

How to market a small country

The travel-section front page of the Californian newspaper, The Press Enterprise, with intriguing pictures of the charmingly rough Faroese nature



The American violinist and composer, Frederic Balazs, was impressed with how many American newspapers had mentioned the Faroe Islands in the last couple of months



The last couple of months the Faroe Islands have been on the front page of countless travel sections across the United States. The reason is a combination of an almost-visit by an American president, a professional press co-ordinator and stories about a watch, a sea researcher and Tolkien.

NATION BRANDING

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When the acknowledged violinist and composer, Frederic Balazs, visited the Faroe Islands last week he brought with him several news clippings from American newspapers that portrayed the Faroes as an exotic travel destination.

Balazs visited the islands 10 years ago when a Faroese orchestra was playing some of his violin sonatas. Back then he had never heard of the place, the Faroe Islands were a totally unknown entity in the United States, but now that he returned to this tiny country, the situation had changed. The last couple of months he had noticed that the islands were frontpage stuff on several travel sections in major American newspapers.

The Faroese newspaper,

Sosialurin, brought the story in connection with a portrait of the composer, but the reason why the Faroe Islands suddenly had become a subject of interest was unknown to the journalist. Of course nothing comes from nothing, and it is not just a question of luck or coincident that the Faroe Islands suddenly get huge world-media coverage. It turns out that the origin of the recent flood of stories is to be found in the cancelled visit by Bill Clinton in May.

Creating interest

Tórun Ellingsgaard was hired as a press coordinator in connection with Bill Clinton's visit already in January. The visit was postponed just weeks before the planned event in May, but eight foreign press representatives chose to visit the islands anyway.

One of the foreign journalists was Karl Ritter from the Associated Press. And thanks to his articles, which were sold to various newspapers and media, people around the world have now heard about these small remote islands.

According to the press co-ordinator, Tórun Ellingsgaard, foreign press doesn't just follow Bill Clinton's tail. They have to be fed with interesting tips about possible stories.

- American journalists are not interested in visiting the Faroe Islands just because Bill Clinton

comes. His visit is an opportunity to invite them, but there have to be additional interesting stories. Otherwise they could just report from a Clinton lecture closer to home, says Tórun Ellingsgaard.

- When we invited Karl Ritter, he was interested in our stories about the Faroe Islands as a Tolkien-like country and about the boy who found a watch that had travelled all the way from the North Pole. But in order to sell the Faroes to his editors, he needed a more solid story. And

the story that got him here was the one about the Faroese professor, Bogi Hansen, who was awarded the Nordic Council Nature and Environment Prize in 2006 for his research into climate and oceanography of the Nordic Seas, Tórun Ellingsgaard explains.

Magic Sites

One of the articles by Karl Ritter, which has been sold to newspapers around the world has the headline »Tolkien tales come

alive in the Faroe Islands«. In a poetic language the article vividly describes the unique Faroese weather that is ever changeable and different.

- The late-setting sun breaks through purple rain clouds to drape the rugged island of Eysturoy in a golden shimmer. A perfect rainbow arches over the Slaettaratindur mountain. Offshore, a wild ocean launches ferocious swells against the Giant and the Witch, two spectacular rock pillars that protrude from the surf like craggy teeth.

And later on, the article describes the inhabitants of these beautiful islands:

- Shy but hospitable, the islanders trace their heritage to a less friendly bunch – the Vikings.

And the Faroese society is described as one of the rare places where you don't have to worry about traffic, pollution or crime. Doors are left unlocked and only seven of the roughly 48,000 residents are in jail.

And while fish products account for an estimated 97 per cent of export volumes, the journalist has noticed that fresh seafood does not dominate the menus at Faroese restaurants. Finally, the article ends with a warning about traditional Faroese food:

- You'll need some courage to sample Faroese delicacies like sheep's head, whale blubber and skerpikjoet – raw mutton that has been left to dry for months.



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