

The Northern Lights Experience

- *Negotiation strategies*

Nina Smedseng

Master thesis in Tourist Studies - June 1 2014

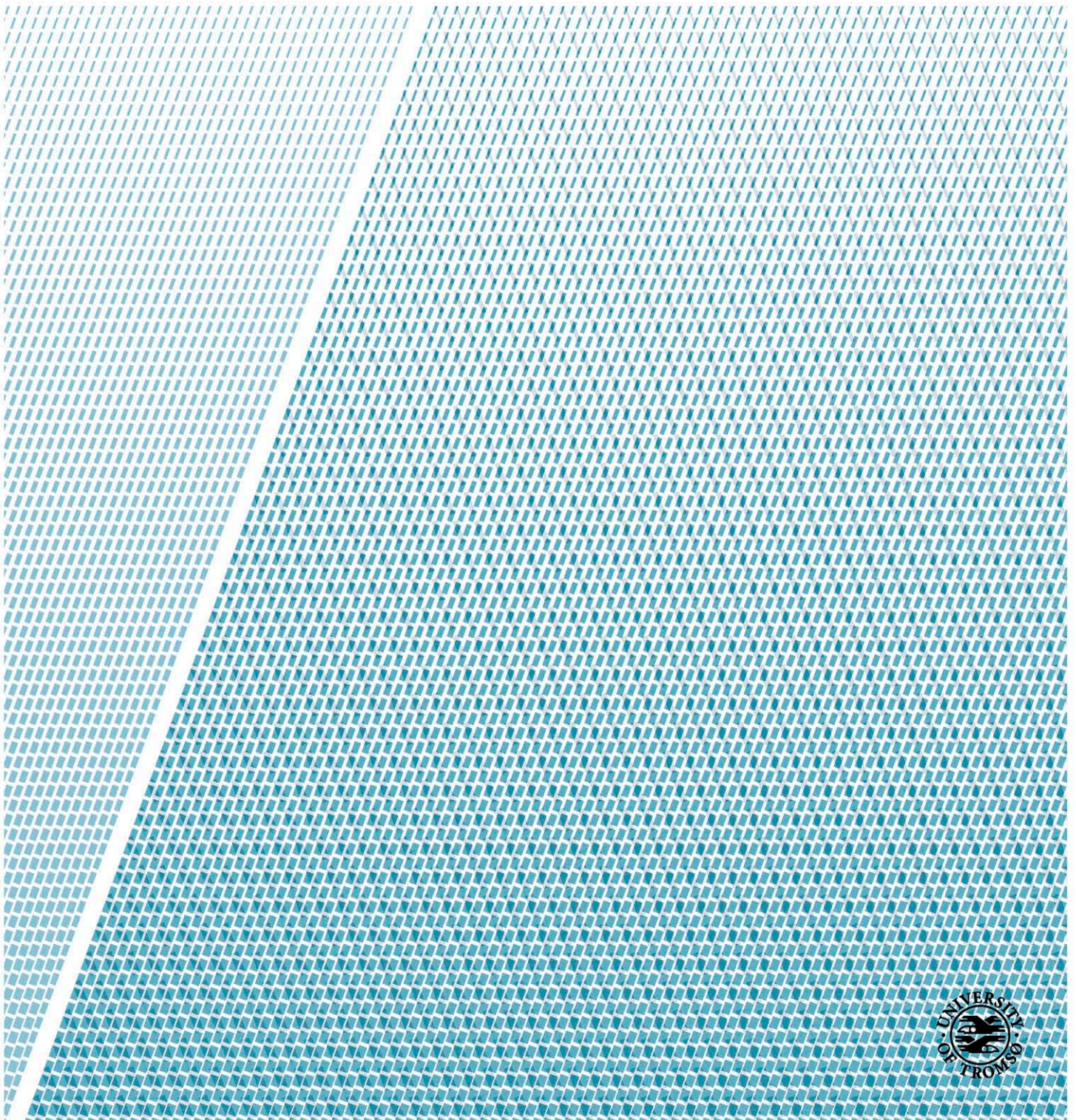


Table of contents

ABSTRACT	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
CHAPTER -I- INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Background for the study	5
1.2 Aim of the study	7
1.3 Structure of master thesis	7
CHAPTER -II- METHODOLOGY	8
2.1 Choice of subject and methodological review.....	8
2.2 Research approach.....	10
2.2.1 Pre-study	11
2.2.2 Semi-structured interviews	11
2.2.3 Participant observation	12
2.3 My role as a researcher.....	12
2.4 Research ethics	14
CHAPTER -III- NORTHERN LIGHTS EXPERIENCES – Staging, Narrative and Negotiation strategies	16
3.1 Nature based experiences in Aurora landscapes	16
3.1.1 The Aurora landscapes – affective atmospheres	18
3.1.2 Landscape and identity	20
3.2 Staging experiences – engaging customers	22
3.2.1 Designing memorable experiences	24
3.3 Using narratives and storytelling in the production of Northern Lights experience production.....	27
3.3.1 Contrasting Aurora narratives – science, myths and history	30
3.4 Controlled by the unruly forces of Nature?.....	32
3.4.1 Facilitating and negotiating extraordinary Aurora experiences.....	33

3.5 Concluding remarks on the theoretical base for the dissertation.....	35
CHAPTER -IV- FINDINGS	36
4.1 Northern Lights experiences in the Aurora landscapes	36
4.1.1 The Aurora landscapes – Alta, the City of Northern Lights.....	38
4.1.2 Landscape and identity in experience production	39
4.2 Staging the Northern Lights experience	40
4.2.1 Extraordinary Northern Lights experiences in Alta.....	46
- “Hunting” the Northern Lights - by bus.....	50
- “Other” nature based Northern Lights experiences	53
- Accommodation in the wilderness - hoping to see it!	55
4.3 Narrative and storytelling in the Northern Lights experience	57
4.3.1 Contrasting narratives used in the Northern Lights experiences.....	58
4.3.2 The natural surroundings – cues for storytelling	61
4.3.3 Narratives – more than told stories.....	63
4.4 Negotiating with nature and negotiation strategies	66
4.4.1 No Northern Lights in sight –firmer structure and creativity in storytelling	67
CHAPTER -V-CONCLUSIONS	71
REFERENCES.....	74
ATTATCHMENTS.....	79

ABSTRACT

With rapidly increasing tourist numbers, the potential in commercialising the Northern Lights has grown immensely over the last few years, and one can only imagine what possibilities the future holds for professional Northern Lights experience providers.

One of the biggest challenges of the Northern Lights experiences is how to deal with the natural conditions and constraints of this ever shifting phenomenon. The experience providers cannot guarantee sightings of the Northern Lights even under ideal winter conditions.

However, despite the fact that nature conditions the production of Northern Lights in the nature based experience, experience providers seem to manage a way around the fact that the Aurora Borealis might be a no-show. This seems to be done through negotiation strategies, meaning to make use of staging and narrative elements in order to handle the absence of the Northern Lights. This requires a flexible and dynamic system that can be handled by the experience stager, and that can be adjusted according to the natural conditions.

The study is done from an experience perspective, and a qualitative approach with case study is used in order to conduct this exploratory study. 6 Northern Lights experience providers were interviewed and 4 participant observations were undertaken.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Despite the fact that writing this Master's thesis has been a long and very hard and unusual journey, I will never regret the efforts made. It has been a really interesting journey that have made me realize that the brain works in mysterious ways, and that I can do whatever I set my mind to. It has also been very interesting to see things from the researcher's point of view, and not from a tourism business view as I normally do.

Thank you, supervisor Stein Roar Mathisen, you for all the helpful guidance I have received the last 5 months. It is much appreciated.

Also thank you to the companies that without hesitation said yes to my requests about being informants and letting me participate on Northern Lights trips.

And finally, thank you to my family, friends and colleagues that have supported me through the many ups and downs of this process.

May 2014, Alta

Nina Smedseng

CHAPTER -I- INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background for the study

The Northern Lights are for many people a very intriguing natural phenomenon that is part of the daily life for only a small part of the world population. Northern Lights occur most frequently in a belt around the magnetic North Pole.

“This so-called aurora zone spans from northern Scandinavia, Iceland and the southern tip of Greenland, the northern Canada, over Alaska and along the northern coast of Siberia. The coast of Troms and Finnmark has a high frequency as it is situated just under the aurora oval. It is obvious that because of its convenient accessibility and mild winter climate, Northern Norway is attractive to people who want to see this celestial phenomenon” (Hansen, 1996) (translated from Norwegian).

In 2012 the earth entered Solar Maximum, meaning that the solar activity was at its highest in 11 years, leading to spectacular Northern Lights. The news has reached the market and Northern Lights trips are more popular than ever. A widespread desire to witness the Northern Lights has given rise to an expanding tourist sector where visitors travel to an increasing number of destinations within or near to the Arctic Circle (Edensor, 2010). In 2012, the general manager of Visit Tromsø, Victoria Bakken, claimed that they had experienced twice as many bookings for Aurora-related activities compared to 2011, and that they were expecting even more visitors in 2013 (Leithe, 2013b). Tromsø is by the tourism industry considered to be the leading winter destination in Northern Norway. Undoubtedly, “Hunting the Northern Lights” in different forms is the new “hype” in winter tourism in Northern Norway. The “Hunting” metaphor is used to express the volatile phenomenon that you might not get to see. The reason for this explosion in demand is not part of my thesis. Still, one can only speculate if Northern Lights featured articles in major international newspapers and magazines, a hugely successful TV-documentary with Joanna Lumley (Nrk.no/nordland, 2008), and amazing photos gone viral on social media, has enabled this breakthrough.

Just a few years back, only small attempts were made at highlighting the Northern Lights. Today, on the other hand, the Northern Lights seem to be in focus, leading the way in marketing of winter activities in both Alta and Northern Norway. For many tourists, seeing

the Northern Lights is considered a once in a lifetime experience, meaning that the experience is purely unique and cannot be replicated (Tung & Ritchie, 2011:1368). Accordingly, the focus on the Northern Lights has forced its way through because of the increasing demand, making some experience providers shift focus from their nature based activities, like dog sledding and snow mobile safaris, to Northern Lights safaris with dog sledding or snow mobile rides.

