

Light in the Dark



Facilitating Tourism Experience Design Workshops: A Manual for DMOs



Research
Development
Innovation



Co-funded by
the European Union



RESILIENT ECONOMIES AND COMMUNITIES

Light in the Dark

Light in the Dark

Facilitating Tourism Experience Design Workshops: A Manual for DMOs

Eva Holmberg (ed.), Maria Engberg, Annemari Andréén

Graphics and layout: Mathias Gröndahl

Cover Photo: Teele Rehe

Publisher: Yrkeshögskolan Novia, Wolffskavägen 33, 65200 Vasa, Finland

© Yrkeshögskolan Novia, Holmberg, Engberg and Andréén

Novia publikation och produktion, serie L: Läromedel 2/2025

ISBN: 978-952-7526-63-7 (Online)

ISSN: 1799-4195

CC BY 4.0

Table of Contents

01. Introduction.....	5
02. Background & Main Processes of the Light in the Dark Project.....	8
What are the Types of Seasonality in Tourism?.....	8
Implications of Seasonality in the Baltic Sea Region	9
03. Overview of the Light in the Dark Project	11
The Main Steps	12
04. The Challenge Inventory Study & the Survey Targeting Potential Tourists	14
The Challenge Inventory Study.....	14
Categories of Tourism Entrepreneurs Identified in the Light in the Dark Project	17
The Survey Targeting Potential Tourists	18
05. Workshop Methodology	22
Vision.....	23
Design	23
Running the Workshop	23
Learn	23
Recommendations for the Workshop Facilitator	25
06. The Workshops for Tourism Companies in the Light in the Dark Project	28
How to Use the Training Guides	29
How to Work with Product Cards.....	30
07. Summary & Further Recommendations	32
08. Workshop Support & Training Guidelines.....	36
Workshop 1: Customer Understanding.....	36
Learning Objectives.....	36
Tools of Workshop.....	36
Methods of Workshop.....	36
Group Exercise 1: Creating a Persona.....	37
Group Exercise 2: Creating an Empathy Map.....	37
Workshop 2: Experience Design.....	37
Learning Objectives.....	38
Tools of Workshop.....	38
Methods of Workshop.....	38

Group Exercise 1: Expanding the Baltic Sea Tourism Season.....	38
Group Exercise 2: Company-Level Season Expansion Map.....	39
Workshop 3: Marketing, Distribution and Pricing.....	39
Marketing.....	39
Distribution.....	40
Pricing.....	40
Learning Objectives.....	40
Tools of Workshop.....	41
Methods of Workshop.....	41
Group Exercise 1: Learning Café.....	41
Group Exercise 2: Best Practices in Off-Season Tourism Marketing.....	41
Workshop 4: Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences.....	42
Learning Objectives.....	42
Tools of Workshop.....	43
Methods of Workshop.....	43
Group Exercise 1: Partnerships for Selling Off-Season Products	43
Group Exercise 2: Map Your Off-Season Partners.....	43
Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability.....	44
Learning Objectives.....	44
Tools of Workshop.....	44
Methods of Workshop.....	44
Group Exercise 1: Creating a Customer Journey.....	45
Group Exercise 2: Creating a Service Blueprint.....	45
Workshop 6: Storytelling.....	46
Learning Objectives.....	46
Tools of Workshop.....	46
Methods of Workshop.....	46
Group Exercise 1: Your Customer and Story.....	47
Group Exercise 2: Connecting Baltic Sea Region Story Threads under “Light in the Dark”	47

01

Introduction

Projects like **Light in the Dark (LitD)** do not get funding in a vacuum. The project was initiated by the **4 Seasons network**, which spent two years laying the groundwork for what would become a successfully funded project under the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme. The original network brought together universities, destination management organisations, public-sector representatives, and industry associations.

From the outset, the project focused on developing solutions to enhance tourism and extend the season in the Baltic Sea region. The 4 Seasons network participants recognised and agreed upon two key issues: the strain caused by overcrowding during high season, and the missed opportunity to capitalise on growing off-season interest due to insufficient service offerings.

Marketing efforts were heavily weighted towards high season. Flattening the seasonal curve would benefit both nature and local communities. Given the

ongoing depopulation of coastal and regional areas in the Baltic Sea region, extending the tourism season could support year-round habitation and stimulate entrepreneurial growth, making the region more attractive for residents and businesses alike.

”

Flattening the seasonal curve would benefit both nature and local communities.



By Teele Rehe.

Everybody in the 4 Seasons Network realised that shared knowledge and shared efforts would be a win-win in enhancing the Baltic archipelago identity off-season. Cross-organisational and cross-border cooperation was seen as the way to develop the off-season in an area too small to be visible on the international market individually, but which could gain visibility through collaborative partnerships. A main activity identified as crucial for the success of the project was enhancing the business models of small tourism companies to support more off-season offerings.

This manual is developed as a tool primarily for destination management organisations located in the coastal Baltic Sea region to organise workshops related to business model development and innovation of new tourism products. The themes of the workshops are related to the focus areas of the Business Model Canvas (BMC), but as the workshops in the project were organised online, it was decided not to introduce the full BMC as it is a rather complex tool to work with online.

The manual is organised as follows: Chapter 2 examines seasonality challenges in tourism, and Chapter 3 describes the main project phase. Chapter 4 summarises findings from the initial studies, while Chapter 5 outlines the workshop methodology. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the workshops conducted. Chapter

7 concludes the manual with a summary and recommendations, and Chapter 8 offers guidance on workshop support and training.

The workshop materials are included as attachments.

”

This manual is developed as a tool primarily for destination management organisations located in the coastal Baltic Sea region to organise workshops related to business model development and innovation of new tourism products.

02

Background & Main Processes of the Light in the Dark Project

Many industries face the challenge of seasonality as the demand for most products and services fluctuates during different times of the year, but in tourism the challenge is more evident than in most other industries. Seasonality affects almost every tourism destination worldwide. Seasonality is challenging for an industry comprising mainly small and medium-sized companies. For instance, in the Baltic Sea region, many companies close their doors for 7-9 months every year. At the same time, fixed costs are running as facilities must be heated and insurance paid. Existing studies show that tourism seasonality exerts important economic effects on the financial performance of hotels, the labor market through the associated temporality of contracts, and the wellbeing of residents

through overcrowding and sustainability issues, such as waste management. (Boto-García & Pérez, 2023)

”

Seasonality affects almost every tourism destination worldwide.

What are the Types of Seasonality in Tourism?

Seasonality in tourism can be divided into three main categories: off-season, peak season, and shoulder season (Honkanen, 2017). The peak season for tourism in Northern Europe is in the summer months, except for ski tourism. As the weather in Northern Europe is most favorable for tourism activities from May to September, both bigger cities, as well as the more rural

destinations, attract domestic and international tourists during this time. The off-season, also known as the low season, is characterised by a limited number of tourists. As a result, prices are lower, and many companies see no value in offering their services at all. The shoulder season is the period between off-season and peak season. The length of the shoulder season varies, but it is usually between a few weeks to multiple months in spring and autumn. In recent years, shoulder seasons have become more popular as prices are lower, and destinations are not suffering from congestion.

Implications of Seasonality in the Baltic Sea Region

Travel and tourism are one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing industries in the world. As such, much like any sector, it is faced with its own challenges. Seasonality is directly linked to the number of tourists visiting a destination, but it is also related to the demand for experience, the budgets and spending habits of the tourists, and the length of their stay. From the Baltic Sea perspective, it is important to get local businesses to work together with the public bodies to prolong the season. Other possible strategies are related to diversifying offers and markets, new marketing strategies, brand building and infrastructure development. (Birkle, 2024)

Of these, the Light in the Dark Project presented in the next chapter aims at testing all these strategies, except infrastructure and challenges related to accessibility.

”

Seasonality is directly linked to the number of tourists visiting a destination, but it is also related to the demand for experience, the budgets and spending habits of the tourists, and the length of their stay.



By Teele Rehe.

03

Overview of the Light in the Dark Project

During the planning stage of the project, tourists interested in nature-based activities were identified as the primary target group. This group has been referred to as nature explorers, natural wonder hunters and, most commonly, simply the nature tribe. They seek to avoid crowds by travelling in the off-season. They expect bespoke experiences and efficient service, they value nature, and are willing to extend their stay. The nature tribe is drawn to activity-focused, nature-based tourism. Nature-based tourism experiences encompass many different outdoor activities, such as hiking, backpacking, skiing, boating, camping, angling, hunting, kayaking and cycling, as well as local heritage related to nature.

The Light in the Dark project aims to prolong the season in rural and coastal areas of the Northern Baltic Sea region. This is achieved by

supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector, by crafting an off-season nature-based offer, and by developing an overall marketing concept that the destinations can use as a common thread in their marketing.

”

The Light in the Dark project aims at prolonging the season in rural and coastal areas of the Northern Baltic Sea region.

The off-season period – autumn, winter and spring – in the Northern Baltic Sea region is dark and silent, and often without snow due to the proximity to and humidity from the sea. This poses challenges for tourism, as the demand for tourism

services is limited and many companies close their doors, even though numerous costs such as heating and insurance continue throughout the year.

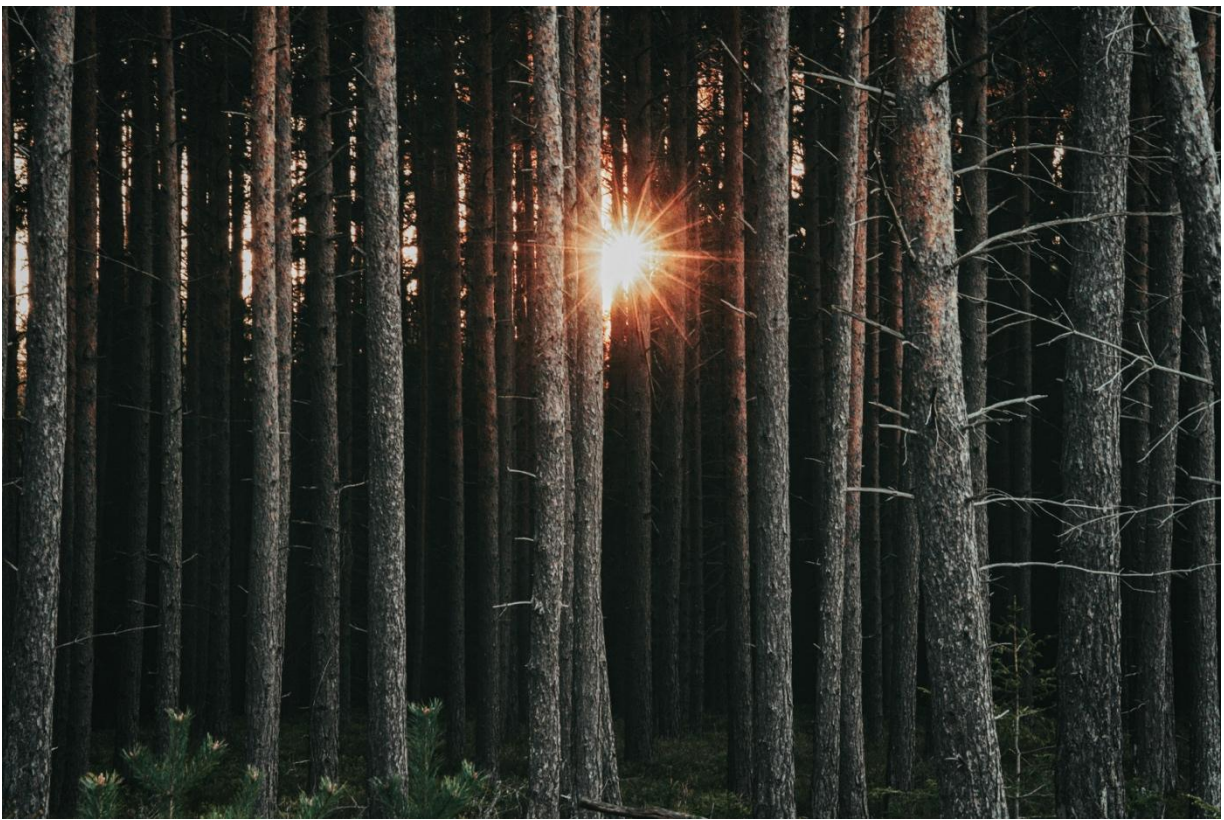
The Main Steps

- **Challenge Inventory Study** - Identification and analysis of key challenges within the project scope
- **Survey to Potential Tourists in Europe** - Gathering insights on traveler preferences and behaviours
- **Development of Three Experience Concepts** - Creation of concept proposals inspired by research findings
- **Workshops with SMEs** - Revision of off-season business models and development of new tourism products
- **Piloting of Workshop-Developed Products** - Implementation and evaluation of the newly developed offers
- **Piloting and Testing of New Marketing Concepts** - Promotion of the Baltic Sea Region during the off-season by regional DMOs

The Light in the Dark project began by gaining an understanding of how tourism companies in the region perceive the challenges related to

the off-season and the potential of the region in the eyes of tourists across Europe (*presented in Chapter 4*). The next step was to develop three main experiences based on the analysis from the previous phase. Following this, tourism companies were invited to workshops to work on their business models and to develop new, innovative off-season products. The new products were then tested. In the final phase, a new marketing concept for attracting tourists during the off-season will be tested by the destination management organisations (DMOs) involved in the project.

In the next chapters, the first steps of the project are summarised to give an overview for people who will be involved in organising a Light in the Dark workshop for local companies.



By Teele Rehe.

04

The Challenge Inventory Study & the Survey Targeting Potential Tourists

The first step of the project was to gain an understanding of how tourism entrepreneurs in the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea region perceive the main challenges of off-season tourism and how they would address them. Another study, in the form of a survey, was sent to potential tourists residing in the main markets across Europe. The following sections will present the main findings from each of the studies.

The Challenge Inventory Study

To gain an understanding of how tourism entrepreneurs in the Baltic Sea region perceive the challenges of seasonality, data was collected

for a comprehensive report: [How to Prolong the Tourism Season? Challenge Inventory Study Among Small and Medium-sized Entrepreneurs in the Northern Baltic Sea Region](#)

”

The first step of the project was to gain an understanding of how tourism entrepreneurs in the coastal areas of the Baltic Sea region perceive the main challenges of off-season tourism and how they would address them.

