

THE INTEREST OF ROMANIAN TOURISTS IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES AS A SUMMER DESTINATION

Emanuela (Anton) Murguleț¹

Alexandra-Ioana Milea²

Mariana Sorlescu³

Abstract

In the last period of time, the tourism sector has witnessed the development of a new trend called the coolcation. The interest of the tourists for spending summer in destinations with mild temperatures has grown like never before due to the constant climate changes that made consumers rethink their vacation preferences. Destinations such as Norway, Denmark, Iceland or Sweden have become very popular amongst tourists because of the unique experiences promoted such as the Artic Circle, the Aurora Borealis or the Midnight Sun, transforming them into must-visit countries during the warm season.

The enthusiasm for these destinations has also risen in Romania in the last years. While most of the Romanian tourists perceived the summer as a chance to vacation in sunny locations with access to the beach, a growing number of people now prefer exploring cultural attractions in colder regions.

Keywords: coolcation, Nordic destinations, summer vacation, tourism trend

JEL Classification: Z30, Z31, Z32, Z33

I. Coolcation – the new trend in European tourism

The climate changes seen in the recent years have led to the transformation of the tourism industry all over the globe, causing the emergence of an innovative phenomenon – the coolcation.

The coolcation is the new trend in the tourism industry that involves spending summer vacations in destinations with a temperate or cold climate. This preference appeared because of the extreme climate changes registered in Europe in the last decade, highlighted mainly in the holiday destinations in the Mediterranean Sea region. In countries such as Spain, Italy and Greece, extreme temperatures were recorded in 2023 and 2024, accompanied by wildfires and extreme drought.⁴

¹ Emanuela (Anton) Murguleț, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, e-mail: antonc.emanuela@gmail.com

² Alexandra-Ioana Milea is Master Student at the Romanian-American University, Bucharest, e-mail: milea.i.alexandraioana23@stud.rau.ro

³ Mariana Sorlescu is Associated Professor at Romanian American University, Bucharest, mariana.sorlescu@rau.ro

⁴ <https://www.dw.com/en/coolcation-is-climate-change-transforming-travel/a-70187090>

Moreover, the experts' forecasts regarding the climate show a constant increase in temperatures in the coming years, a fact that directly favors the growth of interest in colder destinations.

The Nordic countries became the region that experienced one of the biggest increases in demand in the post-pandemic years, a boost favored by summer temperatures maintaining at around 20-25 degrees Celsius, the absence of crowds and the possibility of participating in many activities in nature.

The growing interest for the Nordic destinations can be observed from the overall number of nights spent in the summer of 2024. Finland, Norway, and Sweden saw a rise in the number of overnight stays compared to the previous summer. Out of all the four destinations, Sweden was the top pick for tourists, with the capital Stockholm being the favorite choice.⁵

Also, between June and August 2024, Norway experienced a historic increase in the number of registered night stays, setting a new record and measuring a 3% increase from last year.⁶

Tabel no. 1. Overnight stays in the Nordic destinations during summer 2024

Overnight stays (million)	Foreign	Domestic	Total
Sweden	8,5	20,5	29
Denmark	7,5	18,5	26
Norway	6,3	10,7	17
Finland	1,8	9,2	11
Iceland	3,1	6,9	10

Source: <https://www.insights.visitory.io/post/tourism-boom-in-the-nordic-countries-the-key-figures-of-nordic-tourism-in-summer-2024>

In addition to the fact that they offer mild temperatures during the summer, the northern destinations attract tourists due to their accessibility with various means of transportation. In the last decade, the major airlines have increased the number of flights to this region, adding new destinations every year. Moreover, all northern destinations have the common characteristic of being easy to discover by car during a road trip.