One has to recognize though, that selling experiences based on a natural phenomenon like the Aurora Borealis, might involve major challenges regarding the potential lack of Northern Lights and weather conditions. The Northern Lights cannot be controlled. It can only be seen if the weather conditions are good. A cloudy sky will prevent you from seeing it. And even more importantly, the solar activity must be high. Shortly described, Northern Lights occur when solar storms from the sun hits the magnetic field surrounding the earth (Byhring, 2011). Involved businesses must deal with these natural conditions and constraints on a daily basis, and they are quite aware of the implications the possible lack of the Northern Lights may accompany.

Finally, as a master student at Finnmark University College, now UiT, The Arctic University of Norway, Campus Alta, I was fortunate enough to be a student at a time where Finnmark University College received funding for a winter research project – WINTER: New turns in Arctic winter tourism. Master students were invited in with the opportunity to part take in the project, an opportunity that could not be resisted. The master thesis is of course an individual piece of work without any restrictions from the project, other than the theme winter. One of four directions in the project that interested me in particular was WP4: Aurora Borealis: Tourism performances and symbolic meanings. At the same time as the no-show of Northern Lights and how to handle this challenge is part of the challenges in the marketing of Northern Norway as a winter destination, it is suggested by the project to have a closer look at the Northern Lights experience and how this is narrated and staged.

With rapidly increasing tourist numbers, the potential in commercialising the Northern Lights has grown immensely over the last few years. This is also recognized by the experience providers. With new camera technology and new ways to reach an audience through social media, one can only imagine what possibilities the future holds for professional Northern Lights experience providers. Despite the fact that nature seem to have more recourse power,

experience providers manage to find ways of dealing with the challenges related to the elusiveness of this natural phenomenon by making attractive experiences even though they are not able to guarantee what seems to be the main attraction of the northern winter – the Northern Lights, the Aurora Borealis.

With this in mind, I would therefore like to explore the Northern Lights experience based on the following research question;

“What are the key elements of the Northern Lights experience?

How is the Northern Lights experience staged and narrated, and how do the providers negotiate natural conditions and constraints?”

1.2 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the Northern Lights experience by exploring;

- The key elements of an extraordinary Northern Lights experience (or experiences)
 - Staging elements
 - Narrative elements
- Negotiation aspects and strategies – experience providers’ influence on nature
 - Dealing with natural conditions and constraints
 - Dynamical aspects of the Northern Lights experience – flexibility
- What kind of influence does the experience provider have on nature, what kind of products can they create despite these natural conditions and constraints?

1.3 Structure of master thesis

This first chapter presents the background for the study and why I as a researcher assume that this research topic is of interest. The research question is presented, and finally, the aim of the study with a more detailed list of goals.

Chapter 2 contain a methodological review and a presentation of the type of research undertaken. It also offers an explanation to why the particular method is chosen to solve the research question.

Chapter 3 present a theoretical frame for the dissertation, starting by framing the Northern Lights experience within nature based tourism, followed by theory to discuss the memorable or extraordinary experience, staging of the nature based experience, and how narrative and storytelling is used within experience design.

Chapter 4 is dedicated the findings of the study, which suggest that experience providers use negotiation strategies to deal with the natural conditions and constraints of the Northern Lights.

Chapter 5 provides a general conclusion.

CHAPTER -II- METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the type of research carried out, as well as research methods used to collect primary data for the study. An explanation of why this particular method is chosen will be provided.

2.1 Choice of subject and methodological review

The Northern Lights – or the Aurora Borealis, is the number one winter attraction in Northern Norway at the time being. The fascination for this natural phenomenon and the rising interest for it, both within the tourism industry and in the market, led me towards wanting to do a more descriptive and interpretive analysis of the Northern Lights experience, and especially how experience providers, as I choose to call the companies in question, manage to work around the uncertainty of the Northern Lights - Aurora Borealis.

It must also be said that the rapid growth in Aurora tourists, not particularly in Alta, but in Tromsø as the largest winter tourism competitor to Alta, has led to a cautious alert concerning the rapid growth of the industry, meaning that a lot of “cowboy entrepreneurs”, without tourism experience or experience production skills flourish (Stav, 2014a). They are in it for the easy money, not for the sake of producing extraordinary experiences. This study is therefore focused on collecting data from well established professional, full-time experience providers selling Northern Lights experiences. There might exist more companies, operating on their own and more on a hobby basis, but this dissertation will only include full time

winter tourism companies being part of the joint marketing and winter programs in Alta (www.visitalta.no).

Defining the research question is probably the most important step to be taken in a research study, according to Yin (2003:7). He proposes that the research question holds both substance (what the study is about) and form (what kind of questions do I ask; “who”, “what”, “where”, “why”, or “how”). In general case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" questions are posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and focus on contemporary phenomenon's within real-life context (yin 2003). As my research question contains both “what” and “how”, a case study, emphasizing participant observation and interviews, seems like a suitable options. The first question is *exploratory*; What are the key elements of the Northern Lights extraordinary experience? Second question is; How is the Northern Lights experience staged and narrated, and how do the providers negotiate natural conditions and constraints? The “How” questions are more *explanatory*, but also lead in the direction of case studies. A case study, as an empirical inquiry, investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (R. Yin, 2003:13).

My research question will to a large extent be conducted from the experience perspective, meaning that it is the extraordinary experience and its elements that will be explored. The consumer perspective will only shine through in some of the interview material from the providers. The study is inspired by a phenomenological research approach (Van Manen, 1990) as it systematically aims to uncover and describe the structures of lived experiences. Within qualitative research, phenomenological studies, emphasizing hermeneutic or interpretive analysis, are most strongly devoted to capturing the uniqueness of events (R. K. Yin, 2011:14). This phenomenological research approach is taken to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen, Morrison, & Manion, 2004:36).

The sources of evidence (R. Yin, 2003) used in this qualitative study, also emphasized by case studies, will be semi-structured interviews, participant observation and web-page review of the companies in question. The meanings of the interviewed experience providers will be central to the research. The informants are preferably the owners, in all cases also working as guides (or experience stagers as I prefer to call them). They are the experts and key to the history of the company and also how they have chosen to stage and narrate their Northern

Lights experiences through time, which will help us understand the nature of an extraordinary experience. In addition participant observation will be a source of additional data collecting. Gaining access to the actual experience setting might provide certain unusual opportunities for collecting case study data. According to Phillmore & Goodson, this kind of approach to data collection will enable gathering of rich descriptive accounts (2004) of Northern Lights experiences in Alta.

2.2 Research approach

Based on the fact that Alta has been a winter destination with a good portfolio of available winter experiences for individual tourists for quite some time, the study conducted in Alta only. Alta is a small destination, but with professional companies offering a range of Northern Lights activities. It is therefore also interesting to be able to get the whole picture of a Northern Lights destination and its different Northern Lights experiences.

A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study in order to gain in-depth understanding of the Northern Lights experience. Qualitative methods are applied to collect data on activities, events, occurrences and behaviours and to seek an understanding of action, problems and (Phillmore & Goodson, 2004). Multiple qualitative methods were applied in order to collect data for this research; in depth semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Six semi-structured interviews were held in Alta during the period 9 -30 January. The semi-structured interviews started by asking the informant to describe their Northern Lights experience as detailed as possible, in order to have the informant speak more freely, and so the interview guide served more as a way of leading the conversation.

Throughout the period 21 October 2013 to 27 February 2014 I participated on 3 different Northern Lights trips, one of them twice. The participant observation was undertaken in order to view the elements already spoken about in interviews, to get an accurate description of the actual experience and how it is staged and narrated. It was also of particular interest to aim for Northern Lights trips with different outcomes to observe how this affected the different elements of the experience. This was of course not guaranteed to happen, and could eventually have led to the possibility of having to participate on a lot more trips in order to see the Northern Lights. By closely monitoring the Northern Lights forecast, and the weather

forecast, as well as experience providers flexibility in letting me participate, we managed to accomplish this.

2.2.1 Pre-study

Before conducting the participant observation and interviewing, I did a pre-study on the 21 October 2013 where I participated on a Northern Lights experience, as an ordinary, paying tourist, to get a better idea of what the Northern Lights experience was all about. The goal of this pre study was to test and refine my fieldwork procedures and analysis plans (R. K. Yin, 2011). This helped me create the interview guide and to get a better understanding of what to look for, in addition to new ideas about how to go about the data collection. It was also very helpful to talk to tourists in the group, to get a feeling of the interaction between the members of the group and their interest in the Northern Lights.

2.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview (R. Yin, 2003:90). The main source of information for this dissertation is the semi-structured interviews with 6 of the main winter companies in Alta. Semi-structured means an open interview structure that allows new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what is said during the interview. The interviews were “guided”, informal conversations led by an interview guide serving as a framework for the themes explored. The challenge was of course to compile data afterwards, because answers to different questions seemed to appear at different times during the interview. Since there were only 6 interviews this challenge was manageable. It was important that the informant was the manager of the company. Since most of the companies are “micro” companies, several with only 1-2 employees, managers are always involved in the production of experiences, with broad background from guided tours and a strong connection to the history of the company.

Due to the winter project at UiT, The Arctic University of Norway, several researchers were out collecting information simultaneously. To avoid putting too much pressure on the few companies in Alta, while they were actually in their peak season, I decided to do my interviews together with a fellow researcher in the winter project. The interviews were led by me and my interview guide and my colleague supplied with some additional questions. This

process was a win – win situation for both of us, but also saving the time consumption for the companies interviewed.

All interviews were conducted in Norwegian. For the dissertation all quotes are translated to English. One might think that this can ruin the content or the meaning of statements, but I find the essence of what is said more important to my study.

