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# **Lofoten Islands Cruise Destination:**

Balancing Tourism Development and Sustainability Interests

Karin Wigger and Julia Olsen



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Cruise tourism is a debated topic on the Lofoten Islands, raising both opportunities and challenges economically, environmentally, and socially. This report explores the practices, challenges, and opportunities of cruise tourism on the Lofoten Islands. Within the broader context of the Arctic cruise tourism industry, this topic holds significant importance. With this report we hope to enrich the ongoing dialogue on fostering sustainable development and management of the local cruise industry. Our objective was to provide a comprehensive understanding of challenges associated with tourism practices in cruise communities.

We express our deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed to the realization of this project. We appreciate the dedicated project members, researchers, and experts who generously shared their expertise, insights, and valuable time, shaping the depth and quality of the research findings. We also express our gratitude to our colleagues from Nordland Research Institute, Leticia Antunes Nogueira, who played a key role both in the data collection and the design of the research; Julien Lebel, who created a map of the case area; and Helena Gonzales Lindberg for reviewing the final version of the report. We also extend sincere thanks to the individuals and stakeholders who participated in interviews and workshops, and who provided invaluable research data and perspectives. Their willingness to engage and share their experiences has been fundamental in enriching the findings presented in this publication. Furthermore, we acknowledge the support received from the Research Council of Norway in financing the project "Sustainable Arctic Cruise Tourism Communities: From Practice to Governance" (Grant number 301540), lead Nord University in cooperation with Nordland Research Institute, Dalarna University, Aalborg University, Uppsala University, and the Icelandic Tourism Research Centre.

We hope that this report will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and stakeholders in the tourism industry. May it contribute to meaningful discussions, inspire innovative solutions, and foster the adoption of sustainable practices in cruise communities in the Arctic.

Sincerely yours,

Karin Wigger and Julia Olsen

# SUMMARY

The Lofoten Islands have witnessed a rise in cruise tourism in recent years, driven primarily by an increasing number of medium-sized cruise ships and expedition vessels. The destination comprises three established cruise harbors in Leknes, Svolvær, and Reine, in addition to other harbors that have been welcoming smaller expedition vessels. To contribute to the ongoing discussions about sustainable cruise tourism on the Lofoten Islands, we look into the practices associated with cruise-related activities, offering a detailed and nuanced understanding of how cruising is executed, including its opportunities and challenges.

We have identified specific practices associated with cruise tourism (i.e., ship handling, planning and preparation, tourist hosting, and governance) and have analyzed how these practices are executed, coordinated, and adapted by different stakeholders (e.g., harbor authorities, tour operators, guides, attractions, restaurants, and local communities). Moreover, the report sheds light on the influence of factors such as weather conditions, seasonality, power dynamics, environmental impacts, and carrying capacity on the development of local cruise tourism.

Our findings suggest that to improve sustainability of cruise tourism there is a need to leverage local enforceability, collaborate with cruise operators, establish realistic requirements to cruise operators, adjust to local norms and guidelines, and address concerns of local carrying capacity. Additionally, the report puts forth tools and measures for the governance of cruise tourism, including economic incentives, tourist taxes, environmental regulations, local networks, and information dissemination. In conclusion, we underscore the need for stakeholders to take into account the complexity of interconnected practices, and advocate for the establishment of novel local approaches to balance between development and sustainability interests when developing the local tourism industry on the Lofoten Islands.

**Keywords:** Cruise tourism, sustainable destination development, Lofoten Islands, practice approach

# SAMMENDRAG

Lofoten har sett en økning i cruiseturisme de siste årene, drevet hovedsakelig av et økende antall mellomstore cruiseskip og ekspedisjonsfartøy. Destinasjonen omfatter tre etablerte cruisehavner i tillegg til andre havner som har ønsket mindre ekspedisjonsfartøy velkommen. For å bidra til den pågående diskusjonen om bærekraftig utvikling av cruiseturismen, utforsker vi ulike praksiser knyttet til cruise-relaterte aktiviteter. Rapporten gir en detaljert og nyansert forståelse av hvordan cruiset utføres, samt dets muligheter og utfordringer.

I rapporten beskriver vi spesifikke praksiser knyttet til cruiseturisme (f.eks., håndtering av skip, planlegging og forberedelse før ankomst, vertskap for turister og politisk styring). Vi presenterer en analyse av hvordan disse praksisene utføres, koordineres og tilpasses av ulike interessenter, som havnemyndigheter, turoperatører, guider, attraksjonsansvarlige, restauranteiere og engasjerte innbyggere. Rapporten undersøker også innvirkningen av faktorer som værforhold, sesongvariasjoner, maktforhold, miljøpåvirkninger og bæreevne.

Resultatene fra forskningsarbeidet viser at det finnes mange muligheter for å styrke bærekraften til cruiseturisme i Lofoten. Eksempler er å styrke samarbeidet mellom cruisetilbydere, etablere realistiske krav til cruiseindustrien, for industrien å tilpasse seg lokale normer og retningslinjer, samt for lokale styresmakter å håndtere kapasitets- og miljøbekymringer. I tillegg presenterer vi ulike verktøy og muligheter for styring av cruiseturismen, inkludert økonomiske insentiver, innføring av turistskatter og miljøreguleringer, bygge lokale påvirkningsnettverk og øke informasjonsspredning. Avslutningsvis understrekes behovet for at interessenter forstår kompleksiteten i de klyngede praksisene, og vi argumenterer for etableringen av nye tilnærminger som balanserer utviklings- og bærekraftsinteresser.

**Nøkkelord:** Cruiseturisme, bærekraftig destinasjonsutvikling, Lofoten, praksistilnærming

# 1 Introduction

The Lofoten Islands are a focal point for cruise tourism in the Arctic. The rise in cruise arrivals can be attributed to the increasing presence of medium-sized cruise ships and expedition vessels. As the fascination for the Lofoten Islands grows, so does the imperative to comprehensively examine and understand the dynamics of cruise practices to foster sustainable development.

The cruise industry on the Lofoten Islands brings with it a spectrum of opportunities and challenges, touching upon economic, environmental, and social aspects that the local communities must deal with. Recognizing the need for a sustainable approach to cruise development requires an understanding of the intricate details of cruise practices. This report untangles the complexities of how cruise tourism is executed, shedding light on both the positive aspects and potential pitfalls associated with this form of tourism in the Arctic.

We provide a detailed analysis of cruise practices to contribute to a better understanding of how to achieve sustainable cruise development on the Lofoten Islands. We focus on the connection and configurations of mutual reinforcing practices and refer to them as practice bundles (Shove & Walker, 2010). By scrutinizing specific *practice bundles* related to the operations and management of cruise tourism, such as ship handling, planning and preparation, tourist hosting, and governance, we offer a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of this industry. It is within the interplay of these practices that we find the key to unlocking a sustainable path forward. The study advocates for a more nuanced understanding of cruise practices as an essential foundation for crafting sustainable development strategies. By acknowledging the opportunities and addressing the challenges inherent in cruise tourism, we contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the responsible and sustainable development of the cruise industry.

## 1.1 The Lofoten Islands

The Lofoten Islands span a 240 km long archipelago situated in Nordland County in Norway, between 67 degrees and 68 degrees north latitude, above the Arctic circle. The archipelago comprises seven main islands: Røst, Værøy, Moskenesøya, Flakstadøya, Vestvågøya, Austvågøya, and the southern part of Hinnøya. Figure 1 shows the Lofoten Islands and their location along the Norwegian coast.

To the east, Lofoten is separated from the mainland by the fjord Vestfjord, while the Raftsundet strait serves as the natural border with the region of Vesterålen to the northeast. The landscape of the islands is characterized by rugged, durable bedrock, with the mountain range known as the 'Lofoten wall' visible from the mainland. The peaks in several areas are sharp and jagged, and the valleys are deep, giving Lofoten its unique scenery. The total area of the Lofoten Islands is 1,227 km<sup>2</sup>. The period of midnight sun lasts approximately from 28<sup>th</sup> of May to 14<sup>th</sup> of July, while the polar nights occur from approximately the 7<sup>th</sup> of December to 5<sup>th</sup> of January.





