

## Chapter 13

# Images of Norway as a Tourist Destination From Russian Travel Bloggers' Perspective

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Tourism is increasingly becoming an important sector to be considered when it comes to discussing the sustainable development of the Arctic. This chapter presents a research into the image of Norway—one of the Arctic nations—as a tourist destination. The image is traced through a qualitative study of Russian travel blog sites. Results from the study widen the understanding of Russian tourists' interests in Norway. The findings also highlight the process of image formation of Norway as an Arctic destination by the Russian travel bloggers.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Russian tourists in Scandinavia are a potentially significant market with its presence continuously growing (Kronenberg, Fuchs, Salman, Lexhagen, & Hopken, 2015). This chapter aims to contribute towards better understanding Russian tourists' perception of Norway as a tourist destination.

Currently, Finland appears to be the leader in number of Russian visitors among Scandinavian countries. Two-fifths of foreign tourists in Finland are Russians. Due to easier visa procedures, comfortable transport facilities (3.5 hours by train from Saint Petersburg to Helsinki) and a lot of positive travel experience shared by others, Finland remains very popular among Russian visitors (Manner, 2014). The high interest of Russian tourists to Finland caused a lot of discussions in Finnish newspapers. Gurova and Ratilainen (2015) conducted research on how the image of Russian tourists changed over the last twenty years (1990-2013). They concluded that having started from the image of irritating tourists from the East, Russians became a very attractive consumer group for Finnish business people. One major at-

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traction for Russians in Finland is nature settings. Visitors like to rent cabins in picturesque, rural regions of the country and visit spa-centers, water parks, skiing centers, fishing and relaxing with the family on lakeshores, and enjoy the safety of cities (Suvilehto & Borg, 2001).

Currently, Norway is further away from other Scandinavian countries in the list of the top visited countries by Russian tourists. The results for the 2014 period, presented by the Federal Agency for Tourism of the Russian Federation (2014), show the list of the fifty most visited countries by Russian tourists. The Scandinavian countries were led by Finland, taking the thirteenth place with 379,242 tourists. Sweden took the fortieth place with 44,052 tourists. The number of Russian tourists visiting Norway in 2014 was so low that the country was not even included in the list (Federal Agency for Tourism of the Russian Federation, 2014).

Although the current picture for Norway as a preferred Scandinavian tourist destination shows some room for improvement, current political and economic conditions to link Asia and the Arctic through the Northern Sea Route (NSR) (Bekkers, Francois, & Rojas-Romagosa, 2016). Given the conditions in the Arctic beyond the tourism sector, it is anticipated that Norway may well play a central role in linking the Russian and Asian tourists, who could use northern Norway as a gateway to the Arctic Europe.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Destination Image Formation**

As the current chapter focuses in the image of Norway as a tourist destination, a brief review on destination image formation opens the relevant literature review for the chapter. There are a number of factors that influence destination image formation. Baloglu and McCleary (1999) describe two major forces of image formation: stimulus factors and personal factors. The stimulus factors are the external pull factors, which emanate from physical objects and previous experiences. The personal factors are push factors, which depend on social and psychological characteristics of the perceiver.

Researchers support the view that destination image can be defined as a multidimensional construct, consisting of two main dimensions: cognitive and affective (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006). The cognitive or perceptual dimension is signified by beliefs or knowledge about a destination and its characteristics (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Cognition may or may not have originated from past travel experiences. It can be organic or induced (Pike & Ryan, 2004). The affective dimension refers to feelings that a potential tourist has with regard to a destination and his or her attachment to it (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Affect can be favorable, unfavorable, or neutral. The affective factor has been a more recent focus in destination image research.

### **Russian Tourist Market**

Russian tourist market can be viewed as a relatively new one in international tourism arena, however, a comprehensive analysis and deeper understanding of the Russian tourist market has been acknowledged by several researchers (Choi, Tkachenko, & Sil, 2011). Russia has shown itself as an increasingly important market with further growth registered in most European destinations. The number of Russian visitors to Europe has doubled between 2009 and 2013. In 2013, the highest visitation growth was reported in Greece, Iceland, Slovakia, Romania, and Serbia. As for Northern Europe, in 2013, Russian

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