



Building up the Silver Circle Route

Apprenticeship at Markaðstofa Vesturlands

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Útdráttur

Þessi ritgerð er lokaverkefni starfsþjálfunar sem unnin var fyrir B.A. lokaverkefnið mitt, hægt var að velja á milli á milli þess að skrifa ritgerð eða að fara í starfsþjálfun á vinnustað að vali nemanda. Ég valdi starfsnám og valdi að starfa með Markaðsstofu Vesturlands. Megináhersla í starfsnáminu var að þróa leið áfangastaða í Borgarfirði og var vel þekkt leið valin sem nefnist Silfurhringur. Silfurhringur Borgarfjarðar hefur verið vel þekkt meðal ferðaskipuleggjanda og ferðamanna enn hún hefur ekki verið þróuð og markaðssett sem slík. Markaðsstofa Vesturlands hefur haft vitneskju um ferðaáætlun áfangastaða innan Borgarfjarðar og hefur það markmið að laða að fleiri ferðamenn á svæðið og hvetja til lengri dvalar með því að draga fram eiginleika samfélagsins, sögu og náttúru undra og þar með stuðla að uppbyggingu innviða, atvinnusköpun, samvinnu milli fyrirtækja í héraðinu og íbúa.

Leitarorð: Ferðamannaleið; Áfangastaðir; Markaðssetning; Aðlöðunarmáttur; Skipulagning

Abstract

This paper is a final report of vocational training done for the B.A. final project. The focus area for the vocational training chosen was destination product development, and the product developed was route in Borgarfjörður called Silver Circle Borgarfjörður. The Silver Circle Borgarfjörður route, is an existing route known by tourists and travel agencies, and the stop points are all located in Borgarfjörður, but it is not an official itinerary. This was an opportunity that West Iceland Destination Agency found to improve the itinerary and launch it as a West Iceland product. Taking this strategic decision also created the opportunity to brand the Borgarfjörður region as a tourism destination. Becoming known as a tourism destination, the region will not only attract more visitors but also contribute to the region's economy (by encouraging them to stay longer), connect the different towns of the fjord, and strengthen bonds between stakeholders.

Keywords: tourism route; destination; branding; attractiveness; planning

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Auð síða

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1 Introduction

This paper is the final report of my B.A. final project. For the final project, students were given a choice to writing a research paper or could opt to do vocational training, which was the chosen one. The study focus of the vocational training was destination product development and the product developed, was a Borgarfjörður route in West Iceland. Identifying and understanding a destination's main resources is important whether planning, marketing, and developing a destination or enhancing a destination 's attractiveness (Vengesayi et al, 2009). During 200 hours of vocational training was performed at the Markaðstofa Vesturlands that belongs to the Áfangastaða- og Markaðssvið (Á&M) of Samtök Sveitarfélaga á Vesturlandi(SSV), and a travel route was developed: The Silver Circle Borgarfjörður Route. The route developed is not a new product, and many websites and travel blogs have already written articles about it. However, as an innovation-decision, Á&M decided to use the opportunity to reinforce Borgarfjörður as a tourism destination, empower its identity and launch the route as a product. The purpose of this project was not only to promote Borgarfjörður, but also to create complete and useful information about the area and its attributes. This paper aims to share my vocational training experience by sharing details of my role in the project, how I executed my tasks, and showing the results of what was achieved. A brief literature review related to tourism destinations, the creation of tourism routes is made, followed by a connection of the literature with the discussion.

2 State of knowledge

2.1 Tourism destination

While Hu & Ritchie (1993), define tourism destination, as a combination of destination attributes: tourism facilities and services, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), defines tourism destination as:

„A tourism destination is a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight. It's the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain, and a basic unit of analysis of tourism. A destination incorporates various stakeholders and can network to form larger destinations. It's also intangible with its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness. “

2.2 Creating a Tourism route

2.2.1 Tourism route concept

A tourism route consists of a developed itinerary defined within a geographical area that compiles information about all the tourism attractions available along the itinerary and respective towns, villages, and cities. A tourism route is created having into consideration all stakeholders' interests and aims to offer tourists a wide range of attractions or experiences based on their interests (UNWTO, 2014).