Figure 1. Map of Lofoten, showing the location of the three cruise harbors (Lebel, 2023)

The Lofoten Islands can be reached by car via the European Route E10 or by ferry from the regional capital of Bodø at the mainland to Moskenes, or from Skutvik to Svolvær (see Figure 1 above). Coastal steamers make stops at two ports, Stamsund and Svolvær, and there is a speed boat service available at Svolvær harbor. The archipelago has four public transportation airports: Leknes, Svolvær, Røst, and Værøy. This variety of transportation options makes the Lofoten Islands easily accessible for tourists compared to other Arctic tourism destinations. However, the public transport options between islands, settlements, and even the towns of Leknes and Svolvær, are considered rather limited, with only a few daily departures and routes along the E10. Rental cars are a popular choice for traveling around the Lofoten Islands.

The population of the Lofoten Islands is approximately 24,000 inhabitants. Two Lofoten municipalities, Moskenes and Flakstad, have experienced a decrease in population, whereas Vestvågøy and Vågan have seen slight growth. According to Statistics Norway (2022), it is estimated that the archipelago's population will have grown by several hundred in 2050, indicating an expectation of a stable number of residents. The fishing industry has attracted some immigration to the islands, primarily from other parts of Europe, particularly from Poland and Lithuania. The tourism industry also employs foreign workers, with a growing trend of work and travel among young Europeans who choose to work for a short period on one of the islands.

## **1.2 The tourism industry on the Lofoten Islands**

### **1.2.1 Tourism in general**

The Lofoten Islands is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Norway. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that nearly half a million people visited the destination during 2019 (Kireeva, 2019). This number was reached by adding the hotel guests and other individual overnight guests (e.g., campers, AirBnB, second-home owners), passing-through buses and car-driving tourists, and cruise passengers and crew members. Tourism on the island group is characterized by a great seasonal fluctuation, with a peak season around July (Bertella, 2011; Olsen et al., 2021). Consequently, during this peak season the number of tourists is significantly larger than the number of local inhabitants, which applies pressure and stress to the local infrastructure and peoples, as well as the natural ecosystems (Kireeva, 2019). Prior to the pandemic, the summer season on the Lofoten Islands had even reached a climax that raised discussions about how many tourists were too many and what kind of tourism locals wanted (Fitchett et al., 2021). On the other hand, tourism during the winter season is far less developed. The tourism industry as well as the Norwegian government have implemented several measures to expand and further the tourist season into the winter months. Overall, the numbers of tourists and pressures on local communities have led to discussions about the Lofoten Islands' carrying capacity and whether the threshold of a critical mass of tourists has been reached (e.g., Johansen, 2021). Such discussions have returned in local, national, and even international newspapers after the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 (e.g., Redaktions Netzwerk Deutschland, 2022). For example, a common concern is that the islands' infrastructure is not designed to accommodate large numbers of tourists, cruise ships, buses, and cars at the same time. Hence, there is an ongoing debate on how to further develop the infrastructure (Pedersen, 2022).

The Lofoten Islands present both a nature- and culture-based destination. Sandy beaches, deep fjords, and dramatic mountains invite nature-based tourism experiences such as hiking, fishing, bird watching, kayaking, climbing, cycling, skiing, and sailing. Fishery and related activities—in particular the production and export of dried cod—have historically been the main source of income (Bertella, 2011). Nowadays, the colorful and charming fishing villages have themselves become popular tourist attractions with associated sources of income. Moreover, the historical records of the Vikings' presence on the archipelago have also become an important aspect of the tourist destination.

### **1.2.2 Cruise tourism**

Tourism-oriented passenger vessels, similar to modern-day cruises, began visiting the Lofoten Islands as early as 1889 (Cruise Northern Norway and Svalbard, n.d.). Today, cruise tourism constitutes a significant component of the islands' overall tourism landscape. There are three main cruise ports and many attractions across the Lofoten islands, which are further described

below. The destination welcomes both expedition vessels and overseas cruise ships. Compared to Reine and Svolvær harbors, Leknes harbor is the only port that has the infrastructure and facilities to host larger cruise ships. In addition, Leknes harbor is less exposed to harsh weather as it has a natural bay and shelter.

The Lofoten Islands, together with Tromsø and North Cape, are the top three cruise destinations in northern Norway. Table 1 illustrates that the number of passengers to port had been increasing in the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, nearly 90,000 passengers went ashore, which is close to 3.75 times the local population. In addition to the passengers, crew members typically also go ashore.

Table 1. Cruise arrivals

Cruise port	# of calls 2017	Passengers to port 2017	# of calls 2018	Passengers to port 2018	# of calls 2019	Passengers to port 2019	# of calls 2022	Passengers to port 2022
Lofoten (Leknes/Svolvær)	74	64.405	115	78.141	84	88.736	80	88.000

(Source: CNNS, n.d.).

Lofotterminalen is a major actor at the port of Leknes that provides cold storage with a capacity of 5,000 m<sup>3</sup> (see the red large building in Photo 1). The harbor is subject to the International Ship and Port Facility (ISPS) code. Leknes harbor is located approximately 4 km from Leknes town. Typically, there are private taxi and shuttle buses available, but there is no public transport available from the harbor to Leknes town. The harbor is surrounded by a nice, sandy beach and offers astonishing views of the fjord and neighboring fishing villages.

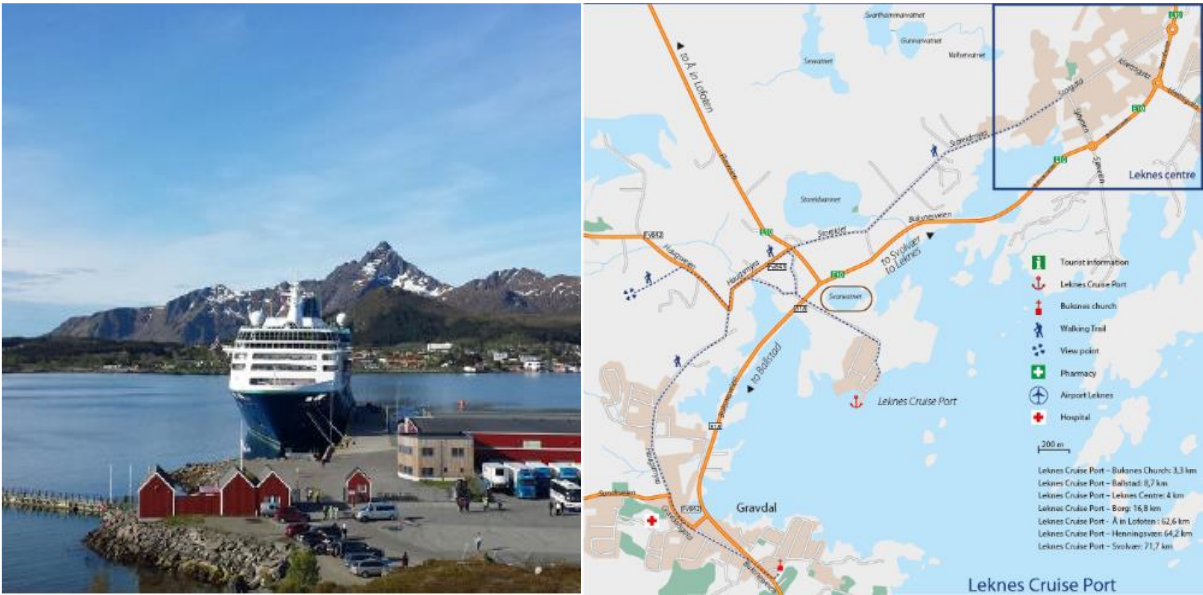


Photo 1. Leknes Cruise Port and Figure 2. Leknes Cruise Port. (both from Lofoten Cruise Manual)

Svolvær harbor is the second largest cruise harbor on the Lofoten Islands. The harbor consists of five options for cruise ships to dock: three piers and two anchor options. The piers and the arrival point of the tenders are at the center of Svolvær town within a short walking distance to the main square. Svolvær is located next to the open Vestfjord, which exposes its harbor to harsh weather conditions such as storms and high waves.

Reine Ytre Havn is a smaller harbor in the west of the Lofoten Islands (see the map in Figure 1 on page 2). The harbor is located in the picturesque traditional fishing village of Reine, which has become an attraction in itself. The berth is 70 meters long and 7 meters deep. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Reine welcomed 4,700 cruise passengers during 17 days of cruise arrivals. Reine is an increasingly popular harbor for smaller expedition cruise ships. In 2022, there were 44 arrivals planned, of which 36 were from the Hurtigruten expeditions (Amland, 2022).