Another reason why tourists prefer these destinations is represented by the lack of crowding that can be found in the peak season in the coastal areas of Southern Europe, as well as the possibility of visiting new, less discovered regions that offer a multitude of activities for all types of preferences. From visiting the northern capitals or observing the Aurora Borealis to visiting volcanoes or glaciers

⁵ <https://www.insights.visitory.io/post/tourism-boom-in-the-nordic-countries-the-key-figures-of-nordic-tourism-in-summer-2024>

⁶ <https://www.insights.visitory.io/post/tourism-boom-in-the-nordic-countries-the-key-figures-of-nordic-tourism-in-summer-2024>

in Iceland, practicing cycle tourism in Sweden or observing the white nights in Greenland, tourists can be attracted to various destinations that combine the mountain area with the coastal area.⁷

Among the most popular Nordic destinations are Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. They have developed their destination brand in recent years, creating strategic marketing plans and offering the highest quality experiences.

The Swedish tourism association, Visit Sweden, supports this change, underlining the fact that tourists are increasingly interested in visiting places with mild climates. Their website emphasizes the shift from seeking warmth to seeking comfort in colder regions. In the same way, Visit Norway promotes trips to the north as a cool option to escape the hot summers of southern Europe.

The scientific article focuses on the reasons that led to the increase of curiosity for northern destinations, having a particular importance in the analysis of how Romanian tourists perceive this trend as a potential fashion for spending summer vacations in the future based on imminent climate changes.

Thus, this study has as main objectives:

- observing the factors that determine tourists to choose northern destinations
- identifying preferences regarding the organization of vacations in such destinations
- shaping the profile of the tourist willing to spend a summer vacation in the northern region of Europe

The importance of the objectives resides in the connection between them and the observation of the tourist market in Romania, with the main goal being the development of this trend through the creation of new tourist packages, the introduction of new air destinations and the adaptation of this phenomenon to the tourism conditions in our country.

The research method is grounded and focuses on understanding the knowledge in the field, with a qualitative research approach focused on describing the phenomenon by documenting current information and opinions and carrying out a survey-type study.

II. The impact of the coolcation on the tourism industry in the Northern destinations

The summer holidays spent in the northern region of Europe represent a major point of interest on the global tourism market, a fact that leads to the appearance of some experts' opinions that predict a change in the tourists behaviour and their preferences.

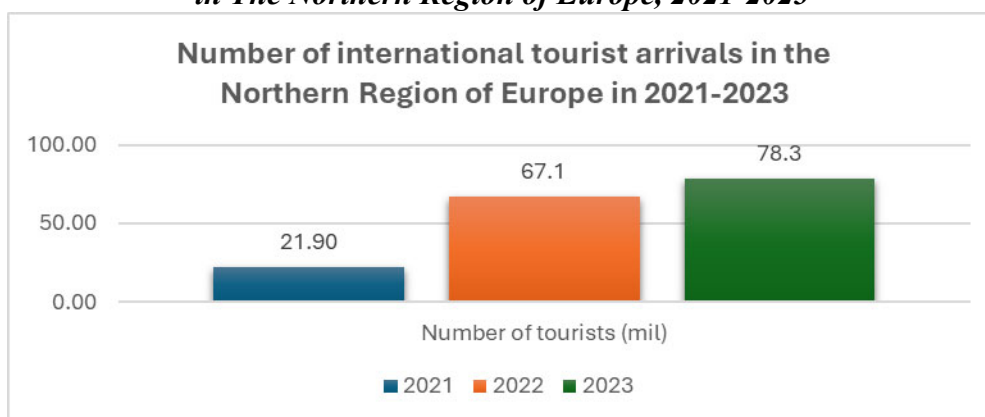
The EU Commission predicts changes in tourism models, with the countries of Northern Europe and Central Europe being prepared to benefit from a

⁷ <https://www.visitnordic.com/en/nature-activities>

fulminant increase in the number of tourists in the next decade. Destinations such as Denmark, Finland and Sweden are expected to be among the most popular, while countries such as Greece and Spain could see a drop of up to 30% in tourism receipts.⁸