2.2.2 Benefits and factors to consider when creating a tourism route.

Tourism route creation can bring many benefits to a destination. Tourism routes connect tourists with places, people, attractions, and tourism services (Idajati & Nugroho, 2019) expanding a destination's offer and enabling travelers' mobility (Velazquez et al, 2021). Increasing tourism destinations' attributes generates attractiveness among tourists and can be a great tool to disperse visitors around the region. Tourism routes also contribute to an increase in the length of tourists' stays. Based on a study Ilic et al (2021), when creating a route, it is important to offer visitors unique information about the place that they are visiting, for example, curiosities about the area, and folk tales because it will wake up their curiosity

and this became one motivation factor to visit the area. UNWTO enumerates numerous benefits (for all stakeholders) of the tourism route. Some benefits listed are attracting new market segments, reducing pressure on destination attractions, and seasonality issues. Destinations in decline often use the creation of new tourism routes to innovate, tourism routes promote cooperation and partnerships between private and public entities, creating powerful synergies. (UNWTO, 2014). However, there are factors to consider when creating a tourism route. The importance of offering options and creating a dynamic route to avoid visitors' monotony, as well as the performance of tourism services and attractions for example, bad signalization, poor maintenance, the high number of visitors at a time, trash, or lack of cleaning are some examples that can ruin a visitor's experience (Ilic et al, 2021).

Creation of a tourism route by steps

The creation of a tourism route can be divided into 4 steps, (1) assessment and appraisal of all resources available and the potential resources in the destination where the route will be developed (Vengesayi et al, 2009); (2) market segmentation: it's more likely to build a successful product when knowing who is the consumer, their needs, wants, motivations and preferences (Tsotsou & Goldsmith, 2012); (3) organization of all information gathered and itinerary delineation (4) evaluation of the feasibility of the route. (Velazquez et al, 2021)

2.3 Destination Attractiveness

Destination attractiveness can be defined as a destination's ability to offer benefits to individuals and fulfill their needs or wants when they visit it. This ability is enhanced by a destination's attractions- also mentioned as attributes (Krešić & Prebezac, 2011).

For Vengesayi et al, the more attributes a destination has, the higher will be the attractiveness among the visitors. The more a destination can meet tourists' needs, more likely will gain a competitive advantage over other destinations. By developing facilities and services, destination makers are enhancing their attractiveness (2009).

2.4 Destination Competitiveness

Advantage competitiveness in a destination is determined by high-quality performed services and customer satisfaction high levels. While talking about destination attractiveness, the focus is on the attributes (identify, categorize, promote) the competitiveness the focus is the performance of those attributes and their relationship with visitors' satisfaction levels (Caber et al, 2012).

2.5 Destination attributes

Destination attributes can be defined as resources that by their characteristics attract tourists to a destination. These can be natural (for example waterfalls or volcanoes) or built (monuments, restaurants, hotels, tours), tangible or intangible (Hong- Bumm, 1998).

The same category of attributes can be found in different destinations, but there are also unique attributes that only can be found in a few destinations, making it an attractive factor for visitors to want to visit certain destinations. Unique attribute 's identification of unique attributes depends mainly on customers' perceptions and satisfaction level and is important for destination managers because, apart from representing an attractive factor, also represent a competitive advantage and new and more effective marketing campaigns could be built from it (Toral et al, 2017).

2.5.1 Identifying destination attributes

Tangible attributes are easier to identify due to their characteristics, while intangible attributes are more difficult because are connected to feelings and emotions that tourists experience during their visits (Krešić & Prebezac, 2011).

According to Toral et al, (2017), online reviews have gained great importance for tourism destinations and are an exceptional source of information about customers' experience in the destination and to identify a destination 's main attributes.

Back in 2018, the number of consumers that access online review websites before a purchase decision reached almost 100% (Power Review, 2018). Online review websites like Trip Advisor or booking.com are great sources of information for potential visitors when deciding on purchasing a certain product or service, but also important for destination managers

because through visitors' experience reviews, we can evaluate the performance of destination attributes and anticipate potential attributes (Toral et al,2017).

2.5.2 Categorizing and evaluating the attributes of destination

For Vengesayi et al (2009), it's important to categorize destination attributes making it easier for consumers to filter information based on their preferences, simplifying their decision-making process (Hong et al, 2006). It's also a benefit for destination planners because when there are scarce or limited resources available, not all destination attributes have the same priority, and destination categorization permits to analyze and prioritize attributes with the main needs. It's common to prioritize attributes perceived to provide the greatest enhancement to its attractiveness (Vengesayi et al, 2009).

A study developed by Vengesayi et al, based on an extensive literature review categorizes destination attributes into (3) wide categories: (1) destination attractions (that includes natural and created resources, culture, heritage, cuisine, and others that attract travelers); (2) destination support services (infrastructures, accommodation, communication); (3) people related factors (social interaction between locals and tourists). And then inside each category, sub-categories would be created. (2009)

2.6 Tourism destination 's perceived value

Perceived value is complex and generates discussion between researchers about the ideal concept (Fernández & Bonillo, 2007). Kopp defines perceived value as “the customers' evaluation of the attractiveness of a certain attribute and its ability to meet their needs and expectations (2020).