## 2 Methods

To investigate cruise practices, we adopted a case-study research approach. The rationale for choosing the Lofoten Islands as our case, with its three primary cruise harbors, lies in the interconnectedness of local cruise practices spanning an entire region rather than focusing on a single cruise harbor. Consequently, to examine cruise practices, we chose to expand the scope to encompass all relevant aspects and involve many of the relevant stakeholders.

Furthermore, the study was designed as a two-step qualitative research, which comprises a desk-based study (for secondary data collection) and fieldwork (for primary data collection). Each of the two steps utilizes the following methods:

1. During the desk-based study we reviewed relevant literature, publications and public media to develop a research protocol, identified relevant interviewees and prepared a case study description;
2. During the fieldwork we conducted structured and unstructured interviews, observations, and participation in community meetings.

The primary data collection took place in the summers of 2021 and 2022, with two one-week field trips to the Lofoten Islands. These field trips provided us with a contextualized understanding of the diverse cruise practices as well as the local peoples' attitudes and values associated with cruises. We conducted eleven semi-structured interviews and engaged in six unstructured conversations. The interview guide, originally developed within the broader research project 'Arctic sustainable cruise communities: from practice to governance', was tailored to suit the local context. Additionally, we generated reflective memos based on informal conversations and observations made during the field trips. Primarily, the data consists of reflections on cruise-related working practices, personal experiences with cruises, and peoples' narratives, opinions, and emotions toward cruise.

We analyzed the data using a pre-defined coding scheme developed in conjunction with the larger cruise project. In addition to the topics related to cruise practices and practices bundles, we included an additional theme that addressed the consequences of COVID-19 travel restrictions on cruise practices. To ensure the validity of our analysis, we presented our findings at a community workshop and engaged in discussions with key stakeholders in Svolvær in September 2023. This iterative process allowed us to refine our understanding and incorporate valuable insights from those directly involved in or impacted by cruise practices in the Lofoten Islands. To communicate the findings to a broader audience, we have presented the project results at local high schools, in the local newspapers, at national and international conferences, as well as in scientific publications.

## 3 Practice bundles

In the following, we present individual practice bundles that are related to land-based cruise activities on the Lofoten Islands before we briefly elaborate on the interconnectedness of individual practice bundles.

### 3.1 Ship handling

Ship handling is a practice bundle taking place in the harbor areas, comprising of welcoming ships, securing safety, and controlling and reducing pollution. According to our interviewees and our own observations, this practice bundle is coordinated by multiple stakeholders, including those located in the port area upon the arrival (e.g., port authority, dispatch, ship agent, guides, bus drivers, shops employees) as well as those outside the port area (e.g., waste companies, governmental bodies). Some variations occur depending on whether cruises vessels are anchored outside the harbor area (for example, in Leknes: 5 minutes with zodiac boats to Leknes harbor) or staying in the port area (in Leknes, for vessels up to 230 m long).

**Welcoming and securing safety practice:** Among the harbor's main responsibilities are to secure a safe port call and to register the number passengers coming ashore. This practice was adjusted after the municipalities in Lofoten implemented new rules on the maximum number of cruise passengers per day. This limiting is important for the general tourist experience, namely, to avoid crowding and queuing, in addition to other social and environmental capacity concerns further discussed in the section on Governing.

Moreover, ship handling also addresses emergencies that can occur during the hosting activities (e.g. accidents, missing passengers, need for ambulance), or unexpected changes that can for example lead to delays in the schedule (see section: "Hosting tourists"). Such changes may cause delays and unpredicted situations that require involvement of employees in the harbor. On some occasions, not only the harbor personnel but also the cruise staff or the cruise tourists themselves help control the safety of the harbor area.

**Reduction of pollution:** Local stakeholders are concerned about the pollution from cruise vessels in the harbors. This refers not only to environmental pollution but also to visual pollution (commonly known as "eye sores"); one stakeholder compared the vessel to "a building right in front of the living room." There are already several practices established in the harbor areas to reduce pollution, such as waste management and emission reduction. Cruise vessels usually handle their own waste on board. If they choose to deliver their waste in the harbors on the Lofoten Islands, it will be handled by the local waste company, Østbø. In addition to the international environmental regulations, Norwegian harbors have introduced economic incentives and offer discounts on harbor (mooring) fees to operators that comply with certain environmental standards.

To summarize, the ship handling practice bundle addresses the issue of safety and control of operations for cruise vessels (while they are in the harbors), which is important when dealing

with a great number of cruise tourists. However, there are different opinions as to what can be called “environmentally friendly” and “zero-pollution” since all transportation vessels have environmental impacts, both during the production phase and in-use phases. In addition to the cruise vessels, there may also be other vessels in the harbor and in the fjords adding extra pressure on local harbor authorities to distribute the traffic and reduce pollution.

Additionally, the temporality perspective is important for the ship handling practice bundle. It should be noted that although cruise ship calls are usually planned two years in advance, last-minute cancellations can occur due to bad weather conditions (even during summertime) and other unpredicted events (such as the COVID-19 travel restrictions). This unpredictability can increase the uncertainty for local stakeholders who are involved in ship handling.

### **3.2 Planning and preparing practices.**

The arrival of a cruise ship requires planning and preparation practices at different levels and involves many actors. The following section on these practices bundles is divided according to the process, starting with planning and preparing to recruit cruise operators to visit the Lofoten Islands and concluding with the planning that occurs during the cruise day.

***Planning to keep desired cruise activities:*** Several stakeholders perceive that little planning is devoted to mobilizing cruise ships to call the Lofoten Islands. Current planning practices are general and consist mostly of discussing how to influence the type of cruises and the time of cruise arrivals. Planning to mobilize cruise ships was practiced more frequently during the 1980s and 1990s, in the early phase of cruise adventures. Now, cruise ships keep coming and there are few active practices in this regard. Some of the key stakeholders think that Lofoten’s locations and nature attract cruise ships by themselves—and as such, that cruise operators can be mobilized with little or no active planning.

However, there are practices related to familiarization trips where key representatives from cruise operators visit attractions, restaurants, and other places the destination and local tourism stakeholders deem important to show. These trips require some planning and coordination. Other practices are related to marketing. Examples here are the planning and possible changes in the annual or bi-annual cruise manual, including vital information about the harbors, attractions, and other important facts.

At the same time, better planning for a cruise is seen as an opportunity. Several stakeholders believe that if the local businesses planned better, this would provide more informed decision making and also reduce the power imbalance between the cruise/tour operators and local businesses. For example, the stakeholders believe that with better planning they can be more selective in targeting specific cruise operators to visit the Lofoten Islands, whereas others would be considered lower priorities.

***Planning for the pre-booking of the harbor:*** Other central cruise practices are connected to the pre-booking of the harbor and planning to coordinate with other activities at the harbor, as well as other requests from other cruise operators. These practices, which are expected to

intensify, also bring conflicting values and regulatory compliance. For example, by law, a harbor cannot reject the request of a vessel to dock at the harbor if there is available space (the Harbor Act, or *Havne- og farvannsloven* in Norwegian). However, there is a proposal to impose a per-day maximum cruise guest policy on the Lofoten Islands. This proposal has led to novel planning practices in how to comply with both the enforcement of a maximum cruise guest policy initiated by the locals and the Harbor Act. Whether such practices are needed and what they should entail is still debated among key tourism stakeholders on the Lofoten Islands (status: April 2023). Moreover, the practice related to berth reservations for cruise ships and those for other vessels, such as fishing vessels or cargo vessels, typically involve different time horizons. Whereas cruise activities are planned several years in advance, the sailing plans of other vessels are planned and shared with shorter notice. This complicates planning to ensure that harbor activities connected to different industry activities can continue unimpeded.

Normally, the outcome of the planning practices between the harbor and the cruise operators would result in a pre-booking at least two years in advance. This means that a destination would know well in advance when a cruise ship is to arrive. However, planning far ahead comes with uncertainties as such plans are often subject to changes and cancellations. Currently, practices around pre-booking include few proactive strategies to change/increase the flexibility related to the cancellation policy, which major local stakeholders find problematic. There are, however, situations where the cancellation policy is stricter. Furthermore, plans to change cancellation practices are also ongoing.

In general, pre-booking and planning activities for when and which cruise will call at one of the three Lofoten cruise harbors is considered crucial (see section: "Governance"). At the same time, our study did not enclose many active practices in this regard. Moreover, the current practices related to berth reservation are perceived by some stakeholders as problematic since only a select few key actors control these practices. Due to the importance of these practices, they argue, more stakeholders should be involved. Overall, the stakeholders have a rather reactive approach to dealing with cruise planning and its potential influence on the cruise operator's itinerary planning.