2.2.3 Participant observation

Participant observation is the hallmark of anthropological methods (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010). All in all I participated on 4 different Northern Lights experiences during the research period (one was the pre-study). These companies have been active for several years, but they differ quite a lot in their focus on the Northern Lights in their experiences; it is two “hunting the Northern Lights” experiences, and one dog sledding experience. The difference in experiences and how they stage their experience will be valuable to the thesis. During the participant observation I did not only look at the experience itself, but I also tried to find out more about the kind of people participating, how they interacted, and how they reacted to the outcome of the trip, meaning if they saw the Northern Lights or not.

Through time many important ethical issues have been raised, like for instance the problem of maintaining the anonymity of people studied. The view of DeWalt & DeWalt (2010:291) is that the people studied should not be harmed by the researchers’ personal involvement with them and should not be negatively affected by the information collected and written about them.

Even though participant observation provides certain unusual opportunities for collecting case study data, it also might involve major problems, like access to events, and potential biases produced (R. Yin, 2003:94), meaning that in undertaking any participant observation these challenges must be seriously considered.

2.3 My role as a researcher

I have been working within the tourism industry in Finnmark and Northern Norway since 1995, and currently employed in Northern Norway Tourist Board, the marketing organisation of Northern Norway. I have also followed the development within Northern Lights tourism

closely from the very beginning so to speak. I consider my background from the tourism industry as a valuable asset in my research.

I had already established good relationships with the informants through my earlier work related contact with them. Because of my background I knew the informants and companies involved, and we therefore had common grounds to base the discussions on. In the interview situation this also enabled me to elaborate questions in order to get more detailed answers from the informants in cases where I also knew there was probably more to it than the answer I received. The atmosphere during interviews was informal and easy going.

There is always a chance that wanted informants do not find the time for an interview. Since I already knew the experience providers and had established a good relationship to them over time I did not have to deal with any typical obstacles in arranging interviews. They were all positive to the contribution they could make, and I therefore had relatively easy access to the events I hoped to participate on.

The same things being my advantage could also be my disadvantages as a researcher. I had to be extra cautious not to take things for granted, or to make sure the experience providers did not take me for granted by having this “she knows us, therefore I don’t have to tell her”-mentality. It was important for me as a researcher to be looked at as an ordinary tourist by the companies, not as the employee at Northern Norway Tourist Board. Not only was I a researcher, but I also had a role in the tourism business as a marketer for Northern Norway that needed to be kept at a professional level. The latter one could have caused problems in the way that they would show me a different version of their experience based on my background, giving me “special treatment” with less or even more information than given to the ordinary tourist. It was of great importance to have an open mind and see the companies and the experiences with new eyes, to use my knowledge in an unbiased way.

When doing the participant observation I always made sure to tell the guide that they should treat me like part of the group and to disregard the fact that I worked in the business. This was also the reason why I had to pass on one of the trips I was scheduled to go on. The reason being that I was afraid I would spoil the trip for the tourists as well as the guide, and for me not to be able to get the wanted data. It was not so much about me being a researcher, but the fact that I spoke English, and the guide and the two other tourists spoke Spanish. As soon as

we entered the car they started a Spanish dialogue, and I was immediately left out. Since I didn't know Spanish I would have to speak English, and the guide would have to repeat everything to me in English. I would get adapted stories in English and the other tourists in Spanish. If there had been more tourists on the trip, the guide would have used English as guiding language. I meant it was important not be the person that would most probably change the group environment and how the guide related to us. I wanted to blend in while collecting data. The companies might also to some degree be worried that the researcher might affect the outcome of the trip, or change the atmosphere in the group, so the best thing was to not do the trip this night. It was an interesting discovery.

2.4 Research ethics

During data collection, particularly on the trips I participated on, it was very important for me to let the rest of the group know that I was a researcher, that way they could choose whether to talk to me or not, which never turned out to be an issue. What I found challenging though, was that the guide on two occasions suggested that I did not have to say anything to the group in plenum. The solution was then to tell people whenever we got in dialog, which also worked perfectly. Just like I was interested in the people in the group, the people in the group were interested in me and would ask questions. In value-free social science, codes of ethics for professional and academic associations are the conventional format for moral principles (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:65). Since the main focus of my dissertation was the experience, no further measures were taken in getting written consents from the participating tourists other than informing the group about my participation.

Concerning the confidentiality of the companies, I have made an effort to anonymize the companies and informants by not using names, but with Alta being a small destination with few companies, there might still be information that will "give away" clues as to which company is discussed. Since the aim of the study is positive and not about displaying the faults of individual companies, I do not think the informants will mind, or that this dissertation will give out secret information that will harm the experience providers in any way.

Even though I have participated on several of these kinds of trips before through my work, I still found it very useful to undertake participant observation on some of the experiences. That

was also necessary to make sure I had the right perspective and attitude towards the road I was about to embark. I have tried to actively put myself in the shoes of a tourist, to see and hear things through tourists eyes. At the same time I also know that I am a researcher, and that I have to be aware of this fact when analyzing my data.

This chapter present the choice of subject for the dissertation as well as the methodological approach taken. By looking at the research question, proving to be both exploratory and explanatory, a qualitative research approach with case study was chosen. The data collection was conducted through 6 semi-structured interviews and 4 participant observations. Further, my role as a researcher is discussed in addition to research ethics.

CHAPTER -III- NORTHERN LIGHTS EXPERIENCES

– Staging, Narrative and Negotiation strategies

This chapter discusses theories that will help clarify the research question. It is only natural to start with a definition of a nature based experience before discussing the role of the Arctic landscape within the nature based experience. Further, a review of the narrative and staging elements of the experience will be conducted.

3.1 Nature based experiences in Aurora landscapes

Based on the fact that these Aurora or Arctic landscapes are scarcely populated, and that nature plays an essential role within the tourism industry in Northern Norway, in addition to nature being considered a “reason to go” in itself, one might argue that most tourism to these areas are of the nature based kind. Still the dissertation calls for a definition of nature based tourism and nature based experiences as such.

Priskin (2001) defines *nature based tourism* as tourism featuring nature. This very broad approach does not really give us a good grasp on what nature based tourism is, except that nature is involved. Frequently nature based tourism is also used synonymously with terms such as sustainability, eco, green, alternative and responsible tourism (Priskin, 2001). Mehmet Mehmetoglu (2007) for example, divide nature based tourism in four different sub categories; eco-tourism, sun- and beach tourism, adventure tourism and culture based tourism. The Northern Lights experience fits within several of these categories. According to these definitions, eco-tourism and sustainability are important parts of nature based tourism. Tourism's impact on nature has received increasing attention, and the idea of sustainable tourism involves the recognition of negative impact. The future of nature based tourism is strongly resource dependent and requires access to high quality natural environments (Priskin, 2001), like the kind of natural environments the Northern Lights experience demands.

But what about *nature based experiences*? In this study it seem only natural to define nature based experiences in the same manner as Tangeland & Aas (2011:824) define a nature based tourism activity –a tourism activity in which the focus is upon an activity that take place in a nature area and where the tourism activity is directly dependent on the natural environment.

Particular elements are common among many of the definitions, namely that learning, recreation and adventure take place in natural surroundings (Tangeland & Aas, 2011).

Furthermore, nature based experiences are highly elusive, and nature cannot be controlled in the same way as an amusement park or a concert experience (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2010:565). This makes the role of the presenter even more challenging. Similarly, experiences are also highly dependent on the tourists themselves (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), meaning that the experience is highly personal, created within the tourist (L. M. Mossberg, 2007). From the perspective of the provider, it might therefore seem difficult to influence the outcome of the experience. However, valuable attempts are constantly made by Northern Lights experience providers even though nature ultimately conditions the production of nature based experiences.

From what is discussed so far, nature based experiences seem to have a commercial angle, but Tangeland & Aas (2011) differentiate between non-commercial and commercial nature-based tourism activities, which to me, makes perfect sense. Whilst a commercial nature based product is defined as a product that take place primarily in nature, are dependent on or enhanced by the natural environment and require a tourist to pay a third party to participate (Tangeland, Vennessland, & Nybakk, 2012:2), non-commercial products can be trekking and hiking, wildlife safaris, climbing, nature photography, and camping in natural areas. If only the user have the competence and equipment for it, these activities can often be enjoyed free of charge (2011). It is intriguing to consider some types of Northern Lights experiences as non-commercial. Not all tourists seem to go on paid Northern Lights safaris. They rather “hang out” while waiting for this phenomenon to appear in the sky. Increasingly these kinds of non-commercial products are converted into nature based tourism products by outfitters, tour operators, and guides (Pomfret, 2006; Tangeland & Aas, 2011), meaning that there is a great potential in product development even though the typical safari is not something this kind of tourist normally would like to pay for.

Thus, the role of the experience provider is to provide the environment and the circumstances for extraordinary experiences to be made in interaction with the customer (L. M. Mossberg, 2007). As Vespestad & Lindberg (2010:565) argue, presenters of nature based tourism experiences can only present and organize the experience with a belief of how the tourists want it, and hope that it is appreciated. The question is basically which belief one chooses and

how it can be translated into certain touristic presentations (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2010), meaning which strategies are used in staging and narration of the experience in order to give the tourist the desired experience.

Nature based tourism can be described as tourism featuring nature, but also involving elements of adventure and culture. Then it only seems fitting for nature based experiences to be defined as activity that take place in nature and where the tourism activity is directly dependent on the natural environment. For example, how the Northern Lights experience is dependent on clear skies as well as the presence of the Northern Lights in order to secure an extraordinary Northern Lights experience. The natural surroundings, together with elements of adventure and culture, are prerequisites for the experiences. The natural environments constitute the stage for the Northern Lights experience, whereas the role of the experience provider then is to stage these natural environments, that cannot be controlled, but rather have to be dealt with. The Aurora landscape is part of framing the experience.

