

**ASPECTS OF TOURISM**

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# **Nordic Tourism**

**Issues and Cases**

**C. Michael Hall, Dieter K. Müller and  
Jarkko Saarinen**

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## Cases and issues 5.2: Culinary tourism project in Northern Iceland

GUÐRÚN GUNNARSDÓTTIR and LAUFEY HARALDSDÓTTIR

Attracting tourists to rural areas is a complex task in a competitive environment where major destinations are firmly established in the consumer's mind.

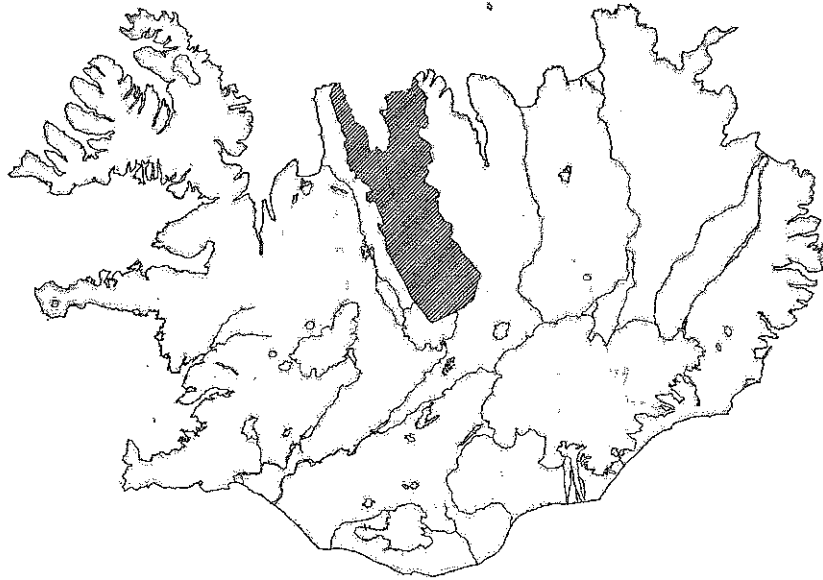


Figure 5.2 The location of the study area, Skagafjörður, northern Iceland

Regional imagery is increasingly used to brand rural destinations, especially with the promotion of quality local food products (Williams, 2001). The Rural Tourism Department at Holar University College in cooperation with University of Guelph, Canada, launched a culinary tourism project in 2004, which aims to promote a regional culinary identity for the Skagafjörður region in Northern Iceland (Figure 5.2).

Tourism in Iceland has grown substantially over the last decades and is now a major source of foreign revenue. From 1990 to 2000, international tourism in Iceland increased by 117%; a yearly increase of 8% (Þjóðhagsstofnun, 2000). However, many rural regions lag behind in terms of tourism development and have not been successful in translating their resources into viable tourism products. This is the case for Skagafjörður where surveys among tourists demonstrate lack of a distinctive destination image, and is an area that tourists travel through to reach the north of Iceland (Guðmundsson, 2005; Gunnarsdóttir, 2005). On the other hand, a survey of tourists in the region showed a high level of interest in local cuisine and that tourists would like to be informed about locally made products (Murray & Haraldsdóttir, 2005). It seems that developing strong culinary tourism could enhance and strengthen the image of Skagafjörður region as a quality rural tourism destination.

Local food production and processing is an important prerequisite for developing regional food tourism. The main industries in Skagafjörður are agriculture and fisheries, and several successful food-producing and processing



**Figure 5.3** Logo for the culinary project. It references one of the islands on the fjord, which for centuries was called the food chest of Skagafjörður due to its abundant bird life

companies are located in the region. In particular, Skagafjörður takes pride in its innovative fish, meat and dairy processing companies.

Credibility has to be an integral part of the regional branding process. Thus, the culinary project encourages participation from both the food processing as well as the restaurant sector. Substantial time has been invested in building up trust as well as establishing a shared vision and commitment to the project. This has enabled coordination among tourism and food producing/processing businesses in terms of labelling and increased accessibility of local products. This cooperation successfully culminated in the project's logo (Figure 5.3) whereby the participants accepted a unifying identity and resolved to use the logo on menus, packaging, and promotional materials. Restaurants experienced a positive response from customers as dishes labelled with the logo increased sales. The benefits of the project are not as immediate to the food processing companies which are not in direct contact with tourists. However, the project was frequently profiled in the Icelandic media which increased the companies' faith in the project.

This culinary project reveals that opening channels of communication between food companies and restaurateurs is important in developing a reliable rural culinary destination. The next hurdle to clear is to keep up the interest and commitment among the participants, and wider involvement is also required in order to sustain the authenticity of the culinary destination image.