

TÓRSHAVN: COSY COMPETITIVE CAPITAL

With an unprecedented pace of development taking place in services, not least the hospitality business, the Faroe Islands capital Tórshavn is on track to become a highly popular destination for international conferences and events.

City of Tórshavn

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Tórshavn is the main economic, political and cultural center of the Faroe Islands.

Tórshavn has been the capital of the Faroe Islands since 850 A.D. and is the country's largest population center. Tórshavn became an independent municipality in 1866.

The area covered by the Municipality today is 173 square kilometers, which makes it the largest municipality in the Faroe Islands. Its population of approximately 20,500 amounts to more than 40 percent of the total population of the country.

The Municipality of Tórshavn encompasses the communities of Tórshavn, Argir, Hoyvík, Hvítanes, Kaldbak, Kaldbaksbotnur, Kirkjubøur, Velbastaður, Kollafjørður, Oyrareingir, Signabøur, Sund, Norðradalur, Syðradalur and the neighboring islands of Nólsoy, Hestur and Koltur.

Mayor Annika Olsen;
The Nordic House in the Faroe Islands, a leading conference venue in Tórshavn (opposite, top).
Partial view of Tórshavn's Cathedral with the West Harbour marina in the foreground (opposite, bottom).

AN UNMISTAKABLE trend has been widely noted of late: people who travel, for business or pleasure, want to experience something fresh and different, something that is peaceful and secure at the same time—and among these people, more and more are discovering how and why the Faroe Islands is fast becoming a very real contender in this highly competitive space.

“This town has so much to offer,” said Annika Olsen, Mayor of Tórshavn since 2017. “As the capital of the Faroe Islands, Tórshavn plays a leading part in a wide range of areas, first of all at the domestic level but

even so abroad; and this is something I find both inspiring and motivating.”

Much of the Faroese capital has undergone what could be described as a process of transformation—a process set to produce even more tangible outcomes within the next couple of years. This includes a series of new buildings, many of which have been designed in a modern and original style. Some of these are schools scheduled for completion within a year or two; coming on the heels, a batch of new hotels and extensions of existing ones; likewise underway, a non-traditional style of residential housing with apartment

blocks and non-detached houses, many of which have been completed in the last decade or so. Also, across the islands, quite a few commercial buildings and industrial structures have been added while, especially in the capital, cultural and sports venues have been, or are being, renewed, renovated or extended.

“We’re currently increasing our hotel capacity significantly,” Ms. Olsen noted, with a reference to the ongoing expansion of several Tórshavn hotels and the upcoming construction of new ones, two of which will be able to accommodate some 400 guests.

Abroad, awareness of the existence of the Faroe Islands appears to be growing, supported not merely through pro-

motional campaigns from the tourism industry but spreading organically in tandem with increased focus on the idea of experiencing unspoiled natural environments in off-locations, coupled with the need to address security concerns in many places around the world.

According to the Mayor, this is a context that makes Tórshavn perfectly positioned as a viable alternative to other capitals in Northern Europe.

“Part of our vision has to do with the ambition to become a preferred conference destination,” she said. “We’re convinced that Tórshavn already has a competitive edge that can be developed further, which is precisely what we’re looking at. The fact that we’re very small and very compact and at the same time surprisingly cosmopolitan should not be underestimated; people realize that this combination represents quite a few advantages. Tórshavn is something unique in many ways, and people I meet from all over the world, both here in the Faroes and abroad, tell me they’re absolutely fascinated as soon as they learn of it. So on these terms we can compete with the likes of Copenhagen and Berlin because we have something very different to offer.”

‘A RICH SUPPLY’

As part of the effort to facilitate and promote MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) tourism, Ms. Olsen regularly attends such events to offer a welcome speech. “We see more and more conferences, courses and similar events,” she said. “For example, we recently had an international medical conference that gathered 400 professionals from all over the world.”

Apart from increasing hotel capacity, public infrastructure is being upgraded in a rather spectacular manner across the Faroe Islands, with two giant underwater tunnels in progress. One of them, linking Tórshavn to two communities on the neighboring island of Eysturoy, is scheduled for completion by 2020. A



second one, to be constructed once the former has been completed, will connect the island of Streymoy, which includes Tórshavn, with the island of Sandoy.

In education, meanwhile, the University of the Faroe Islands (Fróðskaparsetur Føroya) has become part of a growing network of universities.

“We encourage international collaboration in academia as well as student exchange programs and it’s a priority to help strengthen the international position of the University of the Faroe Islands,” Ms. Olsen said. “We’re proud that people studying in Tórshavn can enjoy an incredible environment, surrounded by nature and the sea, with easy access to online resources through world-leading internet connectivity, a rich supply of leisure and cultural events, a good number of cafes, sports activities, and more.”

On another note, the Tórsvøllur stadium is being expanded for upgrade from a ‘Category Three’ to ‘Category Four’ venue, further boosting the Faroese presence in international football.



MARIA OLSEN