It's possible to influence consumers' perceived value of a product by describing its uniqueness or appealing to consumers' intrinsic feelings and waking up their latent needs (Steele, 2020), or even explaining why a certain product/ service is better than the competition. For destination managers, it is important to be aware of all strategies and apply the one that will get the most outcome. Customers' perceived value of an attraction can be measured through appropriate techniques and, based on its results it is possible to not only

evaluate attributes' performance but also innovate with new attributes or through the development of existing ones (Caber et al, 2012).

2.7 Branding a tourism destination

When talking about destination marketing, people tend to immediately associate it with a logo and/ or a slogan, however, destination marketing involves more than that. Branding a destination requires building a unique identity according to the destination's elements like values, vision, and what the destination has to offer, and of course, all of this must have the support of all tourism stakeholders (Digital Tourism Think Tank, 2018). This process can be long and complex. Branding a tourism destination positions a destination within the tourism market and works as a sustainable competitive advantage strategy because it ensures the destination's uniqueness (Bowen & Sotomayor, 2022).

2.8 Destination Planning

A destination plan is a detailed proposal, built for a certain period and considers, not only the planning but also the development and management of all factors that can affect all tourism stakeholders: Visitors, locals, businesses, and the environment, (Ferðamálastofa, 2023). The destination plan provides a deep comprehension of the destination and its uniqueness, lists each stakeholder's role and responsibilities, and highlights which resources will be intervened. The plan follows the government's strategy to promote coordinated and targeted destination work in each part of the country (SSV, 2023).

2.9 Destination Planning in Iceland

In Iceland, each destination agency draws their plan under the supervision and guidance of the Tourist Board Agency. Each destination plan includes one or more action plans. (Ferðamálastofa, 2023)

Table 2-1 Iceland Destination Agencies (Retrieved from Ferðamálastofa)

Capital Area	East Iceland	North Iceland	Reykjanes	South Iceland	West Iceland	Westfjords
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3 Project development and research methods

3.1 Agenda

The vocational training consisted of 200 hours at the Destination and Marketing division of SSV (Á&M), 5 hours a day from Monday to Friday. It started on February 20th and finished on April 20th.

3.2 The workplace

Samtök Sveitarfélaga á Vesturlandi (SSV) owns and operates the Áfangastaða- og Markaðssvið (Á&M). Á&M administer projects related to the development, innovation, and quality of the tourism in West of Iceland (SSV,2023). A close work is also developed with other destination and marketing entities around the country towards strengthening the tourism in Iceland.

The West Iceland Destination Agency (ÁSV) divides its activity into three main components:

- Destination projects
- Promotion of tourism and experience in West Iceland.
- Image, marketing, and promotion of the West Iceland destination.

The main office is in Borgarnes, but there are offices around the West Iceland territory: Akranes, Snæfellsnes, and Dalabyggð. Now there are four employees working at Á&M division permanently, which are the division director, Margrét Björk Björnsdóttir and the project managers: Björk Júlíana Jóelsdóttir, Kristján Guðmundsson and Hafþór Ingi Gunnarsson.

My role during this project was to identify existing and discover potential attributes to add to the route and write descriptions and informative texts about each town, stop point, and attributes, that will be used to promote the route. Suggest potential attributes and ideas to enhance the attractiveness of the area were also appreciated and given.

The workplace where the vocational training had place was great, where each professional had a desk, with adjustable tables and temperatures. The team members are always ready to help and open to hearing our ideas and helping us to think.

Everybody knows their role and therefore there are no conflicts on who is supposed to do what. Weekly meetings had place with the Destination Manager Margrét Björk Björnsdóttir where we would talk about what each one has been working on, ideas were discussed, suggestions presented, and goals and guidelines were set.

3.2.1 Project: Silver Circle Borgarfjörður Route

This project is one of the proposals present on the Áfangastaðaáætlun 2021- 2023, along with other projects within the West Iceland Territory. The project consists of building up a route around Borgarfjörður, the Silver Circle Borgarfjörður Route. highlighting all the point stops (that include attractions, tourism services like accommodation, restaurants, tours, and activities) With this project is also expected to connect towns within Borgarfjörður region and enhance businesses in the area.