**Planning for the season:** The practices related to planning for the season involve more stakeholders than the berth reservation practices and also occur at a different level. Key practices here relates to what kind of products are to be offered and put together in a package (and how to present and market them), as well as how to mobilize the staff and resources needed to make the season happen. For example, the shore excursion packages that are offered on board cruise ships are typically developed one to two years in advance. As such, this requires predicting what experiences shall be offered and whether the packages need to be altered, updated, or replaced with new packages, often two to three years before the product will be offered for the first time. This practice is considered to be rather challenging for newcomers in the market because of the delayed first income. With shore excursions prepared one to two years in advance, it is also difficult to make changes and accommodate for more spontaneous innovations.



Other key practices are related to mobilizing the right workers for the season and other critical resources, such as material that is needed at the attractions. The practices to recruit seasonal workers are regarded as particularly important due to the difficulty of recruiting the right workers and the time-consuming nature of the hiring process. In addition, there are immense fluctuations in the need for staff between cruise days and non-cruise days, which calls for flexible and often hour-based contracts, which workers tend to consider less attractive. The practices recruiting seasonal workers often go beyond the potential employees living on the Lofoten Islands. Therefore, seasonal workers, who often want to experience Lofoten's nature and culture, are recruited from other parts of Norway as well as from other parts of Scandinavia and continental Europe.

**Planning for the cruise day:** The practices related to onshore outings during a cruise arrival involve tight schedules. For example, shore excursions are dependent on the number of tourists, which determines the number of guides and buses needed; this information is typically communicated to the tour operators only 24–48 hours in advance. Understandably, the planning and coordination practices for the cruise arrival are conducted in a hurry. The outcome of the planning practices come with several coordination challenges that lead to new practices, such as mobilizing enough guides, coordinating the bus routes to avoid negative experiences due to crowding or transport challenges, and getting enough buses for a specific cruise arrival. In other words, while the itinerary planning and harbor reservation are made up to two years in advance, the details for the specific cruise arrival day (which depends on how many cruise tourists book each shore excursion package) involves planning with very short notices. Thus, the coordination for the cruise day is a stressful experience for the dispatch team and the bus company, as well as for the people working on the attractions offered in one or several packages. The practices related to planning for enough guides (and the right guides) are critical ones, and sometimes it becomes necessary to have guides flown or driven in from other nearby places, such as Bodø or even Tromsø.

Not all cruise guests that go onshore have purchased excursions on board. Hence, there is also planning needed for accommodating the individual cruise tourists. Most of them make use of the general tourism offerings at the destination. Given that some cruise ships bring large numbers of cruise tourists, individual tourism attractions and other service companies (such as taxis) mobilise their resources to meet the demand of the tourists. This is done by mobilizing resources to handle the expected increase in volume.

Overall, planning for a cruise arrival comes with many temporalities and variations in demand and size, presenting both challenges as well as opportunities for the local tourist operators and businesses. In general, a cruise is an on–off phenomenon on the Lofoten Islands. Although the season is becoming longer and longer, the busiest cruise period is during the short summertime from approximately mid-June to the end of August. This is also when tourism in general is at its peak. Despite the high concentration of cruises within a short time period, there are large variations between cruise days and non-cruise days (this does not include Hurtigruten arrivals). Moreover, the sizes and types of cruise ships vary and not all the actors

are involved—or, at least, not to the same degree for all cruise arrivals. As a result, resource mobilization is rather spontaneous and intermittent. From the perspective of the tourism stakeholders, the inherent on–off nature of the cruise industry brings considerable irregularities.

### 3.3 Hosting tourists

The practices associated with hosting tourists take place when cruise tourists arrive and spend time at the destination. It deals not only with creating values through tourist experiences, products, and services at the destination, but also with how potential negative impacts are avoided or at least minimized.

***Creating value by hosting cruise tourists:*** Practices related to creating value for the stakeholders and the communities are founded on facilitating tourism experiences that center on Lofoten Islands local culture, daily life, weather, and climate. The available time the tourists have for the experiences or parts of experiences sets the frame for local value creation. For example, an owner of a tourist attraction found it challenging to create an experience that lasts only one to one-and-a-half hours, which the owner felt was not enough time for the cruise tourists to truly embrace the desired experience.

The practices of creating value through offering tourism experiences and services can be broken down into more specific practices: When a ship arrives at the pier, many cruise tourists go on their pre-booked shore excursions, while others may take part on their individually organized excursions, wander off on their own or stay on board. Our informants observed that the number of individual cruise tourists (i.e., those that are not taking part in organized shore excursion that are offered on board) is steadily increasing, although there are significant variations among different cruise operators. Generally, a high percentage of cruise tourists, between 70–80%, who visit the Lofoten Islands go ashore when the ships is docked. However, the cruise tourism stakeholders we have talked to notice that the cruise ships still operate at reduced capacity; a persistent consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

***Bringing tourists to attractions:*** Another important practice of hosting cruise tourists is to help bringing tourists to the right attractions and onto tours when they arrive in the harbor. The organized shore excursions that the cruise tourists have pre-booked on board typically consist of several stops at various sites and follow strict programs with little or no room for improvisation. This is because these excursions are predesigned and contain agreed upon itineraries to make sure that all the cruise tourists get the same offer and arrive back at the cruise ship in time for departure. The local tour operators and tourism businesses have limited flexibility to adjust the tours according to changing conditions such as the weather or other unforeseen events.

To bring tourists to the many attractions is often a collective effort among the dispatch of the guide company, the guides and (if needed) translators, as well as the drivers of busses or rigid inflatable boats (RIB). This also involves travelling across municipal borders to get to the

different attractions. For example, many of the shore excursions that depart from the busiest cruise harbor of Leknes, in Vestvågøy municipality, cross the borders to Vågan municipality in the east to go to the famous fishing village of Henningsvær, and Moskenes municipality in the west to visit Å and Reine. Thus, bringing tourists to the various attractions requires coordination between stakeholders, sectors (such as transportation, guide and experience), and between more than one municipality.

There are also cruise tourists who prefer to book their own experiences independently, go ashore to explore by foot, take taxis to specific attractions, hop on the shuttle bus to Leknes, or rent bicycles or cars. Compared to the guests on pre-booked tours, these independent cruise tourists are less manageable by the local cruise tourism services or businesses, although they have an overview of what transportation means and destinations are most popular. The varied practices of bringing individual tourists or independent groups to the attractions could help spread the cruise tourists on several attractions and sites. At the same time, pre-booked shore excursion practices are more predictable and controllable.

**Coordination:** Coordination is critical for getting all the practices mentioned above to go as smoothly as possible. It happens at many levels and between many actors during the onshore excursion activities: the individual attractions involved, the actors who provide services and experiences to cruise tourists, and the local peoples who continuously adjust to the increased pressure on local infrastructure during cruise days.

The dispatcher from the guide company and the coordinator of the bus company play key roles in coordinating the onshore activities of cruise tourists' pre-booked shore excursions. Typically, one to two days prior to the cruise arrival, the dispatcher is in contact with the tour operator to know the numbers of pre-booked shore excursions. Once the number of guests is known, the dispatcher coordinates and mobilizes the guides needed and communicates the number of incoming guests to the attractions, restaurants, and other tourism companies involved in creating the onshore experiences.

The coordination practices are limited to the predefined program and protocol given by, for example, the tour operators and the cruise operators. Coordination practices have little or no flexibility once the cruise tourists have arrived since potential changes often must be coordinated with, for example, the main office or the tour operators' office often located outside the Lofoten Islands. There is little room for adjustments in response to delays and other coordination challenges because materials, such as buses, are often used twice during a single cruise day or guides cannot arrive on short notice in the case of different language demands. In general, coordination practices related to addressing unexpected events are mainly reactive, for example, how to deal with a pre-booked museum that is closed, how to handle too many busloads of tourists having lunch at the same place at the same time, accidents, sudden illnesses, or suddenly closed-off roads.

Coordination is also happening among the restaurants, shops, and other local organisations involved in the cruise activities. Typical practices here are related to coordinating the incoming crowd and dealing with unexpected events. The personnel at the harbor or nearby tourism

organizations (such as souvenir shops) often assist individual cruise guests coordinate their onshore activities. Crowding in the town centers, public infrastructures or transportation also affect the local people. Some respond by coordinating their lives according to the incoming cruise guests, for example, by changing the times they go grocery shopping or drive routes away from the crowds, taking in that the drive might take longer than expected, as one local responded in Henningsvær, a small town that experience being heavily crowded during cruise arrivals. Indeed, coordination both by individuals and others is considered a key task within cruise destination management.