The table below shows an upward trend in terms of the number of tourists who spent their vacation in a destination in the Nordic Region of Europe in the last 3 years. Moreover, tourist activity in the Nordic countries is also increasing in terms of overnight stays, which have exceeded pre-pandemic levels. The increase is most visible in Norway (+18%), Sweden (+12%), Iceland (12%) and Denmark (+9%). The increased fascination is partly fueled by the allure of wild landscapes and the mesmerizing northern lights.⁹

Figure no.1 Number of international tourist arrivals in The Northern Region of Europe, 2021-2023



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/261702/international-tourist-arrivals-in-europe-by-region/>

Additionally, the increased interest in these destinations leads to a stimulation of the local economy, in 2023 the northern region registering an increase of 6% compared to the previous year in terms of tourist expenses, reaching a level of 124 million dollars.¹⁰

The enthusiasm for spending summer vacation in the Nordic countries also led to the transformation of the tourist offer present in these destinations. In this sense, the Finnish tourism sector already knows the potential for increasing the number of tourists, so it offers unique experiences of spending some white nights in nature. At the same time, night hikes are planned in Lapland and Finland,

⁸ <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/climate-change-drives-surge-in-coolcation-travel-trends-what-you-need-to-know-6550151>

⁹ <https://etc-corporate.org/news/european-tourism-recovery-continues-into-2024-with-travel-expenditure-expected-to-hit-record-numbers/>

¹⁰ <https://www.infobae.com/wapo/2024/07/08/los-turistas-escapan-a-la-fresca-escandinavia-en-lugar-de-los-puntos-mas-calurosos-de-europa/>

nature trips are promoted in Iceland to observe geysers and glaciers, and cruises to discover the fjords are organized in Norway.

Climate change is not the only explanation for the development of tourism in Scandinavia. Currency devaluations in Norway and Sweden have increased the attractiveness of these countries to foreign visitors.¹¹ The area is also experiencing various advantages due to a growing trend in post-Covid travel globally.

One of the advantages given by the interest in these destinations is represented by the greater number of stops made by cruise ships in this region, a fact that brings more income to the economy of countries such as Iceland, Norway or Sweden.¹²

Also, the growing demand for these destinations has led to the expansion of foreign air travel, with major airlines adding connections with various European cities. In terms of domestic tourism, the companies in the area have increased the frequency of flights and added new routes to meet the needs of tourists and encourage the visit of more tourist attractions.

The effect that climate change has on tourism demand can also be seen through the analysis carried out by the British tourist cruise operator Iglu Cruise, which observed a 235% increase in 2023 compared to the previous year for cruises in the Arctic region, more precisely Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway.¹³

The global trend of spending vacations in northern destinations also extended to Romania, so that in 2023 the growth for such vacations increased by 30% compared to the pre-pandemic period.¹⁴

Another factor contributing to the increased interest in the Northern European region is sustainability. The Nordic countries are at the top of the European ranking in terms of eco-tourism, constantly implementing multiple sustainable policies and practices. In this way, the region attracts tourists who are more and more involved in protecting the environment and spending a vacation as healthy as possible, emphasizing the promotion of natural attractions and biodiversity, local gastronomy and authentic experiences.¹⁵

III. The interest of Romanian tourists for the Nordic destinations

This scientific article adopts a qualitative research with the aim of observing the interest of Romanian tourists for the Nordic destinations as a way of spending their summer vacation away from the hot temperatures and their effect on the

¹¹ <https://www.euronews.com/business/2024/08/08/norwegian-tourism-gets-boost-as-weaker-kroner-draws-visitors>

¹² <https://www.infobae.com/wapo/2024/07/08/los-turistas-escapan-a-la-fresca-escandinavia-en-lugar-de-los-puntos-mas-calurosos-de-europa/>

¹³ <https://www.iglu-cruise.com/blog/travel-trends-the-rise-of-the-coolcation>

¹⁴ <https://eonomedia.ro/turistii-romani-interesati-de-destinatiile-din-europa-de-nord-cat-costa-o-croaziera-in-timpul-noptilor-albe-la-cercul-arctic.html>

¹⁵ <https://bpholiday.com/scandinavian-summer-tourists-flock-to-cooler-destinations/>

climate. For the purpose of the research, the questionnaire method was chosen, as we used a survey that included 27 questions answered by 56 respondents through an online app.

