



DESTINATION STRATEGY FOR VESTERÅLEN

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH TOWARDS 2025





DOKUMENTET ER UTGITT AV:

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VESTERÅLEN



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Preface

Destination process Phase 2 for Vesterålen has been completed during the period October 2017 – May 2019. The destination of Vesterålen is currently comprised of the five municipalities Andøy, Bø, Hadsel, Sortland and Øksnes, which are the initiators of this tourism strategy, also known as the Master plan.

The destination company Visit Vesterålen is organized as an independent area of activity in the Vesterålen Regional Council and has been the project owner and responsible authority. The advisory firm Mimir AS has functioned as project management, represented by Ingrid Solberg Sætre and Bård Jervan.

Sustainability is a cornerstone for the future development of Vesterålen as a tourist destination. The initial work to achieve the Brand profile as a Sustainable Destination emblem has therefore been an integral part of Phase 2 in the destination process and is called «Sustainable growth moving towards 2025» in the strategy document.

The steering committee for the destination process comprised representatives from both the business community and the municipal public sector and with having a geographic distribution including that includes all five municipalities making upcomprising Visit Vesterålen. The members of the steering committee are the same as those appointed to the Vesterålen tourism committee (formerly the Specialist Committee for Tourism). The mandate of the steering committee has been to prepare the present strategy. The members of the steering committee assumed no financial economic obligations related to the process itself or to further follow-up work.

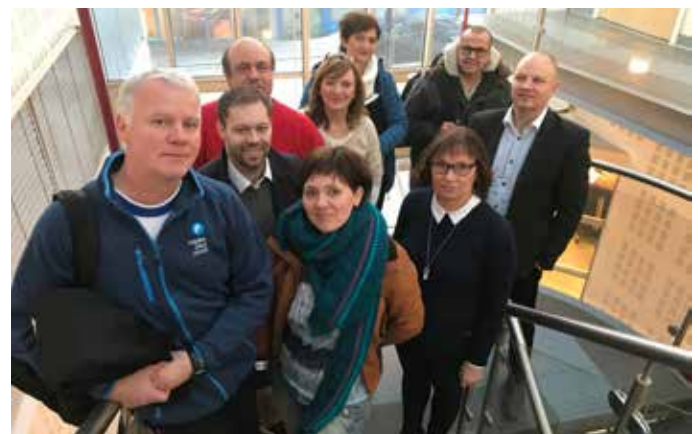
The steering committee collectively support the submitted tourism strategy (Master plan) and underscore the importance of implementing the plan in accordance with its intentions. Therefore, the steering committee has resolved that the process shall be continued into the next phase – «From words to action». Visit Vesterålen, as project owner, is responsible for following up to ensure that the next phase will be funded and realized. A working group is to be established during the last meeting of Phase 2. The mandate for this group is to ensure the crucial transition between the two project phases and to support Visit Vesterålen in their responsibility to follow up.

Implementation plans «From words to action» and models for funding of the next phase will be prepared as separate documents. This is in line with the division into phases that is described in Innovation Norway's handbook manual for destination development.

**** This tourism strategy has been politically considered in the executive committee of Vesterålen Regional Council and by all municipalities in the tourism consortium in Vesterålen during summer and autumn 2019. See page 63 for adopted decisions.***

The steering committee would like to thank everyone who has contributed in various ways towards the implementation of this effort.

Vesterålen, 23 May 2019



The steering committee's signatures

Næringsrepresentanter	Politiske representanter
 Astrid Berthinussen, Reiselivssjef, Visit Vesterålen	 Tove Mette Bjørkmo (leder av styringsgruppen) Leder i Vesterålen reiselivsutvalg, Vesterålen Regionråd
 Daniele Zanoni Salgssjef, Hvalsafari AS, Andøya	 Kolbjørn Blix Kommunestyremedlem, Andøy kommune
 Ingrid Lekven Daglig leder, Lekven Arrangement og Galleri, Bø	 Brith Unni Willumsen Kommunestyremedlem, Bø kommune
 Robin Bolsøy Daglig leder, Melbu Hotel, Hadsel	 Aina Nilsen Kommunestyremedlem, Hadsel kommune
 Laila Inga Daglig leder, Inga Sami Siida, Sortland	 Mona Sandvoll Kommunestyremedlem, Sortland kommune
 Ssemjon Gelitz Daglig leder, Holmvik Brygge, Øksnes	 Hilde Hansen Kommunestyremedlem, Øksnes kommune

Observatører i styringsgruppen:

- Terje Haugen, Finansieringsrådgiver, Innovasjon Norge Nordland
- Tommy Nilsen, Rådgiver reiseliv/opplevelser, Nordland Fylkeskommune
- Brita Erlandsen, Næringssjef, Andøy kommune
- Kine Johnsen, Kultur- og næringssjef, Bø kommune
- Kari-Ann Olsen Lind (tom 1.nov.2018)/Daniel Sowe (fom. 1.nov. 2018), Næringssjef, Hadsel kommune
- Marius Remen Hansen, Næringssjef, Sortland kommune
- Lisa S. Evensen, Næringssjef, Øksnes kommune

CHAPTER 1

THE PRELUDE - SUSTAINABLE GROWTH TOWARDS 2025

About the platform, the potential,
perspective and process



Chapter 1 The Prelude - Sustainable Growth Towards 2025

Platform

The point of departure for this strategy is the desire to create sustainable growth in tourism in Vesterålen grounded in nature, culture, history and vibrant local communities. By this we mean communities that create value and are strongly committed to their own development. This provides the basis for a broader effort, rather than merely in places that have merely only nature or culture or that lack vibrant local communities. The effort is also important to enable development of tourism as a viable year-round commercial option that generates jobs and profitable enterprises.

This is also why the strategy is titled **Sustainable Growth Towards 2025**. Vesterålen shall develop this platform and be a prominent destination in the development of Norwegian tourism.

Potential

Tourism in Northern Norway is currently experiencing a positive development and is growing, in all seasons of the year. This is the case, not least, from Tromsø and southward, in the Hålogaland region and in northern Nordland. In this perspective, more than 70% of all tourism in the region is flourishing in Vesterålen's «close environs». Even though Vesterålen has experienced a positive development for over several years, the region on the whole accounts for merely 15% of the total activity in the tourism sector in Nordland county.

Vesterålen has the same basic resources as the surrounding destinations and the same potential and fundamental resources for further growth as these areas have. **Opportunities for significant growth are definitely present.**

Perspective

International tourism in particular is growing rapidly at the present time, and it is important to develop tourism with a view to sustainability. Therefore, as an integrated part of the strategy process, we have worked towards the goal of Vesterålen's achieving Innovation Norway's «Brand profile for a Sustainable Destination emblem». The first phase of this work has now been completed, and Vesterålen has been approved to use the «aspirant»-level logo «**Sustainable Destination – We are on our way**».

There are three perspectives that must be taken into account considered in sustainable development of tourism. The ability to **create growth** and enhanced added value, the ability to **meet challenges that result from changes** (digitization, new markets, new customer needs, climate challenges, etc.) and the ability to properly **cope with the growth that is created**. These abilities apply not least to the local communities in which growth will occur.

Process

All successful destinations in the world are developed over time, «brick by brick». There is no «quick fix» for developing good destinations that create value. **One basic prerequisite for success is a consensus on goals and direction.** This always involves many participants and decision-makers; thus, it is important to create strategies that point to opportunities and create generate enthusiasm. Tourism is business, – encounters between people and visiting guests to our visiting our local communities. To develop tourism requires both a strong will and resources. Therefore, it is important to spend invest time establishing good joint strategies that will gain the support of business and industry, the municipal sector and local communities.



CHAPTER 2

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

About the strategic journey moving forward
towards a common tourism strategy for
Vesterålen 2025

Chapter 2 Destination development

Rationale

The travel industry and tourism have already had a positive impact on local community development throughout Vesterålen, but there is a potential for continued growth. The industry already provides important jobs and contributes to value creation, both directly and indirectly, in the local economy; nevertheless, there is a potential for greater output.

Successful initiatives in travel and tourism create a positive reputation and enhanced attractiveness, which are additional, important assets. Moreover, this supports the regional initiatives aimed at making Vesterålen an attractive place to live by offering new jobs for new generations. It contributes to a stronger local identity and bolstered pride in one's own homeplace.

One basic prerequisite for Vesterålen to become an attractive tourist destination is that development is sustainable in a long perspective. It involves conserving nature, culture and the environment, strengthening social values, respecting the needs and wishes of local residents, and creating businesses that are financially viable.

Together, these factors represent the backdrop for the long-term effort to develop our region as a destination – an initiative supported by a united Vesterålen.

Frameworks and definitions

Geographic area

The five municipalities – Andøy, Bø, Hadsel, Sortland and Øksnes – make up Vesterålen as a destination, currently organized under Visit Vesterålen¹. In the strategy document, these five municipalities are alternately denoted as Vesterålen, the destination or the region.

Time and scope

The strategy's trajectory moving forward towards adoption of the Master plan for Vesterålen 2025 began already in 2012. The process came to a standstill, however, but was revived during the first half of 2017 after a period during which many indicators pointed in the right direction for Vesterålen. The expression «gather our arrows» derives from the shared, targeted ambition to develop tourism in the region. The work done on strategy during the first half of 2019 has resulted in the Master plan «Sustainable growth towards 2025». One subgoal is achieving the Sustainable Destination emblem, and therefore this is integrated in the process. A more detailed description of this subgoal is found on pages 15–17.

Tourism and the adventure/experience segment

The travel and tourism industry can be defined as «a number of independent businesses that jointly cover the demand from visitors travelling outside their permanent place of residence». Although the goal is often adventure/experiences, specific services are requested, such as transport, overnight accommodation and dining, guidance and information, culture and activities, along with other services (commodities/goods etc.).

The nature of the travel industry demands collaboration between the public and private sectors. Success translates not only as commercial development and new jobs, but also generates vibrant places and local communities for both permanent residents and visitors.

This approach is pervasive in the strategy document for Vesterålen. The terms «tourist and hospitality industry or adventure/experience industry», «travel and tourism» og «the tourist tradem sector» will be used interchangeably.

The strategy focuses primarily on the portion of the demand that can be influenced, frequently called experience-based tourism – mainly associated with vacations and leisure time, but also including conferences, events, festivals and incentive trips.

¹ Lødingen municipality is a member of the Vesterålen regional council but is not part of the destination under the current organizational scheme.

Methods and tools

The destination process for Vesterålen has followed Innovation Norway's «Manual for destination development». This process has culminated in a strategic master document that describes a shared, long-perspective framework (known as a destination strategy or Master plan) for the development of Vesterålen as a tourist destination in a product/market perspective.

The destination process comprises three phases:

Phase 1: Preliminary study encompassing a status and option analysis that also clarifies the prerequisites for prospective follow-up work.

Phase 2: The main project, including the development of a holistic strategy (tourism destination strategy or Master plan)

Phase 3: Implementation phase, i.e. the process of transition «From words to action».

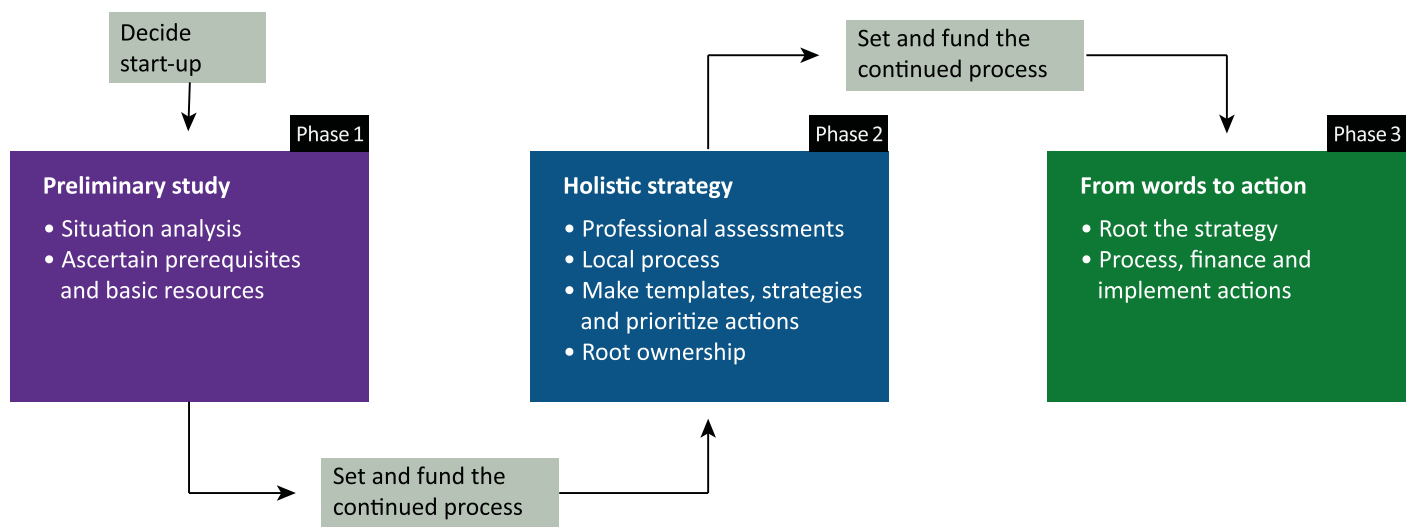


Illustration 2: The destination process in accordance with Innovation Norway's methodology (Source: Innovation Norway's manual).

The tourism strategy shall primarily cover the areas of priority in which it is fruitful for the stake-holders to collaborate on initiatives that create better framework conditions for development at the level of the enterprise and the destination or municipality/region. This strategy encompasses all of Vesterålen and describes how the stakeholders together can profitably create and handle continued growth. Such a strategy is not legally binding pursuant to the Norwegian Planning and Building Act. For the strategy to have its intended effect, all stakeholders must follow it up through their respective prioritizations, both in private enterprises and in the individual municipal governments.

The strong interconnection between a good place to live and visit and legal entities such as planning authorities, framework providers and decision-makers makes the municipalities key stakeholders in destination development. The municipalities in Vesterålen thus become important stakeholders in the implementation of the strategy in the subsequent phase – «From words to action».

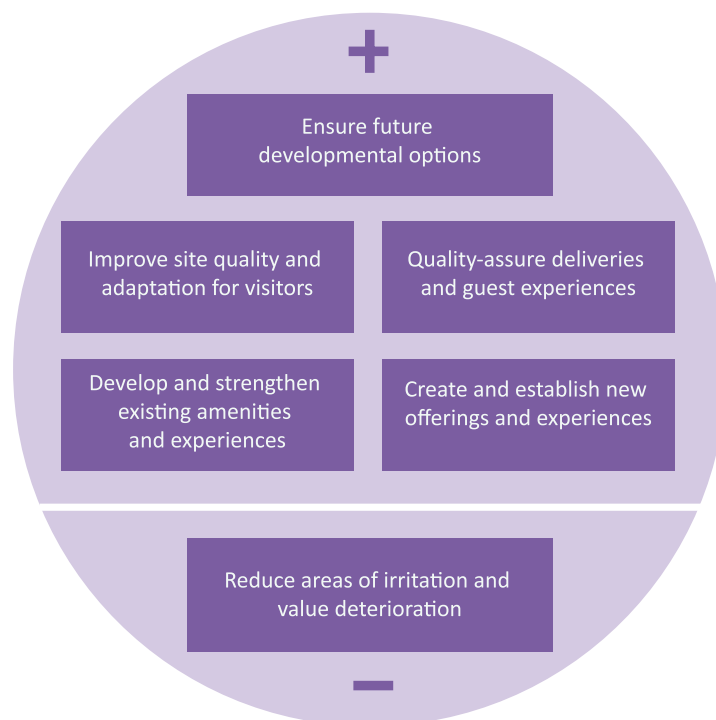


Illustration 3: Areas of focus in the destination process (Source: Innovation Norway's handbook).

Rooting and process

The original preliminary study/Phase 1 for Vesterålen was completed in 2012–2013. The process was discontinued, and the preliminary study was revised during the first half of 2017.

Phase 2 of the destination process was completed during the period October 2017 – May 2019 and was based on analyses and recommendations in the revised preliminary report, cf. the report «Vesterålen towards 2025, revised report from Phase 1 in the destination process», June 2017.

Destination Vesterålen consists of five different municipalities; therefore, it has been crucial to conduct a comprehensive process to ensure broad rooting and involvement within the entire region. The steering committee and project management have made provisions for a broad, open and inclusive process in which stakeholders from the business community were invited to offer input for the strategy work. Furthermore, we have actively sought interaction with the individual municipalities through separate meetings with both administrative and political leaders.

The Master plan for Vesterålen is based on comprehensive analytical work, broad pre-knowledge and collection of specific and relevant information. Overall, this has created the process and path to a common strategy that the entire region now supports.

The key inclusion and rooting activities that have been conducted are:

- **Start-up activity** including information about the process during the course of some ten meetings in the region.
- **Dialogs** in meetings with the political leaders of all five municipalities during which the Master plan process was also discussed.
- **5 open gatherings** in the municipalities. Member companies in Visit Vesterålen, along with other relevant and interested stakeholders in the travel and tourism industry participated.
- **Workshops, working group meetings** and various follow-up activities related to the community development projects in all five municipalities.
- **1 regional workshop in experience development** in collaboration with Nordnorsk Reiseliv (NNR- North-Norwegian Tourism), followed by a pilot/case: Study trip to Fem Fiskevær (Five Fishing Villages) for personas «Cultural Heritage Knut» together with Innovation Norway and NNR.
- **1 regional course in experience development** in collaboration with Innovation Norway

- **1 general study trip** to Ireland and Wild Atlantic Way
- **Case at a workshop on destination design** at the Experience Conference in Narvik
- **Meetings and dialog with key stakeholders**, including local competence environments such as Egga Utvikling (Egga «Continental Shelf Development») (- formerly Fiskeriparken), Fabrikken, RKK (Office of regional competence for Vesterålen and Lødingen), Vesterålen Outdoor Recreation Council, Go Andøy/Andøy Tourism, Museum Nord/Hurtigrute Museum, Reno-Vest, Norwegian Public Roads Administration, Executive of Transport Nordland county, Food Project Vesterålen.