3.1.1 The Aurora landscapes – affective atmospheres

The aurora landscape sets the frame of the experiences tourists have in the north, also the Northern Lights experience. This touristic landscape, or in this case the Aurora landscape, is defined as stages of experiencing place (Edensor, 2010), in this case the natural environments that surround the Northern Lights experience as well as the affects of the natural environment, like weather, light, sounds etc. Culture is an important part of this landscape. Lund (2013:160) disagree with the conventional distinction of nature, that in its purest form, it is allegedly being situated somewhere where there is ‘no culture’, and nature tourism reinforces the idea that nature exists in places that are separate from culture. She further argues that the idea of wilderness implies blurred boundaries between nature and culture and human and non-human forces. For the purpose of this dissertation culture is defined as part of the Aurora landscape.

What is so fascinating about the Arctic and the Aurora landscape? For many travellers these northern and Arctic areas represent a totally new landscape, as well as the people living here and a foreign culture (S. R. Mathisen, 2014). The fact that the area is populated, that the society is rather modern and comfortable, and that the infrastructure is in place somehow seem to be an under communicated message (S. R. Mathisen, 2014), especially the further away you get from Norway.

The fascination for Svalbard and polar areas are discussed by Gyimóthy & Mykletun (2004). The Arctic realm with challenging extreme conditions provides a suitable stage for adventure. Alta is of course less extreme than Svalbard, but for many it is still regarded as “another place” so different from everyday environments. Entering to a northern destination, like Svalbard (Viken & Jørgensen, 1998) or The North Cape (Jacobsen, 1997) may be like entering a symbolic world (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004).

A widespread desire to witness the Aurora Borealis, or the Northern Lights, has given rise to an expanding tourism sector where visitors travel to an increasing number of destinations within or near the Arctic Circle. What is particular about the Arctic is the changing light, from almost total darkness or blue lights for 2-3 months in the wintertime, to the contrasting 24 hours of daylight 4-5 months in the summertime.

“In the winter season, the awe-inspiring sunless polar night, the special midday twilight, and the Aurora Borealis sparkling across the Arctic sky make North Cape even more special to the rare visitor than the midnight sun and the bright nights of summer” (Jacobsen, 1997).

But the attractiveness of the area is not just about the changing lights. The northern darkness also attracts those who wish to move away from over-illuminated landscapes, and to experience a denser darkness against which the Northern Lights may be witnessed (Edensor, 2010:231). For many this makes a huge contrast to the over-illuminated city environments that can be seen from far away as a coloured or light horizon in the dark. It is also no secret that good weather conditions, combined with dark areas, not spoiled by electrical lights, will give the best sights, and the best photos of the Northern Lights.

However, the Arctic landscape is about so much more than its changing lights. The “grand nature” has been the signature of Norway ever since the first tourists arrived here, and natural environments like fjords, mountains, rivers, natural phenomenon's like snow, Northern Lights and midnight sun, are considered important reasons for travelling. The landscape is also surrounded by the affects of weather, temperature, wind, the sound of rivers and streams, the forest, all of which contribute to a wider sensual apprehension (Edensor, 2010; L. Mathisen, 2013a), meaning that the body's ability to sense landscapes is enhanced by the natural surroundings and the effects of the Arctic aurora landscape. One might think that the main

asset of natural environments are their gazing qualities, but apart from these, the natural environments also play an important part in staging the experience in order to inspire and enable performance interaction (L. Mathisen, 2013a).

These natural environments encountered by tourists offer different “stages” for the Northern Lights experience to be performed. They provide tourism managers with cues such as natural attractions, stories, ritual sites, etc. (L. Mathisen, 2013a). These cues offer particular interpretations of a reality that can be linked to tourists’ immediate physical presence (Arnould & Price, 1993; L. Mathisen, 2013a:165) for example the local history and understanding of the experience and its surroundings. They also provide an important link to the cultural heritage of a destination and its history. At the same time as stories help the tourist interpret and understand experiences they are having in the present, these stories also establish a connection to the past (S. R. Mathisen, 2014).

The gazing qualities of natural environment are well recognized (Urry & Larsen, 2011), but according to L. Mathisen (2013a) more knowledge is required on natural environments and how they are used and staged as spaces that both inspire and enable performance interactions. She further (2013a:165) suggests that there are benefits for tourism managers in staging the natural environment as a part of a destinations ontology and ethos, which means that the transmission and interpretation of meanings offered to the tourists can be anchored in the destination itself and develop as a unique resource. The identity of Alta as a winter destination, as well as the identity of the experience provider, is therefore essential in how the tourist understand their experiences.

3.1.2 Landscape and identity

Friedman (2010) points out that landscape is well recognized as a constitutive element in forging identity, whether national, regional or local. Nansen’s polar expedition for instance, did a huge effort in ‘making the Aurora Norwegian’, using the Northern Lights as a national icon. In Nansen’s book ‘In Northern Mists’ he included a number of his own aurora illustrations and established the Northern Lights as an emblem for the Norwegian urge to explore the unknown (Friedman, 2010).

“For both Nansen and Birkeland the aurora borealis, as an object for scientific research and as a cultural symbol, was interconnected with national aspirations and identity” (Friedman, 2010:65).

Northern Norway is doing the same thing as Nansen did, except not forging identity for Norway, but rather for Northern Norway. And for Alta and the experience providers here, it is about creating identity that can help the tourist understand their experiences here. During the first part of the 20 century, Norway and even Alta did have a very important role in some of the first Aurora research, producing significant contributions to the study of the Aurora. One of the pioneers, Kristian Birkeland had a Northern Lights observatory built on Mount Haldde in Alta in 1899 (Friedman, 2010). This is an essential part of local history and the identity of Alta (AltaMuseum), which is used actively by some of the Northern Lights experience providers. The Northern Lights are part of the Arctic identity.

The natural surroundings, the landscape in itself, the light, the darkness, the Northern Lights and midnight sun, the changing weather, wind, snow, and sounds of nature, are all natural parts of the northern areas, or the aurora landscape. This together with the history of polar expeditions highlighting the Northern Lights, and distinguished Northern Lights research in these areas, are part of creating identity and pride, and is therefore also major contributors to local narratives and Northern Lights experience narration. All in all the narration of the aurora landscape will help make meaning, shape action, and mold tourist behaviour, and not to forget help Northern Lights experience providers with cues as to what the Northern Lights experience should emphasize.

Unfamiliar landscapes, culture and people, so different from everyday environments, together with a widespread desire to witness the Northern Lights, have made the Aurora landscape – or perhaps even better described as the “land of the Northern Lights” attractive. Not only do the changing lights of the Arctic, but also the lack of lights, city-lights in particular, seem to have its appeal, especially during the Northern Lights season. As well as providing cues for the experience stager towards staging and narration of the experiences, these natural environments will also be an essential part of how the landscape and its experiences are perceived by tourists. All this, together with local history and former polar heroes’ use of the Northern Lights to forge Norwegian identity, is part of the identity of the Aurora landscape, as the natural environment we are surrounded by is part of our identity, and our story. It will

therefore also be an essential part of the Northern Lights experience, which plays out on the stage framed by the Aurora landscape.

3.2 Staging experiences – engaging customers

By staging experiences, unique and memorable experiences may be created, Pine & Gilmore (2011, 2013) argue. With the introduction to the experience economy by Pine & Gilmore in the 1990's, experiences were seen as the fourth economic forthcoming. Whereas commodities are considered fungible, goods tangible, and services intangible, experiences are considered memorable (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The company, or the “experience stager”, no longer offers goods or services alone, but the resulting experience, rich with sensation, is created within each customer. This would suggest that the tourist is an active participator in creating the experience.

If we are to believe experience researchers, staging is a central concept within experience creation (Pedersen, 2012; Pine & Gilmore, 2011). But what does it mean? According to Mossberg (2007), staging happens during the “service encounter”, referring to the meeting between the staff, the guide for example, and the tourist. The service environment can be understood as a stage that influences customer perception of quality by providing them with cues that produce emotional and behavioural effects (Bitner, 1992). Service marketing in particular, has argued that staging the service encounter will result in enhanced service experiences (Harris, Harris, & Baron, 2001; L. Mathisen, 2013a).

Furthermore, experiences can be seen as staged events, with the intention of creating memorable experiences, that engage the individual personally on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Or the experience can be viewed as a theatre with different stages, where the story is told with different happenings on a timeline. Staging is not so much about entertaining customers, it's rather about engaging them (Pine & Gilmore, 2011:45). Experience managers are therefore recommended to dramatize the experience to ensure maximum engagement (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), because theatre connects the drama and script to customers by staging the performance that engages them as an audience, as so with tourism experiences.

Will different people participating on the same activity have the same experience? No, Pine & Gilmore (2011) argues. No two people can have the same experience because each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event and the individual's prior state of mind and being. This brings even more challenges to the table for the experience stager, the guide that provides the staging. For tourism managers that offer nature based experiences, it is knowledge about the possible effects of the natural environment, together with tourists' motivations, that create the potential for constructing or staging the natural environments (Arnould & Price, 1993; L. Mathisen, 2013a). Staging that makes use of dimensions incorporating tourism purposes like exploration, play, learning, and authenticity, are of particular interest (L. Mathisen, 2013a).

The expression "service encounter" is already used about the meeting between the tourist and the staff, but what is said about the actual physical space where the experience takes place? Bitner (1992) was the first to use the term "servicescape" about the actual physical space where the experience is produced. She sees Servicescapes as constructed physical surroundings intended as sites in which commercial exchanges are to take place and include ambient, social and design factors (Bitner, 1992; L. Mossberg, 2008:196). Not only does the servicescape affect consumers' behaviour, but it is also rich in clues regarding what the organization has to offer. The servicescape is an important factor influencing customer and employee satisfaction and behaviour, meaning that the environment will influence both employees and customers. According to L. M. Mossberg (2007) the servicescape consist of partly external factors such as natural landscapes, parking and availability, and partly inner factors like design, decor, layout, and equipment and should therefore be recognized by experience providers.

