

LEADING IN OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES

TEXT: ANNABEL DAISLEY | PHOTO: NICLAS VESTEFJELL

With miles and miles of untouched nature and scenic landscapes, Sweden is a world-leading destination when it comes to delivering outdoor experiences, and Jämtland Härjedalen is a particularly popular region among a lot of nature-loving tourists. The Link spoke to Anne Adsten, Tourism Developer and Jonas Herjeby, Project Leader at Jämtland Härjedalen Tourism about what makes the region so attractive for explorers.

“People who travel to Jämtland Härjedalen are typically looking for activities close to nature. During summer, this might be biking, fishing, or hiking in the mountains, by one of our many lakes.” Furthermore, Anne mentions that during the winter season the main focus is alpine and cross-country skiing.

According to Jonas and Anne, most tourists coming to Jämtland Härjedalen are looking for outdoor experiences, although the activities of choice may vary depending on the weather, and the season. “We have what we call the ‘Summer Fun’ offering, and the ‘Winter Fun’ offering. During summer, people are mainly looking to hike along our different routes, and around lake Storsjön – the fifth largest in Sweden.”

In the colder months, Anne explains, tourists prefer activities such as skiing, dogsledding, ice fishing, skating and snowshoeing. “Not all visitors want to be on the slopes for six days straight, instead they like to get the full experience of enjoying the snow as well as getting cosy in a Swedish “stuga” with a cup of cocoa close to the fireplace.”

Gastronomic Centres

Apart from its outdoor activities, Jämtland Härjedalen highlights the region’s cultural offering, focusing especially on gastronomic content. “There are more than 150 artisan food producers in the area, including cheese, jams, charcuterie, and we even have a few microbreweries, gin producers and one making wine from birch sap,” Anne says.

Thanks to the high number of local food producers, the city of Östersund has become a national centre for artisan food production. “Since 2010, Östersund has been approved as a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, which has really put us on the

map.” Anne adds that they want to continue shedding light on the region’s many activities, especially those which are less known to the wider public.

Putting the region on the map

Established in 1995, Jämtland Härjedalen Tourism is a regional cooperative association. The aim of the group, consisting of 25 destinations and municipalities, is to be a platform for developing tourism in the region and highlight the importance of tourism. When elaborating on why, Anne explains that it is essential to showcase what a life in the region looks like to make people consider a move to one of the areas.

“The region is large – the same size as the Netherlands – but very scarcely populated. This makes it a great place for the traveller looking for an experience close to nature without crowds,” Anne says. This very same reason made Jämtland Härjedalen a pandemic-friendly destination, for those who wanted to travel during the restrictions. “When COVID-19 hit Sweden, we were very lucky – as all our activities are based outdoors, they were regarded by the government as safe, which led up to us not really being affected by the pandemic, as guests could still enjoy the fresh air and activities away from crowds.”

According to Jonas, their tourists are mainly coming from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany and the UK, brought together by their interest in outdoor activities and nature. “Looking at pre-pandemic figures, we see that most visitors are coming from other parts of Sweden, and 20% of the hotels’ commercial guest nights were from people coming from abroad.” Jonas adds: “Now, we are excited to see how our region will continue to attract new groups of visitors, having first discovered us during the pandemic.”

Delivering high quality experiences

When taking a leap into what the future holds for Jämtland Härjedalen, Jonas mentions that they want to spread awareness of tourism’s positive aspects. “From what we have seen historically, tourism has a great impact on our communities, such as creating job opportunities, attracting visitors to the region, keeping rural parts of the region thriving as well as creating a sense of pride and connection between the residents.”

Lastly, he mentions the physical benefits of their outdoor experiences. “We can further see that by spending more time outdoors, it is increasing people’s wellbeing and self-esteem, as they breathe fresh air and see the beauty of nature.” With this in mind, Jonas highlights that the ambition is to always deliver high quality experiences for guests from all aspects.