In addition, information has been conveyed about the destination process at meetings of the membership, in newsletters published by Visit Vesterålen and on websites, as well as through various items sent to the local and regional media.



Workshop about «Fem Fiskevær» in Øksnes.



Workshop about Hikers Paradise.



Presentation of the strategy at Samskap



New Hurtigruten Museum



Workshop at Sortland.



Study case: Fem Fiskevær.

Organization

The destination company Visit Vesterålen is the project owner of the destination process. Visit Vesterålen is organized as a separate division in Vesterålen regional council and has Vesterålen Tourism Committee as its governing body. The Tourism committee is subordinate to the regional council with the regional council's executive committee (AU) as its superior governing body.

The advisory firm Mimir AS has been retained as project leader.

The work was managed by a steering committee consisting of:

- Tove Mette Bjørkmo, leader of Vesterålen tourism committee, Vesterålen regional council (chairperson of the steering committee)
- Daniele Zanoni, sales manager, Hvalsafari AS, Andøya
- Kolbjørn Blix, municipal council member, Andøy municipality
- Ingrid Lekven, manager, Lekven Arrangement and Galleri, Bø
- Brith-Unni Willumsen, municipal council member, Bø municipality
- Robin Bolsøy, manager, Melbu Hotel, Hadsel
- Aina Nilsen, municipal council member, Hadsel municipality
- Laila Inga, manager, Inga Sami Siida, Sortland
- Mona Sandvold, municipal council member, Sortland municipality
- Ssemjon Gelitz, manager, Holmvik Brygge, Øksnes
- Hilde Hansen, municipal council member, Øksnes municipality

In addition, the following have had observer status in the steering committee:

- Terje Haugen, financial adviser, Innovation Norway Nordland
- Tommy Nilsen, adviser, travel/experience-based tourism, Nordland county municipality
- Brita Erlandsen, head of economic development, Andøy municipality
- Kine Johnsen, cultural affairs and economic development, Bø municipality
- Kari-Ann Olsen Lind (up to and incl. 1 November 2018)/Daniel Sowe (commencing 1 November 2018), head of economic development, Hadsel municipality
- Marius Remen Hansen, head of economic development, Sortland municipality
- Lisa S. Evensen, head of economic development, Øksnes municipality

Astrid Berthinussen, director of tourism in Visit Vesterålen, served as the administrative manager of Phase 2 on behalf of the project owner and was present in all meetings of the steering committee.

In the course of Phase 2 of the destination process, five steering committee meetings were held.



Core activities

Phase 2 of the destination process for Vesterålen has consisted of seven major activities in addition to start-up of the work to achieve the Sustainable Destination emblem.

Seven major activities (MAs) in Phase 2.

MA 01	AMBITION LEVEL FOR DEVELOPMENT Establish a common vision and ambition for the destination, expressed as follows: «To realize Vesterålen's potential as an attractive and sustainable destination having transportation systems that promote growth and adventures/experiences that create a steady stream of visitors year round.»
MA 02	CLIENT TRIPS AS A METHOD AND FUTURE MARKET POTENTIAL Map the needs, product potentials and travel patterns by utilizing customer methodology and preparing personas.
MA 03	CONCEPTUALIZATION AND SEASON DEVELOPMENT Strengthen seasonal development through conceptualization of pillar products: Hikers Paradise – Whales & Wildlife – Flourishing Communities ²
MA 04	COMMUNITY AND ATTRACTION DEVELOPMENT Develop measures that can enhance the quality and accessibility of the most important meeting places reflecting Vesterålen's identity, nature and culture.
MA 05	INFRASTRUCTURE, ACCESSIBILITY AND COMMUNICATION Ascertain the challenges and changes in communications that Vesterålen faces. Clarify how the tourist-relevant provisions can be strengthened, including measures targeting signposting, facilitation/adaptation and information.
MA 06	LOCAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT, NETWORK AND COMPETENCE Strengthen existing businesses and stimulate the establishment of new adventures/experiences and enterprises, professionalization of existing undertakings and a general enhancement of quality and capacity.
MA 07	INSPIRATION AND COMPETENCE ENHANCEMENT Strengthen the culture of cooperation, competence and inspiration by arranging study trips to relevant destinations.

² Vibrant Coastal Society changed its conceptual name to Blomstrende Lokalsamfunn/Flourishing Communities during the process.

Study trip to «Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland»

As one measure under MA 07 Inspiration and Competence Enhancement, the steering committee and a number of stakeholders in tourism participated in a study trip to «The Wild Atlantic Way» in Ireland. The study trip was carried out by the tourism cluster Innovative Opplevelser Experiences in collaboration with the destination process for Visit Vesterålen. The study trip strengthened the culture of cooperation and provided inspiration and beneficial learning for the steering committee and the other participants from Vesterålen. Specific areas of learning were storytelling (narratives, marketing, local pride and cooperation).

Read more about the outcomes gained from the study trip at Visit Vesterålen here: www.visitvesteralen.com/masterplan/studietur

Happy participants during the study trip to The Wild Atlantic Way in Ireland. An educational visit to «The Lost Valley», where host Gerard Bourke demonstrated how a talented storyteller can help to create a memorable experience. <http://www.thelostvalley.ie>



The Sustainable Destination Emblem - a subgoal in the destination process

A basic prerequisite for Vesterålen becoming an attractive tourist destination is that the developments are sustainable, i.e. that considerable effort is invested in preserving nature, culture and the environment, strengthening social values and economic robustness. Innovation Norway embodies this in three topics and ten principles for sustainable tourism, see illustration 4.

Preservation of nature, culture and environment

1. Cultural richness
2. Physical and visual integrity of the landscape
3. Biological diversity
4. Clean environment and resource efficiency

Strengthening of social values

5. Local quality of life and social value creation
6. Local control and engagement
7. Job quality for tourism employees
8. Hospitality and security: quality experience

Economic robustness

9. Economic robust and competitive tourist destinations through local value creation
10. Economic robust and competitive tourism companies

The three topics and ten principles in a more sustainable tourist tradem sector. (Source: Innovation Norway).

Climate issues increase public interest in more sustainable development in all areas of society. In the travel and tourist industry, there are additional challenges associated with overtourism, i.e. volumes of tourists that are unmanageable and that may have a harmful effect on local communities, the environment and culture.

The first part of the work to achieve this brand profile was conducted as an integral part of Phase 2 of the destination process; cf. a more detailed description in Chapter 6.

Innovation Norway itself describes the branding scheme as follows:

The Sustainable Destination Emblem

The branding scheme is a tool for systematizing the work with destination sustainability for which the tourism entrepreneurs are the driving force. By mapping various criteria distributed along three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, social and economic), the places signal that they are on their way in a long-term effort to enhance sustainability. The standard that the destination must meet consists of 42 criteria that have a total of 104 indicators.

To be certified as a sustainable destination means that the destination is working systematically and continually to become as sustainable as possible. The branding scheme is a tool for development, and the destination must be able to demonstrate improvement in the long term. Every three years, all indicators must be assessed again, and the destination must be able to point to a positive development to have the sustainability brand renewed.

Read more about the branding scheme here

<https://www.visitnorway.no/innsikt/merket-for-baerekraftig-reisemaal/>

A continual effort

Being certified as a sustainable destination means that the destination prioritizes achieving, over time, the goal of increased sustainability, not that the destination is sustainable per se. By mapping various aspects that can be improved, the destination signals that it is on its way in a long-term effort to enhance sustainability.

The work towards sustainability, then, is a continual effort towards increasingly more sustainability; it is a matter of demonstrating a positive development. The following prerequisites are listed for the effort in Vesterålen:

- The sustainability effort in Vesterålen shall have clear goals and clearly formulated actions.
- All of Vesterålen (= all five municipalities) are to be included in the effort, and there is to be a broad mobilization.
- Prioritization of actions is to be carried out according to what has the greatest impact and where the need is greatest.

Action plan for sustainable destination development

As part of the work to achieve the Brand, the destination needs to draw up and adopt a separate Action plan for sustainable destination development. The Action plan is to be developed through a broad, open and inclusive process. Visit Vesterålen completed this work in November 2018.

The decision to actively participate has been adopted by the municipalities

An additional requirement is that the municipalities must officially resolve «to be contributors towards obtaining the Sustainable Destination emblem». All five municipalities comprised in the destination passed affirmative resolutions and stated their support for the Action plan by the turn of the calendar year 2018–2019.

Several of the municipalities in Vesterålen seized the occasion opportunity to confirm their clear enthusiasm for the campaign through their respective resolutions. See examples at the end of Chapter 2: the resolution in Andøy (pertaining to the branding process itself) and in Hadsel (pertaining to the development of an eco-lighthouse).

Vesterålen has reached the first milestone

The first milestone in this work was reached in April 2019 when Visit Vesterålen had the A + B criteria in the standard approved and was thereby granted permission to use the «We are on the way» logo, see Illustration 5.

The next milestone will be approval of the C + D + E criteria and conferral of the Sustainable Destination emblem. This is comprehensive work that destinations normally spend one and a half years doing. This means that Vesterålen's goal is to achieve the certification at the end of 2021; see Illustration 5.

The first phase has been completed and adopted in all municipalities. The next phase is financed with assistance from Innovation Norway.

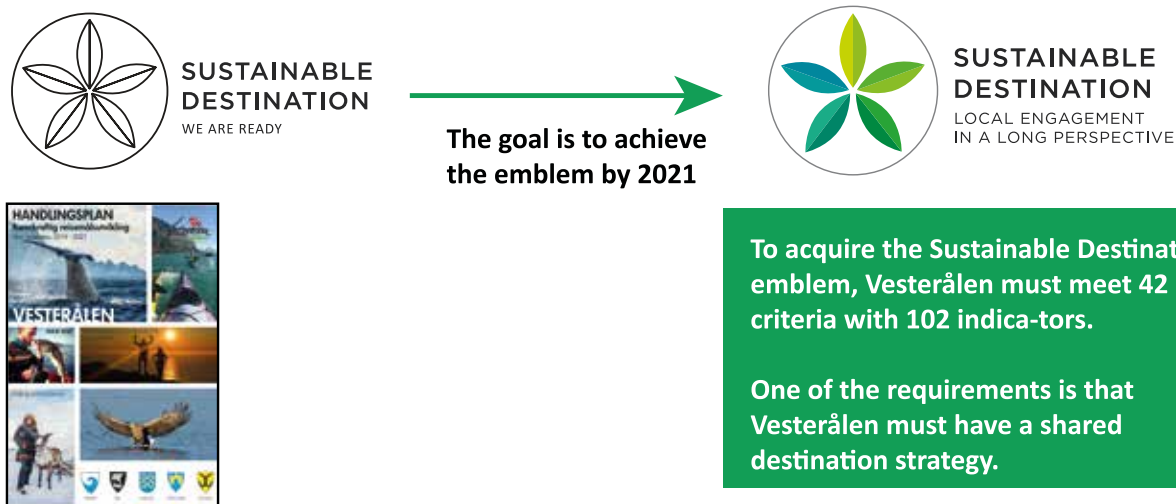


Illustration 5: Vesterålen has reached the first milestone towards achieving the Sustainable Destination emblem by the close of 2021.

Andøy municipality 25 February 2019, MC - 9/2019 Decision:

Andøy municipality shall be an active contributor towards achieving the Sustainable Destination emblem brand profile as a sustainable destination and takes the action plan under advisement. This entails:

- *to assist administratively in document retrieval to respond with simple indicators as required (to give the sustainability project a contact link within the municipality)*
- *to participate in collaborative projects designed to develop Vesterålen as a sustainable destination*
- *to be a driving force for carrying out sustainability actions in our own activities, including:*
 1. *Initiating efforts to become an eco-lighthouse municipality.*
 2. *Stipulating environmental requirements and criteria in all stages of the procurement process where these are relevant and linked with deliveries. Where environment is used as an allocation criterion, it shall be weighted at minimum 30 percent.*

Hadsel municipality 16 August 2018, MEB – 88/2018, Conclusion from information item

Hadsel municipality's further Eco-lighthouse development.

1. *The eco-lighthouse coordinator scheme shall continue as it is currently.*
2. *Hadsel municipality shall offer free one-time certification, whereby certified companies shall receive refunds equivalent to the certification costs (amounts up to 10,000 NOK).*
3. *Hadsel municipality shall introduce the Eco-Lighthouse's head office model in the municipality (eco-lighthouse certification of Hadsel municipality) and the entire municipality shall be eco-lighthouse-certified by the close of 2022.*

CHAPTER 3

VESTERÅLEN - FACTS AND FIGURES

About significant quantities and trends that describe tourism in Vesterålen



Chapter 3 Vesterålen, facts and figures

Key figures and facts

The number of overnight stays (foreign guests) is growing, but the positive development seen in the past ten years ceased in 2018. The total number of accommodation companies in Vesterålen is limited, and many of these have «full houses» during high season. Many visitors to Vesterålen do not spend the night – they are either on day trips from nearby destinations or they are passing through. In addition to the statistics from Statistics Norway, it is likely that a growing percentage of the overnight guests in Vesterålen take advantage of Airbnb/private rental units. Therefore, it is important, moving forward, to acquire figures from Airbnb, etc. so that this kind of overnight tourism will also become a part of the future knowledge base.

Vesterålen's tourism – brief overview

Period: All figures are for 2018 unless otherwise indicated.

Source: All figures are cited from Statistics Norway's Transport and Tourism Statistics/Statistikknett unless otherwise indicated.

Municipalities	5	Andøy, Bø, Hadsel, Sortland and Øksnes.
Number of inhabitants	32,600	(Statistics Norway, municipal statistics) as of Q4 2018
Total turnover from overnight tourism (NOK)	305 million	Includes the turnover for both commercial facilities and private cabins.
Turnover from overnight tourism, commercial facilities (NOK)	198 million	Turnover generated from use of private cabins is not included in the figures.
Total turnover from overnight tourism per inhabitant (NOK)	10,400	
Value created from commercial tourism (NOK)	152 million	Sum of wage costs and operating results before depreciation and amortizations (EBITDA) (Innovation Norway/Asplan Viak). Figures 2017
Travel & tourism companies <i>(also including companies that are not 100 % travel & tourism companies)</i>	127	Overnight accommodation/meal service/experiences/activities (Commercial sector overview from Visit Vesterålen)
Members of Visit Vesterålen	68	(Commercial sector overview from Visit Vesterålen)
Total overnights	143,000	Commercial – hotel/camping/cabins
Overnights, foreign guests	68,000	Commercial – hotel/camping/cabins
Influenceable market	105,000	Overnights in hotels w/purpose Holiday Leisure & Course/Conference Total overnights in cabin clusters (rorbu facilities) and camping sites
Overnights hotel	86,000	
Overnights camping/cabins	57,000	
Hotel capacity in rooms/beds	354/759	11 hotels registered
Units/beds for hire via Airbnb	255/1275	Figures from Q3 in 2018 Parameter included for calculation of beds: 5 beds per unit
Cruise port calls	7	Sortland Harbour (estimate 2019 = 2 port calls, and 2020 = 9 port calls)
Private cabins and holiday homes	3,500	Including 1,100 residential homes used as holiday homes

What are the developmental characteristics?

Foreign-guest overnights are increasing

Vesterålen is the one region in Nordland that has had the greatest percentage growth in the number of foreign-guest overnights at commercial facilities during a five-year period. Between 2014 and 2018, growth amounted to 76% up from 38,500 to 68,000 foreign-guest overnights in hotels, camping sites and cabin clusters in Vesterålen.

Positive development during a ten-year period stagnated in 2018

Vesterålen can boast a positive development both in the entire market and in the influenceable³ market during the period 2010 to 2017. In 2018 there was a general decline, both in Vesterålen and in Northern Norway. It is difficult to draw any conclusion as to whether this is due to factors that are internal or external in terms of the northern region, which has a network of «interwoven»⁴ destinations. It is particularly difficult based on figures from only one year.

It is known, however, that Airbnb had a strong increase in 2018 (see Illustration 16); in addition, there were long periods of poor/cold weather in major parts of Northern Norway, whereas it was a warm and sunny summer in the rest of Norway.

Overall market and influenceable market measured in commercial overnight stays. Development in Vesterålen during the period 2010–2018.

