

“ADVENTURE TOURISM – INNOVATION AND EDUCATION”

**Speech by
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First Lady of Iceland
Höfn in Hornarfjörður
14 March 2018**

Good morning everyone and thank you very much for inviting me to deliver opening remarks at this conference here today.

Travel and tourism is of great personal interest to me, and I am always very happy to showcase sustainable and creative practices that Icelandic tour operators and municipalities are undertaking to promote sustainable tourism growth in our country.

I like to joke that because I was not born in Iceland, but chose instead to make it my home and to raise my family here, I have a little bit more right to brag about the country. And it's really quite the country from a tourism point of view. When Iceland was first on my radar around 20 years ago, its tourism industry was fledgling. Visitors did get access to that “untouched” nature and “off-the-beaten-track” locations, but accommodation, cuisine and tours either in the off season or outside of the capital area, were much harder to come by. I believe that most here in Iceland see the developments of the last decade or so as largely positive, with the caveat that we must do our utmost to preserve our natural sites and our cultural heritage for both local and international visitors to enjoy.

I had the honour late last year of being asked to serve as a United Nations Special Ambassador for Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals. It is my job in that capacity to help promote sustainable tourism and its importance to a region's economic and cultural health.

Hornarfjörður Municipality, where we are now, is in many ways an ideal setting for ambitious projects such as SAINT (Slow Adventure in Northern Territories) and ADVENT (Adventure Tourism in Vocational Education and Training) that also work to enhance the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This region of Iceland has a long history of tourism and a large majority of companies operating in the area are owned by local entrepreneurs.

Increased tourism in Iceland since 2010 has led to increased interest among local companies to develop their capacity to provide tours, and sometimes also accommodation and food. This trend has been fuelled by a large increase in winter activities in the area. Tourism seasonality in Hornarfjörður has subsequently decreased in recent years, opening up possibilities for companies to plan their operations on a full-year basis. But this change has happened over a very short period of time, and has an impact on both nature and society. For the companies themselves, these changes have led to strains on their capacity to simply keep up with the times – the limited resources of micro-enterprises,

whether in terms of money or time, make it difficult for them to utilize the positive aspects of this rapid increase in a constructive, long-term manner.

The Icelandic components of the SAINT and ADVENT projects are working to address several of the SDGs:

Both projects address: **Goal 8 – Inclusive and sustainable economic growth.** SAINT attempts to do this by working with local microenterprises and assisting them in two main fields: (1) development of new tour products that have the potential to reach new markets and (2) building skills (in particular in the use of social media) to enhance their competitive ability in new and existing markets.

ADVENT seeks to address this goal by developing new forms of education for adult practitioners in adventure tourism, again mainly with local microenterprises in mind. Tourism is a highly dynamic economic sector and to keep pace, tourism operators constantly need to learn new skills, as well as to develop the skills they have themselves built up through work experiences. The ADVENT project also addresses tourism innovation by allowing existing tour operators to train to be instructors in the fields they specialize in, thus opening up the potential for the development of educational tourism by the companies themselves.

SAINT also addresses **SDG 12 – Responsible consumption and production**, in particular through its emphasis on non-motorized tours and on immersive, meaningful encounters with both nature and culture in the areas where the tours take place. Food is an essential element of Slow Adventure and this should always be locally produced and prepared on-site, preferably using traditional, outdoor and/or slow methods of food preparation.

Both SAINT and ADVENT could also potentially address **Goal 14, Life below water** but in Iceland this has not yet been put to the test as the projects mainly concern land-based activities.

Additionally, the activities of SAINT and ADVENT intersect, to different degrees, with sustainable development Goals 3, 4, 5, 9 and 13.

Slow Adventure activities contribute to *Good health and wellbeing* by providing new venues for non-motorized outdoor recreation suitable to a much broader range of customers than typical “fast” or “hard” adventure tours.

ADVENT is specifically directed at providing *Quality education* for adults, a group that is either difficult to reach or tends to “fall through the cracks” of the formal education system.

Both SAINT and ADVENT address *Gender equality*, perhaps most importantly by focussing on family-run microenterprises where women have become ever more influential in recent years.

Both projects further address *Innovation* – SAINT by attempting to spur new tour product development and diversification and ADVENT by including tourism innovation as one of its main educational foci.

Finally, *Climate Action* is a common, underlying concern of both SAINT and ADVENT, not least due to the setting of the projects' activities in Hornafjörður, an area heavily impacted by global climate change.

So clearly your work is cut out for you today! The municipality here is doing a lot of good things, but I'm so pleased to see so many of you visiting this beautiful corner of Iceland from abroad, and I hope you will have the opportunity to experience some of the slow adventures on offer in this region. I wish you a very successful and productive conference.