consuming low food miles, little waste (“nose-to-tail” eating), and natural farming methods
- Producers and providers in tune with nature, the seasons, the rhythm of life – an inevitability of living and working in such remote places
- A mix of tradition, creativity and innovation.

Examples of all of these can already be found along the Arctic Coast Way – and so they feature in the Narrative (see section 5). But they are not consistently on offer across the geography, throughout the seasons, nor in any great volume. Provision of great food and drink experiences is patchy, and more opportunities are needed for visitors to experience all the above distinctive features.

As a minimum, tourism providers and hospitality businesses along the Arctic Coast Way should be aiming to serve food that reflects the location: using fresh local ingredients, drawing on local culture to present food and drink, and telling the stories of local producers. For this to be widespread along the route, investment is needed in development projects such as the Arctic Coast Way Menu initiative (see section 4.5).

# FOOD EXPERIENCES

## 4.3 IDEAS FOR NEW FOOD EXPERIENCES

While there are opportunities to consume local food or watch food production, there are only a small number of food tourism experiences along the Arctic Coast Way that are truly engaging and immersive. The workshops and site-visits found that tourism providers are keen to develop more immersive, engaging food experiences, especially giving visitors the chance to connect with locals by preparing and eating food together, by working with farmers and food producers, by joining in with feast days, events and festivals.

Appendix 2-3 shows results relating to two exercises conducted in the food workshop. The first exercise was about existing authentic food-experiences and, as a second step, to attach food-experiences to market segments.

### Ideas that emerged during the experience development process included:

- Learning how to make a local speciality, as for example laufabrauð, kjötsúpa, plokkfiskur, kleinur, rúgbrauð – with the locals – in a restaurant or village bakery, a community hall or a local's own kitchen
- Working with farmers to round-up livestock, help with harvest, collect eggs
- Spending time with an artisan food producer – learning about the stories behind the techniques and learning a skill – for example helping to smoke lamb, learning how to make dried fish and fermented shark, learning about making craft beer with Icelandic barley
- Joining a local chef to make an Icelandic meal from scratch – understand the whole process by visiting greenhouses, fisheries, abattoirs, smoke houses and markets and perhaps foraging for some ingredients – before returning to the kitchen to learn how to prepare (including de-boning meat etc.) and present the food
- Joining in with traditional celebrations and feasts – for example experiencing Bolludagur and making bollur, learning about preparing and eating traditional food by taking part in Þorrablót, or participating in village fisher days.
- Making food events more interactive by providing opportunities for people to learn techniques and cook „on the spot“ at a farmers' market or a festival.
- Baccalao Festival: history, production, tasting, music
- Boat Tour to go from brewery to brewery; Akureyri – Árskógssandur - Sigrufjörður

## FOOD EXPERIENCES

- Going out on a fishing boat and becoming a member of the crew, taking part in the catch, learning about the sea, the weather, the climate and local history, understanding the techniques, experiencing the physical challenges
- Going for a foraging hike – picking berries, mushrooms and herbs, collecting seaweed, Arctic moss or wild angelica and learning how to prepare and use them
- Going sea angling – catching fish and then cooking it, either on the boat or on the beach
- Taking part in a tasting and pairing workshop – comparing the same ingredient prepared in different ways (e.g., raw, smoked, dried, roasted), learning how to pair tastes (food with food, and food with beverage)
- Combining an “off-grid” guided tour into the remotest parts of the Arctic Coast Way (featuring outdoor adventures such as arctic swimming, sleeping

under the stars or in a shepherd’s hut) with trying out traditional cooking methods, for example baking volcano bread and cooking a joint of lamb by burying it in the ground near a heat source overnight.

- Food trail map showing options to buy local food and farmers’ markets

These ideas have the potential to raise the Arctic Coast Way’s profile and appeal to the target markets. The project’s next step should be to encourage appropriate businesses to go through the process of becoming a Hero Experience in order to make sure there are food experiences within the hero collection for the early marketing. Then the project will need to work with food businesses to support and encourage them to develop new food experiences: the list above gives a starting point.

