

SUNDA MUNICIPALITY: SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES IN TOURISM



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Centrally located Sunda Municipality is one of the most frequented places by people visiting the Faroe Islands—with local authorities playing a key supportive role in efforts to develop tourism facilities throughout the area.

AS MORE and more tourists discover the Faroe Islands—indeed, its abundance of scenic locations, cultural heritage and hospitable inhabitants—local authorities are realizing the growing potential for socioeconomic development presented by an ever-increasing flow of foreign visitors.

Among the various local communities throughout the islands, Sunda Municipality is perhaps the best example of this trend. Covering the midmost area on the two largest and most populated islands of Eysturoy and Streymoy, Sunda Municipality has been an obvious place to go to for most tourists coming to the Faroe Islands. Tens of thousands of people visit the villages and sites in Sunda

Municipality on an annual basis, and the number is expected to grow.

According to mayor Heðin Zachariassen, placing more emphasis on tourism was not a difficult decision for the municipal Council a few years back. “Our central location has made a few villages and places in the municipality virtually unavoidable for anyone who visits the Faroe Islands,” Mr. Zachariassen said.

“About four years ago we decided to improve our tourism facilities,” the mayor added. “In fact what we had in mind was not only our visitors but also the local population.”

That decision by the Council led to investments in walking paths, parking spaces, signposting and public toi-

lets, to name some. What makes Sunda Municipality attractive, however, is not merely its location. The area has its own unique features and characteristics, ranging from the picturesque, old villages of Saksun, Tjørnuvík and Gjógv, to cultural sites such as the oldest wooden church in the Faroe Islands, not to mention the marvelous octagonal church in the idyllic town of Haldarsvík.

Spanning a mountainous area that encompasses 11 towns and villages, some of which are separated by quite a distance relatively speaking—nothing is really far away in the Faroes—there are excellent hiking paths between the communities, most of which are constantly being upgraded.

Mayor Heðin Zachariassen, pictured in the village of Gjógv (main); Partial view of Norðskála and Oyrarbakki in the Sound Area with bridge between the islands of Eysturoy and Streymoy (bottom left); Gjógv, Eysturoy (bottom centered); Saksun, Streymoy (bottom right).

BOOSTING CAPACITY

Another point of interest is the development of a new park and recreational area, about 90,000 square meters in size, where some 70,000 trees will be planted. The project has received a grant from Denmark’s Aage V. Jensen Foundation and is likely to become a valuable asset for Sunda Municipality in the future.

“We really didn’t need to advertise for customers,” Noomi Káradóttir Rasmussen, an officer of the municipal Council, noted. “The tourists were already here and the number of visitors to Sunda Municipality is second only to the capital Tórshavn. So our primary focus has been to improve available facilities and add some new ones, in close collaboration with the local communities, while also trying to make sure the locals are not being overrun by the growing influx of visitors.”

Ms. Rasmussen pointed out that some of the settlements consist of only a handful of villagers, making the arrival of up to a thousand tourists on a busy day rather overwhelming at times.

“Working with tourism is always a two-lane approach,” she said, “for the visitors and on behalf of the local community. So we need to manage this business to a certain extent. By improving parking facilities, walking paths and signposts, for example, we can help enhance the experience that visi-

tors have while at the same time making life easier for local residents.”

With mountain hiking between villages rapidly gaining popularity, the natural environment of the islands becomes more exposed to wear and pollution from a variety of sources. Sunda Municipality has responded to this challenge through improving information along the paths.

“We want everyone to enjoy these incredible surroundings,” Ms. Rasmussen said. “However, we also want to protect the environment and make sure that the property of private landowners is not infringed upon in any way. The measures we have taken in this respect have turned out to be effective and so far we definitely consider the overall effort a success.”

Work at making every part of Sunda Municipality attractive for visitors continues as new initiatives are regularly being discussed and existing facilities maintained, Mr. Zachariassen noted. The main focus, however, is gradually shifting, he said.

“Up until now, the Council has largely been at the forefront when it comes to development in the tourism sector. What we now hope and expect to see is more private offerings, be it hiking tours, fishing trips, diving, or leisure and hospitality business, such as new restaurants and cafes or even additional accommodation capacity.”



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Many of the most beautiful natural pearls in the Faroe Islands are situated in Sunda Municipality, located on the islands of Eysturoy and Streymoy. Some of the most popular tourist destinations include the villages Saksun, Tjørnuvík and Gjógv; besides these, Sunda Municipality encompasses the following communities: Norðskála, Oyri, Oyrarbakki, Langasandur, Haldarsvík, Streymnes, Hvalvík, Hósvík.

Tours and excursions, including e.g. themed tours and business excursions, where participants get to challenge themselves with mountain hikes, rapelling, kayaking and more, can be booked through are available through North Atlantic Xperience, www.nax.fo

Camping available through Gjáargarður Guesthouse at +298 423171 or www.gjaargardur.fo.

In Saksun the Dúvugarðar farm and the church are very special historical sites administrated by the Faroese National Heritage, more info: www.savn.fo, Facebook/duvugardar, Facebook/savn.



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