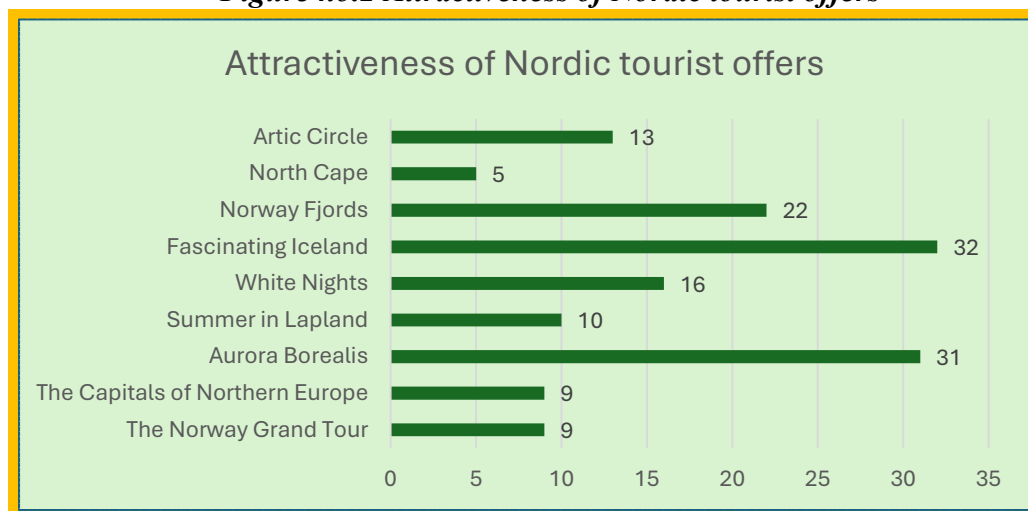
Regarding the analysis of the data resulting from the interviews, the strategy of data reduction through the coding method was used. Therefore, the information obtained was divided into categories based on a similarity of the answers and transposed into a table. A quantitative analysis was added to this method by establishing the frequency of certain terms and ordering the items according to the number of responses.

Regarding the analysis of the responses received, we observed an elevated level of enthusiasm of the respondents for this region, as 54% of them stated they prefer to spend their vacations in destinations with cold climates rather than hot climates and 80% of them responded they are interested in spending their summer holiday in a Nordic destination, aligning our country with the global trend known as Coolcation.

Another element we noticed is the close results in terms of preferred countries with Iceland leading the way with almost 30% of responses, followed by Norway with 24%, Denmark with 18% and Sweden with 17%.

Related to the favorite destinations is the attractiveness of the Nordic region offers. As seen in the table below, packages that include the discovery of Iceland and the possibility of observing the Aurora Borealis are at the top of interest for the Romanian tourists, succeeded by the Fjords in Norway and the White Nights or the Midnight Sun.

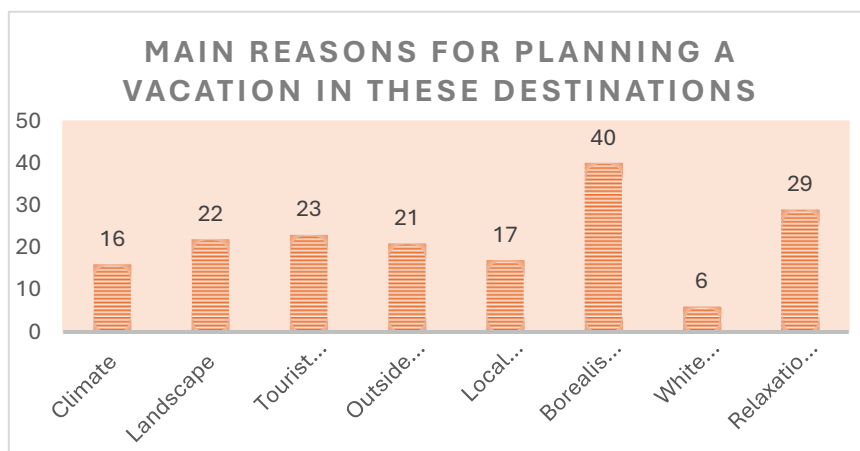
Figure no.2 Attractiveness of Nordic tourist offers