### 4.4 CHALLENGES FOR FOOD EXPERIENCES

In a final discussion with the audience on the food workshop several basic challenges and needs to bring food experiences to life along the Arctic Coast Way were pointed out. The main points are:

- There is a general lack of knowledge about Icelandic products; restaurants often employ international chefs, who do not have profound knowledge of Icelandic products and ways of preparation
- Lack of small artisan producers; a better network and information pool is needed about producers and their products
- A strong network must be developed for chefs, food producers and tour providers to meet, exchange ideas and think together about new and possible experiences

## FOOD EXPERIENCES

- More workshops are required to present good case studies of how to move from product to experience
- Help is needed to develop stories and an individual menu; collecting a bank of stories about local ingredients and the history of the Icelandic kitchen
- Organised site-visits to exchange experiences: chefs, producers, tour providers
- Workshop with chefs to develop creative ideas of how to use traditional products in modern times and teaching other chefs

### 4.5 THE ARCTIC COAST WAY MENU

Markaðsstofa Norðurlands set up a first idea for food experience development to discuss with food provider along the route and to improve the idea with the results of Blue Sails workshop. The idea's working title is Arctic Coast Way Menu – where participating food outlets commit to serve at least one local dish called "Arctic Coast Way Menu" and provide a micro story about it e.g. a few words written on a chalk board or printed on a serviette. This could be the foundation for the Arctic Coast Way's first food trail. Visitors could follow the food trail and be sure they can complete their travel experience by tasting the various local products at the coast.

This first food trail could be easily linked with the plan of Markaðsstofa Norðurlands to have a food passport for visitors to draw more attention to food experiences and encourage food outlets to invest in more local food offers. In order to realize this idea, a few steps must be taken:

- Commitment of enough places all along the route
- Clear definition of "local food"
- Network of committed food outlets to offer different menus under the name of "Arctic Coast Way Menu" to ensure a diversified and creative experience for the visitors and to avoid offering the same products and ways of preparation in each place
- More workshops are necessary to work on this idea together with food outlets
- Help with creative templates for an Arctic Coast Way menu

# FOOD EXPERIENCES

## 5 THE NARRATIVE

As a result of our research and consultation with stakeholders, we have drafted the Arctic Coast Way Food Story. This is not a list of everything on offer. It focuses on what is special and different about the destination's food offer, and how it enhances the visitor's experience of the place. It can be used to steer future investment in experience development – this is the “promise” to visitors when it comes to food and drink, and the experience development programme should work with businesses to make sure that the Arctic Coast Way delivers on the promise:





*As you travel along the Arctic Coast Way, you're never far from the source of your food and the stories behind it. This is a region of vast landscapes and seascapes, where small communities live at one with nature and the seasons. Their long history of self-sufficiency and respect for the natural world has produced a cuisine with a strong sense of place – fresh and pure, and using all the fruits of land and sea.*

*Whether in a cool contemporary restaurant in Iceland's second city or a simple cabin on the seashore, you'll eat freshly landed fish within hours of its catch. There will be arctic moss, herbs, berries and mushrooms foraged on a hiking trail or alongside a glacial river. Auk from the seacliffs at the Arctic's edge. Volcano bread – baked overnight, buried in bubbling black sand heated by a hot spring. Tea made from wild angelica. And vegetables grown sustainably in geothermally heated greenhouses – a natural asset of Iceland's extraordinary geology*

*Preserving food is an ancient art – and it's born out of necessity in this far-flung part of the world: you'll find smoked lamb and foal on the menu, dried fish offered as a healthy snack, and fermented shark (something to be tried at least once, preferably followed by a shot of homemade schnapps). There's a fish salting factory where you can learn about the traditional methods passed down through the generations and still used today.*

*Indeed, food production is all around and a visit here can be a chance to get involved with more than simply consuming. Mountains sweep down to the sea, dotted with Icelandic horses and sheep – free-roaming in the long days of summer: in autumn, visitors can join locals to gather in the livestock – bringing them down to the valley farms before winter comes. Or in early summer at the Arctic Circle, you can join Grimsey islanders as they collect puffin eggs – always sustainably as they have done for generations.*

*There are sea angling trips and then restaurants where the chef will cook what you catch – while you watch for whales from your window seat. There's a herring museum where you can watch a re-enactment of the herring girls working and singing – the women who used to travel with the fishing fleets and process the catch on the quaysides.*