The first data collection strategy was a survey of entrepreneurs, with a total of 239 respondents. In addition to the survey, 36 structured interviews with selected SMEs were conducted.

The analysis of the data from the two studies confirms that most companies are open from April to the end of October. Some companies (around 40%) also offer services during the months considered as off-season in the Baltic Sea region. Companies considering expanding their season are most interested in the so-called shoulder season, i.e., April and September–October.

Most companies rely on the domestic market, but tourists from neighbouring countries are also an important customer group. Most companies rely on direct sales (own webpage or bookings by telephone), but various online booking platforms and tour operators or travel agencies, as well as regional DMOs, are also used for selling the services. The main marketing tools are companies' own websites, word-of-mouth referrals and Facebook, as well as working with local or regional DMOs.

The SMEs see potential in prolonging the tourism season and suggest nature-based outdoor activities, events, as well as wellness and relaxation services as possible solutions to extend the season. To prolong the season, the SMEs view it

as crucial to collaborate with other service providers and DMOs both regionally and nationally. The analysis also shows that there is a need for rebranding as well as new marketing approaches, since thus far most of the marketing communication has focused on the Baltic Sea region as a summer destination.

According to the Challenge Inventory Study amongst small and medium-sized entrepreneurs in the Nordic Baltic Sea region, tourism entrepreneurs in the Baltic Sea area can be divided into **place makers, value-driven experience creators, autonomy seekers and developers**. Most entrepreneurs belong to the place maker category and the fewest to the developer group. From a destination perspective, it is important to engage companies from all categories to participate in development and co-creation workshops.

”

The SMEs see potential in prolonging the tourism season and suggest nature-based outdoor activities, events, as well as wellness and relaxation services as possible solutions to extend the season.



By Teele Rehe.

Categories of Tourism Entrepreneurs Identified in the Light in the Dark Project

1. The Place Maker

- Dedicated to preserving local living conditions and traditions
- Maintains and upholds family heritage or family-run businesses
- Actively contributes to community growth and development
- Motivated by a desire to live in a beautiful, natural environment
- Deeply connected to and proud of their home region
- Committed to enhancing and developing the local destination
- Strives to sustain a vibrant, living archipelago

2. The Value-Driven Experience Creator

- Dedicated to delivering meaningful and memorable visitor experiences
- Takes pride in creating satisfaction and happiness for customers

- Enjoys personal interaction and connection with guests
- Shares knowledge, skills, and personal insights through their work
- Passionate about teaching and promoting sustainability
- Aims to inspire visitors to appreciate and respect nature
- Seeks to convey personal values and a deeper sense of purpose through tourism

3. The Autonomy Seeker

- Motivated by a strong desire for independence and self-direction
- Takes pride in earning a living on their own terms
- Values freedom, flexibility, and control over their schedule
- Pursues work that aligns with personal passions and interests
- Finds joy in “*living the dream*” and turning a hobby into a profession
- Gains fulfillment from seeing the tangible results of their efforts
- Appreciates not being bound by the traditional 9-to-5 routine

4. The Developer

- Driven by innovation and a desire to create something new
- Values collaboration and active networking
- Committed to personal growth and development as an entrepreneur
- Focused on improving the business and developing new products or services
- Strives to deliver high-quality offerings and experiences
- Motivated by a strong will to advance and promote tourism in the region

The Survey Targeting Potential Tourists

The survey “The Nature Tourists – Who Are They and How to Reach Them?” conducted at the beginning of the project, aimed to understand the contemporary nature tribe tourist, i.e., the report analyses the profiles, behaviours, motivations and preferences of nature-based tourists in the Baltic region and nearby countries. The survey comprises almost 5,000 respondents from nine countries. The survey targeting potential tourists identifies the following travel patterns and preferences of nature-based tourists:

”

The survey comprises almost 5,000 respondents from nine countries.

Travel duration and activities:

- Short trips (1-3 days) are most common, especially in the Baltic countries and Finland.
- Nature activities like hiking, camping, and nature photography.
- Key motivations for travel include adventure, cultural experiences, and wellness.
- The importance of nature when choosing a destination varies, with Latvia and Germany ranking it highest.

Seasonality and destination choice:

- Many travellers prefer destinations with activities aligned to the season.
- Summer is the preferred travel season for many respondents.

- Some travellers prioritise cost savings and flexibility (off-season travel, last-minute bookings).

Booking and information sources:

- Online travel platforms (e.g., Booking.com) are the preferred method of booking.
- Recommendations from friends and family, travel websites, and social media (especially Facebook and Instagram) are the main sources of inspiration.

The data collected for the survey shows that **nature-based tourists** can be divided into the following groups:

- **Nature enthusiasts** (48% of the respondents): See travel as an opportunity to enjoy different nature activities and enjoy environmental harmony
- **Cultural travellers** (28% of the respondents): Look for travel experiences rich in social and cultural engagement
- **Leisure seekers** (34.8%): Prefer passive and immersive nature experiences.

Drawing on the survey results and earlier VisitFinland research, the project developed three distinct nature experience concepts for off-season tourism (see figure 1).

The **Local Lifestyle** experience caters to tourists wanting to immerse themselves in regional culture through activities like berry picking, sampling local cuisine and learning traditional handicrafts.

The **Nourished by Nature** concept targets those seeking wellness and tranquillity through restorative time outdoors. Finally, the **Active Adventures** experience appeals to thrill-seekers through challenging activities such as kayaking, extended hiking expeditions and mountain climbing.

”

Drawing on the survey results and earlier VisitFinland research, the project developed three distinct nature experience concepts for off-season tourism.

The Three Experiences

When engaging with companies interested in developing off-season products and reshaping their business models, these experience concepts should serve as a strategic foundation. They are based on direct insights from potential visitors to the Baltic Sea coastal region, ensuring that any products aligned with these concepts will meet genuine market demand.

Learn More

[How to Prolong the Tourism Season? Challenge Inventory Study Among Small and Medium-sized Entrepreneurs in the Northern Baltic Sea Region](#)

[The Nature Tourists – Who are They and How to Reach Them?](#)

[Tunnista kohderyhmäsi, asiakkaasi ja vahvuutesi](#)

See the complete reference list at the end.

Figure 1: The Three Experiences

THE THREE EXPERIENCES

BALTIC SEA REGION / LIGHT IN THE DARK

LOCAL LIFESTYLE



Come close to reality with authentic experiences with local people, food, culture and traditions.

It's a journey into the everyday lives of local people that focuses on personal and meaningful interactions. It's about hearing personal stories that bring the place to life.

A journey where you taste original dishes and learn the stories behind the flavours and ingredients that make them unique.

This is for you who want to go beyond the typical tourist spots and instead dive deep into the heart of a destination to discover its essence through its people and their culture.

NOURISHED BY NATURE



A Journey to stillness and recreation.

A travel experience focusing on relaxation and recreation through close encounters with nature and a deeper connection to the environment.

It's a journey back to the essence of life, where nature nurtures the body, mind, and soul.

It's an invitation to slow down, breathe deeply, and appreciate the beauty of the world around us.

Step into your new comfort zone and immerse yourself in nature. Gain new perspectives and insights, personal growth and self-discovery.

ACTIVE ADVENTURES



Embrace an active vacation with soft outdoor adventures. It's about making adventure travel accessible to everyone, regardless of age, fitness level, or previous experience. Offering lighter versions of kayaking, hiking, exploring, and nature encounters.

It's an opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors without feeling limited by physical demands or the need for specialized skills and equipment.

Whether you're paddling through calm waters or wandering along a picturesque trail, Active Adventures promises experiences that are as memorable as they are attainable.



By Rob Watkins.

05

Workshop Methodology

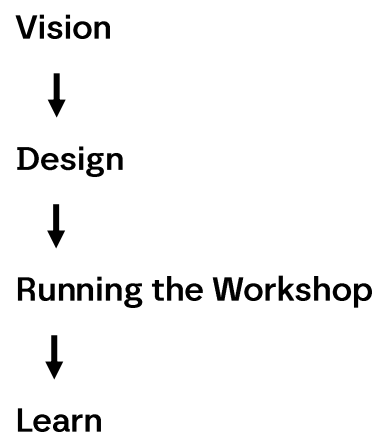
A workshop is an active and solution-focused approach to working with partners and stakeholders. The aim is to generate creative and practical ideas for pre-identified challenges or novel solutions. Workshops can also be organised for collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. A workshop differs from an informal group discussion in that it follows a structured methodology and comprises activities such as brainstorming and idea-sharing. Workshops also aim to strengthen connections, trust and commitment. (Smart;Rim Moiso;& Vidal)

”

The aim is to generate creative and practical ideas for pre-identified challenges or novel solutions.

The main steps for a workshop planning process are summarised in *figure 2*.

**Figure 2:
Workshop Process**



Vision

During the vision phase, it is crucial to decide upon intentions, to define the target group and to draft a preliminary concept. Since there is competition amongst projects to attract stakeholders to events or training sessions, it is pertinent that the concept is well prepared to attract sufficient participants to the workshop. At least 10–12 participants would be needed to bring in as many perspectives and viewpoints as possible.

Design

Once the workshop concept has been decided upon, the next step is to work on the design of the workshop itself. The design phase comprises activities such as deciding on the time and venue, drafting the agenda, refining the agenda, creating a communication plan and deciding whom to invite. Invitations to the workshop must be sent in advance. The invitations must be compelling, and the workshop should be beneficial for all partners.

Running the Workshop

The running the workshop phase starts with the final preparations for the actual work in the workshop. Materials such as markers, sticky notes and flipcharts must be collected, and the team briefed before the participants arrive.

Usually, at least two people are needed to run the workshop: one who is responsible for facilitating and another who works on documentation. The workshop starts with an introduction, clearly stating the aim of the workshop and how the outputs will be used. Many workshops also include a short icebreaker to create trust amongst participants and to get everyone into a creative mood. A good icebreaker is fast and fun, for instance "if I were an animal, I would be...". After the icebreaker, participants are usually divided into groups of 4–6 people and the actual workshop work begins.

Learn

The final phase is the learning phase. It involves reporting, follow-up, summarising learning and celebrating the success of the workshop. In most cases, the results of the workshop will be communicated to a broader audience.

”

During the vision phase, it is crucial to decide upon intentions, to define the target group and to draft a preliminary concept.



By Teele Rehe.

Recommendations for the Workshop Facilitator

The success of any workshop hinges on effective facilitation. A facilitator guides the workshop, ensuring discussions remain productive and that all participants are engaged and heard. The facilitator's role is to maintain focus whilst simultaneously supporting participants in building strong relationships that foster trust. An effective facilitator stays neutral, listens attentively, and recognises when to intervene to steer the discussion or when to allow it to progress organically (Bostelaar, 2016). Successful workshops require careful planning. It is advisable to plan the workshop flow in considerable detail. Numerous templates are available online; for example, the [Workshop Planning Canvas](#) provides a free template.

Points to bear in mind:

- There's no "right" or "wrong" approach to facilitation
- Your facilitation skills develop through experience
- Co-facilitating with a colleague may help initially if facilitation feels stressful

”

A facilitator guides the workshop, ensuring discussions remain productive and that all participants are engaged and heard.

Numerous techniques and tools can be employed to cultivate an innovative atmosphere. Dividing participants into heterogeneous groups, incorporating as much diversity as possible, creates space for generating varied ideas. A brainstorming session at the outset is an effective way to begin by gathering all the group's ideas. This can be achieved, for example, through sticky notes to generate as many ideas as possible, which are then organised and voted upon to identify the strongest ones, or through idea walks using sheets of paper mounted on the wall. There are also techniques such as 5-3-5, whereby each person writes three ideas in five minutes, which they then exchange with others to develop further, or another approach where everyone writes down ten ideas in fifteen minutes, after which the most promising ones are selected for further development.

Drivhuset introduces an exercise in which participants roll a dice to select a target group, a problem, and a solution from a list of provided alternatives. Based on the resulting combination, participants are expected to generate as many ideas as possible within ten minutes. This method requires thinking outside the box and fosters creativity. (Ben Salem Dynehäll & Lärk Ståhlberg, 2015)

Techniques such as the helicopter method or de Bono's Six Thinking Hats (The de Bono Group, n.d.) can also prove useful. In these approaches, different roles are assigned to group members, who then develop ideas based on their assigned perspective. The ideas are documented and discussed, and the most promising ones are selected for further development. AI tools may also be valuable for brainstorming purposes.

Learn More

[Loopa – Affärsutveckling för entreprenörer.](#)

[Six Thinking Hats](#)

[6 Of The Best Icebreakers For Your Next Workshop Or Meeting \(Ideal for in-person, remote & hybrid workshops\)](#)

[The 3 best methods for a successful workshop](#)

[SessionLab's Complete Guide to Workshop Planning](#)

[5 characteristics of a great strategy workshop facilitator](#)

See the complete reference list at the end.



By Teele Rehe.

06

The Workshops for Tourism Companies in the Light in the Dark Project

The workshops with tourism SMEs from the Baltic Sea coastal region were a vital component of the Light in the Dark project. The project application outlined that tourism SMEs in the coastal Baltic Sea area should receive support with their business models to enable them to operate during the months when they are typically closed. Furthermore, the workshops encompassed a process of developing new tourism products for the off-season.

Throughout the workshop process companies worked on developing new or updated tourism products for the off-season. This work was supported by a series of different product card templates: beginning with a template focusing on the added value to customers, progressing to a more comprehensive product card for

internal purposes, which detailed elements such as pricing, marketing and internal components of the product. Finally, towards the end of the process, a final, more sales-oriented version was developed for marketing and piloting purposes for the various experience concepts.

”

Throughout the workshop process companies worked on developing new or updated tourism products for the off-season.