L. Mathisen (2013b:4) on the other hand, propose that unlike the human constructed environments discussed by Bitner (1992), natural environments such as a mountain plateau, constitute a stable structure that conditions activities which are difficult to stage through physical reconstructions. However, they can be staged through people's communication (Arnould, Price, & Tierney, 1998), meaning through storytelling. Staging natural environments by using stories can be done in two ways, according to Arnould & Price (1993). Either by using story structure elements in order to shape and integrate the different stages in the activity, or to tell stories intended to give special meaning to something that is encountered, for example nature (L. Mathisen, 2013b).

By staging experiences, through engaging the individual personally on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level, unique and memorable experiences may be created (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Staging is all about organizing the experience in such a way that tourists are engaged and feel moved by what they experience. It is about connecting the drama and the script of the experience to tourists through narrating and storytelling.

The service encounter, the meeting between the staff, often the guide and the tourist, is the actual staging. In nature based experiences, like the Northern Lights experience, nature and natural surroundings and their affects play a major role in staging of the experience.

Nature can also be seen as a stable structure environment that conditions activities that are difficult to stage through a physical reconstruction.

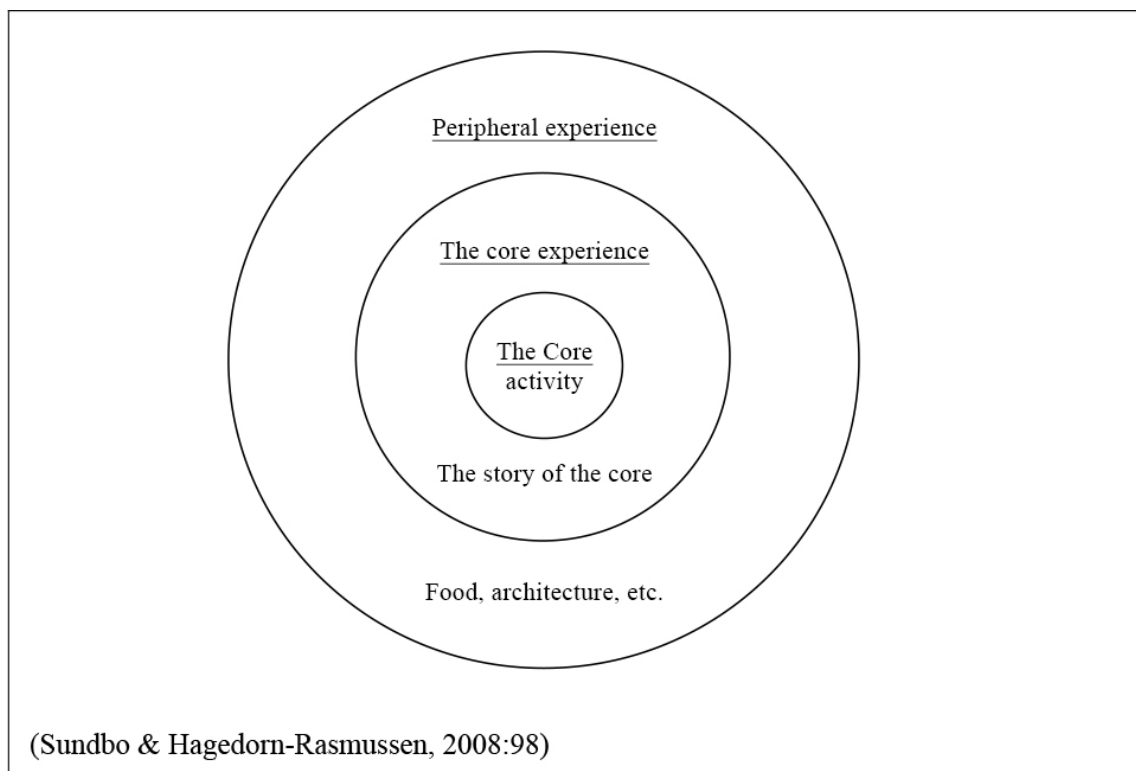
3.2.1 Designing memorable experiences

Designing extraordinary or memorable experiences demand careful attention to detail and planning. Mossberg is inspired by Arnould & Price (Arnould & Price, 1993) using the term “extraordinary” experiences, proposing that when creating extraordinary experiences, it all comes down to absorption, personal control, joy and valuing, and a feeling of “newness”, in order for it to be a spontaneous process (L. M. Mossberg, 2007). So, what is the essence of what constitutes an experience that is especially memorable?

Pine & Gilmore (1998, 2011) suggest that memorable experiences are entertaining, educational, aesthetic or escapist, and that the richest kind of experience are to include aspects of all four categories. These elements reflect the quality of interaction between the experience stager and the tourist in the service encounter (L. Mathisen, 2012). Often we think of *Entertainment* - an activity like seeing a movie, a play, a concert or the Northern Lights – we are passively entertained (L. M. Mossberg, 2007). The *Educational* kind differs from entertainment because it is about actively participating – taking lessons or learning something new like a scientific presentation about the Northern Lights for instance. The third kind is the *Aesthetics*, where participants are immersed or engaged by an activity or an environment, like visiting an art gallery. According to L. M. Mossberg (2007) visitors can here engage in other times, other places or themselves - imagining bygone eras. They are immersed in an experience or the surroundings, but they cannot immediately affect the result. Eventually the fourth characteristic is *Escapism*, like role play, involving a much higher degree of customer immersion, and active participation.

“For the consumer to be immersed in the story and to have an extraordinary experience, two preconditions are proposed which relate to the type of service and the setting: one is the need for the experience to take place in a hedonic service consumption setting and the other is a servicescape that allows the consumer to step away from everyday reality” (L. M. Mossberg, Johansen, & Sjøbu, 2008:195).

Pine & Gilmore (1998) also provide five key experience-design principles to consider when designing experiences. First of all, create a unified storyline, the experience should be themed. Secondly, impressions should be harmonized with positive cues, meaning cues that create the experience in the customers head, setting the stage and preparing the customer for what will come. Third, negative cues have to be eliminated in order to get rid of anything that diminishes, contradicts, or distracts from the theme. The fourth principle is to mix in memorabilia to remember the trip by. But the fifth and most significant principle is to attempt engaging all five senses within the tourist - see, smell, hear, feel and taste. The more senses that are engaged, the more memorable an experience will get (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Sundbo & Darmer (2008:98) proposes a different approach to describe the experience on a more overall level, also recognizing the peripheral experience as part of the experience. This model explains the main elements of an experience:



The model is meant to display the total experience product, and can help understand the totality of the experience. The inner circle of the model symbolizes the core activity, for example the Northern Lights, the pure performance. The inner circle is surrounded by a bigger circle consisting of the core experience which is the story of the core. Tourists experience the core activity together with the story, which adds something to the performance and gives framework to understand the performance (Pedersen, 2012; Sundbo & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008). The core combined with the story about the core and the firm, creates the core experience. The core experience must be meaningful and have substance and have its own attractiveness, in order to make profitable experiences (Pedersen, 2012). The biggest circle symbolizes the peripheral experience like food, architecture and other elements surrounding the experience.

“To the audience, the concept presents a total experience including the core experience, peripheral experience and services and the framework: the storytelling which means that everybody knows what we are talking about” (Sundbo & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008:97).

Tourist does not just assess the core or the core experience, but the total experience. The side activities or peripheral activities should therefore be included in the model of the experience product. What is particularly interesting is what Sundbo & Hagedorn-Rasmussen (2008) say about the core. If the core is not good enough, the experience will not work. More marketing and storytelling may be added around the core, but the product cannot be sold if the core – the artistic or performance aspect is not good - seen from the tourist perspective. That leads to the question about the uncertainty of the Northern Lights experience, and how to organize the core and the framework of the experience for memorable experiences to be created.

Designing memorable experiences consist of many challenges, first and foremost because the experience is produced within the individual, but for an experience to be memorable, the tourist must engage in the experience. Engagement can be created in a number of ways, by watching a Northern Lights presentation for example. Another way of engaging the customer is to view the customer as “partial employee”, as L. M. Mossberg (2007) suggests, meaning that the customer gets more responsibility, for example instead of huskies being all set and ready to go when the tourists arrive, tourists have to harness the huskies themselves, or tourists being part of making the decision on which direction to go hunting for the Northern

Lights. It is about feeling, learning, being or participating – and a wish to experience something out of the ordinary (L. M. Mossberg, 2007). The total experience can also be described as a core activity, surrounded by the story of the core which is the core experience, and the core experience being surrounded by the peripheral experience like food, architecture, transportation and so on. It is about being aware of the total “servicescape”, not only on-stage (the service-encounter) and back-stage, but also what happens in front of the stage (Sundbo & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008).

3.3 Using narratives and storytelling in the production of Northern Lights experience production

First of all some conceptual clarification is called for in the use of the terms stories, storytelling and narration. Various scholars use the same terms differently (Bruner, 2005a).

“Almost all theorists agree that narrative make meaning, and some suggest that narratives are required for meaning to be made (J. Bruner 2003). Experiences may be the ultimate tourist commodity (chapter 1), but in itself experience is inchoate without an ordering narrative, for it is the story, the telling, that make sense of it all, and the story is how people interpret their journey and their lives” (Bruner, 2005a:20).

Similarly, McCabe & Foster (2006) argue that the role of narrative is fundamental in the construction of tourist experiences. And Altmann (2008) for example, refer to narrative – or storytelling – as a necessary strategy of human expression, meaning that narratives are part of our daily lives, hence also experiences.

Tourists go into the story and become part of it, and in retrospect they process and interpret the experiences through telling stories to others (Bruner, 2005b; Pedersen, 2012). The most cherished stories are according to Bruner (2005a) those about experiences out of the ordinary that lead to improvisation as they introduce spontaneity and unexpected elements of adventure. This makes sense in a world where people travel to escape the trivial, everyday life, like suggested by MacCannel (1999).