*And then there are the simple connections made over food: traditional feasts, food festivals and fishermen's days to be part of; a homemade lamb stew eaten in your guide's family kitchen after a morning kayaking; a chat with locals when you stop for coffee and kleinur in a village bakery; beach barbeques under the Midnight Sun. And – in this region burgeoning with microbreweries – there's the unique experience of a restorative soak in craft ale at a beer spa.*



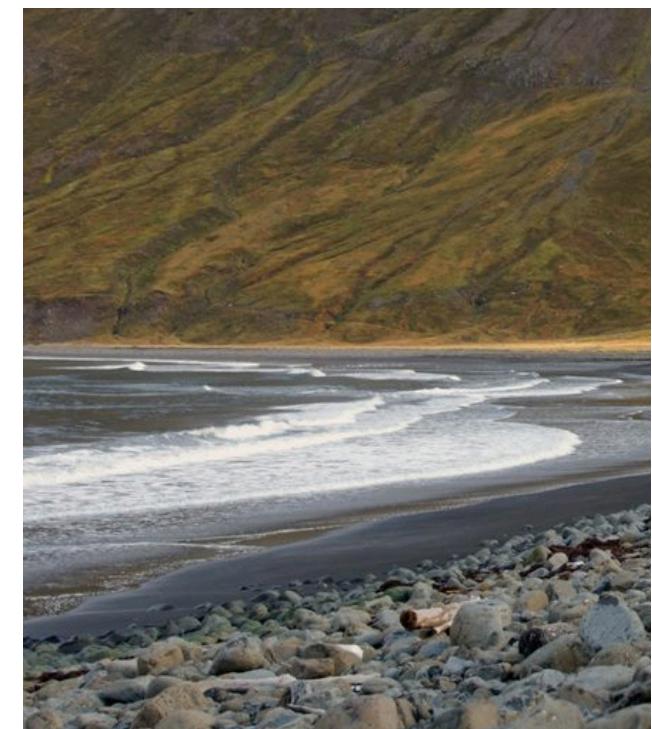
# MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ARCTIC COAST WAY EXPERIENCES



# MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ARCTIC COAST WAY EXPERIENCES

## BLUE SAIL DRAW A NUMBER OF CONCLUSIONS FOR MARKETING OUT OF THEIR RESEARCH:

- Develop a bank of copy, photography and video which captures the Arctic Coast Way brand, themes and experiences. This can be used in all promotional activity – domestic and international.
- Establish a closer working and on-going relationship with Íslandsstofa to find out what they need for their marketing activity – and then make sure you give it to them in the format they require.
- Pay attention to the sections within the Inspired by Iceland website e.g., the Things to Do section which has categories on Whale Watching, Hiking, Northern Lights, and provide them with content – copy, images, Hero Experiences.
- Keep Íslandsstofa up to date with new developments, news items, new images etc. – their PR department will always be looking for something new for the media.
- Offer visits to Hero Experience businesses for PR trips which Íslandsstofa is organising – be prepared to help with the costs if necessary.
- Monitor Íslandsstofa's social media channels and be ready to post Arctic Coast Way content. Prepare your businesses to do the same.
- Identify Icelandic travel writers and bloggers and invite them on a trip. If necessary, commission them to write content.
- Identify international travel writers, bloggers and influencers and send them content on Arctic Coast Way. Invite them on a trip – be prepared to meet the costs.
- Use the #ArcticCoastWay hashtag and other themed hashtags e.g., #HeroExperience on social media. Encourage others – Íslandsstofa and other public agencies, partners, businesses and visitors – to do the same.