***Creating an experience:*** When the cruise tourists arrive at an attraction or special site, the guide who accompanies the group throughout the onshore excursion as well as local tourism employees (such as local guides at a museum) typically seek to involve the tourists in experiencing the attraction as this is a way to co-create the experience. The fruitfulness of such a co-created experience affects the overall tourist experience. The guide plays a critical role in this regard. An experienced guide that is familiar and knowledgeable about the specific attractions has an easier time to co-create the experience than someone who is more recent on the job. Often, the desired co-created experience is not achieved, for example, because the guide lacks knowledge about the region and individual products or attractions. Storytelling is often a critical part of the tourist experience, and stories are best told when the storyteller is personally familiar with them. Furthermore, stories are highly contextual and as such easily lost out of context.

When there are many hosting practices happening at once, finding the needed time and personnel to engage with the cruise tourists is critical. In general, the employees perform many different practices simultaneously, and they tend to prioritize that which appears most essential to get through the pre-defined programs for the shore excursions. Several of our informants expressed that cruise arrivals are stressful and that the overlapping of several practices (which often leave little time for quality engagement) are a key trigger of stress.

***Evaluating, assessing, and adjusting the experiences:*** The tourist experiences that are created in the destination and their associated practices are frequently evaluated and reflected upon. There are formal evaluation and testing practices, such as surveys or reviews on TripAdvisor, Google Maps, or other services, often once the experience has taken place. Commonly, the tourism actors also receive direct verbal or nonverbal feedback when providing experiences. In addition, stakeholders evaluate the experiences on individual as well as collective levels. Questions that are addressed are how the destination overall delivers on various tourism experiences.

In addition to evaluating the quality of the tourism experience, product or service, we observed practices that are connected to adjusting and dealing with externalities while hosting cruise tourism. Externalities that informants mention include additional stress due to the fast pace of work and high safety standards, as well as demanding cruise guests and operators, all of which influence the well-being of employees in the tourism sector. Other concerns that are raised are connected to the depletion of natural resources, crowding, and

overuse of collective resources. Most informants find it important to educate the cruise guests about the specificities of the destination, sustainability issues, and practices that are considered to support the development toward becoming a more sustainable cruise destination. The focus is mainly on responsible tourist behavior. Stakeholders point out that Henningsvær and Reine are bottlenecks when it comes to the use of local infrastructure, such as road infrastructure and parking places. At the same time, the cruise tourists typically walk around the villages without spending money besides maybe visiting the gallery in Henningsvær. From a local perspective, this is seen as problematic since the locals face the consequences related to the 'overuse' of infrastructure in addition to the lack of local value creation from the cruise tourists.

Hosting tourists is a complex practice bundle encompassing many dimensions, such as the mobilization of cruise tourists at the destination, the quality and creation of experiences, and the adjustments and reactive practices to known and unknown externalities. However, considering all the aspects of hosting tourists is a prime opportunity to include considerations of more sustainable practices, such as interventions to alter the movement away from vulnerable natural areas or local people's personal spaces, and increase the local money spending patterns of cruise tourists.

### 3.4 Governing

Governing practices take place at and across several scales, including decisions at the community, municipal, and destination (cross-municipality) levels. Multiple stakeholders with often conflicting interests are involved. Stakeholders have different priorities for Lofoten's tourism sector, with some who are negative to the cruise tourism development due to its perceived minor local value creation and the archipelago's limited capacity to host cruise vessels. Usually, stakeholders who support cruise development are willing to meet and discuss issues. However, given that some decisions must involve the municipalities in Lofoten, it takes a long time for the tourism sector to get to act on ideas and decisions.

**Networking and collaboration:** Networking practices are organized around the stakeholders who want to influence cruise development in Lofoten. While they often are the ones who benefit from tourism development, they also want to reduce the negative impacts and share information about it.

Destination Lofoten is a central tourism network that facilitates coordination of activities at the political and administrative levels, both locally, nationally, and internationally. Together with other cruise-related stakeholders such as politicians, municipalities, tourism industries, and other related companies, they are united in the Lofoten Cruise Network. It acts as a forum to discuss potential improvements in the tourist business, new ideas such as tourism taxes, how to respond to local resistance and put in place common requirements for the shipping companies. The network offers a meeting arena for stakeholders as well as consulting and marketing services, and provides recommendations to the municipalities which, in turn, decide what measures should be financed.

Despite good networking practices on the Lofoten Islands, some of the key stakeholders are competing, for example for guide services. Other stakeholders want to strengthen job opportunities and offer jobs that are not anchored solely to cruise-related activities. Another challenge within the network is its limited ability to influence cruise practices at the specific destinations and it cannot deny access to certain tourist groups (e.g., according to environmental performance), as the local tourism industry is dependent on earning income. Stakeholders we have talked to believe there is no direct competition between Norwegian cruise destinations. Compared to Bodø, Lofoten have more port calls. One of the stakeholders speculated that having both Bodø and Narvik as cruise harbors in the nearby area can present some competition.

***Addressing co-existence and creating transparent information about the impacts of cruise tourism:*** The local population on the Lofoten Islands have many perceptions (and misconceptions) about cruise activities and the Lofoten Cruise Network works on informing the public about cruise impacts. According to the stakeholders interviewed, if the local residents were made aware of how cruise activities are organized and measures implemented, and how they contribute to local development and local economic profit that also benefits them they would be more positive to the continued cruise development. Thus, they find it important that this information is broadly disseminated, and misconceptions addressed. This information gap can also be resolved through more meeting spaces between local peoples, cruise operators and cruise tourists.

The involvement of diverse stakeholders means that it is important to adopt a holistic perspective when discussing cruise development in Lofoten, because cruise-related activities take place across municipalities and are dependent on several tourism companies (also who serve other tourist groups). At the same time, there are stakeholders in the tourism industry that consider cruise as an unsustainable form of tourism, often corresponding to those who do not profit from cruise activities. Some stakeholders also express concerns about caravan tourists, who also create problems on the roads and often park outside designated areas. There are also other actors who use fjords, such as Reinefjorden. New companies, such as adventure-based tourism firms, receive permission to operate there. If this growth continues, several companies may soon be operating in this area, which will have consequences for the local harbor capacity as well as for the environment.

***Addressing capacity concerns:*** One of the main concerns in Lofoten is to accommodate an increasing number of tourists within the current capacity frames. There are worries about narrow roads that are not suited for increasing numbers of buses, especially to Henningsvær and Reine; inadequate or absent bicycle lanes and sidewalks; limited capacity and space in local restaurants and museums; and few public toilets and other basic facilities. Thus, there is an emerging discussion and inventory about the archipelago's carrying capacity. For example, to host a vessel with 5,000 passengers, local actors must estimate the number of available places in offered excursions, buses, guides, and other facilities. A restaurant in Å can serve maximum 400 tourists, but it is important that the quantity do not harm the quality of food.

Also, an uncontrolled number of buses arriving simultaneously at one of the small communities can present a challenge of sudden overcrowding. In Moskenes, this discussion was conducted together with the local community and industry. As a result of the meeting, the maximum number of cruise passengers was set at 500 tourists. In Leknes, they have decided on allowing 4,000 cruise passengers per day.

**Addressing environmental impacts and taxes:** Environmental governance emerges in several destinations where cruise activities are increasing. On the Lofoten Islands, two concerns are particularly relevant: environmental impacts on harbors and introduction of environmental/tourism taxes.

As described previously in the “Ship handling” section, Norwegian harbors deal with environmental concerns in several ways and offer discounts on harbor (mooring) fees to operators that comply with certain environmental requirements. However, one of the stakeholders argued that in addition to such discounts, stricter environmental regulation (by the International Maritime Organization) should be initiated to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emission from cruise ships. However, another stakeholder argued that there is no such thing as a “zero-emission vessel” - even the Hurtigruten ships’ battery pack indirectly pollute via the battery production process. The same person also argued that several measures have been implemented by the cruise industry, such as the Viking company that uses filters to remove polluting particles from their direct emissions. Another issue that was brought up by one of the stakeholders was the challenge of placing a monetary value on nature experiences, which is one of Lofoten’s main attractions. Overall, there is no consensus as to whether Lofoten should introduce a so-called “tourist tax,” due to the rule of *Allemannsrett* that recognizes all person’s non-discriminative access to nature in accordance with the Norwegian Outdoor Recreation Act (*Friluftsloven*). However, several stakeholders were positive to the implementation of tourist taxes to co-finance needed infrastructure and the continued use of common resources.<sup>1</sup>

**Setting requirements for cruise:** Many find it necessary though challenging to set specific requirements for cruise operators. The involvement of many diverse stakeholders in the overall tourism sector means that it is important to set realistic requirements to be able to support local value creation (e.g., demand using local companies when offering shore excursions to the passengers) and limit environmental impacts (e.g., by using shore power, if possible). Most realistically is to demand that the destination be left in the same condition as it was found upon the arrival.