The process for the “Revising the Business Model for Off-Season” workshops comprised the following steps:

- Kick-off Webinar
- **Workshop 1:** Customer Understanding
- **Workshop 2:** Experience Design
- **Workshop 3:** Marketing, Distribution, and Pricing
- **Workshop 4:** Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences
- **Workshop 5:** Quality and Sustainability
- **Workshop 6:** Storytelling
- **Final Pitch Session:** Presentation of new or upgraded products developed during the process

How to Use the Training Guides

The training guides produced for this manual can be used for a series of workshops or for individual sessions. Product development for new off-season products can form part of the workshop process, as undertaken in the Light in the Dark project, or a single workshop

organised with the aim of innovating new products to be offered at the destination outside the main season. The PowerPoint presentations prepared for each session can be found as attachments. They are designed, together with the training guides, to support the workshop organiser. Depending on the time allocated for the workshop, the organiser may need to adapt the preliminary suggestions according to their needs. Furthermore, if the topic is unfamiliar to the participating SMEs, there may be a need to present the topic in greater detail. In these cases, the suggestion is:

- The organiser searches for current videos on YouTube explaining the fundamentals of the topic, or
- The organiser expands the PowerPoint originally prepared for the workshop with more detailed information.

Please note! The PowerPoint presentations serve as the base material and have been revised according to the Baltic Sea Region concept for further use.

How to Work with Product Cards

In the Light in the Dark project, one major aim was also to develop new, innovative tourism products that could attract new target groups to the region. This process was incorporated into the overall workshop process in the project, but the development of new tourism products could equally be a standalone process (with its own dedicated workshops).

The manual offers five product card models to support the product development process. *The comprehensive product card is based on a product card developed by Visit Finland.*

Before commencing the brainstorming for new, innovative tourism products, it is recommended to present the experience pyramid by Tarssanen. Subsequently, the entrepreneurs begin ideating new products, either individually or as a group. Once a new product idea has been identified, it is recommended to use the comprehensive product card to ensure that all aspects of the product are considered. As developing an innovative tourism product requires time, at least 3–4 workshops are needed to refine the product after collecting feedback on the preliminary ideas, as the Loopa method developed by the Swedish Drivhuset suggests.

Learn More

[Loopa – Affärsutveckling för entreprenörer.](#)

[Handbook for Experience Stagers Edited by Sanna Tarssanen 5Th Edition](#)

See the complete reference list at the end.



By Teele Rehe.

07

Summary & Further Recommendations

The Light in the Dark project document, **Facilitating Tourism Experience Design Workshops: A Manual for DMOs**, is a comprehensive guide developed to support destination management organisations (DMOs). The premise is that DMOs can utilise the manual in their work with local tourism companies, particularly for improving company business models or for innovating new tourism products. As seasonality in tourism leads to economic strain, underutilised infrastructure, and challenges with recruiting staff, the manual is especially focused on working towards extending the season. The Challenge Inventory Study Among Small and Medium Sized Entrepreneurs in the Nordic Baltic Sea Region conducted in the first phase of the project provided a concrete understanding of seasonality from the entrepreneurs' perspective.

”

The premise is that DMOs can utilise the manual in their work with local tourism companies, particularly for improving company business models or for innovating new tourism products.

In the subsequent phase of the Light in the Dark project, three experience concepts were created based on surveys sent to potential visitors. The experiences are:

1. Local Lifestyle – food, crafts, traditions

2. **Nourished by Nature** – wellness, stress relief
3. **Active Adventures** – kayaking, hiking, etc.

These experience concepts serve as the starting point for the work with local tourism companies. Workshops, whether online or face-to-face, are generally regarded as a creative way to generate new ideas. Thus, the manual comprises the work process for six workshops. These are:

1. **Customer Understanding** – Personas & Empathy Map
2. **Experience Design** – Experience Pyramid & Value Creation
3. **Marketing, Distribution & Pricing** – Strategies, Channels & Value-based pricing
4. **Partnerships for Off-Season Tourism** – Mapping & Collaboration
5. **Quality & Sustainability** – Customer Journey & Service Blueprint
6. **Storytelling** – Narratives & Emotional Engagement

As many destinations need to diversify their offerings during the off-season, the manual also comprises ideas for innovative workshops aimed at identifying new tourism products. Five different product cards are available for use, including ones for each experience category: Local Lifestyle, Nourished by Nature, and Active Adventures. The product cards can be used for collecting feedback from potential customers and intermediaries selling tourism experiences to international and domestic markets.

”

The most important consideration is that the workshops must be relevant from a company perspective and inspire them to further develop their businesses.

As seasonality is a complex challenge in tourism, it cannot be solved by only one or two stakeholders. Destination management organisations must work closely with the industry to revise company business models (for instance, through finding new partnerships or new marketing channels) and to ideate new tourism products that appeal to new groups

of tourists who can travel off-season. The workshop ideas presented in this manual can be organised as a process of several workshops or, if it is perceived that one theme, such as quality, is a key issue, as a stand-alone workshop. The most important consideration is that the workshops must be relevant from a company perspective and inspire them to further develop their businesses.

The content of the manual can be replicated as presented, but it can also be adapted based on the organiser's previous experience.

Feel free to modify the content of the workshops and the templates offered according to your own needs.



By Chris Alfthan.

08

Workshop Support & Training Guidelines

Workshop 1: Customer Understanding

Understanding the customer is at the core of all service design and product development. A product or service must meet customer needs to succeed. It should, therefore, not be developed for a large mass of people, but rather for a specific group. The customer understanding module includes tools for this purpose.

Learning Objectives

After workshop 1, the participants will be able to:

Design the right customer experiences by understanding:

- Who is the customer?
- What does the customer need?

Tools of Workshop

1. Customer Persona
2. Empathy Map

Methods of Workshop

The workshop begins with an introduction of the participants and their expectations, before moving on to the topic of customer understanding. The tools persona and empathy map are introduced. If there are more than 10 participants, it is advisable to split the group into smaller teams (3–5 people) after the introduction, to enable more fruitful discussion. The participants' first task is to create a persona – a "typical" customer for their product – based on a template listing the personal facts, preferences and motivations of the person. The persona is created based on their assumptions and earlier experience regarding the target group for the service or product.

Before moving on to the next tool, the participants present their personas within their small groups.

After this, they move on to the second tool, i.e., creating an empathy map for this persona. Understanding the specific needs, feelings and behavioural patterns of the customer helps to design a product or service that matches the exact needs of the customer. The results are again discussed in smaller groups, after which they are summarised in the large group.

Group Exercise 1: Creating a Persona

Process: Introduction of the tool, after which everyone works individually on creating their persona (approx. 30 minutes). After this, the participants present their personas to each other in smaller groups and receive feedback from one another and the trainer.

**Estimated Duration for
Implementation:** 1 hour

Debriefing: Short presentation by each participant

Group Exercise 2: Creating an Empathy Map

Process: Introduction of the tool, followed by individual work on creating an empathy map for the designated persona. After presenting the results to their small groups and receiving feedback, the groups will reconvene to summarise the exercises.

**Estimated Duration for
Implementation:** 45 minutes

Debriefing: Short presentation by each participant

Learn More

[Empathy Mapping: The First Step in Design Thinking](#)

[Personas: Study Guide](#)

See the complete reference list at the end.

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Understanding the experience concept will introduce the participants to the difference between tourism products and experiences. According to Komppula (1999), successful tourism products are experiences that are memorable and unique. The module includes the definition of an experience, and key aspects of experiences are discussed. There is special focus on the experience pyramid and how tourism entrepreneurs can develop their products into memorable experiences that affect tourists on an emotional level.

It is also important to keep in mind that any experience must offer value for the customer group. Value can be defined as the costs combined with the benefits of a product or service. It is important

to note that value is subjective – what is valuable to one person may not be to another.

Learning Objectives

After workshop 2, the participants will be able to:

Create valuable tourism experiences by understanding:

- The importance of experiences in tourism and their role in creating value for the tourist
- How to use the experience pyramid to design educational and transformational experiences

Tools of Workshop

1. Value Proposition Canvas
2. Opportunity Map

Methods of Workshop

To gain a mutual understanding of the need for creating value, the first discussion is related to how a local tourism ecosystem in the coastal areas around the Baltic Sea could improve the value offered to potential tourists during the off-season. In this discussion, the value proposition canvas is introduced, as this is one of the main tools for any company considering new services and products for the offering. This discussion is limited to 15 minutes,

and it remains at a destination (ecosystem) level rather than taking the starting point from the company.

The next exercise is related to the experiences offered by the companies participating in the workshop. The trainers briefly introduce the three personas developed in workshop 1, and the participants are given time to reflect upon "how could your company contribute to the value offered by your destination during the off-season, to the identified target group(s)?" The tool to be used is the opportunity map, helping the participants to critically reflect upon what kind of resources they have to extend the off-season offerings. After individual reflection, the participants share their insights.

Group Exercise 1: Expanding the Baltic Sea Tourism Season

Process: Short individual brainstorming, followed by a discussion facilitated by the trainers.

**Estimated Duration for
Implementation:** 30 minutes

Debriefing: Individual work writing one's own ideas on expanding the season on a sticky note and attaching it to a flip chart (*an online tool like Padlet or Miro could also be used*). Trainers facilitate discussion on ideas, challenges and

development approaches. The outcome is a shared understanding of the approaches to expanding the season through new innovative experiences.

1. Write down **your ideas for expanding the season** on sticky notes (or an online platform)
2. **Don't spend too much time – just work with the first ideas** that come into your mind!
3. Place your notes on the flip chart (or write on an online platform) shared by 4–5 participants (if there are more participants, divide them into groups). (You have **10 minutes** for this exercise.)
4. Group your ideas according to themes and finalise the main ideas on a value proposition canvas. Which pains and gains could the product answer?
5. Discuss which ideas are the most innovative

Group Exercise 2: Company-Level Season Expansion Map

Process: Start by describing the opportunity map. Thereafter, companies have time for their own reflection (20-30 minutes). Finally, each participant briefly reflects

upon the resources they already have, and what they need more of.

**Estimated Duration for
Implementation:** 40 minutes

Debriefing: Short presentation by each participant

Learn More

[Low Season Travel - Harnessing the Magic of Darkness and Dark Skies](#)

[Drivhuset – Our Tools](#)

[Strategyzer's Value Proposition Canvas Explained](#)

See the complete reference list at the end.

Workshop 3: Marketing, Distribution and Pricing

Marketing

Digital marketing comprises the company's webpage and its presence on social media channels. Digital marketing requires an understanding of owned, earned and paid media (the POEM model). The webpage is the most important owned media, and it must be both visually appealing and regularly updated. Owned media also includes, for instance, the posts the company shares in its own channels (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok); paid media includes Facebook

campaigns and Google adverts; and earned media includes, for instance, shared customer reviews and content.

Distribution

Tourism distribution channels are the ways travel products are sold to customers. Channels can be divided into direct and indirect channels. Direct channels mean that travel companies sell directly to customers through their websites or shops. Indirect channels involve intermediaries, i.e., middlemen like travel agents or online travel websites (for instance, Booking.com). OTA commission rates typically range from 15% to 25%, which should influence the pricing strategy.

Pricing

Pricing tourism products and services involves balancing time, money spent and customer value. Many entrepreneurs use cost-plus pricing, adding a margin to their costs. The costs can be either fixed or variable, depending on whether they change based on the quantity sold. The time used by the entrepreneur is often overlooked or downplayed when calculating costs, which constitutes a risk for pricing. However, pricing also requires consideration of competition and demand, which means that dynamic pricing based on seasonality and

demand may need to be implemented. Another thing to consider is discounts for certain groups or individuals, which may increase demand but may also affect the profit by 'eating into' the margin. Instead of discounts, loyalty programmes can be applied, aiming at getting customers to return in exchange for benefits. When applying value-based pricing, the starting point is the value the product or service offers the customer. Examples of this kind of pricing can be found, for example, in Lapland during the winter season, when demand is high and customers are prepared to pay higher prices.

Learning Objectives

After workshop 3, the participants will be able to:

- Identify key trends in tourism marketing and understand how to use different marketing channels for their off-season tourism products
- Choose the most suitable distribution channels for their off-season tourism products and understand the basic pricing systems of the main distribution channels
- Determine the appropriate price for their off-season tourism product(s) based on a selected pricing strategy

Tools of Workshop

1. **Learning Café:** Facilitated group discussions supported by flipcharts and markers
2. **Best Practices Session:** Interactive workshop using flipcharts and Post-it notes to capture ideas and insights

Methods of Workshop

The workshop starts with an introduction to the key trends related to marketing, distribution and pricing in tourism, especially from an off-season perspective. The workshop continues with a learning café if there are at least 12 participants. If the number of participants is fewer than 12, more insights will be gained if the three themes of the workshop are discussed in different rounds of 20 minutes plus 10 minutes of summary. The starting point is that the participants will share their best practices and together discuss possible solutions to create demand for off-season products offered at the destination.

Group Exercise 1: Learning Café

Process: The participants are divided into three groups of 4–10 people. Three tables are prepared, one per theme: marketing, distribution and pricing. Each group works separately. A facilitator per

group is responsible for moderating the discussion and documenting the results on a flip chart. The group discusses their experiences and best practices regarding that particular theme for 20 minutes, after which they rotate to another table. The facilitator briefs them on the results from the previous discussion, which they then further develop with their input. After 15 minutes, they switch to the third table and repeat the process. The learning café ends when each group has given their input at all three tables.

Estimated Duration for Implementation: 60-90 minutes

Debriefing: A presentation by each facilitator on their group's theme.

Group Exercise 2: Best Practices in Off-Season Tourism Marketing

Process: The workshop takes place in three rounds. The first discussion is on marketing. Choose a tourism company in the region with a good webpage. Ask the participants in the workshop to write down three things on a sticky note that make the webpage appealing. Everyone shares their findings, and insights are recorded on a flip chart (or an online platform). Next, each participant thinks for 10 minutes about how they could improve their own webpage. The reflection is shared with the group.

The following discussion is related to distribution and sales channels. Discuss the pros and cons of: a) your own webshop, b) relying on online booking platforms, c) working with tour operators. The pros and cons are summarised on a flip chart. At the end of this phase, let the companies discuss how they could increase sales through new distribution channels.

