



What Is Luring Travelers to the Coldest Places on Earth?

By Samantha Shankman 1.25.2018



Photo by Zsoolt / Flickr

An influx of wintertime tourists means steady work for Lapland's reindeer population.

While many travelers daydream about sun and sand during the cold months, more and more are seeking a deep-freeze vacation.

Although the temperatures in Lapland, the northernmost province—or “Arctic part”—of Finland and Sweden, can dip to a chilling 112 degrees Fahrenheit below zero in winter, visitors from as far away as China and California are flying to this part of Scandinavia in ever-increasing numbers.

Finnair increased capacity to Lapland this winter season, which runs November to April, due to strong demand—demand that shows no signs of slowing. And the Finnish carrier is planning to further increase flights 15 percent, from the current 430,000 seats to 482,000 seats, next year. The increased connections are the result of triple-digit growth from tourists hailing from Asia and the United States as well as Russia and Western Europe.

The spectacle of the northern lights is undoubtedly the most popular attraction, but the promise of snow adventures and the opportunity to immerse oneself in untouched nature are also part of the allure. Some visitors are charmed by the chance to see snow for the first time or sleep in a

hotel made entirely of ice ❄️.

“Another thing we’re seeing—and it’s a trend throughout the whole industry—is that people want to learn. Being out with the dogs, making a campfire, heating a sauna, sleeping in an ice room are all valuable assets,” explains Håkan Stenlund, spokesman for the **Swedish Lapland Visitors Board**.



Courtesy of Pixabay

The northern lights from Tromsø, Norway.

Many industry watchers connect the start of this huge interest in the region to the 2013 release—and continued global success—of Disney’s animated film *Frozen*. Since then, the number of people hiking to Norway’s Trolltunga promontory increased from 1,000 per year to more than 100,000 per year, and visitors to the dramatic Preikestolen cliff increased from 60,000 in 2009 to 300,000 in 2017.

“*Frozen* definitely had an impact, but also the introduction of new direct flights from several gateways in the U.S. by Norwegian and new flights by SAS via Copenhagen and Stockholm,” explains Harald Hansen, spokesman for **Innovation Norway**, the economic development arm of the Norwegian government. “Also, Americans are finding Scandinavia more interesting than ever.”

The biggest increases in visitors to northern Norway are from China and the United States. Tourism from the United States to this part of the world is up 34 percent from 2016, and up 65 percent from 2013 to 2017.

The Vienna-based tour booking site **TourRadar** has seen a 276 percent increase in traveler interest in Scandinavia tours. The region has received the greatest growth in terms of tours booked for any destination outside the United States. The number of U.S. citizens traveling to Scandinavia grew three times faster—a shocking 680 percent—than U.S. citizens traveling to other destinations.

What’s the impact of such rapid growth—even in these underpopulated areas? How long before visitors are greeted by anti-tourist signs such as those found in Barcelona and Berlin?

“For rural areas, tourism gives a great chance to develop,” explains Stenlund. “Without tourists [visiting] the tiny village of Ammarnäs, population 50, they wouldn’t have the hotel, the cafe, the three restaurants, the butcher, and the local grocery store. Of course, there can be a grumpy old guy complaining about new fishing rules or that he isn’t alone on the lake as he used to be as a kid, but mostly the locals do understand the value of tourism bringing in money and work opportunities.”