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<sup>1</sup> Tourism taxes have been tested in 2023 in pilot municipalities. [Why It Will Soon Be More Expensive To Visit Norway's Lofoten Islands \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com)

### 3.5 Developing infrastructure

In most destinations it is important to develop and improve harbor infrastructure, town and settlement infrastructure, and other types of infrastructure such as roads, parking spots, and walking paths to the main attractions. Similar to governance practices in this includes multiple local and cross-municipal stakeholders, including the Norwegian Public Roads Administration and the Norwegian Police. Moreover, this practice should be understood in connection with all tourist groups who use the local infrastructure, including cruise tourists. When the number of visitors on the Lofoten Islands increases significantly for a few hours, the pressure on infrastructure becomes more noticeable. Neither the existing road infrastructure nor the tourist attractions have the capacity to host a lot of tourists simultaneously, especially when that number increases significantly on a day with a cruise call. However, the influx of tourists has also led to overall improvements of infrastructure.

In the **harbor area**, infrastructure improvement is necessary to accommodate both cruise vessels and cruise tourists. For example, Leknes harbor is able to take vessels up to 230 m long (longer vessels should anchor outside) and set a maximum number of tourists at 4,000 people. Still, there is a general concern that the harbors were not designed for incoming cruise ships and is ill-suited for cruise tourists. Leknes harbor is an industrial harbor and is located a long way outside Leknes town. Reine harbor has no public facilities and is also located outside the town center. Therefore, income that derives from the cruise operators is considered to be used for infrastructure development at the harbor area (e.g., extension of the harbor, bathrooms and other facilities). Another question concerns the establishment of shore power facilities for cruise ships. However, due to the expensive electricity, this is currently not an option in Lofoten.

According to several stakeholders, **the infrastructure between the harbor area and the town** should also be upgraded to accommodate large numbers of cruise tourists. In Leknes, many tourists walk from the harbor to the town along the motorway that lacks a proper sidewalk. The narrow roads on the Lofoten Islands, especially when used by buses, also pose safety challenges. The tourist buses can be quite dominant on the roads and negatively provoke the local users. One interviewee reported that many of the inhabitants believe that without all the buses and the tourists they carry, life in the Lofoten Islands would be more peaceful. Another concern surrounds the limited number of available buses and busdrivers: If they are used for shuttle services from the harbors to the town centers, there are fewer buses available for tour excursions etc.

When it comes to the connecting infrastructure near to the main attractions, some of the stakeholders emphasize the importance of **building more parking spots and safe walking paths**. Establishing the designated parking spots is challenging as it requires compliance with rules and regulations on signs and fees. When one municipality planned to develop a plan for parking signs, the task was more complicated than anticipated as it required the involvement of both the police and the National Road administration. There are examples of local farmers who have established private parking spots near main attractions that can be used by shuttle



buses. Still, on some occasions, the tourists take the liberty to park wherever they want – dubbed “wild parking” (*villparkering*). Some also find safe hiking paths to main attractions (e.g., stair paths to Reinebringen) are necessary for assuring the tourists’ safety.

To conclude, there is a perception that cruise tourists (and tourists in general) have strained the carrying capacity of the existing infrastructure on the Lofoten Islands, but that they also have had a positive influence on **infrastructure development in the towns and small settlements**. This is manifested in several new cafes, stores and other meeting areas and improvements to infrastructure with several new parking places and road signs. Better cooperation between the Norwegian Public Roads Administration and the municipalities can further improve practices, such as those related to the development of more available parking spots.

### **3.6 Developing and maintaining skills and competencies**

As mentioned in several of the practices described above, skilled employees with the proper competencies are an invaluable resource to contribute to sustainable development of cruise tourism on the Lofoten Islands. Key aspects include how local knowledge and traditions are utilized by local cruise tourism providers as well as how knowledge and competencies are exchanged and shared between employees. The latter is especially important due to the seasonality and frequent need for overlapping between former and new employees. Our research indicates that a great deal of knowledge and competencies may be lost due to insufficient transfer and maintenance practices.

One aspect of this transfer is the guides’ language competencies. The recruitment of guides who can work in the language requested by the tour and cruise operator is challenging. Currently, guide companies must look outside the Lofoten Islands when recruiting multilingual guides. This practice has been criticized by several stakeholders because it does not provide work for the locals and may exacerbate the absence of local knowledge and contextual understanding. During the last couple of years, new guiding companies have entered the market on the Lofoten Islands, thereby increasing the competition for recruiting skilled guides. The competition has been amplified by the practice of demanding hired guides to sign a declaration that they will not take work from another guiding company. The result is an even more acute shortage of tourist guides, but also fewer working hours for already hired guides. Consequently, on the Lofoten Islands is becoming a less attractive destination for guides who want to work for two or three months before moving on to other destinations. As a result, stakeholders complain, some guides not only have limited local knowledge, but also lack basic training. This is problematic since cruise operators typically have high standards when it comes to quality of the experiences they offer. As an additional point, some stakeholders expressed that the tourism industry on the Lofoten Islands has become more professional because of catering to the cruise sector and working to meet their standards.

### **3.7 COVID-19 and its consequences for cruise**

The most severe epoch during the COVID-19 pandemic, with travel restrictions in the summers of 2020 and 2021, is often referred to as a “time-out” for the tourism industry. This two-year period had many consequences for local value creation and associated practices but is also described as allowing the cruise tourism industry to take a break to rethink recent growth and plan for its comeback. The loss of income during the pandemic affected local hosting practices and caused the loss of skilled and competent employees in the local tourism sector. Several companies hosting cruise tourists, both small and large, experienced significant economic losses and some even came close to bankruptcy. During this period, many guides left their guiding jobs, and as a result, a great deal of knowledge and competencies were lost from the companies as well as the destination. In the aftermath of COVID-19, it was challenging for companies to mobilize enough new guides to meet the increased activities. Also cruise harbors lost a significant share of income due to the decreased number of cruise ships. However, it should be noted that in one of the harbors in Lofoten, the reduced income occurred gradually due to a special agreement they had with one of the cruise operators in which pre-payment was kept by the harbor in case of the cancellation after a set deadline. Many of the local stakeholders acknowledge that pre-COVID growth in the tourism industry was unsustainable. During the pandemic, the Lofoten Islands destination had an opportunity to rethink that growth as well as realization of the region’s dependency on tourism, including cruise tourism. To summarize, on the one hand, the period of COVID-19 lockdown had massive implications for the legitimacy and stability of cruise practices due to a loss of personnel and near-bankruptcy conditions for some local tour operators. On the other hand, this period enhanced cruise-related companies’ innovation and coping practices to better deal with uncertainties and to reshape and adjust existing practices.

### **3.8 Reflection on cruise practices**

On a reflective note, the cruise practices in the Lofoten Islands are complex and interdependent and come with different temporalities. For example that certain practices have already been executed long before the cruise ship calls at the Lofoten Islands. The need for long-term planning influences practices that are performed during a cruise day. Hence, the different temporalities (in terms of planning and seasonality of operations) and interdependencies of practices are crucial. While many cruise practices are intertwined, they are often performed by different actors that do not typically engage with one another. There are some challenges and opportunities resulting from this, which are discussed in the following concluding chapter about staying with this situation.

## 4 Staying with the opportunities and troubles

In this chapter, we transition from examining specific practices to adopting a more comprehensive approach to understand both the opportunities and challenges associated with cruise tourism. We start by exploring the interconnections between practice bundles and their mutual dependencies.

### 4.1 Intertwined practice bundles and mutual dependencies

The many practices associated with cruise tourism mentioned in this report are typically intertwined or reliant on one another to varying degrees. Furthermore, cruise-related practices are also intertwined with individual and organized on-land tourism and other industries like fishery, search and rescue, and cargo transportation. Ultimately, all these bundles of various practice shape the activities and define the Lofoten Islands as a cruise destination. In the following sections, we provide examples of how practice bundles intertwine within and across the cruise sector of the Lofoten Islands.