The last discussion is related to pricing. Start by presenting different pricing strategies, such as dynamic pricing (pricing fluctuates based on demand), cost-plus pricing (calculate your costs and add a mark-up), competitive pricing (set a price based on what the competition charges), or price skimming (set a high price and lower it as the market evolves). Which pricing do the participants rely on? Are they sure that their pricing strategy results in the best possible profitability? Summarise the best practices related to pricing on a flip chart.

Estimated Duration for Implementation: 90 minutes

Debriefing: The trainer will summarize the main findings of the workshop.

Learn More

[Tourism Marketing: 12 Tourism Marketing Strategies](#)

[Pricing Strategies in the Tourism Industry](#)

[How do Travel and Tourism Distribution Channels Work?](#)

[Tourism Distribution Channels](#)

See the complete reference list at the end.

Workshop 4: Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences

Within the travel and tourism industry, partnerships play a crucial role for individual companies and destinations. A partnership is an agreement between two or more parties to work together towards a common goal. In the context of travel and tourism, partnerships can take various forms, such as collaborations between tour operators, hotels, activity companies, and destination management organisations.

Partnerships can enhance the overall tourist experience, as well as increase sales through, for instance, shared marketing efforts.

Learning Objectives

After workshop 4, the participants will be able to:

- Identify key partnerships that contribute to success during the off-season, particularly for the product developed in this project
- Recognise existing partnerships and determine which ones need to be strengthened

Tools of Workshop

1. Flip Chart
2. Map over Partnerships

Methods of Workshop

The workshop begins with an introduction to partnerships in tourism. It continues with a discussion on which partnerships micro and small-sized companies in Northern Europe need to successfully sell their products during the off-season. After summarising the discussion, participants have time to reflect upon their own partnerships. Which partnerships do they already have, and which do they need to strengthen to prolong their season?

Group Exercise 1: Partnerships for Selling Off-Season Products

Process: The workshop organiser presents the key partnerships in tourism using the PowerPoint

prepared for the workshop. The first discussion focuses on identifying partnerships needed for off-season tourism products at a general level. Discuss what small tourism companies could do to strengthen the partnerships needed for off-season sales. For instance, who should they work with and how can partnerships be strengthened?

Estimated Duration for Implementation: 25 minutes

Debriefing: The main findings from the discussion are recorded on a flip chart or online platform such as Miro or Padlet and presented once the discussion is finished.

Group Exercise 2: Map Your Off-Season Partners

Process: Map every company and organisation you need for the off-season product to work. Here the organiser asks the participants to reflect upon which partnerships they have that are working well, which partnerships they have but should be strengthened, and finally, whether they need to create completely new partnerships.

Estimated Duration for Implementation: 60 minutes

Debriefing: All participants present an overview of their partnership maps for increasing off-season sales, with a special focus on identifying stakeholders with whom

they must strengthen their relationship.

companies and develop a service blueprint based on the identification of the customer journey and its touchpoints

Learn More

What Is a Partnership in Travel and Tourism?

Why Partnerships in the Tourism Industry are Essential

See the complete reference list at the end.

Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability

When developing new tourism products, it is essential to meet the requirements of both customers and authorities. The right quality level and sustainable solutions need to be ensured to attract both domestic and foreign visitors. This workshop, therefore, addresses these topics and especially what they mean for off-season tourism.

Learning Objectives

After workshop 5, the participants will be able to:

- Identify the key elements for ensuring quality and sustainability in off-season tourism, particularly in relation to the product being developed
- Engage in discussions on sustainability within their

Tools of Workshop

1. Customer Journey
2. Service Blueprint

Methods of Workshop

The workshop begins with an introduction to what quality and sustainability mean in a tourism context. Examples of companies that are front runners are provided, as well as different measurements regarding quality, such as the Net Promoter Score. Environmental calculations and certifications, as well as booking systems, are also briefly touched upon as a means of strengthening the quality and sustainability of the company brand.

Next, the tools "customer journey" and "service blueprint" are introduced. The participants are then divided into smaller groups, where they first engage in a discussion regarding sustainability in their company (15 minutes). The participants share examples and experiences and think of ways in which they could improve the visibility of their sustainable actions to attract customers. The discussion serves as a warm-up for the following exercises, where the participants work with the tools

introduced during the workshop. Each participant first works individually with the tools, and then the results are discussed in the small group. At the end of the workshop, everyone gathers in the main room and the discussions are summarised and results presented.

Group Exercise 1: Creating a Customer Journey

Process: Introduction of the tool, after which everyone works individually but with assistance from the trainer in creating a customer journey, portraying what takes place before, during, and after the customer uses the product in question (approx. 30 minutes). After this, the participants present their customer journeys to each other in the smaller groups and receive feedback from one another and the trainer.

**Estimated Duration for
Implementation:** 60 minutes

Debriefing: A short presentation from each participant, followed by feedback from the other group members and the trainer.

Group Exercise 2: Creating a Service Blueprint

Process: The participants further develop the customer journey into a service blueprint by adding the internal processes to it, listing what takes place in the company before,

during, and after the customer uses the product. Both onstage, backstage, and support processes are listed to ensure that all details that affect the customer experience are covered (approx. 30 min).

Everyone works individually but with help from the trainer in creating the blueprint. After presenting the results to the small group and receiving feedback, all the groups meet to summarise and discuss the exercise.

**Estimated Duration for
Implementation:** 90 minutes

Debriefing: A short presentation from each participant, followed by feedback from the group and trainer.

Learn More

[What Is a Service Blueprint: Definition, Components, Steps, and Free Templates](#)

[This is the Way to Create Memorable Customer Journeys in Travel and Tourism](#)

[What is Sustainable Tourism? Why Sustainable Tourism Management is So Important](#)

[Addressing 9 Typical Quality Issues in Hospitality and Tourism](#)

[Sustainable Finland Pledge](#)

See the complete reference list at the end.

Workshop 6: Storytelling

Successful tourism products are experiences that are memorable and unique, and according to Komppula (1999), experiences can be physical, social, and mental, or a combination of them all. It is clear that companies today can stand out with a good story. Authentic and genuine stories can make a company seem human and arouse feelings such as success, surprise, and empathy, and will help the customer in deciding to pay a visit. Small companies in the tourism industry can make use of local history, and they can use stories to market new products and services. Stories can be based on real life but enhanced with appealing fictional details to attract attention. Finally, stories should include background information about the company to emphasise credibility. This will make a company or product seem human and will convey important values that arouse feelings such as success, positive surprise, and empathy.

Learning Objectives

After workshop 6, the participants will be able to:

- Identify the key components of storytelling for off-season experiences and connect their company's story to the **Light in the Dark** concept

- Engage in discussions on storytelling within their companies and gain the confidence and inspiration to continue developing their storytelling practices

Tools of Workshop

1. **Photographs** are used as a prompt to engage the participants in discussions on storytelling.

Methods of Workshop

The workshop begins with an introduction to what storytelling could be in the context of SMEs in the Baltic Sea Region. Next, there will be an overview of the collective BSR story; certain aspects that connect, yet separate, the region will be introduced. The concepts that were highlighted include silence, religion and spirituality, coastal geography, economy/price levels, different activities, natural phenomena, cultural heritage, local culinary experiences, as well as conservation of the environment. The importance of creating an authentic story that is tied to the concepts above is emphasised. Real stories enhanced with fictional details can act as a possible starting point.

The participants are then divided into smaller groups, where they

share a picture and tell the story of a satisfied customer at their company (5 minutes per participant). They convey the feeling they want a customer to have after a visit. Next, the trainer opens a discussion on how to connect common Baltic Sea Region story threads under the Light in the Dark concept (30 minutes). During the discussion, the participants are asked to write down important keywords. At the end of the workshop, everyone gathers in the main room and the discussions are summarised and results presented with the help of Mentimeter. The participants write down words that convey "the heart of the Light in the Dark concept" to them, as well as the heart of their off-season experience. Word clouds are created as the result of the workshop.

Group Exercise 1: Your Customer and Story

The participants bring a picture to the workshop that conveys a feeling that they would like a customer to have after a visit to their company.

"Your Customer and Story" – the picture is used as an aid to individual storytelling. Based on the picture, the entrepreneurs create a story that connects the customer to the heart of the off-season experience, a story bringing out the heart of the company and connecting the customer to the company.

Process: The entrepreneurs show their picture and explain the feeling that they wanted the picture to convey to the customer.

**Estimated Duration for
Implementation:** 30 minutes

Debriefing: 4–5 minutes per participant, including short comments by the others in the group.

Group Exercise 2: Connecting Baltic Sea Region Story Threads under "Light in the Dark"

Process: A discussion in the group about the common story threads that could be created under the Light in the Dark concept.

**Estimated Duration for
Implementation:** 60 minutes

Debriefing: The participants are asked to jot down pertinent keywords during the discussion, as all participants are asked to write three keywords that convey "The Heart of the Light in the Dark Concept" and three to five keywords that convey "The Heart of Our Off-Season Tourism Experience". Word clouds will be created as an end result of the workshop.

Learn More

Extraordinary Experiences through
Storytelling

See the complete reference list at the end.

References

- Athuraliya, A. (2025, 06 17). *What Is a Service Blueprint: Definition, Components, Steps, and Free Templates*. Retrieved from Creately: <https://creately.com/guides/what-is-a-service-blueprint/>
- Ben Salem Dynehäll, M., & Lärk Ståhlberg, A. (2015). *Loopa : Affärsutveckling för entreprenörer*. Stockholm: Liber.
- Birkle, M. (2024). *How to Prolong the Tourism Season? Challenge Inventory Study Among Small and Medium Sized Entrepreneurs in the Nordic Baltic Sea Region*. Mariehamn: Åland University of Applied Sciences.
- Bostelaar, K. (2016, 07 18). *5 characteristics of a great strategy workshop facilitator*. Retrieved from Strategyzer: <https://www.strategyzer.com/library/5-characteristics-of-a-great-strategy-workshop-facilitator>
- Boto-García, D., & Pérez, L. (2023). The effect of high-speed rail connectivity and accessibility on tourism seasonality. *Journal of Transport Geography*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2023.103546>
- Drivhuset. (2025). *Our Methods*. Retrieved from Drivhuset: <https://drivhuset.se/en/utbildning/vara-metoder/>
- Gibbons, S. (2018, 01 14). *Empathy Mapping: The First Step in Design Thinking*. Retrieved from NN/g: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/empathy-mapping/>
- Honkanen, A. (2017). Sesonkivaihtelut. (J. Edelheim, & H. Ilola, Eds.) *Matkailututkimuksen avainkäsitteet*, pp. 115-119.
- Hosany, S., Sthapit, E., & Björk, P. (2022, 04 04). Memorable tourism experience: A review and research agenda. *Psychology of Marketing*, 39(9), 1467-1486.
- Kalliomäki, A. (2014). *Tarinallistaminen: Palvelukokemuksen Punainen Lanka*. Helsinki: Talentum.
- Kaplan, K. (2022, 10 09). *Personas: Study Guide*. Retrieved from NN/g: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/personas-study-guide/>
- Light in the Dark. (2025, 02 06). *Low season travel - Harnessing the Magic of Darkness and Dark Skies*. Retrieved from Light in the Dark: <https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-posts/light-in-the-dark/low-season-travel-harnessing-the-magic-of-darkness-and-dark-skies/>

- Luxury Travel Diva . (2023, 06 08). *What Is a Partnership in Travel and Tourism?* Retrieved from Luxury Travel Diva: <https://luxurytraveldiva.com/what-is-a-partnership-in-travel-and-tourism/>
- Maglione, A. (2021, 11 29). *How do travel and tourism distribution channels work?* Retrieved from rezdy: <https://rezdy.com/blog/what-are-travel-and-tourism-distribution-channels/>
- maia. (2025). *The 3 best methods for a successful workshop.* Retrieved from maia: <https://www.getmaia.ai/en/blog/workshop-methods-guide>
- Marketing, E. (2023, 06 21). *Tourism Marketing: 12 Tourism Marketing Strategies.* Retrieved from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmZ0RFTdlG0>
- melbado. (2025). *Pricing Strategies in the Tourism Industry.* Retrieved from melbado: <https://melbado.com/pricing-strategies-in-the-tourism-industry/>
- Rauhala, M., & Vikström, T. (2014). *Storytelling Työkaluna: Vaikuta tarinoilla Bisneksessä.* Helsinki: Talentum.
- Reali, C. (2023, 06 27). *This is the Way to Create Memorable Customer Journeys in Travel and Tourism.* Retrieved from mize: <https://mize.tech/blog/this-is-the-way-to-create-memorable-customer-journeys-in-travel-and-tourism/>
- Šaparnienė, D., Bočkus, D., Rupulevičienė, R., & Maračkinaite, J. (2024). *The Nature Tourists – Who Are They and How to Reach Them?* Klaipėda: Klaipėda University.
- Smart, J., Rim Moiso, D., & Vidal, L. (n.d.). *SessionLab's Complete Guide to Workshop Planning.* SessionLab .
- Stainton, H. (2022, 01 30). *What is sustainable tourism? Why sustainable tourism management is so important.* Retrieved from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgAHZHkMTQU>
- Stevens, E. (2024). *6 Of The Best Icebreakers For Your Next Workshop Or Meeting (Ideal for in-person, remote & hybrid workshops).* Retrieved 4 2025, from facilitator.com: <https://www.workshopper.com/post/icebreakers-for-meetings-and-workshops>
- Strategyzer. (2017, 03 07). *Strategyzer's Value Proposition Canvas Explained.* Retrieved from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReM1uqmVfP0>

Sustainable Tourism. (n.d.). *Traveling Responsibly*. Retrieved from Sustainable Tourism: <https://sustainabletourism.net>

Tarssanen, S. (2009). *Handbook for Experience Stagers*.