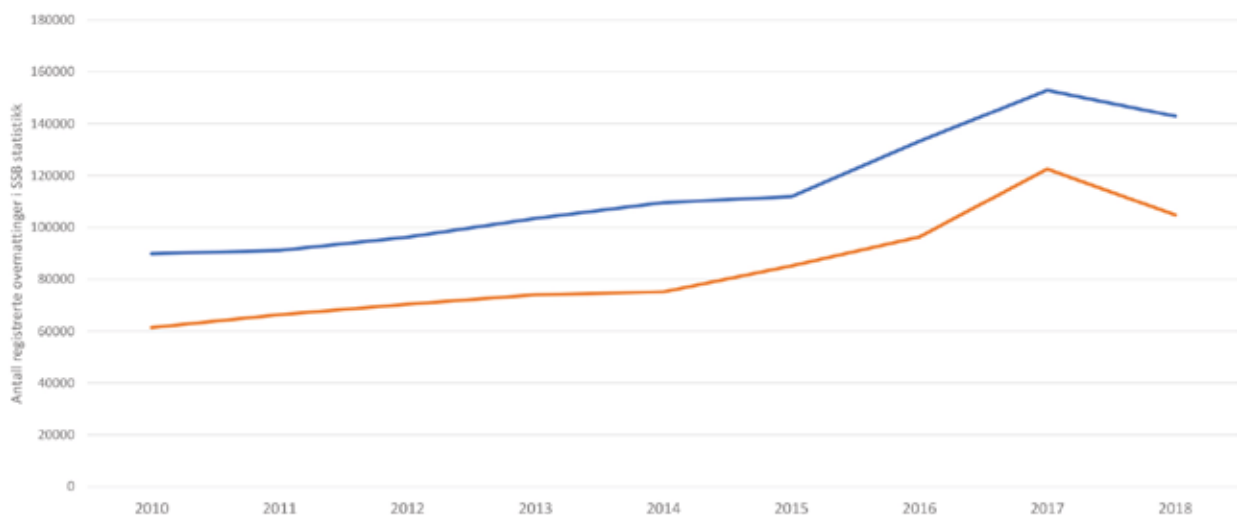


Illustration 6 - Sources: NNR/Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

For the time being, few (large) commercial players (investing) – but there will be more

Vesterålen also needs more investments in capacity, experience/adventure companies and concepts, as well as attractions, if the area is to continue to grow. However, such investments also demand longer seasons and more year-round tourist traffic to be profitable.

In this perspective and at this writing (May 2019), it is positive that plans and decisions have been made for new overnight capacity, increased adaptation/facilitation, new activities/experiences and new attractions in the region.

Low market share – large potential

- Vesterålen in Nord-Norge: 3-5 %
- Vesterålen in Nordland: 8-14 %
- Vesterålen in «the close environs» (Hålogaland region): 11-14 %

Vesterålen in Northern Norway

Vesterålen's share of the overnights in Northern Norway amounts to between 3–5%

In 2018, commercial overnights totalled 3.8 million in all of Northern Norway. The corresponding figure for Vesterålen was 143,000. This translates as a market share of 3.75% of the total overnight stays.

Foreign-guest overnights in Northern Norway in 2018 amounted to 1,440,000, while Vesterålen had 68,000, meaning a share of 4.7%. The corresponding share of overnights in all of Norway was 3.1 %

In 2018, Vesterålen had a 3.8% share of the influenceable market in all of Northern Norway (105,000 out of 2,770,000 overnight stays).

Vesterålen's share of the market for total hotel overnight stays in 2018 was 3.1 %, while the corresponding market share for camping sites/cabins was 5.1 %.

Trends in foreign-guest overnight stays in the various regions of Northern Norway

The illustration below shows the development in foreign-guest stays at hotels, camping sites and cabin clusters in the various regions of Northern Norway during the period 2014–2018.

Lofoten and Tromsø are the two regions definitely having the most foreign-guest overnight stays and the greatest growth.

Overnights at hotels, camping facilities and cabin clusters.

Foreign overnights during the period 2013 to 2017.

Northern Norway in its entirety, distributed by regions (definitions from Statistics Norway).

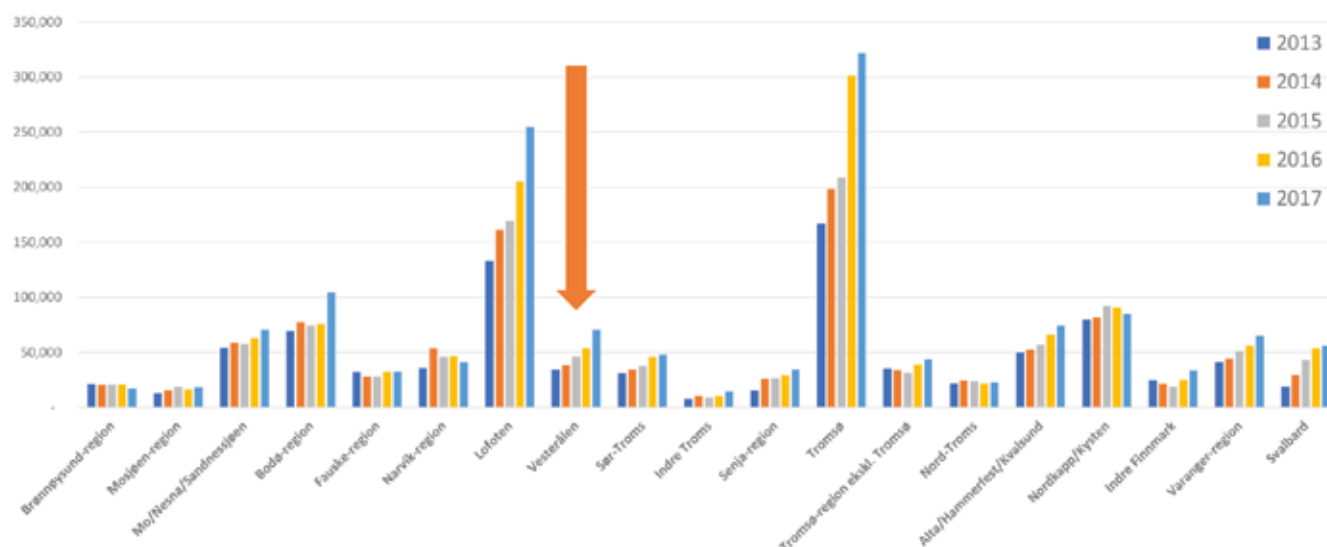


Illustration 7 - Sources: NNR/Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

Vesterålen in Nordland County

Vesterålen's share of the market for influenceable overnight stays in Nordland county amounts to 8 percent.

The total number of influenceable overnight stays in all of Nordland county was 1,280,000 in 2018. Of these, Vesterålen accounted for 105,000 overnight stays, which is an 8% share of the market. Lofoten has the decidedly highest market share in Nordland: 36%.

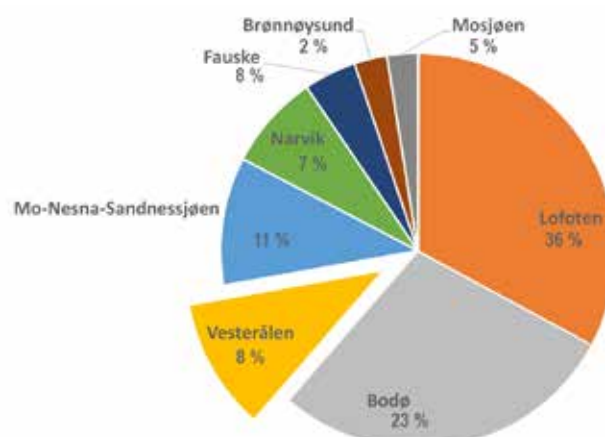


Illustration 8 - Sources: NNR/Statistikknett/Statistics Norway
Shares of overnight stays in Nordland. Influenceable market. 2018.

In Nordland, Vesterålen has the largest % of growth in the no of foreign-guest overnight stays during the past 5 years. The diagram below shows the development in terms of the number of foreign-guest stays overnight at hotels, camping sites and cabin clusters in the various regions in Nordland country during the period 2014–2018. Vesterålen is the one region in Nordland that has had the greatest percentage growth in the number of foreign-guest overnights during a five-year period. With 76% growth, from 38,500 to 68,000.

Development in number of overnight stays at hotels, camping facilities and cabin clusters in the period 2013–2018.

Northern Norway in its entirety, distributed by regions (definitions from Statistics Norway).

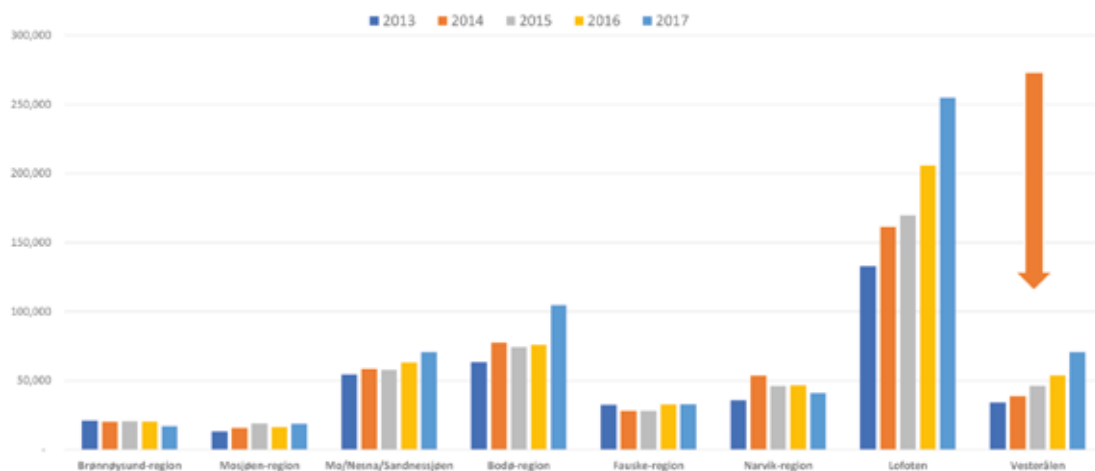


Illustration 9 - Sources: NNR/Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

Vesterålen has the lowest turnover per inhabitant deriving from overnight tourism in Nordland county

Calculations based on the parameters of consumption per overnight stay indicate that overnight tourism in Vesterålen accounted for 305 mill NOK in 2018. Corresponding figures for Lofoten and the Narvik region were, respectively, 625 mill and 425 mill NOK. Overnight tourism is defined here as profit from commercial facilities and from consumption of private cabins.

Calculated turnover from overnight tourism in mill NOK
 Devided in Commercial facilities and Private cabins.
 Vesterålen, Lofoten and Narvik. 2018.

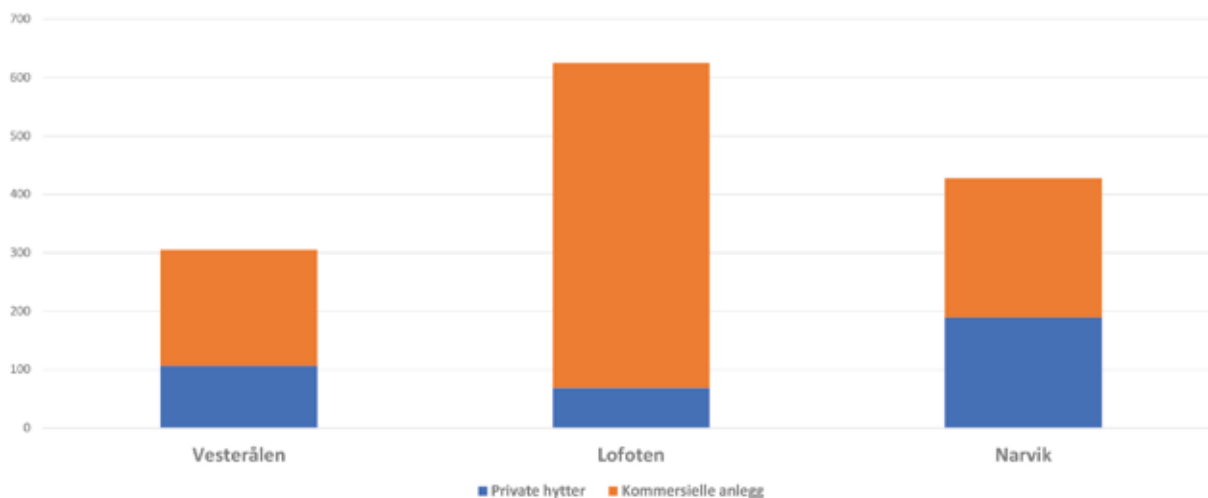


Illustration 10 - Source: Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

If the calculated turnover from overnight tourism is divided per inhabitant in the individual regions, the result is that **Vesterålen has the lowest turnover figure per inhabitant, at around NOK 10,000.** Corresponding figures for Lofoten and the Narvik region are, respectively, 25,000 and 15,000 NOK.

Turnover in NOK per inhabitant from all overnight tourism 2018.

Northern Norway in its entirety, distributed by regions (definitions from Statistics Norway).

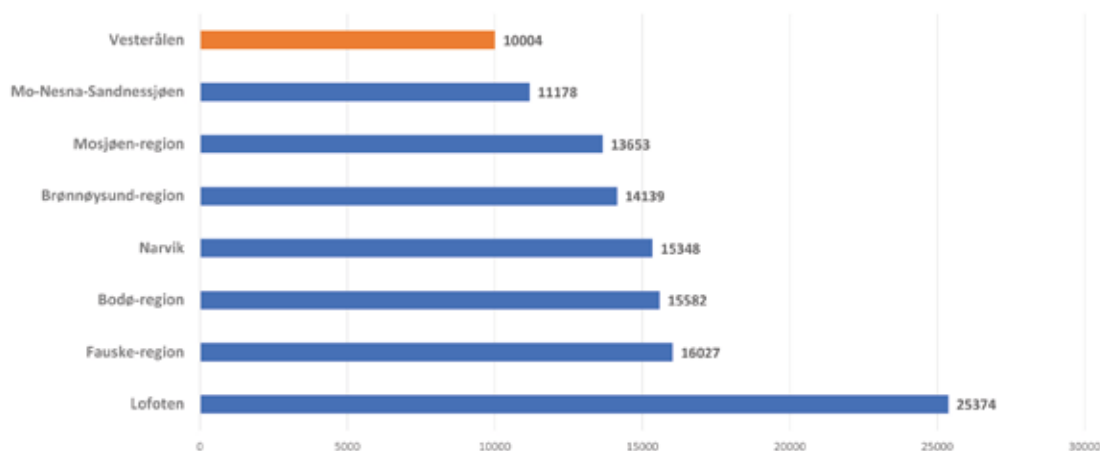


Illustration 11– Source: Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

Vesterålen in relation to the environs

Tourism in Northern Norway is currently experiencing a positive development and is growing, in all seasons of the year. This is the case, not least, from Tromsø and southward, in the Hålogaland region and in northern Nordland. In this perspective, more than 70% of all tourism in the region is flourishing in Vesterålen's «close environs».

In the figures and illustration below, these «close environs» are defined as Lofoten, the Narvik region, Sør-Troms, including the Harstad and Senja region (which correspond with Statistic Norway's overnight accommodation statistics). Vesterålen has a market share of between 11–14 % of the overnight stays in its «close environs». The figures also show that Vesterålen took a gain in market share from 2014 and up until 2017, but 2017 but lost some of its share during the past year.

As a part of these «close environs», Vesterålen has a share of about 15% of the foreign-guest overnight stays at commercial facilities in 2018.

Foreign-guest overnight stays at commercial facilities. Vesterålen and surrounding regions. Shares in percentages 2018.

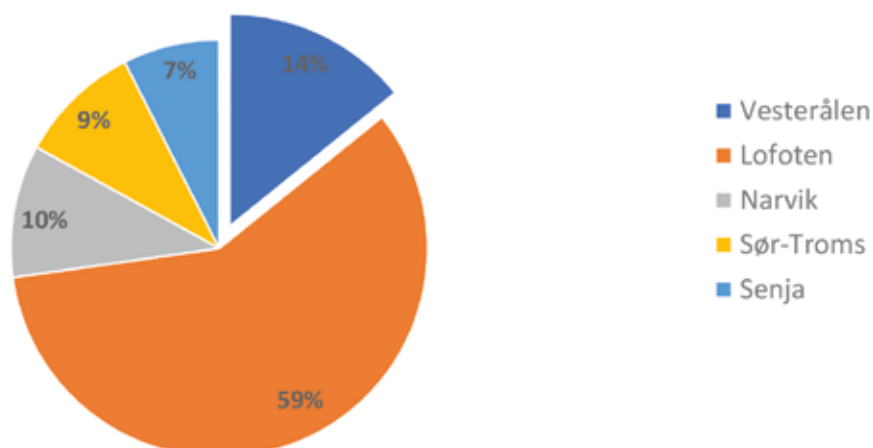


Illustration 12 - Sources: NNR/Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

Both Lofoten and Senja have had steady growth in foreign-guest overnights during the entire period of 2014–2018. Vesterålen experienced growth up until 2017, but the curve pattern flattened out somewhat in the course of 2018.

Foreign-guest overnight stays at all commercial facilities. Vesterålen and neighbouring regions. Period of 2014–2018.

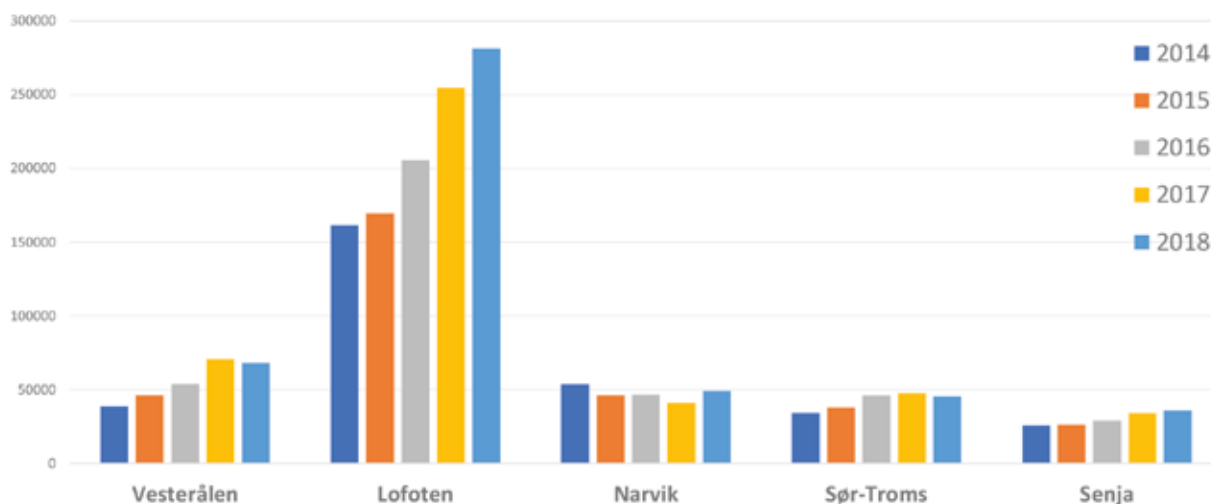


Illustration 13 - Sources: NNR/Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

Vesterålen had an 11% share of all overnights at camping sites and cabin clusters in the close environs

As a part of these «close environs», Vesterålen has a share of about 11% of all overnight stays at camping sites and cabin clusters in 2018. Many rorbu cabin facilities are also included in this statistic.