Source: author

As for the main reasons of planning a vacation in the Nordic destinations, Romanian tourists stated that the Aurora Borealis is one of the most important parts that play in choosing a trip to this region, followed by the possibility to relax and detach as these countries offer a break from the overcrowding that happens in popular tourist destinations. The unique tourist attractions, the possibility to do activities in nature, the spectacular landscape or the mild climate are other reasons for which tourists would opt for these countries as a place to spend their summer vacation.

Figure no.3 Main reasons for planning a vacation in these destinations



Source: author

In regards to the planning of a trip to the Northern region, 50% of people document about what activities they can do in the first two days, while 38% of them plan their whole trip with long time ahead, the first option to retract information about the experiences in the region being the Internet (93%). Also, 79% of the respondents said they organize the vacation alone, while only 21% of people choose a tourism agency either for the transport and the accomodation or for full packages.

Most of the tourists choose to travel in the months of June (29%) and September (34%) as these are the times when most of the destinations are less crowded and they can enjoy their real potential.

Additionally, the average period of stay is 4 to 7 days (48%) as it offers the time to visit more attractions and to spend more time discovering the nordic culture, followed by 8 to 10 days (27%) and 1 to 3 days (23%) for people who prefer city-breaks in the capitals of this region.

In regards to the actual vacation, the majority of respondents want to spend it with their family (50%) or friends (46%), choose individual planning (89%) rather than group planning (11%) and would spend a budget between 2000-5000

lei (61%) or above 5000 lei (30%), showing great interest to cultural attractions mixed with activities made in nature such as trekking or hiking (59%).

In order to get to the destination, 73% of the tourists opt for the plane, while the rest are divided between train and personal car. At the destination, tend to travel either with a rented car (36%) as it is convenient for road trips, with local buses (36%), mainly in the capitals and with the train (23%) as the the railway system in the region is extremely developed.

Most of the Romanian tourists prefer to spend their vacation in a hotel (52%) or an apartment (43%) and opt for a Bed&Breakfest type of meal (59%) as they want to experience the local cuisine outside of the accomodation.

In regards to the typical profile of the Romanian traveller who wants to spend the summer vacation in the Northern destinations the common characteristics include a frequency of travel of 2 to 3 times a year (63%), vacation time split in 3 breaks over the course of one year (64%), a preference for the mountain destinations (54%), an avearge age of 18 to 24 years old (36%), followed by 35 to 44 years old (29%), educational level at superior studies (59%), professional status at employee (59%) and student (34%) and an avearge monthly income of 4000-6000 lei (59%).

IV. Conclusions

Climate changes that happened in the last decade have affected the tourism industry, shaping and developing new trends along the years. The coolcation, a phenomenon that implies the spending of the summer vacations in regions with mild or cold temperatues has become extremely popular amongst tourists who are in the search for new, undiscovered attractions.

The Nordic region has started to record a growing number of tourists interested in destinations such as Norway, Iceland or Denmark or in activities such as exploring the fjords, seeing the Aurora Borealis or visiting the gheizers and volcanoes.

The Romanian tourists also seem to be part of this trend, as the demand for packages including the Northern destinations has witnessed a boost in the last years. The results of the study realized on the tourists show a growing enthusiasm for this region and a preference towards activities in nature mixed with cultural attractions, local cuisine and overall off the beaten track experiences.

Therefore, a development of the offers for this region can benefit the tourism market in Romania, as this trend is set to grow in intensity duet o the constant climate changes and rising temperatures recorded in the destinations that are now popular such as the Mediteranean region.

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