A particularly critical intertwining of practices that deserves attention is that of hosting tourists, planning and preparation, and local infrastructure development. These practice bundles involve key actors that typically do not collaborate or coordinate among each other, which is understandable since they often are parts of separate systems that converge only when it comes to tourism issues. However, these actors also rely on one another for both the cruise experience and the sustainability of the Lofoten Islands.

This intertwining can give rise to unique challenges for the building of a sustainable cruise destination of Lofoten Islands. For example, public infrastructure is a vital component for various systems, including local mobility, individual tourism, and transportation of goods. Thus, these aspects are taken into consideration when developing infrastructure. Simultaneously, hosting tourism places significant emphasis on providing optimal experiences and ensuring a smooth flow for tourists. Accessing attractions therefore becomes an essential prerequisite for the overall experience bundle.

However, with regards to planning and preparing for the cruise experience, there is a distinct lack of understanding and coordination among the actors involved. This disconnection can result in situations when the carrying capacity of the infrastructure or place itself provides a 'bottleneck' leading to delays and decreased quality of the experiences. Considering the interconnections and dependencies between practice bundles, infrastructure can be seen as a limitation, and the utilization of existing infrastructure can present challenges.

Looking at it from another perspective, adjusting current practices of hosting tourists, planning and preparing may alleviate bottleneck situations as an alternative to developing new infrastructure solely to cater for cruise arrival days. To illustrate this scenario: If there are 1,000 cruise passengers on land, 60 % of whom book a shore excursion activity that includes a stop in Reine or Henningsvær, the impact on the bottlenecks will be the same as if there were 2,000 cruise passengers of whom 30% stopped in Reine or Henningsvær. Additionally, the distribution and spread of cruise passengers throughout the day and among different attractions play a critical role in managing bottlenecks. This example demonstrates that

discussions about maximum capacity to avoid bottlenecks can be addressed at various levels encompassing different practices such as planning shore excursions and offering shore excursions, and policies regarding maximum bookings. Alternatively, building new infrastructure to alleviate bottlenecks is another option. It is important to consider why troubles arise as well as when and how to address them to minimize the negative consequences.

Based on our analysis, we observe that many of the opportunities and challenges discussed in the following sections can be approached from different angles, which we consider an important aspect of thoroughly understanding and grappling with these issues before making changes to the existing cruise practices. It is crucial to ask what kinds of practices are affected by these adjustments, what their dependencies and interconnections are, and how these practices can contribute to addressing the challenges at hand. It is also worth noting that shifting perspectives can turn opportunities into challenges, and vice versa. We acknowledge that the development of the Lofoten Islands as a cruise destination entails a dual nature. Nonetheless, we structure the following paragraphs into opportunities and challenges while remaining aware that the former can become the latter—and vice versa.

## **4.2 Cruise opportunities for local self-control**

To examine the Lofoten Islands cruise destination from an opportunity-driven perspective, it is essential to distinguish between different interests and potential trade-offs. In this section, we will first outline several conditions that offer opportunities for Lofoten cruise stakeholders, followed by a description of tools to enhance these opportunities.

Multiple conditions facilitate cruise opportunities, including geographical and natural factors, the mobile nature and inherent short-term resource use of the cruise market, adjustments following the COVID-19 pandemic, and enforceability. The unique geographical and natural conditions—coupled with changing climate patterns—have already led to an extension of the summer cruise season as well as a growing potential for winter tourism. Extending the tourist season can contribute to spreading traffic and leveraging the economic benefits. However, this progress remains vulnerable to unpredictable Arctic weather conditions. In fact, cruise call cancellations may occur even during the summer months, thereby impacting local tour providers. Regarding winter tourism, the Lofoten Islands faces competition from other established winter destinations such as Tromsø and Alta further North in Norway. To extend the season, factors beyond the feasibility of winter cruise tourism must be considered, such as tourism offerings and the willingness and suitability to allocate resources. While summer cruise practices coexist alongside other tourism practices, the winter tourist season is currently less developed, necessitating more standalone practices.

These standalone practices can be seen as opportunities when considering the cruise market's mobility since resources have to be available for only a short period - a period which is typically known approximately two years in advance. Drawing lessons from other destinations, the short term availability of resources allows for collaboration with local high schools and other educational institutions. For example, cruise activities can be incorporated into school projects, enabling pupils to apply what they have learned during the cruise day by acting as guides, assisting with tourist information, or setting up pop-up stores in the harbor area. Thus, the cruise's temporality allows for the mobilization of people and resources, such as schoolchildren and retirees, in creative and non-traditional ways, including options during the

wintertime. In general, the temporal nature of resource use when starting with winter cruise provides opportunities for unorthodox mobilization approaches. On another note, we do acknowledge that the lack of synergies with other types of tourism can bring novel challenges. The rapid growth in cruise tourism prior to the pandemic, as well as the significant socio-economic consequences experienced by many cruise stakeholders during COVID-19, have highlighted the need to rethink how cruises can be further developed in a sustainable manner while minimizing disruptions to social and environmental conditions. Despite the perceived power imbalance between large cruise operators and local host communities, there is an opportunity to leverage local enforceability. Although power dynamics may favor cruise operators in itinerary planning, there are various ways for the host destination to exercise power over local practices, since the experiences at the destinations are crucial aspects of the overall cruise satisfaction. Our interviews revealed that many aspects of the cruise experience are often taken for granted, and that opportunities to create more feasible and favorable conditions for the destination remain untapped. For example, there is potential for negotiation and adjustments of the language requirements, shore excursion packages, and the duration and timing of port stays—particularly during the midnight sun season. Opportunities for increased local value creation exist in the encouragement of value-added activities brought by different tour operators and ground handling organizations. By localizing these value-added cruise practices, the destination gains more control and, consequently, opportunities to implement changes and adjustments towards becoming a more sustainable destination. Several informants believe that this is feasible due to the Lofoten Island's international recognition and popularity as a cruise destination.

Municipalities can also promote innovative guidelines for (cruise) tourism activities. However, coordination among the municipalities on the Lofoten Islands (and perhaps even neighboring destinations along the Norwegian coast) is necessary. Such guidelines and standards must comply with national and international regulatory frameworks. Examples from other destinations show voluntary guidelines but steering measures can also be facilitated through pricing strategies, as long as they align with price-fixing and price agreement regulations.

### **4.3 Cruise troubles**

Cruise stakeholders in Lofoten have expressed several concerns regarding the ongoing cruise development. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the local communities' dependence on the tourism industry, including the cruise sector. Although it provides an additional source of income and employment opportunities for local municipalities, industries, and individuals, it also presents challenges and concerns during and after cruise ship arrivals. Many of these challenges have a dual nature, meaning that they can also be viewed as opportunities for sustainable and responsible tourism development.

Some stakeholders emphasized the need for more discussion and better coordination of various needs when developing local infrastructure. Key stakeholders that must be involved include the Norwegian Public Roads Administration, the Norwegian Police (regarding new parking spots and signage), and local tourism stakeholders. Local stakeholders are generally aware of the infrastructure needs and necessary adjustments to accommodate growing tourist flows. However, translating these needs into infrastructure improvements is rarely straightforward. For example, pressure on existing infrastructure may lead to suboptimal traffic coordination. Solutions in such situations could involve better distribution of tourist

flows during peak periods. Another example is the development of new harbor infrastructure with the aim to adopt environmentally friendly solutions such as shore power. This may impose additional costs on the local population due to grid capacity constraints. Given that infrastructure development is resource-intensive and has several negative externalities, we recommend efficient coordination to maximize the available opportunities.

Furthermore, there are enactment and coordination challenges that hinder local stakeholders from ensuring local value creation and capture. We perceive the shore excursions aspect of cruise practices as being highly structured, perhaps even too structured. Engaging in such overly structured shore excursion activities incurs high coordination costs. A typical value chain for overseas cruises calling in Lofoten involves several coordination stakeholders located outside the Lofoten municipalities, thereby reducing local value creation and capture. Examples of such stakeholders include the European Cruise Service and Arctic Gateway, which are external tour operators and ship agency. However, we see this as an opportunity to reconsider and increasingly localize the cruise value chain leading to local empowerment and socialization of cruise tourism. Similarly, the benefits from cruise tourism may not be evenly distributed among local actors or even the local municipalities. Ensuring that the economic gains from cruise reach all segments of society and contribute positively to the well-being of inhabitants is a challenge that must be addressed.