The de Bono Group. (n.d.). *Six Thinking Hats*. Retrieved 4 2025, from The de Bono Group: <https://www.debonogroup.com/services/core-programs/six-thinking-hats/>

Travel Trade Ready. (n.d.). *Why Partnerships in the Tourism Industry are Essential*. Retrieved from Travel Trade Ready: <https://traveltradeready.net/partnership-in-tourism-industry/>

Vesterinen, A. (2024, 05 27). *Addressing 9 Typical Quality Issues in Hospitality and Tourism*. Retrieved from Falcony: <https://blog.falcony.io/en/addressing-9-typical-quality-issues-in-hospitality-and-tourism>

Visit Finland. (2025). *Sustainable Finland Pledge*. Retrieved from Visit Finland: <https://www.visitfinland.com/en/sustainable-finland-pledge/>

Visit Finland. (n.d.). *Tunnista Kohderyhmäsi*. Retrieved 11 2025, from Visit Finland: <https://www.visitfinland.fi/suomen-matkailudata/matkailun-kohderyhmat>

Light in the Dark

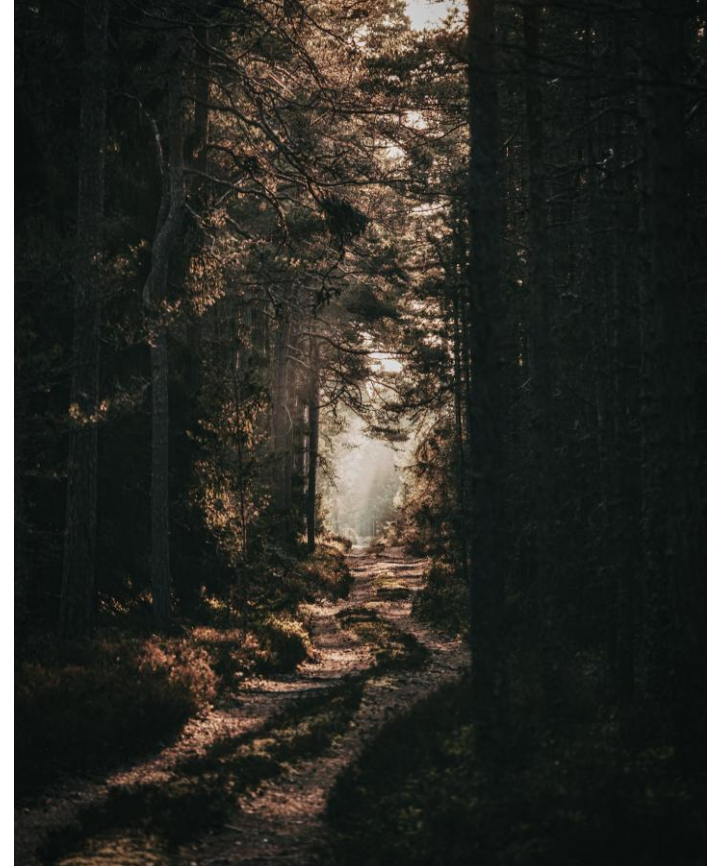


Workshop 1 Customer Understanding

Light in the Dark

Aim of the Workshop Series

- Development of new or improved tourism products tailored for the off-season in the Baltic Sea region.
- Strengthening the capacity of small tourism businesses in sustainable product and business model development.
- Further development of the three experiences identified through the Light in the Dark survey in the target countries.



By Teele Rehe.

Light in the Dark

The Three Experiences

THE THREE EXPERIENCES

BALTIC SEA REGION / LIGHT IN THE DARK

LOCAL LIFESTYLE



Come close to reality with authentic experiences with local people, food, culture and traditions.

It's a journey into the everyday lives of local people that focuses on personal and meaningful interactions. It's about hearing personal stories that bring the place to life.

A journey where you taste original dishes and learn the stories behind the flavours and ingredients that make them unique.

This is for you who want to go beyond the typical tourist spots and instead dive deep into the heart of a destination to discover its essence through its people and their culture.

NOURISHED BY NATURE



A Journey to stillness and recreation. A travel experience focusing on relaxation and recreation through close encounters with nature and a deeper connection to the environment. It's a journey back to the essence of life, where nature nurtures the body, mind, and soul. It's an invitation to slow down, breathe deeply, and appreciate the beauty of the world around us.

Step into your new comfort zone and immerse yourself in nature. Gain new perspectives and insights, personal growth and self-discovery.

ACTIVE ADVENTURES



Embrace an active vacation with soft outdoor adventures. It's about making adventure travel accessible to everyone, regardless of age, fitness level, or previous experience. Offering lighter versions of kayaking, hiking, exploring, and nature encounters.

It's an opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors without feeling limited by physical demands or the need for specialized skills and equipment.

Whether you're paddling through calm waters or wandering along a picturesque trail, Active Adventures promises experiences that are as memorable as they are attainable.

Workshop 1: Customer Understanding

Learning Objectives

After workshop 1, the participants will be able to:

Design the right customer experiences by understanding:

- Who the customer is
- What the customer needs



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 1: Customer Understanding

Tools and Documentation

Customer Persona

Empathy Map



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 1: Customer Understanding

Customer Persona

Name – The Cultural Traveller – Local Lifestyle

Main Age Group: 45-64

Prefers off-season travel

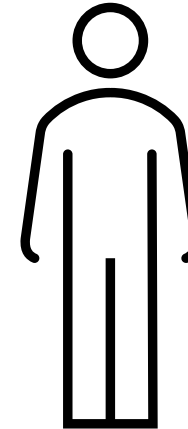
Enjoys berry picking and cultural experiences

Seeks authentic insight into local life

Values accessibility and inclusivity

Prioritises cultural connection and immersion

Drawn to everyday local living



Workshop 1: Customer Understanding

Customer Persona

Name – The Leisure Seeker – **Nourished by Nature**

Main Age Group: 45-64

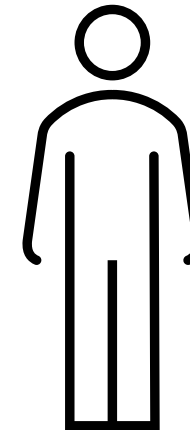
Often travels off-season

Enjoys hiking, photography, and solo trips

Seeks easy access and minimal hassle

Feels recharged in natural settings

Prioritises relaxation and well-being



Workshop 1: Customer Understanding

Customer Persona

Name – The Nature Enthusiast – **Active Adventures**

Main Age Group: 18-30

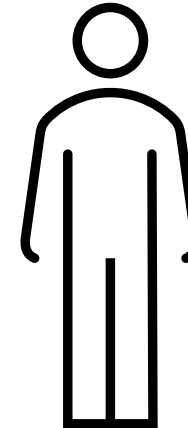
Often travels with friends, sometimes in peak season

Interested in remote work opportunities

Enjoys hiking, biking, and water activities

Seeks a balance of adventure and relaxation

Values immersive, hands-on experiences



Workshop 1: Customer Understanding

Customer Persona Template

Basic Information

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Location / Residence:

Occupation / Profession:

Demographics and Lifestyle

Income Level:

Education:

Family / Household:

Hobbies & Interests:

Travel and Tourism Behaviour

Travel Frequency:

Preferred Travel Type:

Travel Companions:

Typical Trip Duration:

Preferred Season:

Goals and Motivations

Why do they travel?

What experiences are they seeking?

What are their must-haves on a trip?

Challenges and Pain Points

What frustrates them when travelling?

Barriers to booking or enjoying a trip:

Decision-Making and Media

Where do they get travel information?

How do they decide on destinations or experiences?

What influences their choices?

Workshop 1: Customer Understanding

Empathy Map Template

Says

What the user says out loud.

Thinks

What the user is thinking but may not voice.

Does

Actions and behaviours of the user.

Feels

Emotions the user experiences.

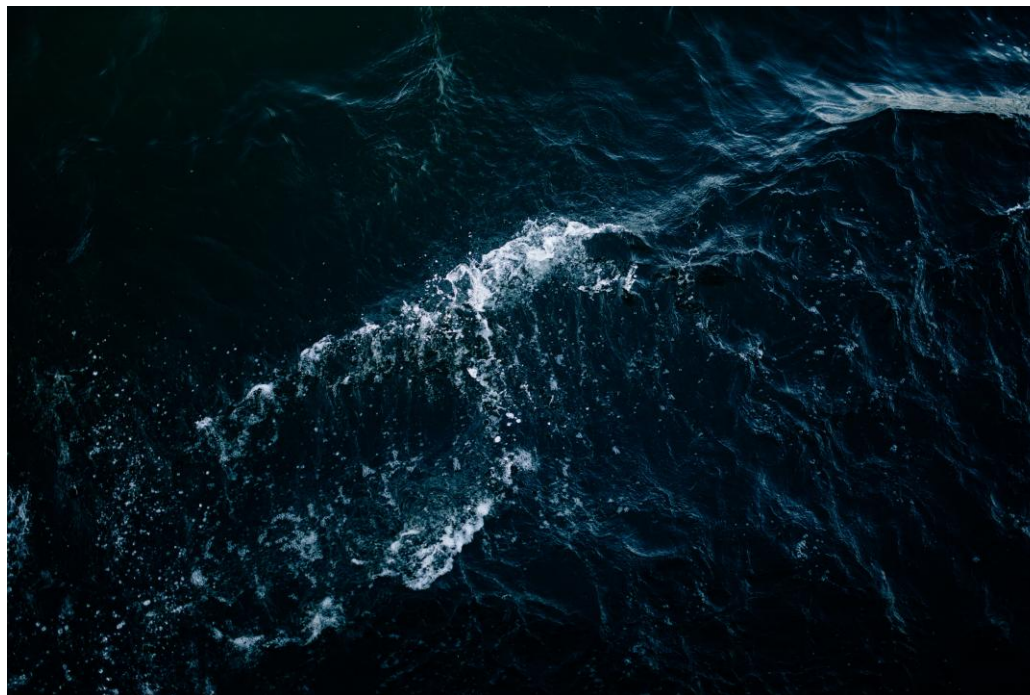
Workshop 1: Customer Understanding

Learn More

Empathy Mapping: The First Step in Design Thinking

Personas: Study Guide

Light in the Dark

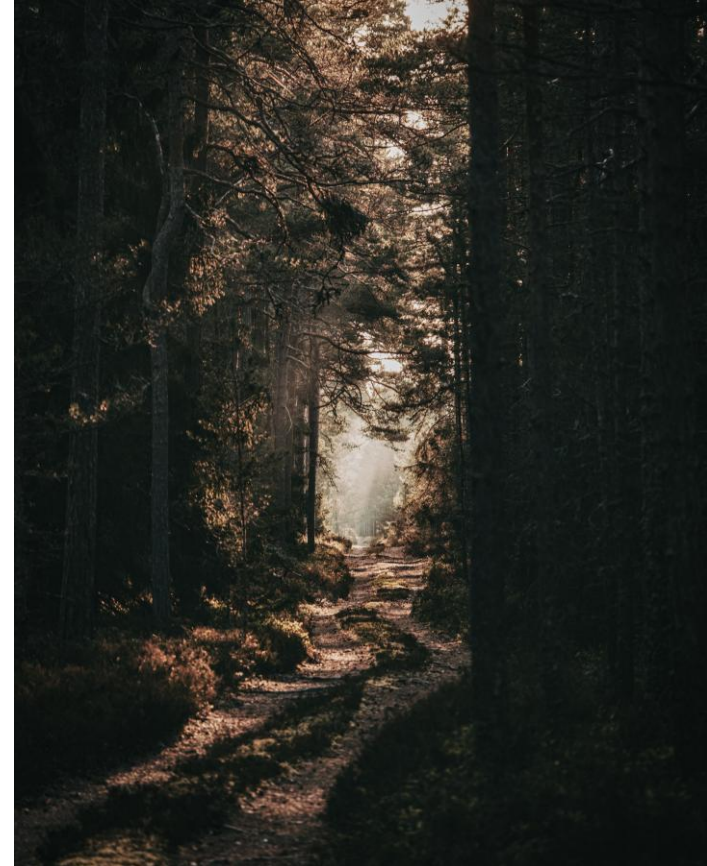


Workshop 2 Experience Design

Light in the Dark

Aim of the Workshop Series

- Development of new or improved tourism products tailored for the off-season in the Baltic Sea region.
- Strengthening the capacity of small tourism businesses in sustainable product and business model development.
- Further development of the three experiences identified through the Light in the Dark survey in the target countries.



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Learning Objectives

After workshop 2, the participants will be able to:

Create valuable tourism experiences by understanding:

- The importance of experiences in tourism and their role in creating value for the tourist
- How to use the experience pyramid to design educational and transformational experiences



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Tools and Documentation

Value Proposition Canvas

Opportunity Map



By Teele Rehe.