“Narrative is a fundamental means of imposing order on otherwise random and disconnected events and experiences. Since narrative are embedded within discourse

and give shape to experience, storytelling and the self are closely linked. The pleasure of narrative is that it seamlessly translates knowing into telling about the way things really happen (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:335)”.

Thus far, the terms narrative and story seem to be used intertwined and with the same meaning. Bruner (2005b) talks about on-tour narratives, meaning narratives from local tour guides, from descriptive handouts, markers at the site, postcards, pamphlets and books sold in the destination culture, from the stories that tourists tell each other, and from those that emerge from the tourists’ own encounters and observations. To him the guide skills and guide professionalism is an underestimated resource.

According to McCabe & Foster (2006:198) stories are studied in different ways; as elements of symbolism and culture, as vehicles for communication and learning, as dramatic performances, as occasions for emotional discharge or as narrative structures, however what is obvious for all of these approaches is that stories are part of a sense-making process. They see storytelling as an essential part of human nature where stories inform people about who they are, and how they should behave. Tourist experiences are essentially stories about events and circumstances, places and people, experiences which happen outside of a person’s normal community and so often the teller and listener do not share the same experience (McCabe & Foster, 2006:194).

But can narratives be something different than told stories and expressions? Most definitely! Pedersen (2012) emphasize that storytelling in the context of experiences is a lot more than telling stories. We also experience stories or narratives in words, pictures, and film, the latter two seemingly more important than ever with the advances in the Internet and social media. Motivation for taking pictures and film on-tour can be self-centred with a goal of gaining respect and recognition, and the building of “self” (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014:46). The experience provider should then naturally facilitate photo moments for tourists to create post-tour narratives that in time will lead to marketing for the company and the destination (Bruner, 2005b). Similarly, narratives can also be integrated in the physical surroundings of the experience, like design, architecture, props, or other elements that can be sensed within the space of the experience, or it can be plain storytelling done through hosts and guides telling stories to their guest.

Just to mention some of the things that can affect the outcome of the experience, Arnould & Price (1993) gives a description of a several day boat trip on a river, also expressing the importance of narrative structure:

“The experience is extraordinary, offering absorption, personal control, joy and valuing, a spontaneous letting-be of the process, and a newness of perception and process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is recalled easily for years after, but, because of its considerable emotional content, it is difficult to describe. People sometimes report that it changed them forever. It is magical. As such, satisfaction with river rafting, a hedonic encounter between customer, guide, and "nature," does not seem to be embodied in attributes of the experience such as amount of time spent freezing in wet clothes, uncomfortable toilet facilities, bad food, or any summary index of specific attributes of the trip. Rather, satisfaction is embodied in the success of the narrative, an interactive gestalt orchestrated by the guide over several days' journey into the unknown” (Arnould & Price, 1993:25).

Storytelling can be used to stage activities for tourists, to conceptualise and construct an activity as a story by using story themes or a story structure in the construction of an activity (L. Mathisen, 2013b; L. Mossberg, 2008). Storytelling can incorporate multiple meanings in tourist activities, which also can be used in order to stage tourist encounters with the natural environments. Bitner (1992) suggest that the importance of staging natural environments is also linked to the effect of the environment on participant behaviour, such as their desire to approach or avoid situations.

The director Nils Gaup claims that behind every staging or staged event there is a story (Pedersen, 2012:16). The story is the content which determines the expression chosen for the staged event. The storytelling is the soul of the experience, helping people intuitively understanding their experiences and being moved by them (Pedersen, 2012) – essentially creating memorable experiences. If a tourist does not understand his or her role or how to act, the service encounter will be less successful (L. M. Mossberg, 2007), and consequently also the experience. The role of the guide is essential here.

Narrative is fundamental in the construction of tourism experiences, meaning that without a story there is no experience. Storytelling is used to stage activities for tourists.. It is a meaning making element in the experience that is essential in order for tourists to be able to make sense of new environments and experiences they are having.

Even though story and narrative seem to have the same meaning for many, narrative also seems to be used on a more overall level. If the narrative is the overall frame of the experience for example, all the different stories constitute the experience - storytelling is staging. For the Northern Lights experiences, Aurora narratives are crucial.

3.3.1 Contrasting Aurora narratives – science, myths and history

The Northern Lights have had deep impact on the culture in northern areas (Egeland, Henriken, & Henriksen, 1997), and is therefore a natural part of the Aurora narratives. Not only is great Northern Lights researchers, like Birkeland, associated with the area, but mythical tales have been part of most Arctic peoples' childhood stories repeated through generations, hence example in chapter 4.

When the Northern Lights are presented as an attraction for the tourists by destination companies and Northern Lights experience providers, one can find elements from both modern and historical Northern Lights research and science (S. R. Mathisen, 2014). In addition, the Northern Lights are also associated with mythical tales about ghosts of virgins, or the murdered (Edensor, 2010), about the souls of ancestors dancing in the northern sky, or even scare tales about the Northern Lights coming down to catch you (S. R. Mathisen, 2014). In ancient times some people even believed that the Northern Lights were omens of punishment or reminders to remain law-obedient. The Vikings even used the Northern Lights as a navigator when crossing the oceans (Egeland et al., 1997).

This is how one of the Northern Lights companies in Alta describes the Northern Lights on their web page:

“The phenomenon Aurora Borealis has spellbound mankind ever since the first people thousands of years ago migrated to this wonderful part of the world. With none of today's rational explanations, the Northern Lights formed a part of the myths and religion in people's life. Some believed that it was souls of the beloved ones that were

waving; others believed the light was dancing virgins. In all cases the light was considered dangerous and there was a risk of getting caught when teasing it. Even today children are afraid of the Northern Lights. There is of course a scientific cause behind the magical Northern Lights, a light that has interested scientists since the Age of Enlightenment” (Company, 2013).

When it comes to science, it is a fact that the Northern Lights activity has been on an all time high in 2012-2013, resulting in a lot of media attention to the phenomenon as well as leading some attention as to where it can be seen – mainly in the Arctic areas (Leithe, 2013a; Symington, 2012). As the Northern Lights experiences have become the star of the winter activities, more technical tools to foresee this phenomenon have become available, both on-line and on APPs for mobile phones. This is how Visitnorway, the official on-line travel guide of Norway market their own Northern Lights APP in order to get tourist to come visit;

“NorwayLights – a free, user-friendly app. During the last decade it has become easier to predict the weather and the appearance of the northern lights. Visitnorway launches the new app in order to make this knowledge available to everyone. «We are happy to see that an increasing number of tourists are coming to Norway to chase the mysterious northern lights. The NorwayLights app will make it even easier for them to spot the lights this winter», Tuftin concludes” (Visitnorway, 2014).

These new possibilities within Northern Lights forecast, not only makes the Northern Lights more accessible, but for many also more interesting.

In much of the promotional literature that advertise the charms of the aurora to tourists, words like “magical”, “spectacular” and “mythical” recur (Edensor, 2010). Northern Lights experiences are often described to be “magical”. This can be seen through several of the examples used throughout the dissertation. According to S. R. Mathisen (2014) the meaning of the word “magical” is defined by the surroundings constituted by the Northern Lights hunt, and at the same time many of the mythical narratives tied to the Northern Lights has its roots in the stories of people that has traditionally lived in these Arctic landscapes – the Sami

The contrasting narratives used by the different Northern Lights providers help tourists understand the destination and their experiences, as well as giving the destination and the experience providers' identity tied to these Arctic landscapes.

The role of narrative is fundamental in the construction of experiences. It is the story and the telling that make sense of it all, and that ties culture and landscapes and people together. Narrative is not just about "told stories". Storytelling is used to incorporate multiple meanings in tourist activities by staging tourists' encounters with the natural environment and local culture, as well as the activity itself. People also experience stories or narratives in words, pictures, or film. Narratives are also found in the physical surroundings of the experience, like design, architecture, or other elements that can be sensed within the space of the experience. Furthermore, the scientific, historical or mythical narratives surrounding the Aurora, places the experience within the Arctic or Aurora landscape and helps create meaning for the tourist. Essential to the Northern Lights experience is the narration around the volatility of this natural phenomenon.

3.4 Controlled by the unruly forces of Nature?

Nature and natural phenomenon's like the Northern Lights, or the weather for that matter, are all natural, unruly elements that cannot be affected in any way by anyone. According to Edensor (2010:230), the relationship of the sun, moon and stars, and a range of other atmospheric phenomena are rarely discussed in conceptions of landscape, and this is despite the ways in which such natural phenomenon's can transform the perception and feel of space. Similarly to weather, he claims that the light continuously enfold and is enfolded into the world to produce the ever-shifting qualities of landscape and provide the means through which it is perceived (Edensor, 2010).

Furthermore, the absence of light also need to be explored, since the dark provides other sights, and other sensed impressions. Since space is apprehended differently in the dark, and certain features of the landscape cannot be seen at all, others can be sensed vividly (Edensor, 2010).

Ben Anderson (2009) points out how certain features such as clouds, winds and rainbows are "associated with the uncertainty, disordered, shifting and contingent – that which never quite

achieves the stability of form”, and Edensor (2010:235) proposes that the same is apparent in the ever-changing configurations of waves and curtains of the Northern Lights.

“In the confrontation with the Northern Lights, the affective realm is constituted out of the elements already identified, above all, the swirling aurora, but also the pervasive dark, the black mass of the land, the temperature, the quiet, and the sounds and gestures of human bodies. This affective landscape provides an environment of energies and capacities, a context within which a body feels and acts” (Edensor, 2010:236).

A striking feature of the Aurora is the extent to which it dominates space, especially when there is little light cast by the moon, and the earth contrastingly appears as a dark gathering of matter (Edensor, 2010). However, the experience providers cannot guarantee sightings of the Northern Lights even if the ideal winter conditions of clear skies prevail (Edensor, 2010).

So what happens if this great spectacle does not appear as expected? This is the biggest challenges for tourists’ (S. R. Mathisen, 2014), and particularly experience providers.

According to S. R. Mathisen (2014), the volatile status of this phenomenon is not something that can be ignored. Therefore the question is; how do experience providers deal with it?