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# APPENDIX

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- 1 Results of brainstorming about new experiences**
  - 2 Brainstorming on: What are truly special food and drink experiences along the Arctic Coast Way**
  - 3 Brainstorming on: Determine authentic food experiences on the Arctic Coast Way and stick it to the 3 segments**

# APPENDIX

**1 RESULTS FROM BRAINSTORMING ABOUT NEW EXPERIENCES  
THE AUDIENCE WAS DIVIDED IN EIGHT GROUPS TO  
BRAINSTORM ON EIGHT CATEGORIES OF EXPERIENCES, WHICH  
WERE WRITTEN DOWN ON PAPER POSTERS.**

**1.1 – CONNECTING WITH LOCALS**

1. Taking part in the sheep and horse roundup with the locals; eat, sing and dance together
2. Help picking the eiderdown in summer and learn all about it
3. Taking part in the Þorrablót in February
4. Helping out on a farm for the lambing season (is this legal?)
5. Going fishing with local fishermen
6. Tanning your own sheepskin in the tannery in Sauðárkrúkur
7. Carding & spinning wool / colouring wool with Icelandic plants
8. Knitting with the local knitting club
9. Helping to smoke & package food at Matarsmiðjan Skagaströnd
10. Foraging activities; for example berrypicking and learning how to make jam, picking and using mountain lichen, known as Iceland moss (Fjallagrös), picking wild mushrooms & cooking
11. Cooking lessons, e.g., Icelandic lamb soup, plokkfiskur (minced fish), dried fish, fermented shark, or beer-making with Icelandic barley, cooking and eating sheep heads together
12. Speed date with locals to learn about their daily life: ask what you always wanted to ask about Iceland, Icelanders and the life here
13. Visit local coffee breaks in companies – fellow colleagues

14. Meet the local artist; learning from a local artist; taking lessons
15. Meet the locals – walk and visit – coffee and cakes– farm visiting
16. Locals – concerts at home; singing together; learning famous Icelandic songs
17. Food invite homepage (couch surfing – same idea) – Dinner – sell seats at a dinner table - exchange between locals & tourists
18. Knit your own sweater of sheep's wool under the guidance of locals. Learn where wool comes from, how the sheep are sheared, spinning wool
19. Go on 'secret' hiking trails with locals
20. Collect eggs in the bird cliffs, boil and eat the eggs
21. Swim in the ice-cold ocean with a local swimming group

**1.2 – SLOW ADVENTURE**

1. Horseback riding tour for several days
2. Slow-walking tours – collect plants/birds
3. Kayak-based tours, for example whale watching or sailing around puffin island
4. Hiking to seal watching locations
5. Berry picking hike
6. Astronomy tours
7. Watching the sunset while doing exercises, e.g., yoga
8. Birding tours
9. History walking tours
10. Elf walk in Akureyri

11. Small group private cruise to Flatey with accommodation and local food and/or dance in the old town hall
12. Gásir – take part in medieval life; get a costume and take part
13. Silent dinners - Mindfulness and cooking for body and soul
14. Slow sea tour in an old boat to places which are just reachable by sea– cook the catch with a local
15. Walking the 'postman-route' from coast to coast – guided, to get the story, stop and eat local food
16. Walking to different places where you find a different energy and learn to feel the difference of elves and fairies. Talking about important stories about the lives of farmers, fishermen, housewives and children, as well as elves and the help they can bring to man and animals. Help the traveller to discover the feeling of nature – it brings love and makes the traveller more aware of environmental thinking

**1.3 – FIT-CATION**

1. Yoga in open nature – beach – top of a mountain
2. Hike for 24 hours during the longest day
3. Swimming the ocean and warming up in hot pools, for example Grettislaug
4. Kayaking around the beach for some days; kayaking the Arctic Circle in company with a helping zodiac (safety!)
5. Mountain bike tours
6. Mountain marathon
7. Crossfit in nature
8. Beach volleyball event
9. Ski marathon (Super Troll Ski Race) on Tröllaskagi
10. Zumba on beaches

# APPENDIX

11. Yoga in swimming pool
12. Bike – 4 tunnel challenge – Sigrufjörður – Ólafsfjörður – Dalvík
13. Sigrunes – hiking/sailing
14. Kaldbakur – Hiking Midnight Sun – Múlakolla
15. Bike between all museums along the coast
16. Invite strong/fit travellers to gather the sheep with the local farmers
17. Running across Melrakkasléttu from Raufarhöfn to Kópasker