3.2.2 How the project was conducted:

A meeting to present the project and my role in it was held by my workplace supervisor, Kristján Guðmundsson. A document was shared with me the guidelines about what was pretended, and it served as a starting point for the project (the document can be consulted in the attachments). From there, a set of tasks was defined by order of priority.

Table 3-1 Framework of tasks ordered by priority.

1	Delineation and description of the region to be approached
2	Assessment of all towns and villages and rural areas in Borgarfjörður
3	Identification of natural and built natural resources
4	Identification of infrastructures and accesses to each point
5	Grouping all the information gathered by categories
6	Create a route
7	Writing informative and descriptions about each destination attribute
8	Identification of what is unique in each place and highlighting it in order to attract visitors to have interest in each place

During the vocational training there have been individual meetings with stakeholders and the project manager and also focus meetings where the project manager presented some points of discussion and let all the stakeholders participate, add ideas, opinions, and objections.

3.2.3 Three-step method

I had the freedom to choose the research method according to what I thought was best. The research was divided into 3 steps being (1) gather and examining existing data available online related to the subject; (2) literature review based on trustworthy and quality sources (3) cross-referencing data.

Table 3-2 Three Step Research Method Adopted

Step 1.	The online data was collected from online review websites, travel blogs and travel agencies pages and related to Borgarfjörður and Silver Circle. Region and its attraction´ description, as well as the Silver Circle description, which attractions were included in the area and who was selling it or advertising it;
Step 2.	To do book consulting was not only to get trustworthy and quality information, but also to look for unique information and history to add to the project. Something unique and not available online.
Step 3.	This step started with steps (1) and (2) because while accessing books it was already possible to research sources, trust elements, understand in which context information was written, if it was modified or true to the truth.

4 Results

A document was created with interesting and useful content for the destination managers.

Below is a framework with the information available in the documented handed in.

Table 4-1 Silver Circle Route Content Framework

Core Chapters	
Chapter 1. About Borgarfjörður	
Chapter 2. Silver Circle Route	
Chapter 3. Route Itinerary	
Chapter 4. Target definition	
Chapter 5. Borgarfjörður Attributes categorized List	
Chapter 5.1 Natural Attributes	Chapter 5.1.1 Animal Life
	Chapter 5.1.2 Hot springs
	Chapter 5.1.3 Glaciers
	Chapter 5.1.4 Lava Fields and Caves
	Chapter 5.1.5 Waterfalls
Chapter 5.2 Built Attributes	Chapter 5.2.1 Sagas
	Chapter 5.2.2 Archaeology
	Chapter 5.2.3 Movie's sceneries
	5.2.4 Chapter Activities
	5.2.5 Chapter Tourism services

Project suggestions

- Based on a potential logo that will be used in the Borgarfjörður branding project, a suggestion of an improved logo was made to the project manager (it can be consulted in the attachments).
- Creation of a gps audio guide (more information is available on attachments)

- Another suggestion made was the creation of an element that could serve as not only as a symbol of the Silver Circle route, but also serve as a built attribute to attract visitors to the region (more information is available on attachments)

Along with the Borgarfjörður Silver Circle document, a PowerPoint presentation was also created (with the information more compact) with the tourism stakeholders as a focus. This document is great to introduce the Silver Circle Borgarfjörður product.

Discussion

Based on While Hu & Ritchie's (1993) attributes and tourism destination definition, we can conclude that Borgarfjörður is a tourism destination, as the region possesses a combination of attributes (natural and built). The region offers a great variety of attributes to be visited and experienced, justifying the need for an overnight stay. However, its image and identity, which according to UNWTO influence market competition, are not being well-used and more can be done to reposition the destination in terms of competitive advantage.

Borgarfjörður has great and unique attributes, but the fact of these are dispersed in the area and a route hasn't been offered to them might be one factor for them to skip visiting the area when preparing their itineraries and/ or just think that is enough to visit it in one day. The more attributes a destination has, the higher the attractiveness level to visit it, and therefore it's important to not only highlight these attributes and group them for visitors to perceive that might need to spend more time in the region, but also in case that they have short time to visit the area, choose this area because they will find what they need here, instead of evaluating if it is worth to drive and sacrifice short time available to visit the area.

When researching online, The Silver Circle route appears located in the West of Iceland and not in Borgarfjörður even though all the attributes are located there. That is why it's important to brand Borgarfjörður region as one of West Iceland's products and relocate the Silver Circle Route.

While in different destinations the same category of attributes can be found, some unique attributes can only be found in one place, and this represents a key determinant when

attracting visitors. Not only being able to identify existing attributes, but also visualize unique attributes or potential unique attributes, is something that destination managers and stakeholders should be aware of.