One cannot get past the fact that natural phenomenon's, like the Northern Lights, are unruly as well as uncontrollable, but still they have the ability to transform the perception and feel of space. Even though the striking appearance of the Northern Lights dominates space whenever it appears, its volatile status cannot be ignored by the experience providers. This is also the biggest challenge that Northern Lights experience providers face when staging experiences involving the Aurora Borealis. The need for a flexible, dynamical system that can be handled by the experience stager is a key factor when staging Northern Lights experiences.

3.4.1 Facilitating and negotiating extraordinary Aurora experiences

The guide, or the experience stager, is the key to an effective negotiation between nature's capricious being and enabling creation of memorable experiences by staging the Aurora landscape and its natural environments for the tourists.

In the Northern Lights experiences explored in this dissertation, there is often a facilitator present, meaning a guide or someone to tell stories and narrate around what is happening in the experience, or mediating while waiting for the Northern Lights to appear. Vespestad & Lindberg (2010:564) defines a “presenter” as someone who interprets, stages, co-creates, or arranges a nature-based tourism experience. This is a fitting description for the guide, or maybe even someone not perceived as a guide, but rather the owner of micro companies, being present during check-in at accommodation facilities, talking to guests during breakfast and so on. A guide can be used to facilitate a tourist’s immersion in a story and a servicescape (L. Mossberg, 2008), and to be a mediator between the ordinary and the non-ordinary and initiate the relationship to the servicescape and with other consumers. The guide acts as a helper and keeps the parts of the story together.

If the experience itself does not involve a presenter, the tourist and the undertaken experience is still regarded a part of nature-based tourism if taking part in the tourism experience involves, e.g. accommodation, food, service, or other parts of the tourism experience (Vespestad & Lindberg, 2010). An example of this might be guests staying at the Igloo Hotel, hoping to see the Northern Lights, but not attending any other types of Northern Lights experiences.

L. Mathisen (2012) suggest that experience managers have to recognize the strategic importance of the guide and learn how to empower them in order to be co-creators of the tourist experience. The concept of co-creation focuses on the creation of value and view tourists as active, with a desire to use their knowledge and skills in order to interact with other tourists, objects, and environments (L. Mathisen, 2013a:164). She even suggest that a communicative staging strategy (the use of performative speech acts) may be of particular interest for tourism managers (2013a:166). The guides themselves, with their role expectancies, work context, and storytelling, are important dimensions for the co-creation of memorable tourist experiences, because co-creation depends on their personality, their passion or genuineness, and their knowledge and skills (L. Mathisen, 2012). In the performance and service research, staging strategies are believed to influence the creation of performances in terms of for example scripting, roles, and actions (L. Mathisen, 2012).

Not only is the guide a presenter that interprets stages, co-creates or arranges, but he/she tell stories, narrate around what is happening in the experience, or mediate while waiting for the Northern Lights to show. The skills and expertise of the experience stager is crucial since he/she chooses the narratives and stories to be told, when they are to be told, which cues in the Aurora landscape to be used, decide how the experience should be staged, and even more importantly, which negotiation strategies need to be put in action in order to deal with the prevailing conditions of the night and the Northern Lights.

3.5 Concluding remarks on the theoretical base for the dissertation

This chapter is a discussion of theories that are considered helpful in order to answer the research question. The Northern Lights experience falls within the nature based experience category, as an activity that take place in nature and where the activity is directly dependent on the natural environment – here the Aurora landscape. The natural surroundings, together with elements of adventure and culture, are prerequisites for the experiences. When staging an experience it is about engaging the customer on a personal level.

When designing memorable experiences the totality of the servicescape must be taken into consideration, because for the tourist it is all about feeling, learning, being or participating – and a wish to experience something out of the ordinary . Narrative and storytelling is essential to convey the meaning of the experience and its surroundings, also meaning that the experience stager is the link between the staged experience, the natural environments and the tourists.

The coming chapter is a review of the findings. We will be looking for the key elements of the Northern Lights experience, as well as information on how the experience providers chose to stage and narrate these in order for memorable experiences to be made. Finally we will also be looking for evidence of negotiation strategies, meaning, information on how providers deal with the natural conditions and constraints of the Aurora landscape. There seem to be a dynamical aspect involved here. This will give insight on the kind of influence experience providers have on natural environments and how they manage to create Northern Lights experiences despite the act of the unruly Northern Lights.

CHAPTER -IV- FINDINGS

This chapter contains a broad analysis of the primary data collected through semi structured interviews as well as participant observation. The participant observation is primarily done in order to confirm interview contents. Apart from an introduction to the destination, the findings will be presented in accordance with the themes and subthemes identified in chapter III. Findings through interviews will be cited in *italics*, while supplements from participant observation will be set in roman (normal). Notes from Participant Observations will be marked “(PO)”.

4.1 Northern Lights experiences in the Aurora landscapes

Tourism featuring nature? Tourism activity directly dependent on nature? Nature based tourism? Yes – yes - yes. The Northern Lights are a natural phenomenon; part of nature's capricious being and like the weather, non-controllable and not possible to predict with a 100% certainty. Even though the Northern Lights are there, there are still other factors playing a role, such as the weather.

For all the experiences involved in this study, natural environments play the main role as part of the core activity or the core experience, and therefore establish the Northern Lights experience as a nature based experience. Whether sitting in a bus, on a snow mobile or in a dog sled, or by the Alta-river on a bench, the natural environment, nature, is the stage on which the performance plays out, whether the Northern Lights are visible or not.

The narratives surrounding this natural phenomenon leaves a feeling of nature being in control, deciding whether to reveal its spectacle or not, and for the guide or the experience stager to try to work around these natural conditions and constraints in order to see the grand spectacle. Maybe even leaving the tourists with the impression that if the guide is skilled enough one will have a better chance of finding the Northern Lights when the conditions are difficult? This will be discussed further through the dissertation.

The modern technology allows both tourists, but particularly the experience providers, to predict the chances of seeing the Northern Lights, but they are of course only forecasts and cannot give 100% accurate answers. They will however, be able to give a skilled experience

stager some clues as to how big the chances are. Yet, with high chances for the Northern Lights to be visible, it is only one obstacle left to get past, and that is the weather.

According to the informants it appears as if most tourists are well aware of the uncertainty of the phenomenon, at least to some degree. One can of course not know this with a hundred percent certainty without asking the tourists directly, which is not done in this study, but the thoughts of the experience providers can also give some valuable information on the matter. I think it also gives some answers to the importance of establishing this kind of narration related to the experience in order to keep expectations reasonable. It was pointed out by all the informants that they make a point out of the uncertainty of the phenomenon, whether it is to lower the expectations, making sure that the tourists understand that it is not guaranteed, or used as a part of the narration around building excitement when staging the experience.

“The tourists are made aware of, not just by us... but by everybody really, that it is a natural phenomenon. You can’t just switch it on.....so they are aware that they might not see it... it is a disappointment of course, but not necessarily a negative experience anyway. It’s not like they are going to sue you for not seeing the Northern Lights. It’s not that bad, but the smiles are that much bigger if they see it” (Informant 2).

“When people don’t see the Northern Lights they get disappointed, but I still have the impression that they understand that this is just the way it is. We are very particular about emphasizing that there are no guarantees.....and also that tonight it is particularly difficult. It is about clarifying expectations by saying: If we find the Northern Lights tonight, we are really lucky” (Informant 4).

“I think people are humble if they get to see the Northern Lights, so in some ways it seem like it is communicated to them that seeing the Northern Lights can’t be guaranteed. But they understand it very well. When the weather is bad they understand that the Northern Lights are behind the clouds, but if the sky is clear and still no Northern Lights, they get disappointed” (informant 6).

This can be an indication on the fact that pre-tour narratives (Bruner, 2005b), or pre understandings about the destination and the experience prepare tourists coming here on the fact that there are no guarantees to see the Northern Lights. At the same time it seems to be

one of the most important and obvious narratives shared about this natural phenomenon on-tour. It is part of the “negotiation” between nature and the experience stager, and it works like a “safety net” for the provider in cases where the Northern Lights are a no-show. It might also, in a strange kind of way, prepare the tourist for what is to come. On the “hunting” type of activity, one is much more dependent on the Northern Lights to be present, but for the other kinds of nature based experiences, seeing the Northern Lights as a “bonus”, the lack of Northern Lights might not affect the experience too much.

4.1.1 The Aurora landscapes – Alta, the City of Northern Lights

To get a good picture of the Northern Lights experience and its surroundings, a description of Alta is in order. Alta is the biggest town in Finnmark with its approximate 20.000 inhabitants. The town is situated in the middle of the nature, surrounded by mountains, the Finnmarksvidda plateau, birch- and pine forest, and the Alta fjord. Alta is relatively easy accessible with a two hour flight from Oslo, and several direct flights to and from Oslo every day. Winter cruises are also getting increasingly more popular every year. Alta had the first and only winter cruise ship in 2009 and with a steady increase every winter resulting in 10 ships in 2014, just to show the increase in winter tourism. Looking at the map, Alta is one of the northernmost cities in the world, placing the area well within the Aurora landscape. That people can live here in modern societies is for many unimaginable, but that is also part of the attraction of the area. What many people living here might see as a hard time of the year to get through because of the prevailing darkness is perceived as something new and exciting to winter tourists hoping to see the Aurora.

Alta is a relatively small winter destination with only a few fulltime, professional Northern Lights experience providers (companies). This will give a good overview of the destination, the providers in question, and the types of Northern Lights experiences offered. Several of the companies of interest are micro companies, employing only the owner and for some a few more trusted employees. Most of the companies have pick-up of guests at the different hotels in Alta, but the activities are located in the natural surroundings outside of Alta to secure low light-pollution and to make use of the fantastic natural surroundings.