Domestic and foreign-guest overnight stays at camping facilities and cabin clusters. Vesterålen and neighbouring regions. Period of 2014–2018.

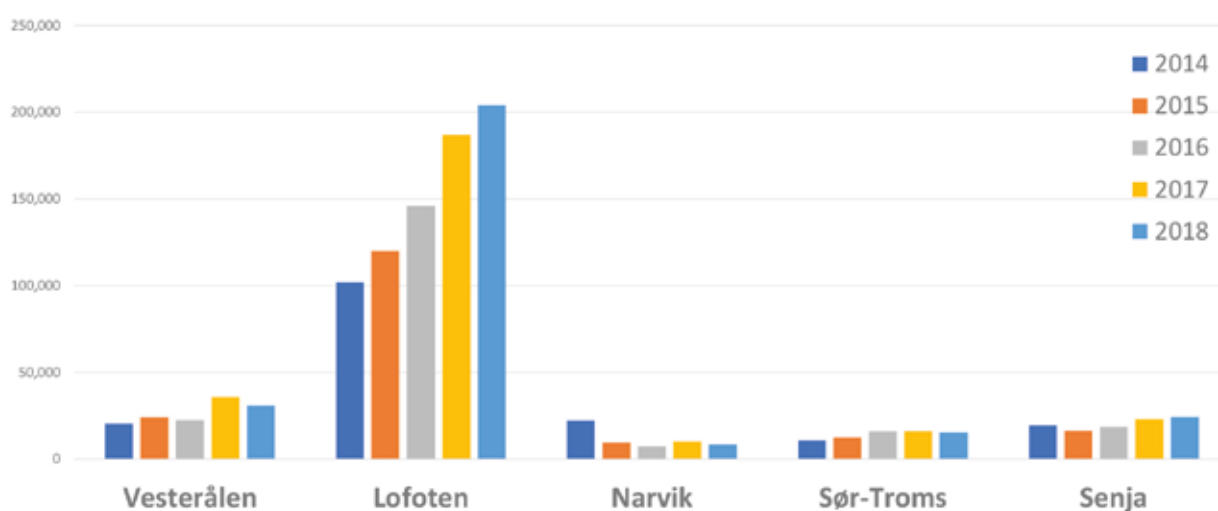


Illustration 14 - Sources: NNR/Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

The influenceable market in the close environs is dominated by Lofoten

As shown in the illustrations above, Lofoten is the only dominating region in the «close environs». It is also Lofoten that gained market shares in the influenceable market during recent years.

In 2018, Lofoten's share was as high as 53%, while the Narvik region had 10%, Sør-Troms 17% and Senja 8%. Vesterålen's market share was 12%.

Influenceable* market for the period of 2014–2018 for Vesterålen and surrounding regions. Number of overnight stays.

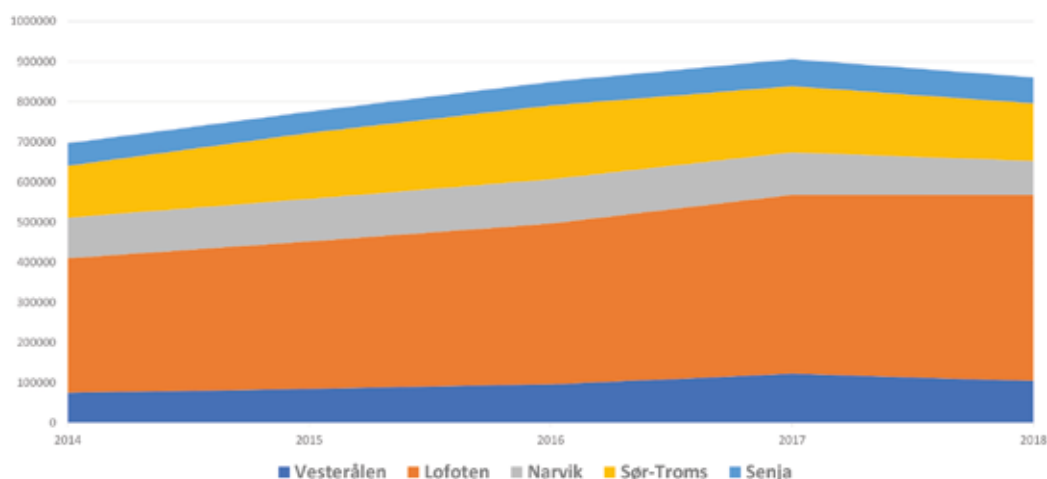


Illustration 15 - Sources: NNR/Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

Airbnb is now a major player

Airbnb units in Norway had more than 4 million guest days in 2017. 76 % of the guests were for-eigners, as compared with 30 % in hotels. The number of available units for hire via Airbnb in Vesterålen, Senja and Lofoten show a 6–7 fold increase in 2 years, from the summer of 2016 (Q3) to summer 2018 (Q3).

Almost twice as many beds are rented out via Airbnb as available hotel beds in Vesterålen

In Vesterålen there were 255 rental units available via Airbnb during summer 2018, while there were 944 in Lofoten and 117 in Senja. If we apply an average of 5 beds per unit, this means a bed capacity of 1,275 Airbnb beds in Vesterålen. By comparison, the 11 hotels have a total capacity of 354 rooms and 759 beds.

Rental units via Airbnb for Vesterålen, Lofoten and Senja.

No. of available units Q3/summer 2016 compared with A3/summer 2018.

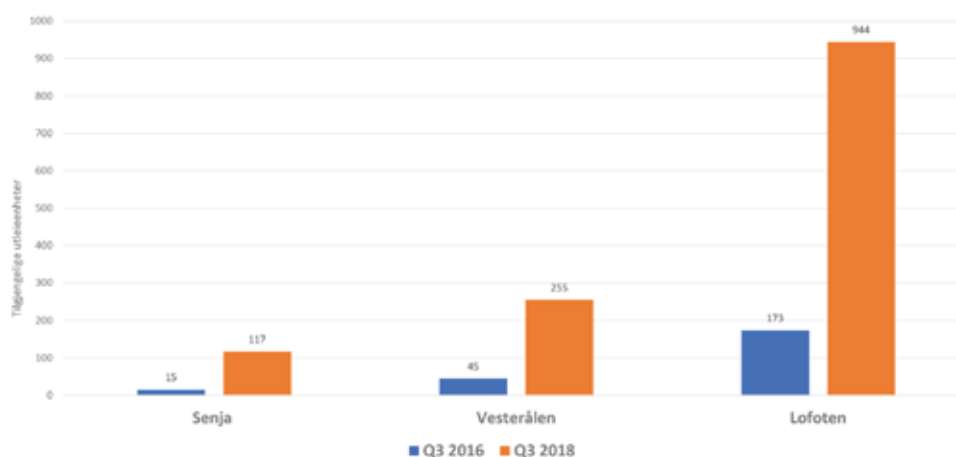


Illustration 16 - Source: Airdna.co

Large differences between municipalities in value creation from travel and tourism

Value creation in this context is calculated as the companies' turnover minus purchased goods and services. At the same time, this means that the companies' value creation⁵ corresponds to the sum of the wage costs and operating result before depreciations and amortizations (EBITDA).

There are large differences between municipalities in value creation from the travel and tourism sector in Vesterålen. These range from nearly 64 million NOK in Sortland, about 58 million. In Hadsel, almost 14 mill. in Andøy, more than 12 mill. in Øksnes to over 3 mill. in Bø. We also see a corresponding variation in Lofoten.

Value creation in tourism shown in millions NOK.
Wage costs and EBITDA 2017. Figures for municipalities
in Lofoten and Vesterålen.

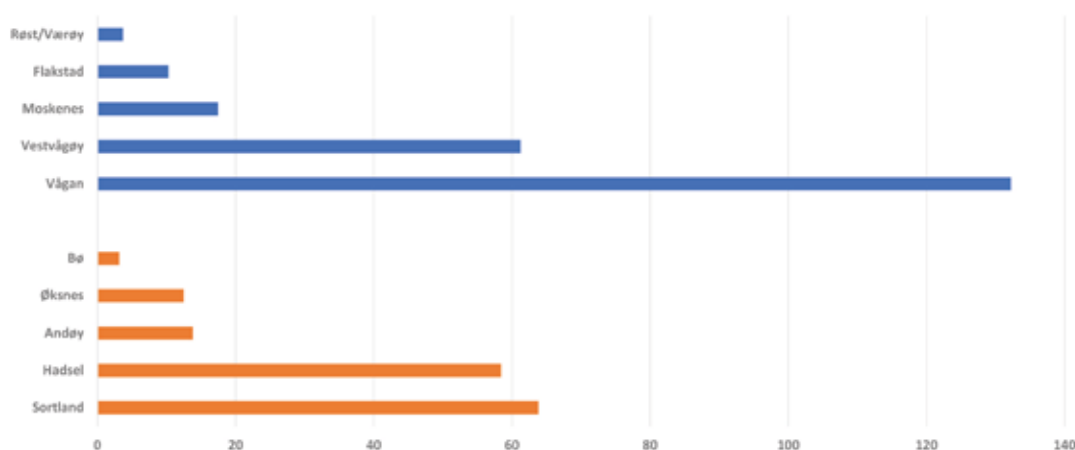


Illustration 17 - Source: Innovation Norway/Asplan Viak
<https://www.visitnorway.no/old-innsikt/reiselivets-verdiskaping-i-norge/>

The Hurtigrute and cruise ships bring day visitors to Vesterålen

Hurtigruta (Coastal Express)

During the past decade, the number of passengers who either begin or end their trip with the Hurtigrute in Vesterålen has been about 15,000 for Stokmarknes, 8,000 for Sortland and 4,000 for Risøyhamn/Andøy. This is a share of, respectively, 2%, 1% and 0.5% of the total number of passengers (750,000) who travel with the Hurtigrute each year.

The figures from the Hurtigrute have shown a negative development in the number of passengers in all of Nordland county throughout the entire period of 2010–2018, but with a growth surge in the middle of the period (2013–2015), including the three harbours in Vesterålen, the two in Lofoten and Harstad.



⁵ The travel and tourism industry's value creation is thus the sum of wage costs and EBITDA in all companies, but does not measure the sector's importance for the Norwegian economy – this is found in Statistics Norway's satellite account for tourism.

Hurtigrute 2010–2018.

Development and changes in passenger figures.

Figures for three ports in Vesterålen, two in Lofoten and one in Harstad.

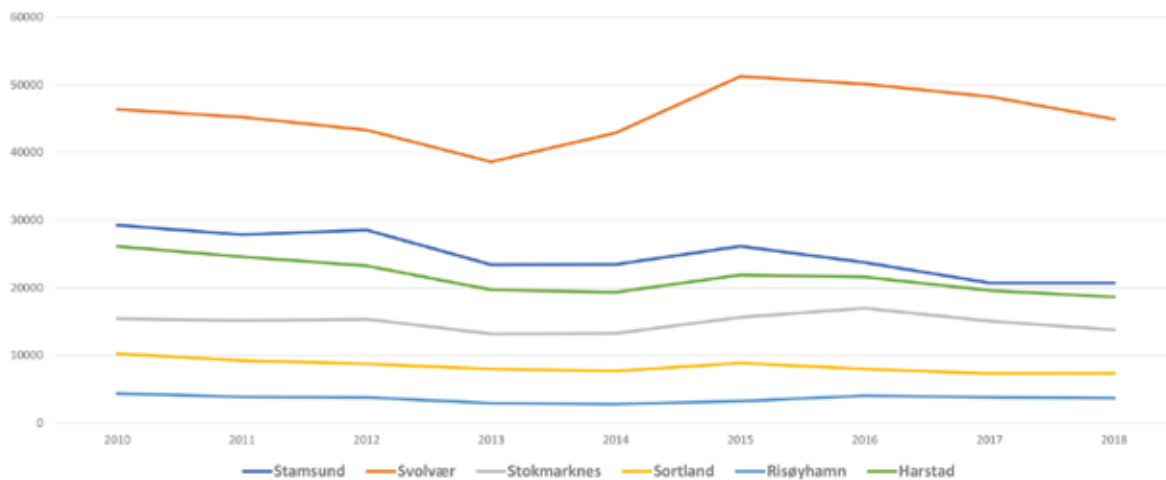


Illustration 18 - Source: Statistikknett/Statistics Norway

Cruises

A total of 487,000 cruise passengers came to the harbours in Northern Norway in 2018. This is a growth of 16% over the previous year. The number of port calls increased from 380 in 2017 to 457 in 2018 (+ 20 percent).

Vesterålen has a small share of the cruise traffic market in Northern Norway, corresponding to about a 0.5–1.5% share. For Sortland Harbour, the peak year was 2015, with ten port calls. In 2019, there appear to be only two port calls, but 9 port calls have been announced for 2020.

Cruise port calls, Sortland Harbour. Period 2014–2020.



Illustration 19 - Source: Cruise Norway (* Actual port calls in 2014–2018. Announced calls for 2019–2020)

Excursions in Vesterålen sold by the Hurtigrute

The Hurtigrute sells a number of day excursions to its guests. Two excursions are sold on the southbound Hurtigrute, which «passes through» Vesterålen – one of these is a two-and-a-half-hour RIB trip from Svolvær to the Trollfjord, while the other is a half-day bus trip from Harstad to Sortland. <https://www.hurtigruten.no/utflukter/norge/>

CHAPTER 4

VISION AND GOALS

About the vision and goals as a destination that Vesterålen shall reach for - together

Chapter 4 Vision and Goals

Vision – Sustainable growth towards 2025: By 2025, Vesterålen shall have established itself as the Nordic region's most attractive year-round tourist destination for nature experiences including hiking (Hikers Paradise), Arctic fauna (Whales & Wildlife) and encounters with vibrant northern coastal settlements (Flourishing Communities) as signature products.



Goals for 2025

«In 2025, Vesterålen will be certified as a Sustainable Destination and will have developed existing and new sustainable companies that are profitable, able to handle growth and offer meaningful experiences rooted in the local resources available. Several new attractions and initiatives will have been established in all the municipalities and Vesterålen's attractiveness as a destination will be strongly rising. Vesterålen's experiences are available year-round, and offers available to collective target groups are adjusted to the needs of the travel and tourism sector».

Target goals 2025 – specification

Experience/Adventure Tourism: «In 2025, Vesterålen will be known for delivering unique experiences linked with the alpine coastal landscape and including hiking (Hikers Paradise) and encounters with the rich fauna, with the whale as a spearhead attraction (Whales & Wildlife), as well as vibrant and flourishing coastal communities (Flourishing Communities) as the framework and content providers (also including culture and food/meals experiences featuring local/regional signature products)».

Conference and Event Tourism:

«In 2025, Vesterålen shall be known for its distinctive conference environment, exciting festivals and events year-round, as well as specialities associated with art and cultural events».

Classic North-Norwegian tourism:

«In 2025, Vesterålen will have positioned itself as a «must-visit» attraction in the largest tourism current in Northern Norway – the outer trajectory between Bodø and Tromsø, with Lofoten, Vesterålen and Senja located between the two like a string of pearls. This is a stretch travelled by the Hurtigrute, cruise ships, tourist buses and individual tourists – who use their own vehicles or mass regional transport options».

Cruises will have become profitable and an adapted part of Vesterålen's tourist industry, including the many winter cruises that send guests on excursions throughout the entire region»

Goals for value creation in the local communities in 2025:

«Travel and tourism and the hospitality industry in 2019 already had a positive importance significance for local community development in Vesterålen, but in 2025 significant considerable new growth will have been achieved in all the municipalities. The industry already provides important jobs and contributes to value creation, both directly and indirectly, in the local economy. Through a successful effort in the travel and tourism industry, a more positive reputation and enhanced attractiveness will be achieved. It will have supported the regional goals of enhanced attractiveness as a place to live, and will have contributed to stronger local identity and increased pride in citizens' homeplaces. The region will now experience a significant growth in people moving to and returning to Vesterålen».

Vesterålen in its entirety, year-round

To fully exploit the existing potential, there is a need to **create additional independent «reasons to visit» Vesterålen** – and not merely be a «copy» of other destinations in the surrounding area. Therefore, we have developed a conceptual framework (vision) for this strategy. The conceptual framework is based on the natural and cultural resources the region possesses, particular assets and interactions with the numerous active and value-creating local communities throughout the entire region.

Each season has its own potential in terms of both products and experiences, but it is important to identify the the «reasons to come» that are relevant and that can be best exploited on a year-round basis. Travel time and accessibility also change vary throughout the year, and this makes market insight important in terms of «who can come, when and how?» Aspects independent from weather and season, such as food and meal experiences, art and culture cultural experiences, events and festivals, are all important priorities on the path towards year-round traffic. Another current trend is summer activity enjoyed during winter, for example kayaking/canoeing, biking and hiking.



Marketing rationales for everything

The vision builds on a process during which the participants have agreed on how yearround tourism in Vesterålen can be developed based on a commercial, concept-oriented approach to seasonal development and pillar tourism product concepts.

The choice of the three overall product concepts that, combined, create the possibility for all of Vesterålen to benefit from its potential throughout the year, is made on the basis of market assessments.