During the creation of the Silver Circle route, reviews websites like trip advisor were accessed because, supporting Toral et al (2017), online reviews are an exceptional source of information about customers' experience in the destination (performance evaluation) and to identify a destination 's main attributes (destination 's attractiveness).

Developing a route where the information is all compiled is more beneficial for visitors. instead of promoting attributes independently because it simplifies the visitor decision-making process and helps destination marketers to prioritize attributes with the main needs (Vengesayi et al, 2009). For example, along Borgarfjörður the main rivers are rich in salmon, and this could be great an opportunity to add attractiveness to the area and attract a new market segmentation, however, according to what was transmitted during the practices, even though the potential is identified, there are scarce resources to develop it and therefore is not the priority at the moment.

One of the focuses when writing the description texts for the Borgarfjörður Silver Circle route, was creating texts that are true to reality in a way that does not disappoint visitors' expectations but instead emphasizes their unique characteristics and what makes them different from the others.

When the Silver Circle document was handed to me on the first day, the logo was the last point to be discussed, exactly because that should be only projected after creating the destination 's identity. This is a long and complex process but is needed for the success of the destination brand. At the moment, the Silver Circle Borgarfjörður logo and route 's name are still being discussed because not all stakeholders agree with it.

During the vocational training, there were some constraints and challenges that deserve my reflection:

- (1) Time management: It was already useful to have information available online, about the region and visitors' experiences, and if it would be needed to build up a route from scratch it would take even longer. However, it took some time to find the research methods that would work for me and apply it.
- (2) Initially, I spent much time looking for potential and unique attributes and lost the focus on the existing identified attributes that deserved the main attention.

(3) Borgarfjörður is a region rich in history and many attributes are connected to sagas, folktales and the use of Icelandic books was extremely needed but a part of difficult (due to the fact of not dominate the Icelandic), it was also a time-consuming process generating frustration (because the feeling is that nothing has been done, for not seeing results immediately) and anxiety (due to time shortening) and questioning (if it was really needed and worth to do it). The answer now when my role in this project is finished is yes. Even though there is a lot of information online, books not only confirm the veracity of facts but also add always something knew not explores or mentioned before.

There are still many things to do before launching the Silver Circle Borgarfjörður route, but its development is going, and in a good pace and all the stakeholders are motivated and want to contribute to the project 's success.

My vocational training is finished but I will keep on following closely the development of this product and contribute as many as I can and if is required, because it's a project with a great potential. I believe sincerely that I achieved what was set out with my participation in this project and contributed with great suggestions that in a long term can be developed to enhance even more the route 's attractiveness.

5 Final words

The B.A. project gave the possibility to work closer with experienced tourism professionals, contributing largely to enrich the experience. Initially I decided myself to write a thesis on "How to increase tourists' expenditure in Iceland?", but on the last minute I have changed ideas and opted to go for a vocational project. Looking back, it was the most asserted choice because before wanting to reach a higher step, we must know exactly what we have in our hands and how to take the best of our product. Making a brief reflection, after this project I'm more prepared now to write about it "How to increase tourists' expenditure in Borgarfjörður?". This report reflects exactly what I have learned and what was achieved.

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7 Attachments

7.1.1 Silver Circle document handed in by the workplace supervisor.

[Silver-Circle-vinnuskjal \(1\).docx](#)

7.1.2 Borgarfjörður logos



Illustration 1 Borgarfjörður idea for the logo



Illustration 2 Borgarfjörður proposed logo by me

7.1.3 Creation of an Audio Guide

Like the ones used during the day tours Reykjavik Sightseeing or Reykjavik Excursions) that travelers can download and have an experience when driving around the area. When driving around Borgarfjörður it's possible to see mountains, glaciers, and farms (which names are very curious) and the idea is that tourists can know those names. The real names in Icelandic would be there as well as the translation (if there is). This app would enrich their experience when travelling around the area and it does not compete with guides or anyone, and instead it would serve as an educational tool for not only tourists but professionals within the tourism area that bring tourists here. It happens many times that mountains or hills have interesting shapes and travelers might ask themselves what it's, and with the app they will know.

7.1.4 Silver Circle Borgarfjörður Symbol

In Borgarfjörður there is only one bakery, and this can play a great opportunity because Borgarnes is also the starting point of The Silver Circle Borgarfjörður Route. Apart of the nonexistent direct competition it would also be possible to create an event with the locals for them to play part on deciding which will be the silver circle cake.