A photograph of a forest with tall, thin, vertical tree trunks. Sunlight is streaming through the trees from the center, creating a bright starburst effect and illuminating the scene with a warm, golden light. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

”

**Successful tourism products are experiences that
are memorable and unique.**

Komppula (1999)

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Successful Tourism Products

Experiences can be:

- Physical
- Social
- Mental

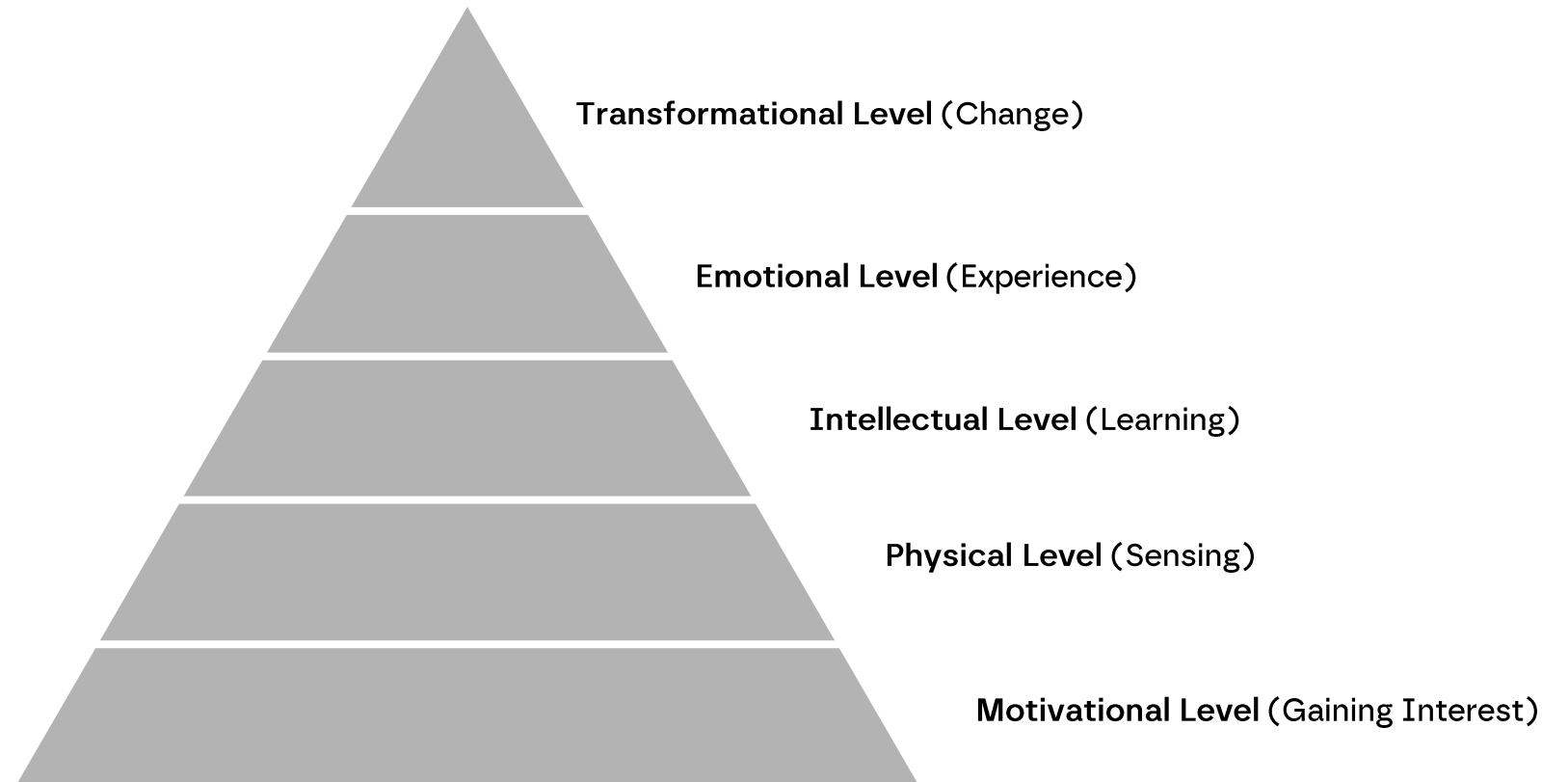


By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 2: Experience Design

The Experience Pyramid

Tarssanen (2009) *Modified*



Authentic – Storytelling – Interaction – Individualistic – Multisensory

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Value Creation is Essential

Every tourism experience must deliver value to visitors.

Value = Benefits received minus costs incurred.

Value is highly subjective – what one person finds valuable, another may not.



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Tourism During Off-Season

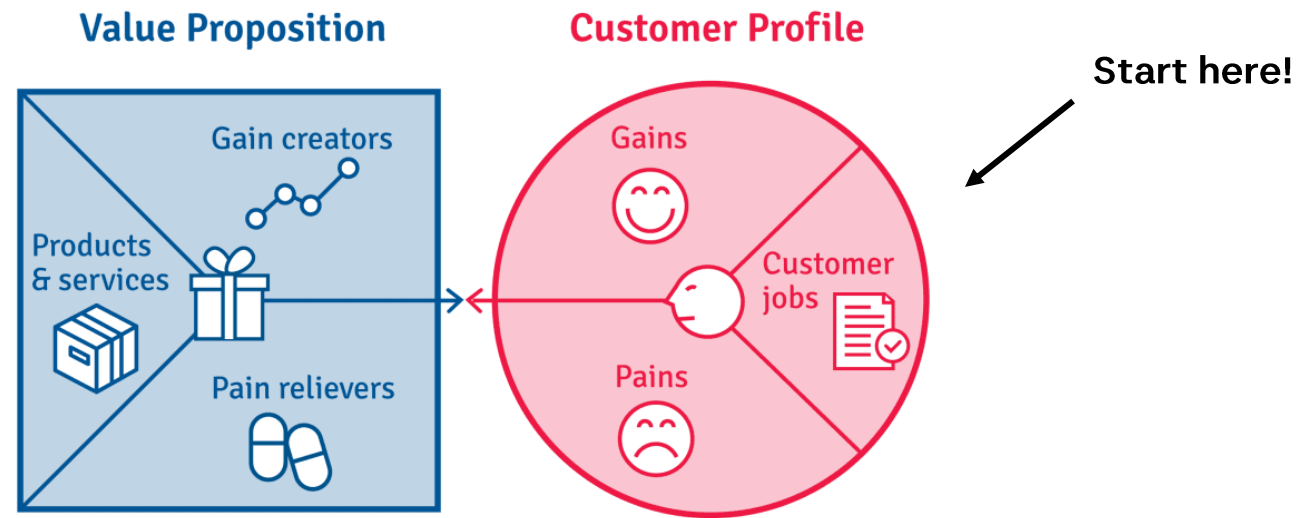
Question: Since destination choice is typically tourists' first decision, how can Baltic Sea coastal tourism ecosystems enhance their value proposition for off-season visitors?



By Rob Watkins.

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Value Proposition Canvas



Workshop 2: Experience Design

How to Define the Value Proposition

A value proposition is a statement describing what your product or service will bring the customer.

"Hedon Spa & Hotel – A place where the sun is always shining."

"Havsvidden Resort – A place where the sky meets the sea."

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Value Proposition Canvas

What will they get?

Which possible problems will they encounter before, during & after the trip?

Customer Profile



What do they need to do?

- Arrange transport from Central Europe
- Secure accommodation
- Plan activities
- Identify dining options
- Etc.

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Your Company During Off-Season

How could your company contribute to the value offered by your destination during the off-season, to the identified target group(s)?

The leisure seeker

“Nourished by Nature”

The cultural traveller

“Local Lifestyle”

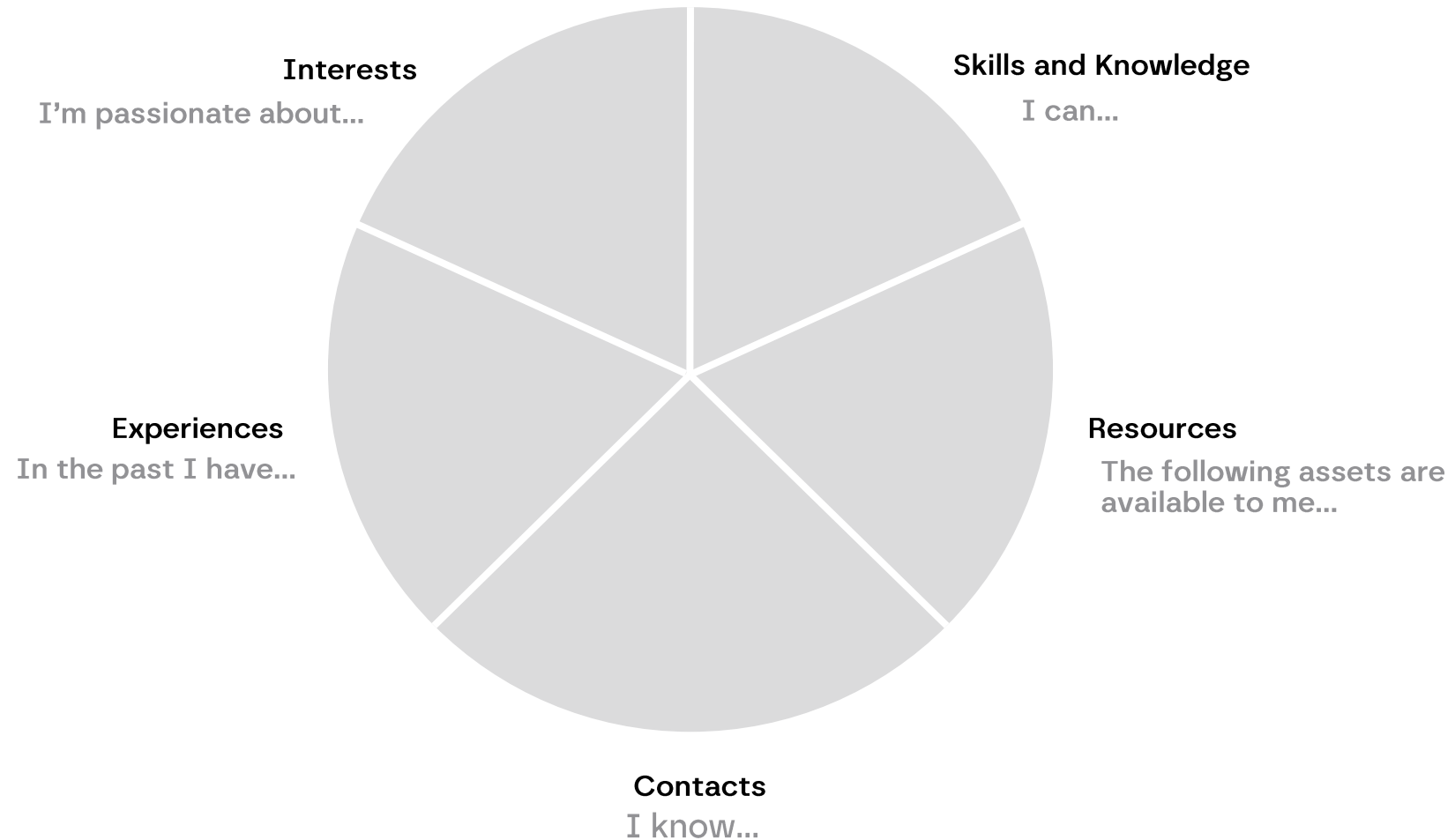
The active traveller

“Active Adventures”

Workshop 2: Experience Design

The Opportunity Map

Drivhuset Modified



Workshop 2: Experience Design

Opportunity Map

What potential do you have that could improve sales during the off-season?

What new or improved experience(s) do you think your company could offer during the off-season?

Start with the **opportunity map**:

What core competencies do you bring to this?

What resources would this experience require?

Do you have the right contacts or network connections?

Have you tested this product/experience yourself?

How can you align your personal interests with this opportunity?

Workshop 2: Experience Design

Learn More

Low Season Travel - Harnessing the Magic of Darkness and Dark Skies

Drivhuset – Our Tools

Strategyzer's Value Proposition Canvas Explained

Light in the Dark



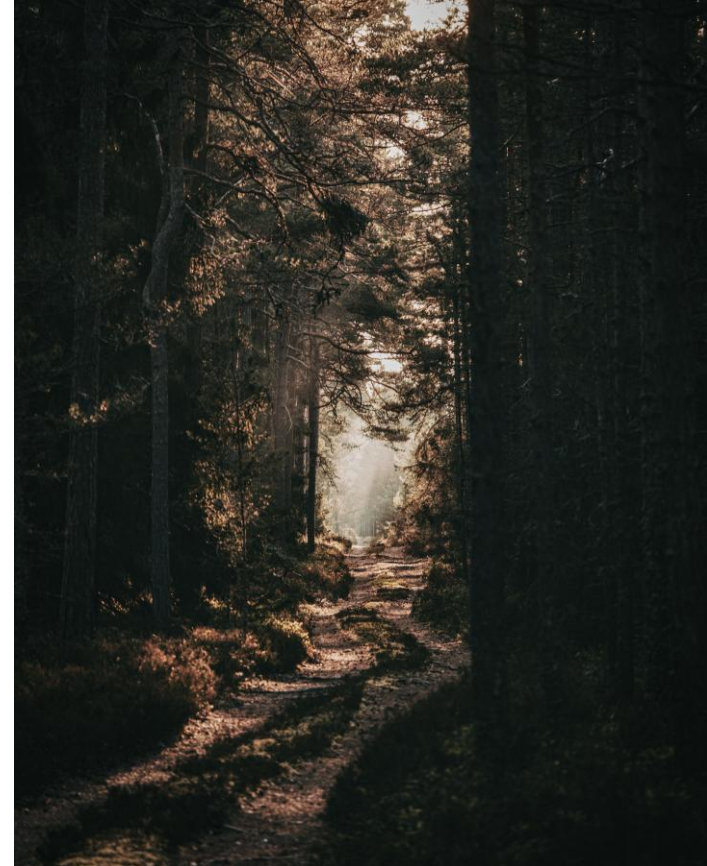
Workshop 3

Marketing, Distribution & Pricing

Light in the Dark

Aim of the Workshop Series

- Development of new or improved tourism products tailored for the off-season in the Baltic Sea region.
- Strengthening the capacity of small tourism businesses in sustainable product and business model development.
- Further development of the three experiences identified through the Light in the Dark survey in the target countries.



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 3: Marketing, Distribution & Pricing

Learning Objectives

After workshop 3, the participants will be able to:

- Identify key trends in tourism marketing and understand how to use different marketing channels for their off-season tourism products
- Choose the most suitable distribution channels for their off-season tourism products and understand the basic pricing systems of the main distribution channels
- Determine the appropriate price for their off-season tourism product(s) based on a selected pricing strategy



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 3: Marketing, Distribution & Pricing

Tools and Documentation

Learning Café: Facilitated group discussions supported by flip charts and markers

Best Practices Session: Interactive workshop using flip charts and Post-it notes to capture ideas and insights



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 3: Marketing, Distribution & Pricing

Learning Café

The Learning Café is a participatory method that facilitates citizen engagement and organisational change through inclusive group discussions.

This approach maximises participation by tapping into the collective knowledge of larger groups.

Each table selects a permanent host before discussions begin.

Tables focus on different topics, with 15-minute initial rounds followed by 12-minute subsequent rounds.



By Chris Alfthan.

Workshop 3: Marketing, Distribution & Pricing

Learning Café in Practice

Group Formation: Form groups of 5-6 participants per table.

Host Selection: One host stays at each table throughout all rounds.

Discussion Phases:

Round 1: 15 minutes

Rounds 2-4: 12 minutes each

Final summary and presentation at original table: 20 minutes

Workshop 3: Marketing, Distribution & Pricing

Discussion Topics

If a tourism company wants to extend their operating season, which strategies would you recommend for:

Marketing: Social media campaigns, SEO optimisation, direct email marketing, etc.