In a survey among foreign Adventure Tour Operators, the latter answered that «Hiking (soft)» and «Local Culture» are the activities of greatest relevance for their customers (Source: Vestlandsforskning, commissioned by NCE Tourism, 2018).

On «Norway's Tourism Map» there is a vacant position for «rambling hiking up close to day-to-day life and fauna». There are of course many wellknown and well adapted hiking destinations in Norway already, for example the Hardanger Plateau, the Jotunheimen Mountains and Indre Troms, which were the three other destinations, in addition to Vesterålen, that were selected by NRK TV's «Monsen minute by minute» during summer 2018. Even with so many opportunities to hike in Norwegian destinations, no other Norwegian destination can compare with Vesterålen in terms of diversity of adapted hiking routes in close proximity to people's day-to-day life and the fascinating fauna.

The fact that Monsen himself made the following statement from the stage at the Norwegian Experience Conference in Narvik in November says volumes about the potential: «Vesterålen impressed me the most – fantastic possibilities!»

Markedsfaglige begrunnelser for alt

Ledig posisjon på Norges Reiselivskart: «vandring tett på dagligliv og dyreliv»

Which adventure activities would be of greatest relevance to your customers?

1 = "not attractive at all",

5 = "very attractive" for your customers

Kategori	Mean	Median
Hiking (soft)	4,4	5
Local culture	3,7	4
Bicycling road	3,6	4
Food experiences	3,5	4
Snow-shoing	3,4	4
Skiing (cross country/downhill/tearing)	3,4	4
Hiking (hard)	3,4	3
Bicycling mountain / off-road	3,2	3
Kayaking	3,2	3
Boating	2,7	3
Climbing	2,5	3
Ocean fishing	2,0	1
Lake/stream fishing	1,9	1

www.vestforsk.no

Respondentane –aggregert kunnskap

- alpetour Touristische GmbH
- Club Aktiv
- Open Leaf Excursions
- Kuoni Group Travel Expert
- Feelgood Reisen GmbH
- Rucksack REisen
- Miki Travel Ltd
- GIVER VIAGGI & CROCIERE S.R.L
- Scantours Inc
- Norge Reiser
- Headwater Holidays
- Service-Reisen Giessen
- Summer Feet Cycling
- Juven Tours and Travel, Inc.
- Sierra Club
- UNIKO
- Kria-Tours
- Sunvil
- Absolutely Snow
- Longrow Travel
- Taber Holidays / Scandinavia Only
- Avalco Travel
- Nature Travels
- The Mighty Fine Company
- Avanti Destinations
- Norden Trips
- Tumlare Corporation
- BBI Travel
- Nordic Experience
- VorScot Tours
- BikeTours.com
- Norsk Rejsebureau
- Wolverine avontuurlijke reizen
- Buro Scanbrit
- NPT
- Zenith Holidays

Lars Monsen på tur: Vesterålen imponerte meg mest – fantastiske muligheter!!

Illustration 20 - «Marketing rationales for everything»

Tourism focussing on whales and animal life has been a pillar for tourism in Vesterålen for many years. The initiatives linked with tourism in the restructuring programme in Andøy municipality, including the establishment of The Whale, will strengthen this. Market assessments are the basis for these endeavours; they include comprehensive evaluations of the market that document the visitor potential for The Whale.

The vision builds on a process during which the participants have agreed on how year-round tourism in Vesterålen can be developed based on a commercial, concept-oriented approach to seasonal development and pillar tourism product concepts.

VESTERÅLEN

Vandringsparadis – Blomstrende kystsamfunn – Hvaler og dyreliv

Hikers Paradise – Flourishing Communities – Whales & Wildlife



These concepts can be combined, given assigned varying priority and be extended seasonally. At the same time, they offer operators and the municipalities many multiple strings in their bow. They can be conceptualized and made accessible to different target groups, and they can be prototypes for further product development in companies and for prioritization of actions in the individual municipality.

The pillar concepts provide guidance for actions that enhance quality, increase accessibility and handle the volume of visitors to **the most important meeting places where one may encounter Vesterålen's identity, local society, nature and culture**. This includes a sharper awareness about the various places as settlements, as destinations, arenas for experiences/adventures (e.g. Local foods, art and culture) and perhaps also as nodal points. This will help to bolster the attractiveness of the individual places and their status as places in Vesterålen that are worthwhile to visit year round.

New tourism as a cornerstone

Modern destinations regard themselves as arenas capable of covering tourists' needs through an interplay between places, people and activities. Traditional branding philosophy, based on promoting one thing/one attraction or one site, no longer provides the tourists with a sufficient idea of what is attractive in a region like Vesterålen. If the goal is year-round tourism, the importance of individual places becomes⁶ even more important in the sense of providing a total experience for the guests.

⁶ Winter tourism is different and is sold to a greater extent as excursions from places (base sites) that are attractive in themselves. In the development of year-round tourism, this is particularly important: Tromsø w/excursions, Svolvær w/excursions, Reykjavik w/excursions, Longyearbyen with excursions (community development). «The Base» = attractive place.

Illustration 21 is derived from the responses in a large European survey in which 1,600 persons were interviewed about momentous experiences they have had. Although new tourism is experience-driven, the place/destination itself and the way it is experienced are important factors in 50% of the responses from the interviewees. In addition, the encounter with other people was highlighted as important in 30% of the analysed experiences.

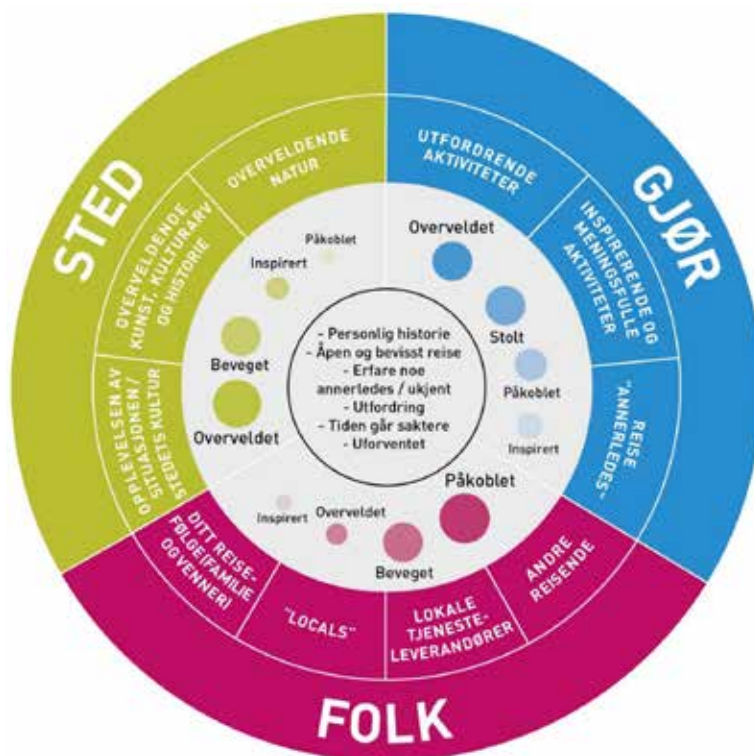


Illustration 21: Momentous experiences in new tourism (Source: <https://www.reizennaarmorgen.be/en/>)

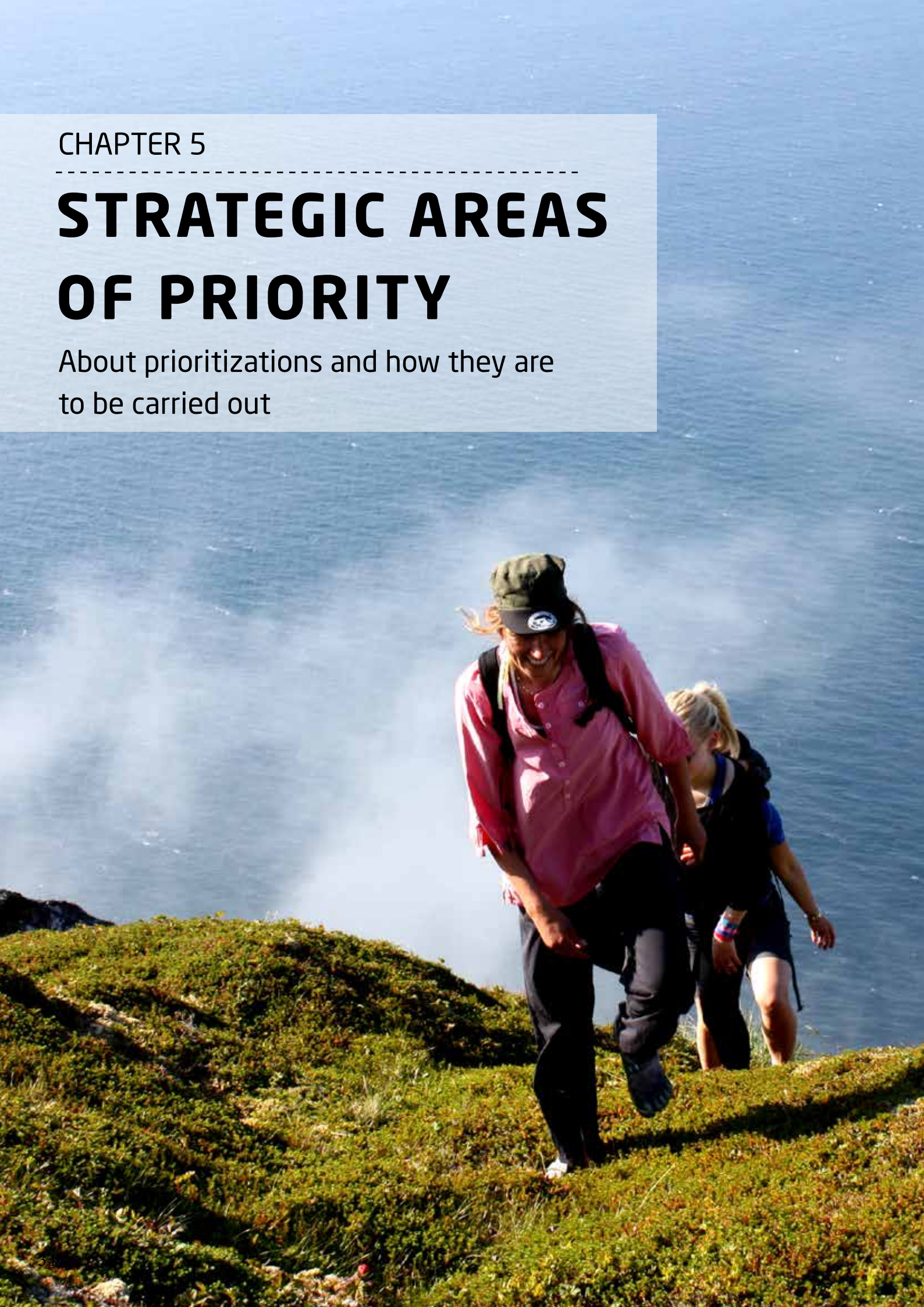
In new tourism, the future-oriented destination sees itself as an arena for interaction between places (meaning: in Vesterålen); the people one meets and the activities (what one does). Thus, Vesterålen shall:

- Develop the potential in the interplay between nature, culture and the coastal communities in the region and leverage them into a clear competitive edge.
- Design products and experiences under the «umbrellas» **Hikers Paradise, Whales & Wildlife and Flourishing Communities**; these are to serve as guidance for Visit Vesterålen's communication, companies' joint product development and the municipalities' prioritizations.
- Customize the most important «meeting places» between visiting guests and Vesterålen's nature, culture and local population so that one can handle continued growth and ensure that development is sustainable.
- Further develop major initiatives in the municipalities that strengthen this holistic strategy, including FEM FISKEVÆR (Five Fishing Villages) in Øksnes, THE WHALE in Andenes as the capital city of the whale, THE HURTIGRUTE MUSEUM in Stokmarknes as the Birthplace of the Coastal Steamer, TREKKING ON THE OUTER SIDE in Bø and THE BLUE CULTURE CITY Sortland.

CHAPTER 5

STRATEGIC AREAS OF PRIORITY

About prioritizations and how they are
to be carried out



Chapter 5 Strategic Areas of Priority

Introduction

Destination development is about what happens on the stage – what tourists to Vesterålen encounter, and the experiences they have. In addition, it is about what happens backstage to ensure that the tourists are given their experiences. As in theatre, it takes organization, staging, agreed interplay, competence/skills and available seats to see to it that a theatrical piece can be experienced.

Destination development requires marketing investments, communication, accessibility/communications (to and within the region), competence/professionalism on the part of private and public stakeholders. Not least of all, it also requires leadership and the ability to follow through on the part of Visit Vesterålen – the region's DMMO (Destination Marketing and Management Organization). This is the organization that is responsible for both marketing and hosting, as well as destination management and development (see page 57). Visit Vesterålen plays a key role in the implementation of the strategy, in the interplay with both private and public stakeholders.

This holistic perspective is the starting point for the strategic areas of priority.

See Illustration 22

Vision: «By 2025, Vesterålen shall have established itself as the Nordic region's most attractive year-round tourist destination for nature experiences including hiking (Hikers Paradise), Arctic fauna (Whales & Wildlife) and encounters with vibrant northern coastal settlements (Flourishing Communities) as signature products».

The visitors' experiences shall be based on the tourists' needs and on strategic initiatives that have a potential for growth for **all** of Vesterålen.

Hikers Paradise - Flourishing Communities - Whales & Wildlife

Plus good framework conditions:



Better accessibility/
good infrastructure

Enhanced competence
Enhanced professionalism

Build on NNT's new brand platform and insight into target groups, and have Visit Vesterålen as the hub – with responsibility for hosting, marketing and destination development.

Illustration 22

North-Norwegian Tourism's new branding strategy as the basis for market development

To identify the needs of the tourists, North-Norwegian Tourism AS' new brand platform and their strategic compass have been adopted and form the basis for Vesterålen's destination strategy. The work involved with using what has been called Northern Norway's «personas index», designed to understand client needs and to develop products, is already well under way in the region. It also provides this strategy with a joint platform.

Target groups and their «reason to go»

The experience seeker's «reason to go» (to a specific destination) is often linked with a specific motive. North-Norwegian Tourism operates with five such motives.

1. To see well-known attractions

Many travel to be able to cross destinations off on their bucket list. Others are genuinely interested in seeing an attraction they have heard about or perhaps want to visit multiple times. The great attractions in the world have very many visitors of this kind. In Northern Norway, Nordkapp and the northern lights are attractions that draw many such attraction seekers.

2. To reaffirm their own connection with a destination

This motivation is about visiting a place, an experience or a theme to which the visitor has a relationship in their own life. It might be a trip to visit a place where one's family has roots, or to learn something about a theme that defines the visitor as a person, or to find oneself again in a suitable setting. Part of this comes out of a desire to experience something positive with close relations or colleagues and to 'care for their own' in this way.

3. To be a part of something larger than oneself

This kind of motivation is found in spiritual and religious journeys, but also in experiences where-by the visitor enters another local community/society and becomes a part of it. The motive can also be related to the desire to participate in festivals where one has the feeling of taking part in a larger collectivity or has momentous experiences of nature in spectacular landscapes, thereby being uplifted and mentally fortified.

4. Pushing one's limits to reach a goal

This motivation is largely about learning something new, breaking barriers and doing something totally new and different, such as encountering new cultures, eating tasting new types of food and, in general, exploring and expanding one's own horizon through experiences.

5. Becoming a better version of oneself

This motive largely involves finding time for oneself, turning inwards towards oneself, improving one's own physique or finding relaxation. This reason to go is typical for those who travel to spas, training holidays, yoga retreats etc.



Strategic compass for Northern Norway

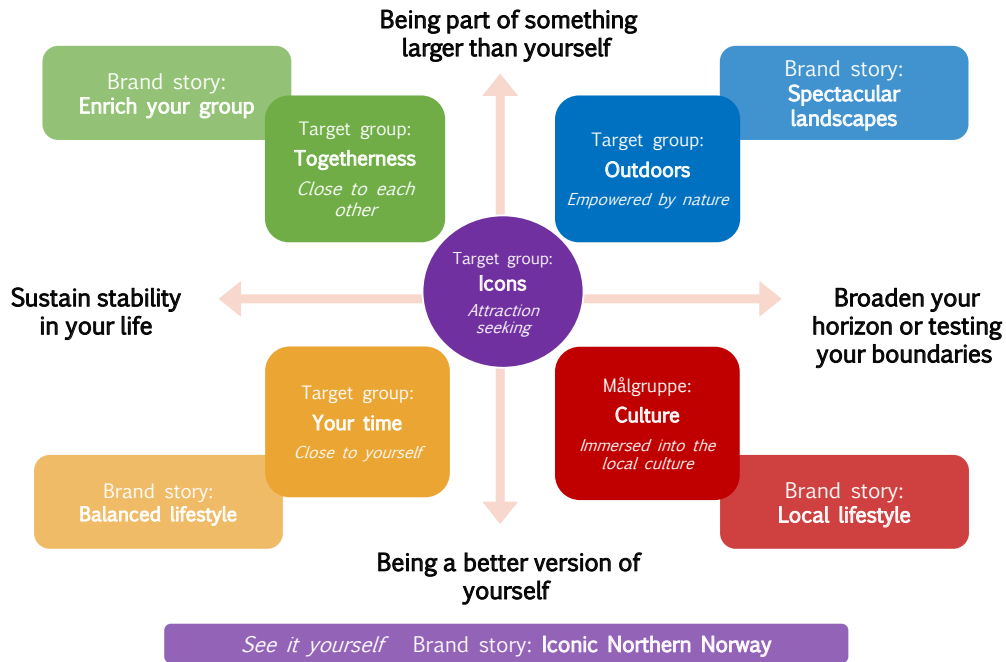


Illustration 23: North-Norwegian Tourism’s strategic compass (<https://brand.nordnorge.com>)

The various segments each have their own colour code and are placed on the threshold between two «reasons to go» that they are pulled between. One of the segments is situated at the core of all motives and is influenced by simpler motivational factors for travelling than the others; namely, to see well-known attractions (purple colour). Based on this model, North-Norwegian Tourism uses so-called travel styles to make it easier for the market to understand what Northern Norway can deliver to them.