The utilization of common cultural and natural resources can pose various troubles. For example, cultural values conveyed through local stories can become lost in translation or gradually lose depth when overused without careful attention to details. On the one hand, the inherent message or educational aspect can be compromised, while on the other hand, the same message diminishes the cultural value itself. Culture is also practiced by the locals: The cultures and daily lives in the Lofoten Islands possess an exotic quality due to factors such as its remote location, island culture, climate, and history. Cruise tourists may sometimes misunderstand this and become fascinated with village life, inadvertently treating it as an open museum rather than respecting the privacy of local people. This imbalance between experiencing the authentic and real Lofoten as a tourism attraction, the way tourists consume tourism experiences, and the interference with the locals' daily lives poses a challenge. Another significant challenge is the adoption of a "one-size-fits-all" approach within the cruise industry. This approach refers to a standardized and uniform method of organizing and structuring cruise operations, particularly regarding shore excursions. It often leads to a high level of inflexibility that diminishes the local cruise provider's ability to cater to diverse passenger demographics, accessibility needs, preferences, and interests. However, to provide a limited range of predetermined excursions to seemingly fit all overlooks the opportunity to cater to the varying needs and preferences, potentially alienating certain segments of the cruise passenger base.

Further significant challenges and uncertainties stem from the temporary nature of planning in the cruise industry. This refers to the practice of determining excursion offerings and overall activity planning well in advance—typically two to three years—without having a clear understanding of guest bookings for specific trips or attractions. This creates uncertainty regarding the demand and popularity of certain excursions among cruise passengers. This is particularly evident in the overall cruise activity planning, where broad outlines and requirements are established without specific details. Although a general framework of activities is set, the specific elements and intricacies often remain unknown until perhaps 24 hours prior to the scheduled cruise arrival time. This lack of detailed information can limit the

ability of local harbor managers and tourist providers to fully prepare and coordinate the logistics and resources required for each cruise activity, leading to potential challenges and compromises. Additionally, short-term events and unpredictable changes can further contribute to the uncertainty in planning. Weather conditions, safety concerns, or unforeseen circumstances may necessitate adjustments to the scheduled activities. For example, if a particular harbor becomes inaccessible due to adverse weather conditions or operational issues, the cruise itinerary may need to be altered, requiring quick changes to shore excursions or even the cancellation of certain activities. Seasonality also poses challenges when it is crucial to balance the demand for cruise tourism with the carrying capacity of the destination. The Lofoten Islands may face challenges related to an excessive concentration of visitors during peak times in the summer that strains local resources.

To implement local guidelines in relation to national and international regulations also presents challenges due to conflicting requirements and differing perspectives. An example is the implementation of new norms and guidelines to effectively manage the defined carrying capacity in Reine and Leknes, while adhering to Norway's Harbor Act. Such local measurements are critical when addressing localized environmental impact from cruise tourism (such as waste management) and potential damage to marine ecosystems. Lastly, finding competent individuals to work as local guides during cruise arrivals is a crucial aspect of delivering high-quality and enriching experiences for cruise passengers, but this is challenging in the Lofoten Islands.

#### **4.4 Lessons for a sustainable Lofoten Islands cruise destination**

***Coping and adaptation to the cruise industry:*** The local cruise network addresses several concerns and opportunities that arise from cruise development, such as the need for greater flexibility and more room for adjustments and to limit the disturbance on society and environment. To understand what is needed it is positive to increase meeting opportunities among locals and the cruise tourists/operators. A measure to take advantage of cruise opportunities is the introduction of **tourism tax** (implemented in 2023). During our interviews, several stakeholders were positive about its implementation to co-finance public infrastructure and better facilitate the use of common resources.

**Locally defined carrying capacity (through dialogue between the municipality and local population)** should be considered in existing cruise practices when making decisions on the number of passengers in the harbors, coordination of the tourist flows and developing existing infrastructure. The maximum number of passengers has been defined for the ports of Leknes and Reine, but the dimension and capacity of the current infrastructure is not able to meet the tourism pressure during busy days in the summer season. There is a need to coordinate the tourist's flows and limit the pressure on some roads (e.g., regulate the number of buses between Leknes and Reine to avoid pressure and traffic jams). Thus, coordination is necessary to reduce the stress on the limited infrastructure, but also to discuss whether and how infrastructure can be further developed.

Another important lesson is that of transparency in the **communication with local communities** to highlight the opportunities the cruise industry brings to Lofoten and how cruise stakeholders are addressing the challenges. Examples to highlight to the public are the infrastructure improvements in Leknes harbor and value creation for local harbors and businesses resulting from arrivals of cruise ships. A way to address the negative aspects can be

to facilitate **community engagement** and to increase the accountability of the cruise operators by encouraging **operators to contribute more economically to benefit** the local community.

We also advocate for a **joint negotiation strategy** with both cruise operators and tour operators. This means that the local stakeholders develop a common strategy for how to approach and negotiate with the cruise and tour operators. The strategy should align the stakeholders to perform practices that both directly and indirectly impact the negotiation and power attributes between the Lofoten cruise destination and cruise/tour operators.

Furthermore, to increase opportunities for local value creation, our interviewees suggest the function of a **local cruise coordinator** with adequate resources and allocated time to work with cruise. In general, there is a desire to control the value creation locally. However, at present there is no such person or position to help facilitate this control. Although the Lofoten Cruise Network has a secretary working part-time (10% position) embedded at Destination Lofoten this position is regarded as insufficient.

Although cruise practices seem to be well established, we still see some potential for **niche innovations**. Based on our understanding of the Lofoten cruise destination, we suggest that there is room for innovative thinking and novel approaches that constitute more win-win situations. Examples here include regenerative tourism experiences and volunteer tourism. We advocate for potential redesigning of some aspects of the offered shore excursions, including pricing and value pricing strategies. By promoting responsible and sensitive use of cultural and natural resources, shore excursions can deliver authentic and enriching experiences while fostering sustainable tourism practices that benefit both the Lofoten Islands and its visitors. **Guidelines and standards for responsible and sensitive use of cultural and natural resources** are essential to strike a balance between providing an authentic experience for cruise passengers and preserving the integrity of cultural and natural sites.

Last, but not least, we see the potential for active (rather than reactive) planning towards meeting the growing cruise destination Lofoten. The development of a common strategy as an opportunity for the Lofoten Islands to move toward becoming a more sustainable cruise destination with increased ownership and perhaps even control of the cruise tourism.



## 5 Conclusion

Cruise tourism in the Lofoten Islands has undergone continuous development since the 1980s, and the archipelago has become world-known destination for various cruise operators. This growth can be attributed to Lofoten's location, captivating landscape, picturesque fishing villages, and favorable harbor infrastructures. The arrival of cruises on the Lofoten Islands involves multiple practices across many different levels, including guides, attraction hosts, service providers, and governing bodies. These practices are interconnected and interdependent to varying degrees, involving diverse stakeholders who do not always have a common strategy or meet on a regular basis to coordinate their efforts.

Our analysis reveals the intricate nature of hosting cruises on the Lofoten Islands, showing that it in many aspects it functions effectively. However, local stakeholders we have talked to emphasize the importance of collaborative efforts to establish Lofoten as a sustainable cruise destination. The diverse group of stakeholders and the interwoven nature of cruise practices present significant challenges in governing Lofoten as a sustainable cruise destination. Since cruises are not the primary responsibility of many of the actors involved, not all of them prioritize taking ownership and responsibility to work towards becoming a sustainable cruise destination.

Based on our analysis, we find that a local coordinator, equipped with sufficient time and resources, would play a crucial role in coordinating and potentially modifying individual practices to enhance coordinated efforts towards sustainability. The cruise destination has already initiated projects aimed at collectively defining sustainable cruise, such as establishing a shared understanding of the Lofoten Islands' carrying capacity. These initiatives are important. However, our analysis indicates that several practices stem directly from the actions of cruise operators. Therefore, we propose that a local cruise coordinator would take the role of an intermediary between the cruise operator, tour operators, and local stakeholders to enhance local control over the cruise development.

Because certain cruise practices have the potential to be in conflict with sustainability objectives, stakeholders must grasp the complexity of interrelated practices to make changes and establish new approaches that strike a balance between economic growth and social and environmental concerns.

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