Distribution channels: Company website, travel agencies, online booking platforms, etc.

Pricing strategies: Dynamic pricing, off-season discounts, package deals, etc.



By Teele Rehe.

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, thin, vertical tree trunks. Sunlight is streaming through the trees from the upper center, creating a bright starburst effect and illuminating the scene with a warm, golden light. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**Discussion Topic: How would you design and sell
darkness and silence?**

Workshop 3: Marketing, Distribution & Pricing

Learn More

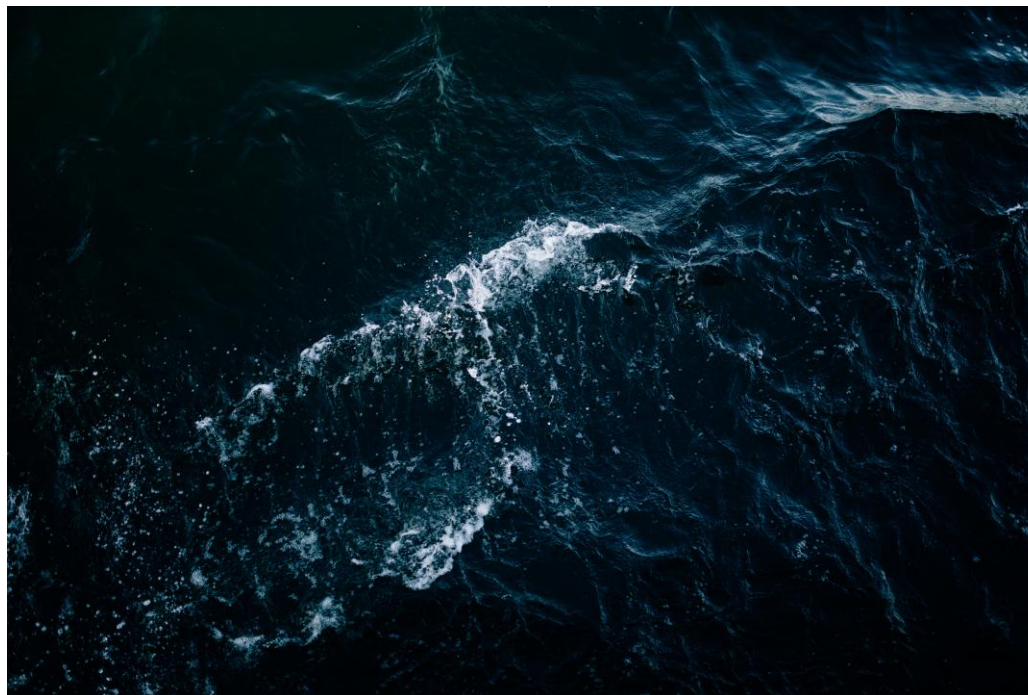
Tourism Marketing: 12 Tourism Marketing Strategies

Pricing Strategies in the Tourism Industry

How do Travel and Tourism Distribution Channels Work?

Tourism Distribution Channels

Light in the Dark



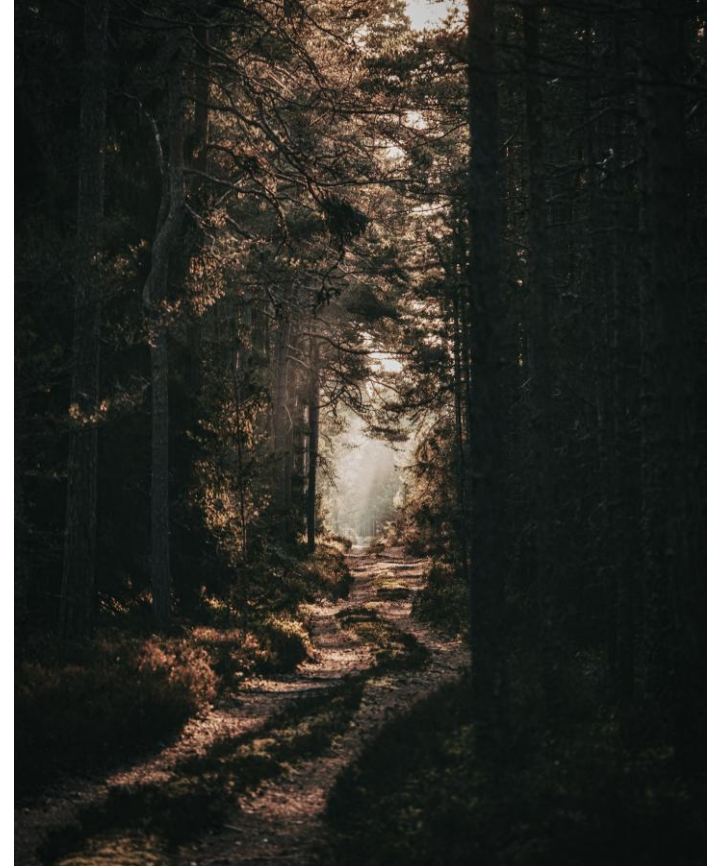
Workshop 4

Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences

Light in the Dark

Aim of the Workshop Series

- Development of new or improved tourism products tailored for the off-season in the Baltic Sea region.
- Strengthening the capacity of small tourism businesses in sustainable product and business model development.
- Further development of the three experiences identified through the Light in the Dark survey in the target countries.



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 4: Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences

Learning Objectives

After workshop 4, the participants will be able to:

- Identify key partnerships that contribute to success during the off-season, particularly for the product developed in this project
- Recognise existing partnerships and determine which ones need to be strengthened



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 4: Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences

Tools and Documentation

Flip Chart

Map over Partnerships



By Teele Rehe.

A photograph of a forest with many tall, thin tree trunks. Sunlight is streaming through the trees in the center, creating a bright starburst effect. The scene is dimly lit, with the light from the sun illuminating the surrounding trees and foliage.

”

**Networking is the No.1 unwritten rule of success
in business.**

Sallie Krawcheck

Workshop 4: Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences

Partnerships in Tourism

What could a small tourism company do to strengthen the partnerships needed for off-season sales?

- 1) Other local SMEs
- 2) Political decision-makers
- 3) Destination management organisation(s)?

Who is responsible for making these partnerships work?



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 4: Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences

Partnerships in Tourism

Reflect:

Which of the partnerships do you already have to prolong your own season?

Any of the partnerships you need to strengthen?

Identify:

Short-term partnerships, objectives, and actions (one year)

Long-term partnerships, objectives, and actions (3-5 years)

Workshop 4: Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences

Map over Partnerships

Existing and Strong

Not Existing but Would Be Crucial

Existing but Needing to Be Strengthened

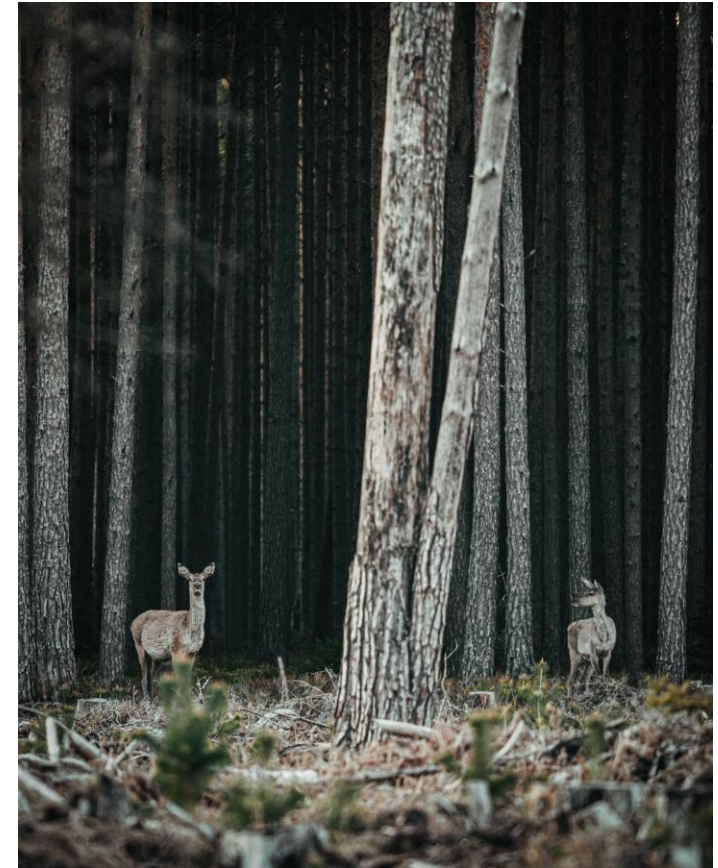
Not Existing but Would Be Nice to Have

Workshop 4: Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences

Partnerships in Tourism

Question: Which are the most important partnerships for a tourism entrepreneur especially during off-season?

Locally, regionally, nationally and internationally?



By Teele Rehe.

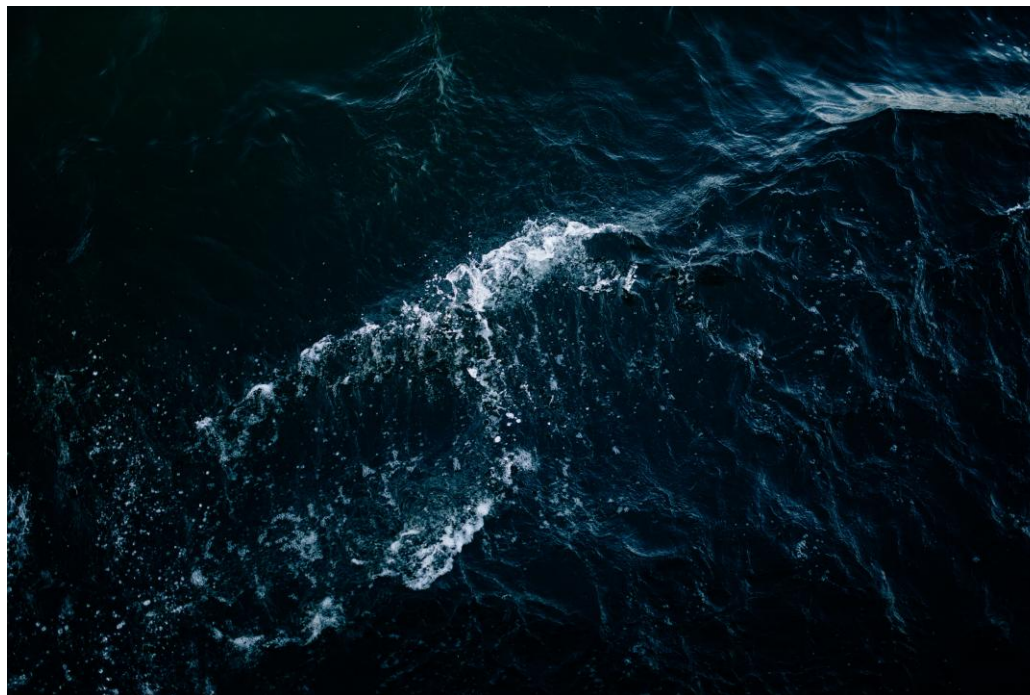
Workshop 4: Partnerships for Off-Season Experiences

[Learn More](#)

[What Is a Partnership in Travel and Tourism?](#)

[Why Partnerships in the Tourism Industry are Essential](#)

Light in the Dark

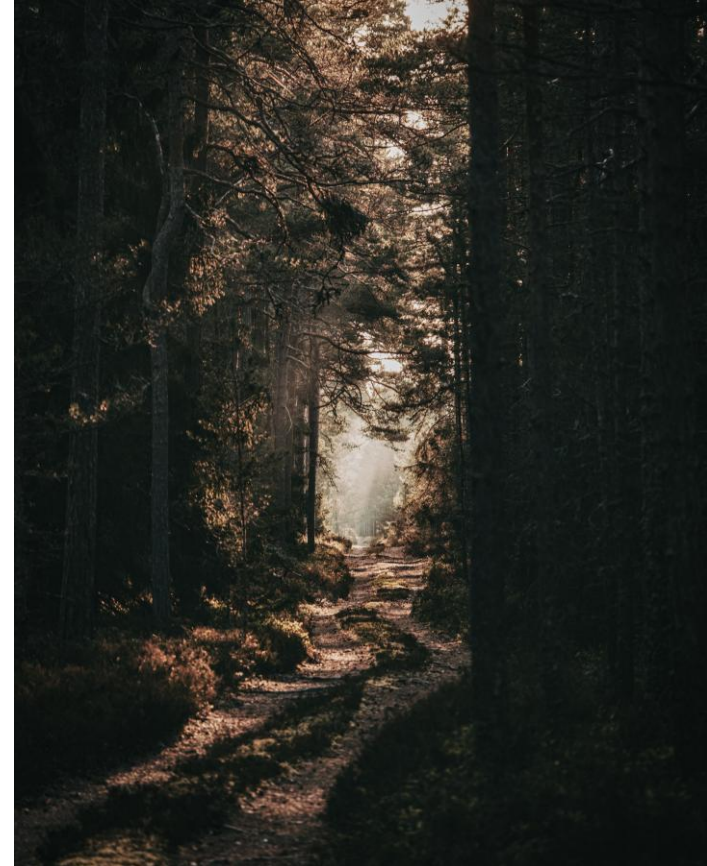


Workshop 5 Quality and Sustainability

Light in the Dark

Aim of the Workshop Series

- Development of new or improved tourism products tailored for the off-season in the Baltic Sea region.
- Strengthening the capacity of small tourism businesses in sustainable product and business model development.
- Further development of the three experiences identified through the Light in the Dark survey in the target countries.



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability

Learning Objectives

After workshop 5, the participants will be able to:

- Identify the key elements for ensuring quality and sustainability in off-season tourism, particularly in relation to the product being developed
- Engage in discussions on sustainability within their companies and develop a service blueprint based on the identification of the customer journey and its touchpoints



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability

Tools and Documentation

Customer Journey

Service Blueprint



By Teele Rehe.

