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Winter Island Bornholm – Creating a Smart Travel Destination

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Destination Bornholm's Winter Island Project has helped develop Bornholm into an attractive, digitally smart travel destination. The project has achieved remarkable success with a 144% increase in Danish overnight stays during the winter of 2021-2022. The project has helped support and grow local businesses and the local community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing the est. revenue from 47 Mio. DKK to 72 Mio. DKK.

Organisation in charge of best practice
ECTN

Location
Destination Bornholm ApS

Dates
August 2021 - September 2022

Description
Bornholm is known as the "Sunshine Island" Historically, the Danish Island of Bornholm has always been known as a summer destination. For this reason, Bornholm has been nicknamed "The Sunny Island". Destination Bornholm ApS has been working with local partners in the tourism industry, municipality, and other public and private entities to build a sustainable tourism destination since 1992. Through the years, both the Spring and Autumn months have seen a steady increase in visitors and helped prolong the season, benefiting the island through economic and social stability and growth.

Turning a summer destination into a Winter Island In 2019 Destination Bornholm started a new project in cooperation with several local partners Danish Board of Business Development with the lofty goal of turning our island into a winter travel destination. The goal was to expand the tourism season into the winter months, thus creating opportunities to increase revenue for local businesses, create more full-time employment within the tourism industry and offer the island community a wider range of activities during the

winter. We also realized that Bornholm is a very different destination compared to the summer months during the winter period. During the summer, every store, attraction, and shop is open and can cater to our guests, but most businesses hibernate until spring during winter. The closed businesses also limit the opportunities for the local inhabitants to experience their own island.

Open for business

However, several businesses are open during the winter season, and the project partners agreed to keep their doors open during winter. So even though there might be several closed doors, plenty of shops, eateries, attractions, and accommodations were now open. Enough to create a unique travel experience to Bornholm for any tourist during the winter period. For the benefit of the tourists AND the locals To help tourists find open local businesses (and promote those who were open), Destination Bornholm initiated a digital development project, partly funded by Danish Board of Business Development. The aim was to upgrade our local destination travel guide app, 'Bornholm', so the visiting tourist were given a tool that helped them navigate Winter Island Bornholm. As a side effect the locals started using the app to find open restaurants, shops, events.

During 2019-2020 Destination Bornholm launched a three-stage digital development project to facilitate a smarter and more accessible travel destination.

The development stages were:

- Event Engine: Creating a unique overview of events on the island by creating an "Event Engine" that could automatically fetch event data from local partners and display them in Destination Bornholm's app and on the website www.bornholm.info. This helped promote events during the winter period and optimized the time used for the event creators since they only had to create their event once (in their own system). Several local attractions implemented this Event Engine – incl. Bornholm's Museum and Bornholm's Art Museum.
- Usability upgrade: Destination Bornholm has allowed our partners to update their information directly on the destination website and official travel guide app in a unique cooperation between a local destination agency and local businesses. The partners have a login and can edit their opening hours, images, contact information and create events directly in Destination Bornholms database. This procedure was initially developed in 2017 but optimized through a usability upgrade during this project. The upgrade makes it easier for businesses, locals, and event creators to access the system and promote their offers.
- Inspiration in the official app: To guide tourists to great travel experiences, the official travel guide app 'Bornholm' was upgraded to include inspiration articles that could highlight experiences available during their stay on the island. Through this new system Destination Bornholm can now display selected articles from the app in both Danish, German and English – such as "Sjove vinteraktiviteter for familier med små børn" (Danish for "Fun winter activities for families with small children").

Links
https://bornholm.info/ https://bornholm.info/erhverv

Resources needed
Based on the digital development in this project, Destination Bornholm has started additional digital development in co-operation with the local municipality. Building on the Event Engine and easy usability of the system, it has been decided to develop the online event calendar further to include tourist-related events and events by clubs, societies, congregations, etc. Thus, creating the basis for a digital overview of all events and activities on the island of Bornholm.

Challenges encountered
Increased online interest The digital development supported Destination Bornholm's digital channels throughout the pandemic and helped the Danes find an opportunity to experience our beautiful Baltic Island. Unfortunately, we lack the precise data from our app due to technical issues at the time of this application, but the digital development affects both our website and app. We experienced a 31% increase in traffic in 2020 compared to 2019 (pre-pandemic) on the website. In 2021 (when all digital stages were implemented) we experienced a 24% increase in traffic during the winter period. Based on the digital development in this project, Destination Bornholm has started additional digital development in co-operation with the local municipality. Building on the Event Engine and

easy usability of the system, it has been decided to develop the online event calendar further to include tourist-related events and events by clubs, societies, congregations, etc. Thus, creating the basis for a digital overview of all events and activities on the island of Bornholm.

Evidence of success
The project launched in 2019, and, unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the travel industry hard. An unforeseen development in the project affected the key performance indicators. However, during 2019 and 2020, Destination Bornholm implemented the digital development described in the previous sections and continued to lobby local businesses and partners to stay open during the winter. As part of the 'Event Engine' digital development the following partners were automatically integrated into Bornholm's official travel guides in the app 'Bornholm' and on the website www.bornholm.info: Bornholm's Museum (incl. all subdepartments) Svanekegården Grønbechs Gård Bornholm's Teater Gaarden – Bornholm's Food Culture House NaturBornholm Bornholm's Art Tour Bornholm's Culture Week It is estimated that these partners and others have contributed with several hundred new events through the Event Engine and thanks to the usability upgrade. Dialogue with the newly established 'Bornholm's Christmas Market' also helped create a strong reason-to-go. The pandemic hit Europe hard in 2020 and 2021and, closed borders and quarantine laws prevented international travel to Bornholm. Especially the number of international tourists to Bornholm. In the winter months of 2020, Bornholm lost over 90% of its international accommodation bookings compared to the previous year. More open local businesses Luckily, Bornholm managed to attract Danes during the summer and Autumn to offset the lack of German, Swedish, Polish, and other international tourists. The island's popularity helped Destination Bornholm and our partners persuade local businesses to keep their doors open during the winter. At the project's start, there were 208 registered open businesses on the island during winter, but in 2021 that number had increased to 375. Destination Bornholm could present tourists and locals with the best overview of everything Winter Island Bornholm had to offer through digital platforms. More Guests and more revenues As the travel restrictions were still in effect during the winter of 2020 and (to some degree) 2021, Bornholm became a popular winter destination for Danes. In 2020 Bornholm experienced a 29% increase in Danish overnight stays. In the winter of 2021, this number increased by 144% and helped Bornholm's tourism industry through the pandemic. We estimate that during the winter months of 2020 and 2021, Bornholm's tourism revenue increased from an estimated 47 Mio. DKK to almost 72 Mio. DKK – a 53% increase in times of a pandemic. We believe this success was achieved based on this project's goals of developing an innovative digital travel destination that helped facilitate co-operation between local businesses, the local community, and tourists.

Potential for transfer
This particular application has the ability to adapt.

Further Information
This project won the ECTN 'Destination of Sustainable Cultural Tourism' Award 1st prize in 2022, in the framework of ReInHerit Horizon 2020 CSA, jointly with Europa Nostra and European Travel Commission.