Thus, this is a conceptualization of the region to which Vesterålen can relate and try to accommodate. The five concepts correspond with the segments in the compass and have matching colour codes. Travel styles are outward communication, as opposed to the compass, which is an internal tool for development.



Illustration 24

Vesterålen’s strategy is to supply experiences to all segments based on the three pillar product concepts. Below we have listed some examples of potential offers to the individual segments:

Green guests	Weddings, events, family holidays, trips with friends, groups etc. Interested in one another.
Yellow guests	Slow travellers or well-being seekers Very interested in peace and time for themselves.
Blue guests	Active guests, particularly in winter experiences, but also hiking, hunting and fishing.
Red guests	Interested in culture and history, culinary experiences and exploring local society. Very interested in meeting local people and learning from the local culture.
Purple guests	Particularly interested in experiencing the northern lights in the winter and the midnight sun and sunny nights during the summer, but also attractions and notable museums. (Purpleguests . often have little time and are interested in gleaning the best of attractions without going into any depth.)

Core narratives from Northern Norway and Vesterålen

Northern Norway as a destination builds its strategy on five core narratives. Each one is aimed at its individual major segment in North-Norwegian Tourism’s strategic compass (<https://brand.nordnorge.com>)

Together, they are intended to provide a holistic content for the Northern Norway brand, and to develop the brand product. All three strategic hallmarks in Vesterålen can benefit from conveying these narratives through specifically designed experiences linked with the Hikers Paradise, Flourishing Communities and Whales & Wildlife, along with combinations of these. The five North-Norwegian core narratives are:

- Northern Norway is a good place in which to tend one’s flock (green guests)
- Northern Norway is a good place to find peace and inner strength (yellow guests)
- Northern Norway has spectacular landscape and accessible natural surroundings (blue guests)
- Northern Norway has vibrant and open local communities that offer encounters with culture, good food, learning and fulfilment of personal interests (red guests)
- Northern Norway has well-known attractions and unique natural phenomena (purple guests)



Strategy for development of experiences, signature items and important meeting places

The most important specific areas of priority in the strategy are based on strengthening Vesterålen's provisions for delivering optimally on the three core concepts.

The first level is promoting the signature products, or proof (to those who want to come), that we truly are a hiker's paradise, that one actually can experience whales and animal/bird life and visit flourishing coastal communities.

The chosen destinations are those that already have a status that is typical of Vesterålen and that still have a potential for development and growth. These include Møysalen, Dronningruta, the coastal paths and Trekking on the Outer Side in Bø (Hikers Paradise). These include Whalesafaris and excursions to watch puffins and eagles (Whales & Wildlife). These include the «Fem Fiskevær» (Five Fishing Villages) concept in Øksnes, Andenes and its initiatives in terms of whales, community development, The Whale and space technology, Sortland the Blue Cultural City with its festivals, events, dining establishments etc., and Stokmarknes, Birthplace of the Hurtigrute, which will now have a major attraction in the form of the new showcase building. The more that happens and is developed in relation to these signature products, the stronger Vesterålen will stand as a destination, and the more target groups we will be able to please.

The second level is called *the 10 most important meeting places*⁷, which is the level below the signature attractions, but equally attractive places/attractions/events and which already today have many visitors. These also have a need for ensuring that Vesterålen delivers quality, that facilitation and infrastructure function well and that stimulation is given for further initiatives, increased visitor numbers, new products and further commercial development. Several of these places/attractions/events are also incorporated in the work towards the Brand Profile for a Sustainable Destination emblem (and are included in the action plan for this subprocess that has already been adopted); see also Chapter 6. A significant amount of experience has been gathered in order to ascertain the priorities that have been adopted⁸.

It should be noted that a list of this nature both can and will be adjusted, supplemented and expanded concurrently with further developments. The meeting places that are listed in Illustration 25, however, indicate the important areas of priority based on the current situation (i.e. at the writing of this plan).

Community development that fortifies strategy

As part of the work with this strategy document, the municipalities were each encouraged to develop one major action. The rationale was both to create a unique action/project for each of the municipalities/communities and to mobilize around a potential underlying one of the chosen areas of priority, which in turn will help to mobilize locally and generally strengthen Vesterålen as a destination. This again will strengthen the signature products and meeting places and reinforce Vesterålen's overall position as an attractive tourist destination. **The five proposed projects/actions are:**

- Develop the concept of «Fem Fiskevær» (the Five Fishing Villages) in Øksnes (begun)
- Develop Hadsel's position as the Birthplace of the Coastal Steamer in conjunction with the improvements being made to the new Coastal Express Museum in Stokmarknes and Hurtigruten's increased efforts toward landbased experiences.
- Develop Andenes as «the capital city of the whale» through community development, The Whale and appurtenant efforts (begun)
- Further develop Sortland as the Blue Cultural City where «doors are always open and there is always something on the bill»
- Make Trekking on the Outer Side in Bø a new signature product for hiking experiences in Vesterålen

⁷ Meeting places here means either physical places, attractions, events or other types of experiences where visitors encounter Vesterålen's natural surroundings, culture and/or local society.

⁸ Environments such as Vesterålen Outdoor Recreation, birdwatching organizations, the municipalities themselves, Reno-Vest, etc. have provided input. The documents on which the choices were made may be found as separate enclosures to the strategy document.

The synergy in this can be illustrated as in Illustrations 25 and 26.

Strategic actions for Vesterålen

Hikers Paradise

Flourishing Communities

Whales & Wildlife

Signatures
(evidence):

- Dronningruta
- Møysalen
- Coastal trecks
- Hiking at the outer side

- Fem Fiskevær
- Hurtigruten birthplace; Stokmarknes
- Sortland, the blue cultural city
- Andenes w/Andøy Space Center

- Whalesafari
- Eagle and puffin safari
- The Whale

Important meeting places - nature and culture, locations and areas of action in the strategy for facilitation and development of adventure offerings:

- VETTEN
- MÅTIND
- STEIRAHEIA
- STRANDHEIA
- KYSTSTIENE
- ØRNHEIA, STORHEIA
- BREKKA (start-point)
- MYRTIND
- HØYDALSFJELLET / SKIPET

- LOCAL FOOD
- FESTIVALS AND ARRANGEMENTS
- SAMI CULTURE (Inga Sami Siida)
- MELBU
- NASJONAL SCENIC ROAD w/Bleik
- VISITOR CENTRES
- ARTSCAPE NORDLAND

- BLEIK ISLAND
- ANDA LIGHTHOUSE
- ANDØYA
- STØ
- NYKVÅG - HOVDEN
- STRAUME
- SKAGEN CROSSROAD
- TROLLFJORDEN
- BLEIK-DEEP

Illustration 25: Strategic actions in Vesterålen with signature products (evidence) and the most important meeting places (which both can and will be adjusted, supplemented and expanded concurrently with further developments. ** For supporting documents for choice of meeting places, see p. 61

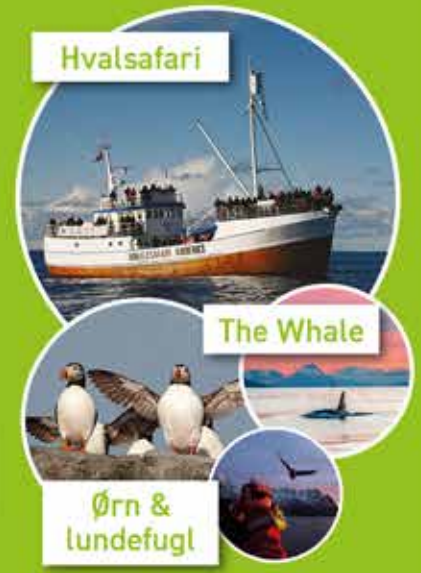
Strategiske satsninger for hele Vesterålen

Hikers Paradise

Flourishing Communities

Whales & Wildlife

Signaturer
(bevisene):



Visuell identitet



Bærende historier

- Dronning Sonja/ Monsen på tur
- Alpene ved havet
- 150 merkede ruter
- +++

- Bosetting i 10.000 år
- Rikt kulturliv
- Verdiskapende sjømatnæring
- +++

- Golfstrømmen
- Hvalen ved egg
- Fuglefjell og kolonier
- +++

Illustration 26 - Visual of the strategic actions

Food/meal-based experiences as a pervasive initiative

Food/mealbased experiences are an important component in the encounter with Vesterålen's flourishing local communities; this is not merely about culinary experiences or special local dishes, but just as much about food as an integrated part of the encounter with Vesterålen. Food/meal experiences pay a particular role in new tourism, and it is often described as follows (Source: ATTA):

Create context (circumstances) Food creates a meaningful context for experiences and provides for a better understanding of the place that guests are visiting. Meals are a good arena in which to narrate local culture and way of life through storytelling.

Create lasting memories. Good food and mealtime experiences help to shape strong memories of a trip because several human senses are activated in the experience. Aromas and the taste of food supplement sight and hearing.

Create connections between people. Meals in themselves are an internationally recognized arena for encounters between people. They help to open for dialog, develop relationships and create contact between visitors and permanent residents.

In the next phase, a separate initiative under the banner of «Vesterålen's food on the tourist's plate» should be considered as a way to strengthen the encounter between tourists and the many flourishing local communities in the region. Quality criteria, pride and storytelling should be linked with this action if it is to become a competitive component.



Enhanced communications and increased accessibility

A basic premise in the strategy Sustainable growth towards 2025 is that everyone who wants to come to Vesterålen will come here, and that everyone, to the extent it is possible, can also travel collectively. The strategy focuses on what is possible within the framework of the situation today/framework conditions and planned/started projects that will change the situation before we reach 2025. This is structured as challenges/opportunities for Vesterålen that must be worked on further at three levels:

1. The trip to the destination (Getting There) – Correspondences and infrastructure to/from Vesterålen
2. Travel within the destination (Getting Around) – Traffic flow to/from and around Vesterålen/places that one wishes to visit
3. The continued trip (Getting Further) – The connection with other destinations – the «next» destination

This is the point of departure for highlighting what is needed so that accessibility will not be a bottleneck for development of the destination. Some actions/investments are major, long-term changes, such as new airport structures, large road developments etc. Others can be changed in a more short-term perspective, for example through better bus connections, better boat routes and increased ferry capacity.

Travel to Vesterålen

The largest adopted change in accessibility for Vesterålen will come through completion of the stretch of road between Sortland – Evenes/Harstad – Narvik along the Hålogaland route (E10). This will result in a savings in travel time between Vesterålen/Sortland and Harstad, Evenes airport and Ofoten amounting to 40–45 minutes, along with a much safer road during the winter season. This will be a significant improvement in accessibility for the region at several levels and will be important for further initiatives to benefit year-round tourism in the region.



Illustration 27: Source: The Norwegian Public Roads Administration

This strategy has not discussed the future airport infrastructure for Lofoten/Vesterålen (changes that will be made after 2025), but states that good air traffic connections are particularly important to be able to develop tourism year-round, to attract international visitors and exploit the short holiday market. At the same time, it is important to note that use of other forms of collective traffic is on the rise, including the combination of bus and train via Narvik/Kiruna and that the phrase «travel like a local» (implying that the trip is a part of the experience) has become a concept in and of itself. Air travel-based holidays will become a «hot potato» in the encounter with climate challenges in the coming years; in particular, short-term holidays involving lengthy air travel will be controversial.

When «Havila» soon supplements the Hurtigrute routes with 4 new ships, Hurtigruten ASA plans to sail the coast «off-route», but generally with many of the same ports of call. This will also potentially bring more guests to Vesterålen by the coastal route and present new opportunities year-round.

Cruise traffic is now beginning to become differentiated, from small expedition cruises with 100–200 persons on board, to large mega ships with more than 3,000 passengers. It is important for the relevant ports of call in Vesterålen to develop in relation to ships of this size in terms of the the volume of tourist products that we are able to develop profitably on shore. The target is a sustainable effect from this tourism, and that it helps to strengthen the land-based products and extends throughout the entire year.

The shuttle and ferry connections between Andenes and Gryllefjord on Senja are also very important for classical North-Norwegian round-trip traffic in the region. This is a travel pattern that also applies, to a great extent, to the Melbu–Fiskebøl ferry route.

Travel around and about in Vesterålen

This encompasses timetable-based public transport such as buses and ferry routes, rental cars, capacity and accessibility of roads, experience/adventure-based boat and bus excursions, as well as general information systems for everyone on the move in the region. The conjunction with the development of the National Tourist Routes also falls under this heading. A significant potential has been identified for a further development of the public transport offerings; it will require a closer collaboration with the Nordland Transport and Communications Department, which has the responsibility for development in the years to come. This will need to be followed up on an ongoing basis and should be a separate area of priority in the next phase:

- Identify Bottlenecks in the current scheduled traffic infrastructure – be proactive, address the problems as they are detected.
- See opportunities in the summer traffic schedules – think creatively; can the material be better utilised over the day?
- Find concept titles for some of the routes – like those that many have already, «physically» speaking, but that are not perceived as having any connection, (such as, for example, «The Whale Bus» from Melbu – Sortland – Andenes. The buses travel the route already, but are not profiled as being one continuous route).
- Formulate concepts that one can work with jointly – such as the current Fly & Bike (e.g. Fly & Hike, Fly & Kayak), etc., through the use of TravelPass Nordland.

The trip to surrounding destinations

Very many tourists in Vesterålen also visit one or more of the nearby, surrounding destinations, for example Senja and Lofoten, but also places that are even farther away. It is important, then, to collaborate on consolidated tourist routes and traffic systems that combine to serve larger distances. We might mention, for example, that Vesterålen already is part of this kind of collaboration through Visit Arctic Europe (<https://visitarcticeurope.com/>). In the next phase, greater effort should be made to develop general traffic systems that link Vesterålen with the neighbouring regions and make it easier to travel individually within the «region at large» and year-round. In the case of Vesterålen, this will mean a collaboration between two counties – Nordland and Troms/Finmark – with a view to developing good concepts for longer route systems.

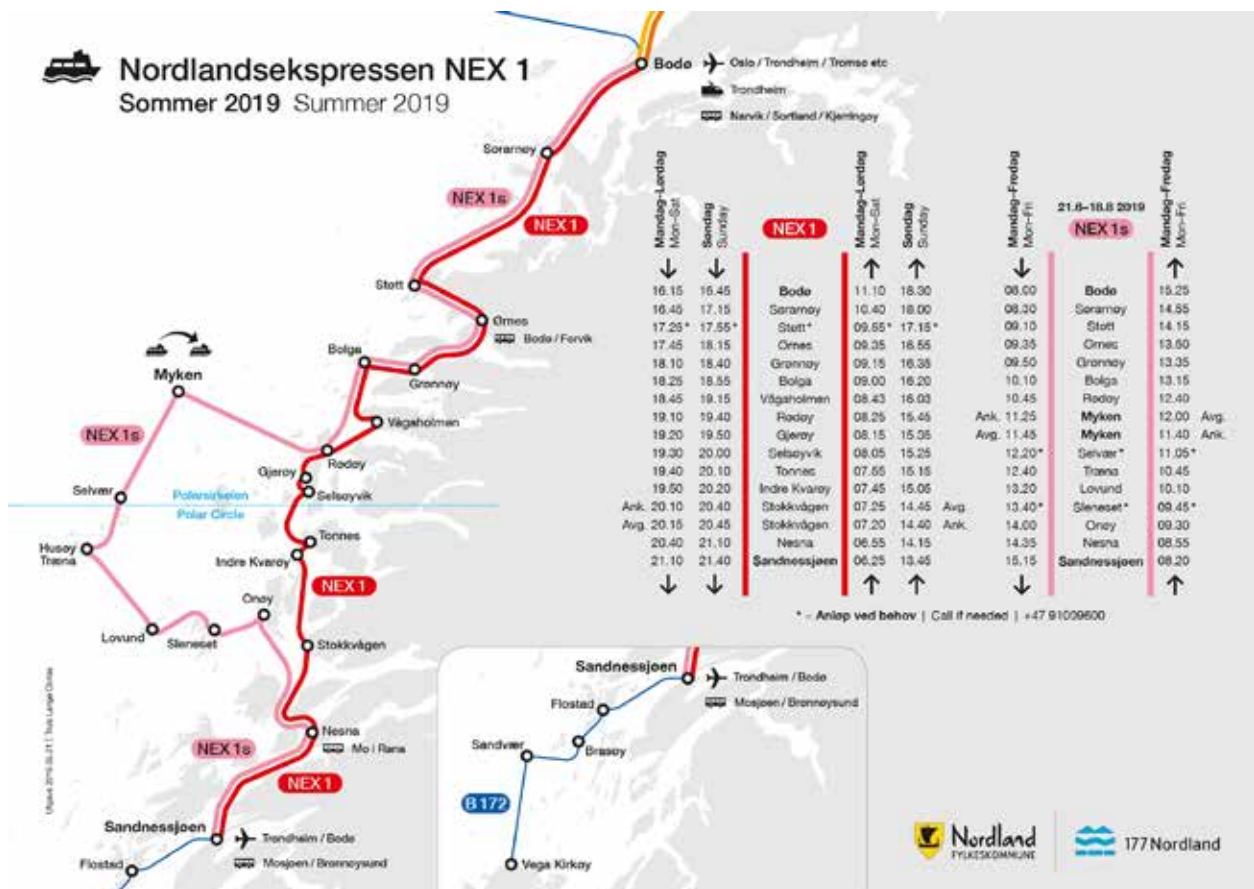


Illustration 28: THE NORDLAND EXPRESS – Summer route 2019, an example of a holistic presentation of the route system covering long distances. Nordland County Council

Stimulate new enterprises

An important strategy goal in «Sustainable growth towards 2025» is to create predictability for stakeholders who want to establish themselves and invest in travel and tourism in Vesterålen. By staking out the course for how the region and the municipalities will work moving forward, we help to reduce the risk that private entrepreneurs will face. Everything depends on everything else in this context, from competence to market insight, signposting of hiking trails, development of local food products, community development and entrepreneurial guidance. It will be impossible to exploit the potential growth that lies ahead without also having new and additional investments in the region. This is true in terms of activities, new experiences/adventure-based attractions, events, dining amenities, overnight accommodation, transport and attractions.