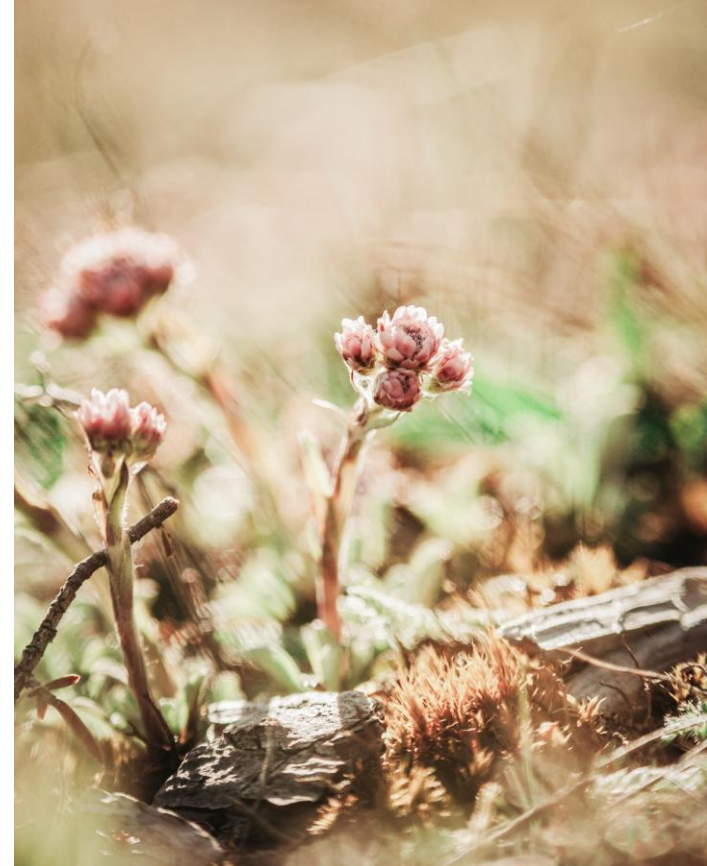
Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability

Quality in Tourism

Quality assurance in tourism involves systematic processes and standards designed to ensure tourism services meet customer expectations and enhance overall satisfaction.

Key components include regular monitoring, evaluation, and staff training to maintain consistency in service delivery, safety protocols, and environmental responsibility.

Effective quality assurance measures enable tourism providers to strengthen their reputation, build customer loyalty, and gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace.



By Teele Rehe.

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, thin trees. Sunlight is streaming through the canopy, creating a bright starburst effect in the center. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with warm, golden light.

”

Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.

UN Tourism

Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability

Examples of How to Measure Quality and Sustainability

Customer satisfaction measurements
(KPI's such as NPS)

Personnel satisfaction - Turnover of personnel

Sustainability certifications – become more important
when working with an international market

- Different situation in different countries

Carbon footprint calculations

Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability

Examples of How to Measure Quality and Sustainability

Focus: The product you are developing for this project

Guiding questions:

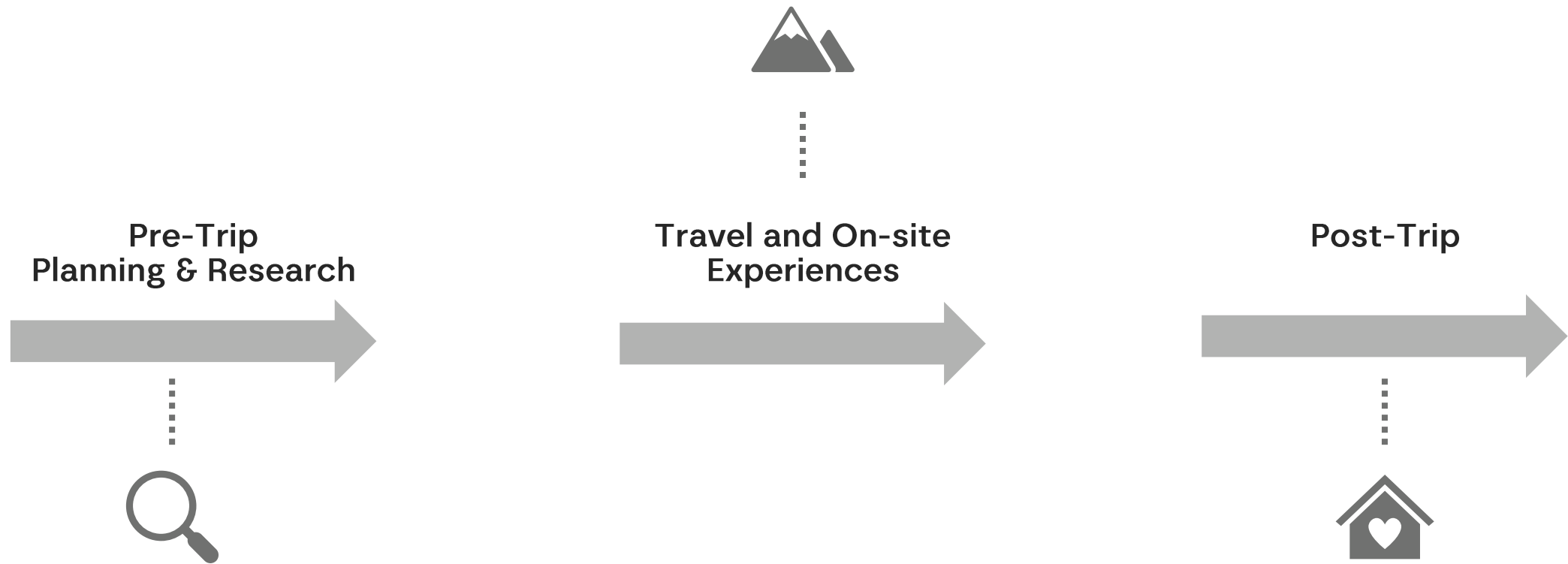
How does sustainability align with our business goals and practices?

Which tourism impacts should we prioritise?

How can we effectively communicate our sustainability efforts?

Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability

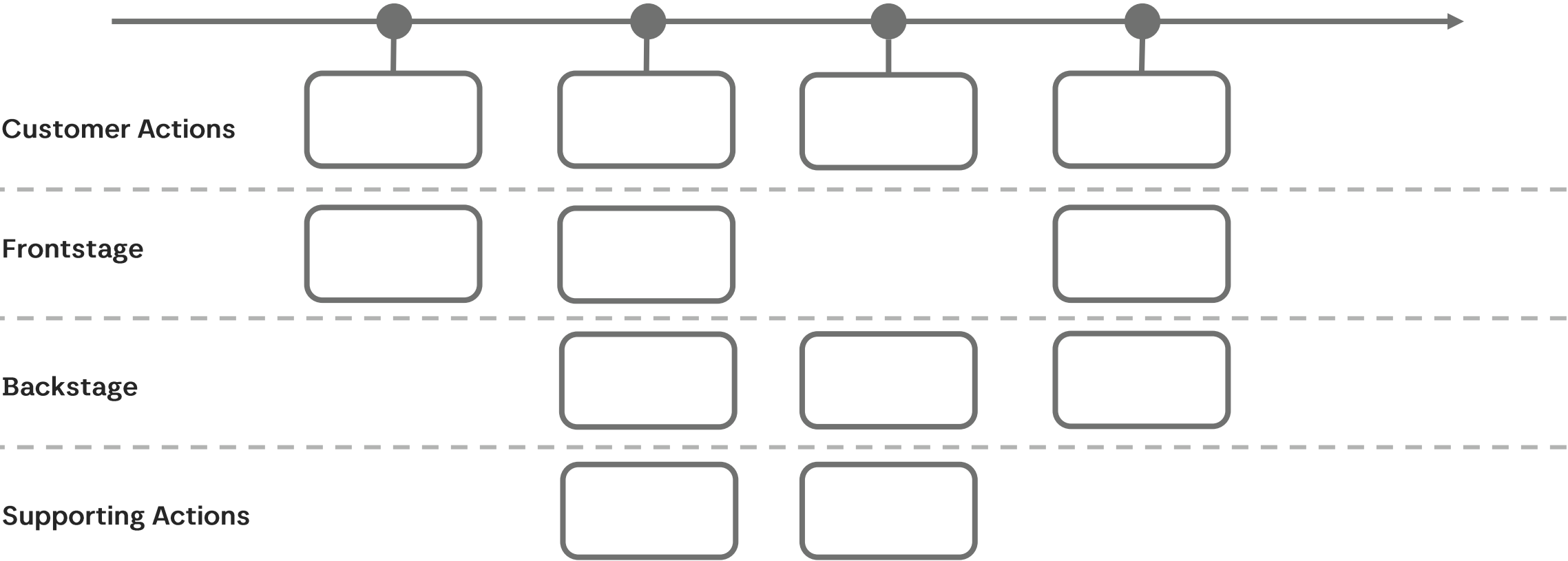
Customer Journey



Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability

Service Blueprint

Physical Evidence



Workshop 5: Quality and Sustainability

Learn More

[What Is a Service Blueprint: Definition, Components, Steps, and Free Templates](#)

[This is the Way to Create Memorable Customer Journeys in Travel and Tourism](#)

[What is Sustainable Tourism? Why Sustainable Tourism Management is So Important](#)

[Adressing 9 Typical Quality Issues in Hospitality and Tourism](#)

[Sustainable Finland Pledge](#)

Light in the Dark

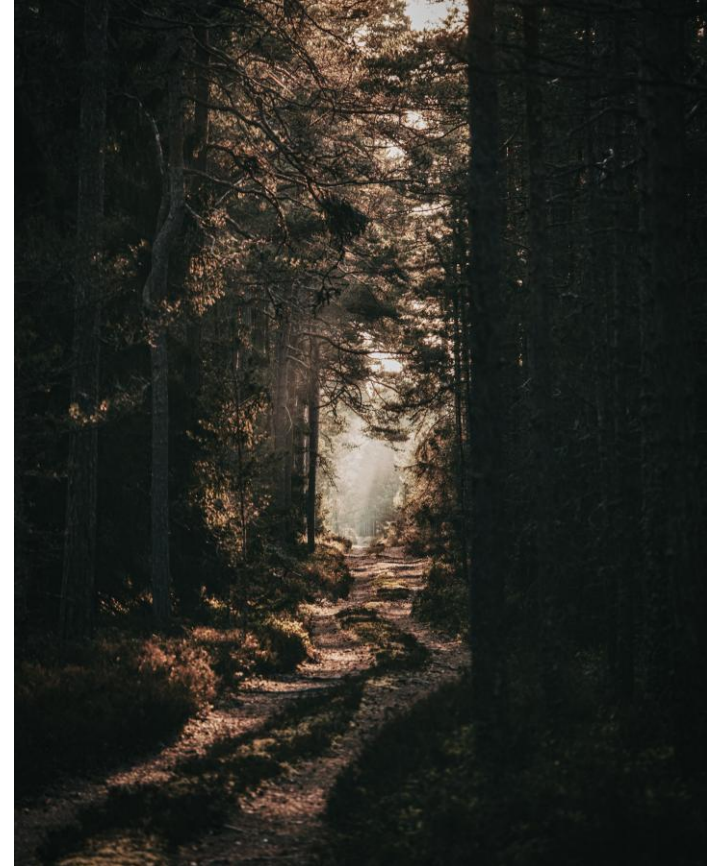


Workshop 6 Storytelling

Light in the Dark

Aim of the Workshop Series

- Development of new or improved tourism products tailored for the off-season in the Baltic Sea region.
- Strengthening the capacity of small tourism businesses in sustainable product and business model development.
- Further development of the three experiences identified through the Light in the Dark survey in the target countries.



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 6: Storytelling

Learning Objectives

After workshop 6, the participants will be able to:

- Identify the key components of storytelling for off-season experiences and connect their company's story to the **Light in the Dark** concept
- Engage in discussions on storytelling within their companies and gain the confidence and inspiration to continue developing their storytelling practices



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 6: Storytelling

Tools and Documentation

Photographs are used as a prompt to engage the participants in discussions on storytelling.



By Teele Rehe.

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, thin trees. Sunlight is streaming through the canopy, creating a bright starburst effect in the center. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

”

Selling others is the best way to sell yourself.

Benjamin Donner

Workshop 6: Storytelling

The Light in the Dark Concept



Workshop 6: Storytelling

The Light in the Dark Concept

Coolcation

Space & Pace

Pureness

Crisp, fresh and comfortable fall temperatures

Clean air

Safe

Secure

Nature as part of everyday life

Eco-tourism

Sustainable travel

Less crowding

Distinct seasonal experiences

Stillness & tranquillity

Freedom

Proximity to nature

Silence

Workshop 6: Storytelling

Why Do People Write Business Storys?

A good business story helps with decision-making by:

- Providing background information and **credibility**
- Making a company or product seem **human**
- Communicating important **values**
- Evoking **emotions** like success, positive surprise, and empathy
- Companies can be more convincing and stand out from competitors with compelling storytelling.

Workshop 6: Storytelling

Authentic and Fictional Business Stories

Fictional company stories: Example: Disney World

Fictional product stories: These raise product value through fictional narratives and are often used for products targeting children.

Authentic stories:

Company history and location

New products and services

Staff experiences

Customer experiences

Real-life stories enhanced with engaging, fictional details

Workshop 6: Storytelling

The Heart of Our Off-Season Tourism Experience

Select an image that conveys the feeling you want customers to have after visiting your company.

"Your Customer and Story" – Use the picture as an aid to individual storytelling. Based on this picture, create a narrative that connects customers to the essence of your off-season experience – a story that reveals your company's heart and forges a meaningful connection with your customers.

Continue with a group discussion on common story themes that could be developed under the **Light in the Dark** concept.



By Teele Rehe.

Workshop 6: Storytelling

Learn More

[What Is a Service Blueprint: Definition, Components, Steps, and Free Templates](#)

[This is the Way to Create Memorable Customer Journeys in Travel and Tourism](#)

[What is Sustainable Tourism? Why Sustainable Tourism Management is So Important](#)

[Adressing 9 Typical Quality Issues in Hospitality and Tourism](#)

[Sustainable Finland Pledge](#)