## 1.4 – AUGMENTED REALITY

1. Virtual puffin experience – at the end of a museum experience
2. Virtual Viking adventures – in the centre of Sauðárkrúkur
3. Seal journey (live map/trackers) of tagged seals
4. Video projection on fog – local stories or legends come alive in a ghostly manner
5. The music of Ásgeir Trausti in nature
6. A map tracking your location to get info about the place
7. Burial Rites audio/visual tour
8. Icelandic water puppetry – with project or digital & sound
9. Gásir – Medieval – see the archaeological place how they once were
10. Old Town Akureyri – Audio sound guide
11. Mountain hike with audio guide with folk stories of the area – trails and elves
12. Walk with Hidden People – maps – use existing maps & audio guide
13. Follow the Trolls in Tröllaskagi

14. Viking stories - Deserted house, for example in Melrakkasléttu: Stories (remake how the sound was), soundtracks inside, audio guidance headset, app in phone – QR Code
15. Skálar: Abandoned fishing village – stories of former locals, history of Iceland (fisheries/agriculture; hardness/poverty; hopes & expectations (shifting norms); demands/traditions. WWII – bomb that ruined houses – walking around the remains of houses, overnight stay close to sea in a tent-/other, or ship/boat. Church up on cliff – stories of former residents

## 1.5 – NATURE REVEALED

1. Flights over the ACW – see from the air how beautiful it is and where you want to go
2. Farm stays – midnight hiking, unguided – with maps and typical Icelandic packed food
3. Birdwatching tours with guide
4. Take part in Arctic Open (Golf)
5. Hike Ólafsfjörður – Múlakolla to see the midnight sun
6. Golf at midnight in the golf areas of the villages; meeting the local golf club
7. See the movement of the Arctic Circle; walk and stories
8. Watching Northern Lights on Grímsey; maybe without village lights
9. Bjargsig-sýning (Abseiling exhibition); – 10 May to 30 May
10. Earthquake centre in Kópasker – discover the earthquake outside; geological walk around Kópasker

## 1.6 – AFTER DARK

1. Floating in the swimming pool with Northern Lights and stars
2. Candlelight dinner in swimming pools, with music and concerts
3. Horse tour with fire on the beach
4. Concerts in the lighthouses
5. Torch tour in the night in old towns, telling old tales & ghost stories
6. Ski run open in night for skiing under Northern Lights
7. Laufás (turf houses) life in the old times with only a candle and ghost stories, getting old costumes
8. Star gazing photo tours
9. Kajak tour in darkness
10. Candle tours to the dark places on the ACW to experience darkness, sounds (Skagi, Melrakkasléttu & Langanes)
11. Northern Lights – photographing lessons
12. Switching off all the lights in villages & having a Northern Lights watching event (strengthens bond amongst tourists/locals)
13. Going out on a zodiac in the night; turn off the engine; Adding microphones under water, so guests can experience whale sounds
14. Kayak with Midnight Sun in summer
15. Dine in the dark with headlights
16. Meditation walk through the night – awareness creation for surroundings and inner voice
17. Hikes with “fire torches” through the darkness
18. Collect driftwood – make a fire and bonfire, roasting fish, telling sagas
19. Constructed hot pots in remote nature for star gazing and Northern Lights

# APPENDIX

## 1.7 – TASTE THE PLACE

1. From sea to dish – go out to fish, and then cook it, maybe on the beach
2. Seal watching boat tour with a nice dinner on board
3. Go out on a fishing boat and see how they catch and process fish
4. Take part in a Þorrablót
5. Experience Bolludagur and learn to make “bollur” (English?)
6. Beer tasting at local brewery
7. Learn to make traditional Icelandic pastry – laufabraud, kleinur, flatbrauð – meet the locals & do something together
8. Make an Icelandic delicacy from scratch – debone meat and cook it, visit meat-smoking shed – taste cooked and raw meat – try differently prepared/cooked meat and fish – visit greenhouses – prepare/gather ingredients from nature
9. Blueberry trips – making jam
10. Eat with the locals – connected to traditional days/food – max 16 guests
11. Picnic trips: buy a picnic, for example in the bakery, with local products and enjoy it at the lighthouse
12. Food adventures – define a hiking route on a special day. All along the route are stops to enjoy local food from farmers, fish smokers and restaurants
13. Fish tasting (same idea as wine tasting) – one fish in all possible varieties, textures, for example arctic char smoked, cured, salted, dried, pickled and the preparation explained
14. Cookery lessons – cook and taste

