



*Elin Heinesen, director of
Faroe Islands Enterprise*

Faroe Islands – the most appealing islands in the world!

By Elin Heinesen

At SamVit – Faroe Islands Enterprise - we are noting rapidly increasing numbers of inquiries and an increased interest from foreign journalists, scientists, business people, tourists and tour operators from around the world who visit the Faroe Islands in fast growing numbers.

There is a reason for that. For many years we have lived here in the North Atlantic almost in secrecy. But now things seem to be changing. Never before in history have the Faroe Islands been more visible to the outside world so frequently and extensively in such a short period of time as in the past year or so – undoubtedly because we have had tons of interesting and relevant stories to tell the world.

During the last year former US president Bill Clinton visited the Faroe Islands as key note speaker at a big business conference in Tórshavn – and Bill Clinton emphasized environmental issues and noted some environmental specialties in the Faroe Islands – among which was the extensive use of climate-friendly grass-turf

roofs. Almost immediately after his visit last October, the Faroe Islands were selected the most attractive island destination in the world in the National Geographic Traveler by a panel of 522 experts in sustainable tourism who reviewed conditions in 111 selected islands communities. Again it was our environment that scored highly amongst other things. This is the best kind of advertising or marketing you could dream of – and it still echoes in the world press today.

The G! Festival – a cosy rock music festival in a little Faroese village called Gøta – was appointed by several European music magazines as the second best music festival in Europe – maybe mostly for its environmental qualities. The Faroese rock band Boys in a Band won the Global Battle of the Bands and are now touring the world and getting fantastic reviews all over. Last year the Faroese singer/songwriter Teitur had the honour of being selected male singer of the year by the music industry in Denmark. His popularity and record sales are fast increasing – especially in the

United States. The designer duo Guðrun & Guðrun managed to lure the international fashion press to a spectacular fashion show in a hangar at our airport – which, by the way, got just as spectacular reviews. Guðrun & Guðrun are known for their emphasis on using ecological wool and garments. And this spring we had former US vice president and Nobel Price winner Al Gore as key note speaker at the Trans Atlantic Climate Conference, which was held at the Nordic House in Tórshavn – an event that also attracted the attention of the world press. Once again the focus was on environmental issues.

Simon Anholt, the man credited for introducing the term ‘nation branding’, not long ago called the Faroe Islands “the true Shangri La of the 21st century.” According to the Economist, “Simon Anholt is one of the world’s leading advisers to governments who wish to build global brands.” Now that does lend a touch of class to whatever he has to say about the competitiveness of any place.

What we offer is in demand

out there, it seems. According to the latest reports on population trends, people living in big cities, for the first time in recorded history, now outnumber people living in rural areas. I think what some of them see in our country – the clean air, unspoiled nature and old traditions still alive and intact – is something missing elsewhere, maybe something that used to be there for them but disappeared somewhere along the way. So what the Faroe Islands has is a mix that can bring back that feeling of serenity, but fascinate at the same time.

Ranking the Faroe Islands at the top of its 111-long list of island destinations – ahead of the Azores, Lofoten, Shetland and Iceland – National Geographic Traveler quoted its experts: “Lovely unspoiled islands – a delight to the traveler.” The magazine added: “Remote and cool, and thus safe from overcrowding” Our autonomous archipelago northwest of the Shetlands earns high marks from panellists for “preservation of nature, historic architecture, and local pride.”

The feature also warned aga-

inst “tourism overkill”. “The world’s most appealing destinations – islands – are the ones most prone to tourism overkill,” it said. “Islands symbolize vacation. Escape! They are worlds unto themselves – their own traditions, ecosystems, cultures, landscapes. That’s what attracts us. But as micro worlds, islands are also more vulnerable to population pressure, climate change, storm damage, invasive species, and now, tourism overkill.

So, of course we need to take dangers like these in consideration in our future planning. But as for now we do still have capacity for more visitors – and we are welcoming everyone. The massive coverage we have received will doubtlessly attract more tourists in the future. But beyond that, it helps us in terms of nation branding. Other global trends do undoubtedly also have an impact on the travel patterns of tourists that could benefit us. Now people tend to look away from the overcrowded south and focus on more remote, safe and tranquil destinations – like the Faroe Islands.