Enhanced competence and professionalization

Enhanced competence and increased professionalization are an important prerequisites enabling Vesterålen to realise the strategy and intention of sustainable growth moving forward towards 2025.

Based on the analysis from Phase 1 and a broader mapping completed in Phase 2, a knowledge base has been acquired that will be used to target and prioritize the initiatives listed in the phase titled as «From words to action». The mapping work, among other things, consisted of the following:

- Needs survey among stakeholders (what do stakeholders themselves say they need?)⁹
- Mapping of regional competence environments and others offering relevant competence training to stakeholders, namely Egga Utvikling/Fiskeriparken, Fabrikken Næringshage and the Regional Course and Competence Centre for Vesterålen.
- Mapping of already completed and projected competence training for the stakeholders (2017 - 2019)
- Other relevant initiatives and input, including actions for the Action plan, Sustainable destination development

Three subgoals

Three subgoals have been established for the prioritized area in the strategy, competence. The first goal is **increased customer insight**, at both individual company level and at a general level, as a basis for development of experience-based attractions; see the description on pages 44 – 46 concerning NNR Brand product platform/strategic compass.

The next subgoal is that **more decisions in the travel and tourism industry are to be knowledge-based**. This entails offering competence enhancement and networking measures for stakeholders, as well as actions aimed at enhancing knowledge among municipal management teams and in the local community about the importance and prerequisites for success in sustainable growth of tourism in the region.

The last subgoal encompasses **quality and capacity** enhancement through professionalization of existing businesses, as well as stimulation to establish new experiences and enterprises.

In the next phase, it is recommended that Nordland County's new Competence strategy be adopted. Furthermore, the work should be linked up to the following three areas: interaction and networking shall be integrated as a part of the effort to enhance competence; Vesterålen shall work systematically to develop the export maturity of tourism, and a competence programme shall be developed that is adapted to various target groups.

⁹ Mapping of competence needs in private business in Vesterålen, conducted by Essensi on assignment from Vesterålen Regional Council, 2017

Competence

Enhanced client insight

Knowledge-based decisions

Enhanced quality and capacity

Increased client insight as the basis for experience development – utilise NNR's Brand platform and Brand Toolbox

Decisions are taken based on knowledge – at both the company and municipal level

Stimulate and facilitate enhanced quality and capacity development, including a strengthening of existing enterprises and establishing new ones

Illustration 29

The Competence Strategy for Nordland 2019–2023 as a foundation

In the preliminary study, it was pointed out that there is a need to develop local competence environments' knowledge about tourism. By engaging the largest competence environment in Vesterålen (i.e. Fiskeriparken/ Egga Utvikling, which recently merged with Fabrikken) to serve as the local project manager for the work with the involved with qualifying for certification as a Brand Profile for a Sustainable Destination, provisions have already been made for building up local and regional competence in tourism.

The new Competence Strategy for Nordland 2019–2023 «Competence for changing working life» (see separate text frame) also covers the «tourism in change» and is to be the basis for further work with this area of priority in the Master plan.



Competence for changing working life – Competence strategy for Nordland 2019 –2023

Changing working life and demographic changes require a future-oriented and offensive effort to enhance competence in Nordland county. Nordland county administration prioritizes the development of competence in working life in this strategy. Furthermore, Nordland county administration prioritizes the development of strategies that emphasize the synergy between working life and education. The primary goal for the strategy is to enhance competence in the population to meet the future challenges and needs faced by working life.

To achieve this goal, the work is divided up into priority areas:

- Partnership and mobilization for competence enhancement in working life
- Develop educational programmes congruent with the future needs of working life
- Profile the attractive opportunities in working life in Nordland county and facilitate good education and career choices
- Strengthen the effort to attract an influx of newcomers and to recruit
- Include more workers in working life

The main strategy to reach this goal is to strengthen cooperation between working life, providers of education and administrators of public policy instruments.

The strategy specifies areas of priority and conveys information about organization and implementation. The strategy has a four-year operating period, 2019–2023. To render the strategy concrete, an action plan will be drawn up for regularly rotating work.

Source: Nordland County Administration

Collaboration and networks

Set focus on entrepreneurship and networking as an integrated part of competence development.

In other places, the cluster method has given good results for experience-based tourism. An established network for sharing experiences and knowledge between operators can help to enhance competence and to develop more targeted products that, together, strengthen the total experience offered.

North-Norwegian Tourism now works closely with the destination companies. Therefore, it is crucial for development that Visit Vesterålen acquires a resource basis that enables it to facilitate development in terms of both completion of Phase 3 (from words to action) and stimulation of development. The process by which Vesterålen will achieve and retain the Sustainable Destination emblem strengthens this need. Read more about organization on pages 55 and 57.

Export maturity

In Sweden, they have developed criteria for assessing market maturity that can be applied as a standard for Vesterålen as well. (<http://www.exportmognad.se/>) The premises are the needs and demands of the markets, and the requirement to be aware of the criteria and offer products and services that match the demand. The criteria are:

- The destination can offer a 2–5-day total experience (accommodation dining, activities, travel).
- The destination's offer is consolidated, packaged and possible to order.
- Communication is adapted in terms of language.
- There is a local organization with a clear mandate to represent the destination.
- The destination jointly prioritizes markets and target groups.
- There is a plan and a long-term financing mechanism for market activities, as well as a joint brand profile platform.
- The local organization is responsible for development and implementing the destination's joint business plan/strategy based on knowledge of the market, choice of target groups, products offered and resources.
- The destination has a business model for how collaborating companies at the destination be profitably developed.

The Master plan is designed to be able to meet challenges associated with the fact that continued growth will have to be based on international visitors (in Lofoten currently, more than 50% of the overnight stays are foreigners), and a focus on export maturity will be an important part in the further professionalization of operators in the region.

Competence programme tailored for different target groups

A comprehensive competence programme in and about travel and tourism shall be developed during the next phase. The technical content and practical implementation shall be adapted to the various target groups/stakeholders, the three most important being:

- Stakeholders/companies – individually (at employee and business level) and in networks/collaborations
- Municipal sector – both the political and administrative levels
- Local population/local community – for broader understanding and social sustainability

The table below shows a few examples of how a comprehensive competence programme for travel and tourism can be rendered concrete in Phase 3.

Programme for competence development in and pertaining to tourism in Vesterålen		
Target group/ Interest group	Specialized fields/Themes	Potential collaborative partners
Company/stakeholder – individually and as a joint quality requirement for new networks/concepts	- experience design - customer insight - local culture - food and meal experiences - cultural understanding - marketing and sales - digital communication/SoMe - sustainability	Innovation Norway, North-Norwegian Tourism. The clusters Innovative Opplevelser and Arctic 365. Vesterålen Food Project, Egga Utvikling/Fabrikken, Lofoten Food Park, Lofoten Tourism Vocational School etc.
Company/stakeholder – individually and as a joint quality requirement for new networks/concepts	- environmental certification - quality assurance and development - HES and statutory regulations	Eco-lighthouse Foundation, Egga Utvikling/Fabrikken and VARDE (a new quality and certification system for the tourism sector)
Municipal sector – both the political and administrative levels	Academic basis and understanding for Tourism 2.0; a prerequisite for -> smart organization moving forward	RKK, NHO/Virke, professional environments. Can be organized as Training for politicians postelection
Local population/local communities	The meaning of tourism; the opportunities and challenges facing us who dwell and live here	Local media, voluntary organizations



Organization and ability to follow through

Visit Vesterålen will undergo change as a consequence of restructuring of the collaboration through Vesterålen Regional Council. This encompasses both future roles related to inter municipal cooperation on services in the area of tourism, including hosting, profiling, regional development etc. – as well as pursuing the Brand Profile for a Sustainable Destination emblem, implementing the Masterplan's phase «From words to action», etc. and in terms of the prerequisites for being able to develop activities and generate income that meet the companies' needs (sell services, market action, booking etc.) The purpose of Visit Vesterålen, according to the current bylaws, is «..to pursue innovation, tourism and product development in the region».

Organization for new, emerging tourism

The traditional tasks for the destination organizations have been marketing of the destination via fairs, the press and showcase presentations, workshops, advertisements, campaigns, brochures and web portals that have booking systems. In addition, they provide tourist information and have a hosting role (press/media), partly on behalf of the host municipalities, along with competence enhancement measures (courses etc.). The destination company is also the link to the umbrella organization North-Norwegian Tourism AS, Visit Norway/Innovation Norway, tour operators, media actors and business stakeholders at the local level.

These organizations are now experiencing the need to lead an effort directed toward holistic destination and local community development, sustainable development, responsible marketing, facilitation/adaptation and collective benefits. They now frequently lead efforts with strategies/Master plans and sustainable branding, and they have a supra management function. The destination company is the hub and driving force in the restructuring process from a growth and volume-based focus to a local community, value-creative and steering focus. See the illustration below for a description of the components of this role:

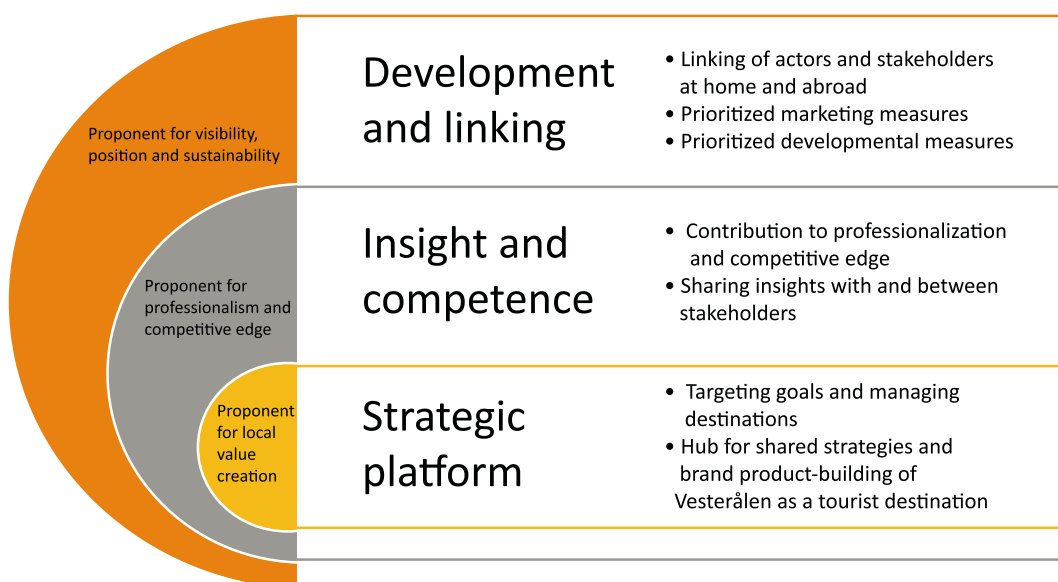


Illustration 30

Key tasks for Visit Vesterålen in the future should be clarified in the course of 2019 and will necessarily lie within the following areas:

- Lead the effort outlined in the Master plan/Destination strategy and Brand Profile for the work towards certification and the Sustainable Destination emblem– «From words to action»
- Destination and experience development; sustainability, change processes, new customer groups
- Facilitation/adaptation: collective benefits, infrastructure, experiences
- Joint guidelines and quality systems; safety, guiding competence, certifications
- Communication adapted to guests; reach out to guests before and during the stay, «matchmaking»
- Own one's own history (brand product); definitional power and appeal, ombudsman
- Market communication in the «new tourism» sector, in harmony with the member companies and in line with the umbrella organizations North-Norwegian Tourism and Innovation Norway.

A close-up photograph of an adult white seabird, likely a booby, with a distinctive blue eye and a long, pointed beak. It is standing on a nest made of dark seaweed and twigs. Next to it is a fluffy white chick with a dark beak. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

CHAPTER 6

THE PATH TO THE SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION EMBLEM

via the milestone achieved along the way

Chapter 6 The path to the Sustainable Destination Emblem

Sustainability is a cornerstone for the future development of Vesterålen as a tourist destination. The first part of the effort to achieve Innovation Norway's Brand Profile for a Sustainable Destination emblem has therefore been an integrated part of the strategy work. Visit Vesterålen's governing bodies and all the municipalities have already passed formal resolutions to get the first step approved in the in the process leading to achievement of this milestone (cf. Criteria A + B in the Standard).

The objectives that strengthen the sustainability perspective are therefore part of a separate area of priority in the Master plan for Vesterålen titled «Sustainable growth towards 2025».

Overall goal – robust sustainability

Vesterålen shall handle its own growth properly so that the local resource base does not degenerate for the future and that the strain on the environment (eco-footprint) is reduced over time. Increased tourism shall enrich the region and not create conflicts and frustration in terms of its own inhabitants, the local communities or other business and community-related activity.

Vesterålen as a destination shall always stay «one step ahead».

Subgoals and strategic direction

1. Vesterålen as a destination shall always stay «one step ahead».

Vesterålen shall be future-oriented, proactive and cautious so that growth in tourism occurs in a gentle, controlled manner. Development shall be based on the dawning experience-based tourism, relevant customer insight pertaining to the needs of the tourists, as well as updated knowledge about how growth in tourism affects local society.

2. Vesterålen as a destination shall succeed in further growth without increased strains on the environment.

In Vesterålen, there is to be control over waste disposal and sanitary installations, least possible wear and tear on the natural surroundings and a reduction in the total strains on the environment over time. This includes facilities in the form of sanitary installations and waste disposal facilities along the key traffic arteries – including hiking trails, bicycle paths and motorcar roads. The capacity to handle growth must be proportionate to growth, so that Vesterålen as a destination will not lag behind or experience irreversible negative consequences and a poor reputation.

3. Vesterålen as a destination shall be well adapted and easy to visit.

Vesterålen shall be Norway's best adapted region for hiking, with signposted and marked trails, with an emphasis on security and restoration. There is to be enough parking accommodation and good public communications. Vesterålen shall be a leader in providing information so that the visitor behaves in line with the wishes and needs of business and the local inhabitants, and so that the tourists are equipped to reduce their own eco-footprint. This shall be realized through the use of new technology and narratives. Vesterålen shall be a credible actor for conveying authentic experiences of nature and culture. There shall be a high level of knowledge at the destination concerning how to properly convey cultural heritage, traditions, history and preservation of natural resources.

4. Further growth in tourism in Vesterålen shall be an enrichment for the local communities.

Growth in tourism shall contribute positively to increase the job market and make Vesterålen an attractive place to live, in vibrant and flourishing coastal communities (as opposed to theatre stage backdrops for tourists). Furthermore, the relationship between the guest and the local inhabitant shall be characterized by mutual re-

spect and a positive attitude. There shall be social meeting places (physical buildings/showcase centres) where the local inhabitants and visitors can meet. The local population shall be able to take pride in and contribute towards the development of the tourism sector. At the same time, the tourism sector shall be characterized by and associated with values such as solidarity, cooperation and mutual pride. The tourism sector shall collaborate beneficially with other business areas.

5. Vesterålen as a destination shall be a year-round destination.

It shall be attractive to visit Vesterålen all year round, featuring year-round weather and season-specific products, including food and meal experiences, events and theme-related experiences. The development of year-round tourism is the single area of priority that will be the most important catalyst to promote economic growth, local value creation, stable workplaces and profitable companies in the tourism sector.

6. Vesterålen as a destination shall mobilize on a broad basis

Sustainability tasks shall include and engage the business sector, the municipalities (local politicians/administrators), the voluntary sector and local population. A broad front shall be prepared through environmental certification of the municipalities and companies. To create visible results as quickly as possible, this effort shall be facilitated through separate incentive schemes (financial support) and a holistic communication effort.

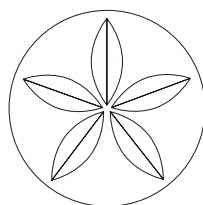
7. Vesterålen as a destination shall organize itself so as to ensure that the sustainability effort has the best effect possible.

By this, we mean that all five municipalities and other key actors are to work together to ensure effective implementation of the sustainability effort. This includes a consensus on the decisionmaking structures, as well as a simplification of the work processes designed to ensure effectiveness and proper use of resources. All of Vesterålen must develop an understanding for and motivation to cooperate in the development of a sustainable tourist destination.

Subgoal 7 requires optimal organization of the sustainability effort conducted «behind the scenes». The first six subgoals deal with what is to occur «on stage», i.e. In in the encounter with the visiting tourists.

Vesterålen has reached the first milestone in the marker course and is entitled to use «We are in full swing» as of March 2019.

Vesterålen aims to achieve its goal - the «Branded as a Sustainable Destination» emblem by the close of the year 2021.



**SUSTAINABLE
DESTINATION**
WE ARE READY



**SUSTAINABLE
DESTINATION**
LOCAL ENGAGEMENT
IN A LONG PERSPECTIVE

Vesterålen as a destination shall stay “one step ahead”

Shall manage further growth without increased pressure on the environment

Shall be a well adapted and easy-to-visit place

Further growth shall enrich the local communities

Shall be a year-round destination

Shall mobilize broadly

Shall organize itself so that sustainability efforts have maximum effect

Illustration 31: Summary of the strategic area of priority, the «Brand for a Sustainable Destination» emblem.



