

THE NORTH SEA COASTAL EXPERIENCE

Developing coastal tourism in the North Sea region

During 2010-12, the North Sea Commission, an organisation for regional authorities around the North Sea, launched the idea of a macro-regional strategy for the North Sea.

The final version of this document, with four vertical and one horizontal priority, was adopted 31 October 2011. The vertical priority areas are management of maritime space; increased accessibility and clean transport; tackling climate change; and attractive and sustainable communities. The horizontal priority is the promotion of innovation, excellence and sustainability.

The North Sea Commission, through its North Sea Region 2020 vision document is dedicated to the development of a North Sea specific tourism package/brand based on the unique coastal nature and heritage of the regions bordering the North Sea.

Our vision:

*The North Sea region should be a preferred coastal tourism area of Europe
The North Sea region should be on the top on excellence performance in tourism
In the North Sea region, tourism will contribute much more to achieve future economic development and growth*

Our three targets:

Visit Your Neighbours – Intra-North Sea tourism

- A large number of North Sea residents will travel within the region for their holidays and week-end leisure activities
A North Sea Coastal Experience branding would by nature have a broad target group as such, but the various elements of such a brand will target more specific groups, like families, with and without children; young people, older people etc.

Visit a New Corner of Europe – European tourism

- A large number of tourists from other parts of Europe will travel frequently to the North Sea area for recreation and leisure activities
The target audience would be wide here also, but more activity products would be targeted towards more specific groups

Visit the Most Exciting Corner of Europe – International tourism

- A large number of non-European tourists will make the North Sea region their prime destination in Europe, and a larger number includes the North Sea in their travel itinerary
Products here are targeted towards experiential tourism based on the nature and heritage of the region, and target groups may include specific interest

groups travelling together; and individual special interest tourists. A niche market would be more extreme activities.

Products

A wide variety of products are needed to achieve the vision, and most of these already exist. Packaging/branding is one major challenge; the other is to develop the products still missing.

Branding and packaging requires a broad partnership incorporating a number of stakeholders like national and regional authorities, destination companies, travel agencies and travel producers, and the hospitality industry.

Product development requires triple-helix partnership, combining research, commercial products and public authorities. Activities like the linking of related products, and the development of niche products or of products that require a significant contribution from authorities, would be suitable for the North Sea Commission and its Culture & Tourism Group to pursue.

The North Sea Commission and specifically its Culture & Tourism Group has already been actively involved in the development of the North Sea Cycle Route, the North Sea Walking Trail, the North Sea Viking Route and projects linking the maritime heritage of several North Sea regions together.

Through the work of especially Greg Richards, a number of thematic development projects have been suggested:

- Viking Route
- Hanseatic Route
- Stockfish Route
- Industrialisation Route
- Colonial Heritage Route
- Ancestry Routes
- Harbour heritage
- Industrial production
- Floating art exhibitions
- Redesign biennale
- Fashion circle
- The North Sea Cup
- Connectivity
- North Sea App for tourism
- Quality food and drink
- Light and colour
- Wellness/spa
- Stories of the North Sea Shore
- Masterclasses and workshops

Most of these concerns the linking together of already existing products in one way or another and make them more readily available to tourists. Cultural routes or itineraries is one way of linking various sites and tourism together, festivals and other events can be linked together through a similar kind of umbrella thinking, but there

could also be specific North Sea events, that for instance move from one region to another through a pre-defined cycle similar to the European Capitals of Culture.

The way forward

Linking in with the other stakeholders

The important stakeholder groups must be involved in the development of the North Sea coastal tourism.

The first step towards such a dialogue and interaction is planned to be a workshop in Middelburg in March 2012.

Culture & Tourism Group itself

The C&T Group should continue to act as a clearing house for good project development ideas, and should also support and follow-up project ideas, even after they have achieved funding. Project should try and include the C&T group as an advisory body into their project funding.

Pilot project on linking of sites or events

The building up of a North Sea Coastal Experience brand is a process with many steps. There is a need to discuss with stakeholders, to test pilots, and to pursue a wide range of ideas.

There already exists a Viking route linking Viking sites around the North Sea (and beyond).

There are a number of similar linked routes on the table, but the C&T group should select a few as pilot projects to gain experience. A few projects are also better suited to the resources available.

It has been decided to start with two pilot project ideas:

Promoting the North Sea through the Visit Your Neighbours concept, a separate paper will be presented by Østfold County Council.

A North Sea Seafood Route, a separate paper will be presented by the Central Denmark Region, partly based on a project idea developed by the North Jutland Region.