15. Langanes (May, June) – taste the Auk (seabird) eggs with the locals

16. Arctic Circle Beer – taste all the breweries, maybe taking a boat tour from place to place
17. Farm markets (bread, arctic char, lamb, eggs, shark)
18. Hike/bicycle with local food snacks

## 1.8 – SLEEPING ‘OFF-GRID’

1. On Drangey during the puffin season
2. Sleeping on an oak boat out on the sea; connected to special nights: super moon, nights of falling stars, midnight sun longest day, stargazing in the longest night
3. Sleep in lighthouses
4. Sunset camping with ocean view
5. Sleeping in a turf-house like in the old times, cooking on the fire
6. Atlantic Ocean Scuba Camping (sleeping underwater in glass rooms)
7. Sleeping in stables with hay
8. Mountain peak camping
9. Glass igloo camping
10. Sleeping in an abandoned farm and listening to its story
11. Sleeping in self-made shelters, e.g., on the beach with driftwood
12. Sleeping in a snow/ice house
13. Storm-watching cabins – high above the waves
14. ACW legal camping in remote nature places – pre set-up camps along the way

15. Sleeping in the middle of Jökulsárljúfur in a hanging glass cabin

16. ACW from the seaside – travel & sleep in a sailboat
17. Tide Cubes – glass cubes where you feel and see the tides
18. “Cliff Eye” – or tunnel from glass

## 2 BRAINSTORMING ON: WHAT ARE TRULY SPECIAL FOOD AND DRINK EXPERIENCES ALONG THE ARCTIC COAST WAY (APART FROM RESTAURANTS AND CAFÉS)

- The Great Fish Day in Dalvík
- Bacalao Bar in Hauganes connected with tour in Ektafiskur
- Björðöön in Árskógssandur
- Kría Restaurant in Grímsey and bird egg collection
- Arctic Sea Tours in Dalvík; Whalewatching with barbecue
- Farm Ytra Lón: local food and learning about farming
- Báran Þórshöfn; local food and celebrating fishermen days
- Petrol station Kópasker
- Akureyri Local Food Festival
- Akureyri Food Walk
- Kría on Grímsey and tasting eggs
- Tour to Flatey and barbecue on Flatey with Gentle Giants
- Víkur Lax; angling ponds for fresh fish
- Joining a local restaurant on sprengidagur, Þorláksmessa
- Top Mountaineering: hiking and fish soup

# APPENDIX

## 3 BRAINSTORMING ON: DETERMINE AUTHENTIC FOOD EXPERIENCES ON THE ARCTIC COAST WAY AND STICK IT TO THE 3 SEGMENTS:

### CULTURAL COMFORT SEEKER:

- Good restaurants in Akureyri, e.g., Stríkið, Rub23, Bautinn, Nóa
- Bakkarbraður in Dalvík
- Björböðin in Árskógrsandur
- Skjaldarvík in Eyjafjörður
- Sjávarborg in Hvammstangi
- Local Food Walk Akureyri
- Fríða Chocolate House in Siglufjörður
- Bacalao Bar in Hauganes
- KK Restaurant in Sauðárkrúkur
- Restaurants and cafés in old and cosy houses with history and good local food, for example Kaffi Krókur, Hofstaðir, Rauðka, Kaffi Ilmur, Salka
- Farm Geitarfell on Vatnsnes
- Local Food Festival Akureyri

### FUN-LOVING GLOBETROTTERS

- Björböðin in Árskógrsandur
- Whale watching Dalvík with sea angling and barbecue
- Bacalao Bar in Hauganes
- Surf and Turf Tour from North West Adventure in Skagafjörður
- Food Walk Akureyri

### INDEPENDENT EXPLORERS

- Kaffi Klara in Ólafsfjörður
- History of Iceland Menu in Stríkið
- Small local restaurants like Geitarfell on Vatnsnes, Lónkot in Skagafjörður
- Eyri in Hjalteyrí
- Bacalao Bar in Hauganes and Ektafiskur
- Fish Day in Dalvík
- Þorrablót
- Lónkot in Skagafjörður
- Local Food Festival Akureyri



# CONTACT

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