A close-up photograph of a hand holding a thick bundle of red cables. The hand is wearing a dark blue sleeve with white polka dots. A wooden handle is visible, attached to the cables. The background is a dark surface with white polka dots.

CHAPTER 7

FROM WORD TO ACTION

about the path from a holistic and strategic framework to action plans and specific measures

Chapter 7 From words to action - Phase 3

Brief description of Phase 3 in Destination development

Phase 3 is an independent, new phase that must be organized and funded based on the action plan that specifies the strategic areas of priority that have been agreed.

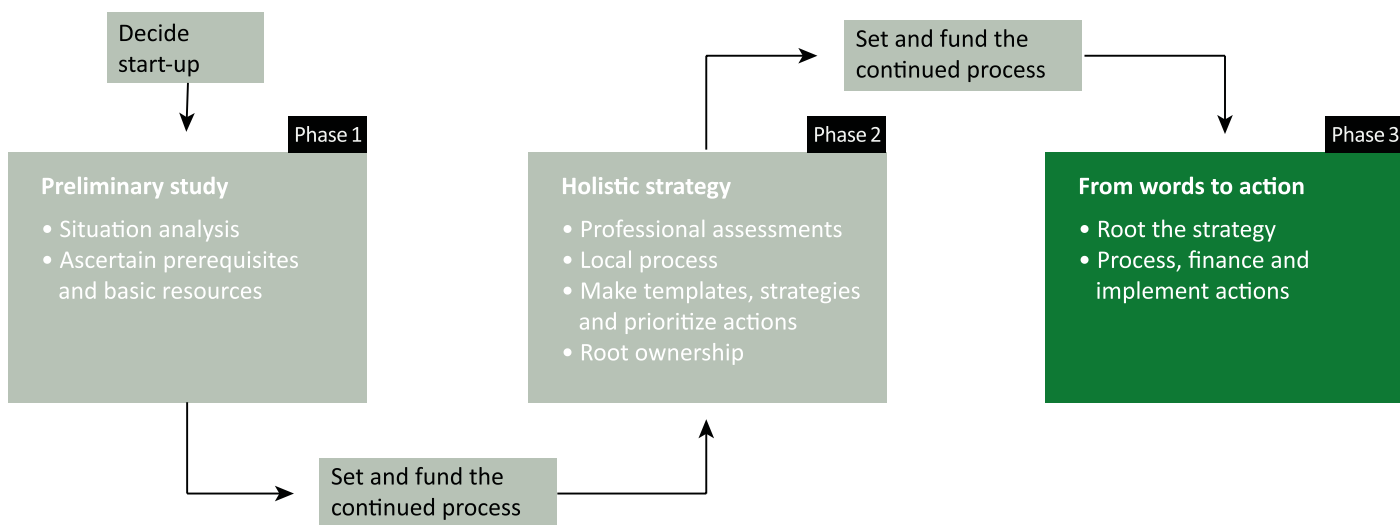


Illustration 32: Destination development in 3 phases and important decision-making milestones in the process (Source: Innovation Norway).

From-words-to action phase for Vesterålen applies until 2025

Vesterålen's ambition is that Phase 3 will start up during the course of autumn 2019 and that the strategy period will extend until 2025. Achievement of the Brand Profile for a Sustainable Destination emblem by the close of year 2021 will, as previously described in Chapters 2 and 6, be an integrated part of the process. The brand profile emblem qualification scheme requires annual reporting and a major rebranding qualification every three years.

Transition from Phase 2 to Phase 3

Continuity is important in the transition between Phase 2 and Phase 3. It is also important that Visit Vesterålen takes the responsibility for appointing a working group comprising members from the Tourism committee. Important tasks are rooting «Sustainable growth towards 2025» and preparing for Phase 3, as well as determining organization and applying for funding. The working group shall be operative until the steering committee for Phase 3 has been established.

When the strategy document has been signed by the steering committee and officially processed by the Executive Committee of Vesterålen Regional Council, the document will be sent to all the municipalities in Vesterålen for a decision in principle.



Decision in principle in the municipalities

The decision should contain statements indicating that the plan is in harmony with the municipality's own goals for tourism development, that the municipality concurs with the major features of the plan and that the strategy is recommended for adoption in the further ongoing work with tourism development in the municipality.

By extension, the strategy document (Master plan) will have the status as a holistic basic document that can be used in the municipality's planning work, e.g. In conjunction with the municipal master plan. In other words, the strategy document is regarded as consolidated and thoroughly prepared input from tourism stakeholders in the region. A decision in principle of this kind must also be understood as an endorsement that the municipality should «consult» the strategy (Master plan) and areas of priority when it processes individual cases that pertain to tourism. Thus, the strategy will become a part of the planning processes and will visualize how development will benefit the local community, local attractiveness and commercial development – as well as how all of this combined will strengthen Vesterålen as a destination.

Example of a municipal decision taken in Bykle/Setesdalen (extract)

Bykle municipality finds that the submitted Master plan for Hovden provides a good basis for development of Hovden as a destination and that it is congruent with the municipality's own goals for tourism development. The Municipal council therefore endorses the major features of the plan and recommends that it be made the basis for future planning and processing of cases pertaining to the development of Hovden and the Central region as a destination....

For the municipalities in Vesterålen, the decision might well be formulated as follows:

.....(Andøy/Bø/Hadsel/Sortland/Øksnes) municipality finds that the Tourism strategy for Vesterålen titled «Sustainable growth towards 2025» is congruent with the municipality's own goals for tourism development. The Municipal council therefore endorses the major features of the plan and adopts it as the basis for future planning and processing of cases pertaining to (Andøy/Bø/Hadsel/Sortland/Øksnes) municipality as a destination.



Andøy



Bø



Hadsel



Sortland



Øksnes



Foundation is a criterion for success

In addition to being processed at the political level, the strategy (Master plan) should be rooted in other suppliers of conditions/stakeholders in Vesterålen as a destination.

- Commercial players including culture providers, museums and transport providers
- Competence environments such as Fiskeriparken Egga Utvikling, Fabrikken, RKK (regional competence office for Vesterålen and Lødingen)
- Vesterålen Outdoor Recreation Council and Møysalen National Park
- The Norwegian Public Roads Administration, Nordland county council and Reno-Vest
- Voluntary organizations such as Vesterålen Hiking Association (DNT) and local/regional events
- Go Andøy/Andøy tourism, Food Project Vesterålen and other local initiatives/organizations
- This foundation-laying is not necessarily linked up with formal decisions.

The foundation phase can be rounded off with a sector-relevant social kick-off, where the plan is roughly presented and the work for the subsequent phase is set in motion. In this conjunction, a short version of the destination's strategy is to be produced and made available to everyone who is interested (both in writing and digitally).

Communication to various interested groups about the importance of having a joint strategy for Vesterålen, along with relevant updates related to the actual work with «From words to action», are success factors in Phase 3. Many destinations also use social media for this (see Innovation Norway's manual).



Application, prioritization and organization phase 3

The organization as described on page 49 in Chapter 5 applies to organization in a normal situation.

Phase 3 «From words to action» is a separate phase that is to be organized and funded independently, and having a steering committee as its supreme body, a local project manager and a strong focus on carrying through. This should be done by Visit Vesterålen's getting a separate resource for the task for a period of 2 – 3 years; for example, its own dedicated staff member in a 50 – 100% position during this period. (The need for resources will depend on the scope and type of projects, funding and the degree to which the project manager himself/herself performs the task of implementing the realization of the actions).

The work requires local knowledge in terms of both the developmental environments, what is necessary to realize various measures and potential financial solutions. Normally, funding of the various actions consists of a number of different financing models, depending on the contributions of the companies, the municipalities, local or regional business development funds, Innovation Norway, the county council, the county governor (Norwegian environment agency), private foundations such as the SpareBank Ffoundation and the Gjensidige Ffoundation, etc.

Action plans drawn up in Phase 3

Horizons will vary greatly between the point at when an initiative and/or action is described in the planning document in Phase 2 and the point when it can be realized or «the spade is put in the earth». By using the system from the Project management process (PMP), the status of all prioritized areas can be «checked out» using the following questions:

- Do we have a sufficient basis for making a decision? Or do we need to gather more information? In other words, do we need to do a further review of the basis for decision-making before we can finally say yes or no to realization?
- Is there a need for a working group for implementation, or can it be done directly by one or more of the involved stakeholders? Are more resources needed to make progress with realizing the objective?
- Based on experience, when involving new persons in major sub-projects, it will be a question of the mandate for the proposed actions. Who will decide this, and how can one follow up to ensure that the mandate is complied with?

All mandates for working groups, when applicable, are adopted by the steering committee for Phase 3 and the project manager follows up the groups at this point. The mandates are also the basis for the groups reporting to PA. It may be useful to tutor the project group's members in project work in accordance with the Project Management Process in order to instil an understanding of how the work should be done. The PA and Steering Committee for Phase 3 have a particular responsibility to intervene in actions that are not developing in accordance with the mandate and the purpose. The main current here is that the phase is called implementation – from words to action, – where the goal is realization and initiation.



About financing in particular

In principle, there are two methods of financing an implementation phase. One can fund all the actions from the very beginning, in a single package. This is recommendable. Or, if one is unable to fund it all, one can see to it that funding is done piecemeal, year by year. This is often more demanding and may result in the work taking more time, becoming more uncertain and actually more expensive as well. Vesterålen, whatever the case may be, must find its own solution to this.

An action plan in the next phase should contain the following components, where each action is linked with an area of priority and the remainder of the strategy:

AREA OF PRIORITY Names and description of the defined, prioritized areas

MASTER GOAL What is to be achieved?

PROJECT GOAL What are the goals in the project phase (milestones)

NEEDS What market needs or stakeholder needs must be covered?

ACTION What is to be done and by whom?

TIME SCHEDULE Start-up for the actions, termination and the continued journey after the project has ended

DEGREE OF INNOVATION To what extent does the action entail innovation needs?

BUDGET Costs of actions distributed by years (e.g. 2020–2021).

FINANCING Who contributes and with what? How do we make provisions for liquidity?

Begin with actions from the Action Plan Sustainable Destination Development

At an early stage of Phase 3, it is important to show results. It may be a smart move to seek out projects that are simple to realize and that will have important symbolic value for the continuing process within the prioritizations that have been made.

For Vesterålen, the achievement of the Brand Profile for Sustainable Destination emblem will both be visible and have symbolic value. An Action plan for sustainable work for 2019–2021 has already been drawn up, and all the municipalities have discussed it at the political level. It will be necessary to start with a specific action from this Action plan in order to acquire the brand profile emblem by the close of 2021, and to have symbolic value and be clearly visible.



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HIKERS PARADISE	FLOURISHING COMMUNITIES	WHALES & WILDLIFE
VETTEN: Vetten in Bø is a frequently visited mountain, which is showing signs of wear and tear. Measures must be taken to correct this.	LOCAL FOODS/MEALS are to be included to enhance and bolster the major strategies. Meals and the encounter with local foods will strengthen Vesterålen as a tourist destination.	BLEIKSØYA - important bird colony.
MÅTIND on Andøya is one of the summits that attracts the most visitors; it faces challenges in the areas of infrastructure and wear and tear. Measures must be taken to correct the situation.	FESTIVALS AND EVENTS generate the desire to visit here and live here permanently. How can Vesterålen make potential visitors aware of all the eminent festivals we have to offer. Most of the festivals, at this writing, primarily target the local population.	ANDA FYR important bird colony.
STEIRAHEIA is the region's most frequently visited summit because of its proximity to Sortland city centre.	SAMI CULTURE (Inga Sami Siida): An important reason-to-go to Vesterålen is the local Sami culture.	ANDØYA - capital city of the whales; the entire island is an Eldorado for bird enthusiasts, fascinating geology and more.
STRANDHEIA a summit is also beginning to show signs of wear and tear after heavy use.	MELBU - strong industrial history/museums, which should be made more visible.	STØ important bird colony, in addition to the whale safari attraction. Can be associated with Hikers Paradise - as one of the starting points for the Dronningsruta (Queen's Route) and Fem Fiskevær (Five Fishing Villages). These should be linked together.
KYSTSTIENE (Coastal Trails) - There is to be a coastal trail in all Vesterålen municipalities, and in Lødingen as well. Must be facilitated.	NATIONAL TOURIST ROUTE w/ Bleik. Important national initiative having great potential for better utilization as a tourist attraction.	NYKVÅG - HOVDEN important bird colony - birding. Must be cautious, because there are multiple bird species in a vulnerable natural area.
ØRNHEIA, STORHEIA - heavily visited hiking destinations in Hadsel.	DISPLAY CENTRES - robust display centres strengthen the year-round strategy for tourism in Vesterålen.	STRAUME - a special area for birding. Both ocean and land.
BREKKA in Melbu is the gateway to an Eldorado of year-round hiking trails.	Artscape Nordland, represented by the statue «The Man from the Sea», is an important initiative on the part of Nordland County Administration.	SKAGENKRYSET (Skagen crossroads) - special bird species; should be considered in terms of vulnerability and protective adaptation. Linked to the Action plan for Sustainable destination development.
HØYDALSFJELLET/SKIPET in Myre has a high volume of visitors - proximity to the town centre.	Nyksund - is currently a strong attraction in Øksnes and Vesterålen. Nyksund is vulnerable, and the need for infrastructural improvements is noticeable, in terms of roadways, parking, etc.	TROLLFJORDEN - vibrant history, important destination, Vesterålen has much that can be done to utilize this already strong signal product. Large eagle colony.
		BLEIKSDYPET (Bleik Depths) - the pantry of the whales

Bearing narratives will help to enhance product images in Vesterålen; for example:

- Queen Sonja of Norway, a monarch who is fond of visiting mountains in Vesterålen and who is the namesake of the now well-known Dronningrute (Queen's route) in Øksnes municipality.
- The Gulf Stream, which caresses the shores of Vesterålen, has given us multiple and diverse flora, fowl and fauna.
- Migration of the skrei (Arctic Cod).
- The Battle of Trollfjord.
- The history of the Hurtigruta (Coastal steamer) and its importance in the context of the Hurtigruta's birthplace, Stokmarknes.
- Nyksund, from a historic fishing village to a crucible of art and culture.
- Klondike in Eidsfjord.

* Decision pertaining to the Master plan in the executive committee Vesterålen regional council, and the municipal councils of Andøy, Bø, Hadsel, Sortland and Øksnes:

Arbeidsutvalget Vesterålen regionråd 24.5.2019,



051/19: MASTER PLAN FOR DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT IN VESTERÅLEN

Recommendation

The executive committee of Vesterålen regional council adopts the Master plan for destination development in Vesterålen, «Sustainable growth towards 2025». Concurrently, the executive committee recommends to the municipal councils that they take under advisement the Manual for destination development from Innovation Norway. The agenda item under CONSIDERATION was presented by Tove Mette Bjørkmo 24 May 2019 in Vesterålen regional council's meeting. For clarity, the word «tourism strategy» was suggested to be included in the text under consideration of the resolution.

Executive Committee -051 19

DECISION: *The executive committee of Vesterålen regional council adopts the Master plan for destination development in Vesterålen, the tourism strategy «Sustainable growth towards 2025». Concurrently, the executive committee recommends to the municipal councils that they take under advisement the Handbook Manual for destination development from Innovation Norway.*

Andøy municipality 26 August 2019, MC - 68/2019 Decision:



Andøy municipality finds that the Tourism strategy for Vesterålen «Sustainable growth towards 2025» conforms with the municipality's own aims for the development of tourism.

The municipal council therefore endorses the general provisions of the plan and adopts it as the basis for further planning and consideration of matters that are relevant to Andøy municipality as a tourist destination.

Andøy municipality takes for granted that during the next phase, denoted as «from words to action», emphasis and priority will be given to destinations that are signature, experience-based attractions for Vesterålen.

Bø municipality 13.6.2019, MC - 35/2019 Decision:



Bø municipality finds that the Tourism strategy for Vesterålen «Sustainable growth towards 2025» conforms with the municipality's own aims for the development of tourism.

The municipal council therefore endorses the general provisions of the plan and adopts it as the basis for further planning and consideration of matters that are relevant to Bø municipality as a tourist destination.

Hadsel municipality 20.6.2019, MC - 37/2019 Decision:



Hadsel municipality finds that the Tourism strategy for Vesterålen «Sustainable growth towards 2025» conforms with the municipality's own aims for the development of tourism.

The municipal council therefore endorses the general provisions of the plan and adopts it as the basis for further planning and consideration of matters that are relevant to Hadsel municipality as a tourist destination.

Sortland municipality 13.6.2019, MC - 23/2019 Decision:



Sortland municipality finds that the Tourism strategy for Vesterålen «Sustainable growth towards 2025» conforms with the municipality's own aims for the development of tourism.

The municipal council therefore endorses the general provisions of the plan and adopts it as the basis for further planning and consideration of matters that are relevant to Andøy municipality as a tourist destination.

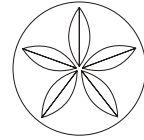
Øksnes municipality 27.8.2019, MC - 79/2019 Decision:



Øksnes municipality finds that the Tourism strategy for Vesterålen «Sustainable growth towards 2025» conforms with the municipality's own aims for the development of tourism.

The municipal council therefore endorses the general provisions of the plan and adopts it as the basis for further planning and consideration of matters that are relevant to Andøy municipality as a tourist destination.



The logo for Vesteraleu features the word "Vesteraleu" in a blue, cursive script. A red swirl icon is positioned above the letter 'e'. Below the text are two green, wavy lines that resemble a stylized horizon or water.

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