Within 10-20 minutes outside the centre of Alta, in scarcely populated areas, there are suitable surroundings for experiencing the Northern Lights with minimal “light pollution”. Several of

the companies studied made sure they could turn off all outside lights when required, even street lights. Some equip their guests with head lamps, or mark trails with flares so the tourists can “do nature” on their own while waiting for the Northern Lights. Shorter hiking trails are used as important means to get out into the nature. Again it is about making nature accessible and safe. The darkness not only makes the Northern Lights stand out more, but it also seems to enhance other senses when being out in the nature, maybe creating a closer relationship to nature and the experience. To many this is wilderness.

“It’s not like they are just sitting here waiting for the Northern Lights. Some go dog sledding, some go on snow mobile safari....they do many things. They go hiking and kick-sledding...because they have come here to experience the wilderness, which they think this is. For them it’s wilderness you know” (Informant 5).

4.1.2 Landscape and identity in experience production

As a Northern Lights destination, Alta draws up on the fact that one of the first and leading scientists on the Northern Lights, Kristian Birkeland built a Northern Lights observatory on mountain Haldde in Alta (Friedman, 2010). Only a few of the providers seem to include this in their narration, therefore this might not be particularly known to the outside world unless you are particularly interested. There seem to be some unexplored potential here for the experience providers.

However, what is recognized though is that the climatic conditions of Alta and the inland towards east, is stabile and dry, meaning that the chances of seeing the Northern Lights are greater if there is a lack of Northern Lights due to cloudy weather.

This is how Alta portrays itself as a Northern Lights destination on the destination web page www.visitalta.no:

“The Northern Lights city of Alta is a great choice for visitors seeking to experience the magic of the Northern Lights. Alta's history as a Northern Lights city goes back to the days when Birkeland built the world's first Northern Lights observatory on the top of Mt. Haldde in 1899. Alta has a stable climate and is therefore one of the best places in the north for seeing the Northern Lights” (VisitAlta, 2013).

The Arctic identity, forged by Nansen and Birkeland amongst others, is important for the experience production, and in particular for staging Northern Lights experiences.

The accessible wilderness is an essential part of the Arctic narratives and the stories presented by the experience providers. These natural surroundings set the frame for the experience and are central to the staging of the experiences. The experience providers, without exception, see their natural surroundings as assets in their experience production, and they use narratives based in what they find interesting or what is particular about their company; where they are located (by the Alta river for example), the natural surroundings, the darkness, the weather, and local wild life (moose, fox, reindeer), the sound of the forest and the vast plateau, and even the “sound of silence”. The conditions are therefore ideal for nature based activities like Northern Lights Experiences, whether it is “hunting” experiences or other kinds of nature based experiences including the Northern Lights. The identity of this area as Arctic and the “Land of the Northern Lights” is created through early adventurers like Nansen and Birkeland, and the fact that Alta had its own Northern Lights observatory, is part of placing Alta on the map.

4.2 Staging the Northern Lights experience

The main attraction of the Northern Lights experience is not surprisingly the Northern Lights. For the experience providers, the first thing that comes to mind is the uncertainty of the phenomenon and how to work around the fact that the expected phenomenon might not show. How can the experience be staged in such a way that memorable experiences will be created either with or without the Northern Lights present?

Let us first have a look at the phenomenon and some of the available technology to predict the strength of the phenomenon. The Northern Lights are an ephemeral phenomenon that one cannot rely on to show whenever it suits the experience provider. Sometimes seeing the Northern Lights involve pure luck, other times it depends on skills and knowledge about local conditions, and other times again there are very good conditions and high activity combined with clear weather. It is clearly in the hands of Mother Nature, or is it?

These days there are many options to find Northern Lights forecasts on-line, but according to several of my informants, they are not always reliable. They will give some clues towards the

strength of activity, but local conditions will always play an important role. The Northern Lights are also volatile and might show for just a short period of time, in which the spectators have to gaze at the sky to recognize it. Missing it is easy if you do not pay attention to the sky or you stay inside for too long.

“Last night it was crazy. I walked in and out and suddenly I saw that something started moving in the sky. I told the receptionist that I saw some weak Northern Lights, but I wasn’t sure if it was bright enough to even tell anyone. But the receptionist said that yes, we have to get the tourists out. As soon as she told them, they all ran out, and I thought: oh no, not much to show for. Suddenly the receptionist came in and asked me to come see for myself. It was enormous. It only lasted for a short while, and then it was gone” (Informant 5).

“So, I check the Northern Lights forecast, and I notice how it is outside compared to the weather forecast....then I tell the guests what the forecast tells us today and that we are lucky if it turns up, if not....then we have to wait and see...and sometimes it suddenly shows...even when it might not have been notified on the forecast” (Informant 3).

The staging of the Northern Lights experience is framed by the Aurora landscapes and the affect natural environments have on tourists, like wind, weather, and of course the Northern Lights for example. To be successful in staging the experience, the sequence of settings and events should evoke tourists’ emotions, and it should bring the nature and surroundings alive, and make the tourist engaged in their own experience. The elements used by the experience stager to create extraordinary experiences are many, but nature and natural environments play an important role, providing excellent stages for performances to be made, for example the river bank of the Alta river, the plateau, or a parking lot by the road.

The stage, on which the Northern Lights show plays out, is the natural surroundings of the experience providers – out in the nature or maybe even wilderness as some would call it. The goal of staging experiences is to engage tourists in a personal, memorable way (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The Northern Lights are something that can only be gazed at, something that one cannot be influenced in any way. It cannot be smelled, touched, heard. Or can it? According to Edensor (2010:233) there are numerous accounts, mostly dismissed by scientific

researchers, that the Northern Lights also emit a sound as well as illumination. In Sami language the Northern Lights are called «guovssahas», meaning the light you can hear. It has been a common belief among nature people (Sami) for centuries that the Northern Lights make a sound, but these stories are often dismissed as folktales (Egeland et al., 1997). Similarly, in scientific circles it has long been rejected that the Northern Lights can make sound, until recently, where several researchers recognize that there might be a sound, but still does not know the full extent of the phenomenon (Stav, 2014b).

Whether the Northern Lights can be heard or not, the intensity of the phenomenon combined with the sounds of the natural surroundings, might definitely engage the customer and create personal, memorable experiences. Edensor (2010) suggest that the overwhelming visual impact of the lights, the pulsing and the flowing, provokes deceptive sensation of noise, highlighting just how the landscape is experienced in a multi-sensory matter.

“When I go on trips with our guests in the evening I tell them that now we are crossing the river covered with ice and snow, an ice bridge, and if we stop and listen we can hear the river trickle, and then we stop and listen to the forest. Many believe it’s the sound of a waterfall, but I tell them that it is just the wind playing with the trees. You can hear the squeaks and creaks when you walk in the snow. I’m very fond of nature, both in good weather and bad weather. There is no bad weather... it just depends on how you convey it, right? I just say let’s get dressed and take a walk in the woods... shield from the wind and weather....have them experience what it’s like to be outside when the weather is bad...the feeling of having been outside...cold cheeks” (Informant 3).

One of the simplest ways of staging, even a non-commercial experience, is to enable the tourists to move around on their own in close proximity of their accommodation for example. One of the informants explained how their guests had the opportunity to transport themselves the short distance from the activity to the accommodation with a traditional kick-sled(spark). Several of the informants also mentioned that they had made easy hiking trails or just easy paths through nature in their surroundings, where tourist could walk around and get a sense of the Arctic nature. This was particularly important for guests spending the night and having spare time to do their own thing.

“We’ve made a trail behind the barn and mark them with flares so that tourists can walk down to the river if they want to. The scenery is fantastic. There has been a lot of moose lately, so we send out the guide first. Thus, it is great to sit on a bench by the Alta River watching the Northern Lights” (Informant 6).

One of the informants even has a big German Sheppard dog, an old “retired” husky and a couple of cats that walked around the yard unattended, minding their own business. The two of them were a natural part of the environment, and they did not really pay particular attention to the tourists.

“Both the cats and the dogs wander about out in the yard, and that does something to people: Wow, is that possible? I personally, experience this as part of creating a cosy atmosphere. Yes, it is a bit like “Hakkebakkeskogen”. The cat sits there watching when the huskies are fed. I often notice that guests visiting us, when having the close interaction with the animals together with powerful experiences here, they are often emotional when they leave us” (Informant 6).

The link to animals and creating bonds with animals proves to be very powerful way of evoking senses and moving people emotionally, hence creation of memorable experiences. The same goes for personal relationships. Mossberg (2007:76) point out that strong bonds often occurs between a customer and the activity, and that these often can be reinforced by rituals.

“It is very important to try to create a personal relation to the tourist. Once you start sharing personal stories, your family background, maybe the Sami, WWII, things happening in nature, in this area....Then the tourist feels like: Yes, I know here. I think that is very important in order to create a good experience” (Informant 3).

During the interviews with the informants it became evident that the focus on the staging of the experience and the importance of having the tourist take an active part in the experience is of great importance for the end result and the satisfaction of the experience. This is recognized in the interviews as well as through the participant observation.

When staging Northern Lights experiences, the provider must create opportunities to engage the customer in the activity. Seeing the Northern Lights, especially when it is at its brightest, might do a lot in its own, creating a feeling of happiness and all together engaging the individual personally in an emotional, physical, intellectual or even spiritual way (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). But in cases where there are no Northern Lights in sight, it is more of a challenge for the experience stager, or the guide to engage the tourist. How is it even possible to engage the tourist in the “hunting the Northern Lights” experience where the mean of transportation is a bus where you go “hunting” or searching for the Northern Lights? Even though this seems to be a passive experience where the gazing is the main activity, attempts at involving the tourist are made. This is done by involving the tourists from the beginning of the trip by asking them to take part in the decision process on where to go, based on the information presented about Northern Lights activity and weather conditions. The group, together with the guide, will make a joint decision.

“We talk about where to find the Northern Lights tonight, and how it is not so much a hunt for the Northern Lights, but more a search for clear skies. When they see the different weather forecasts from yr.no, they realize why we have to do what we do. In many ways they are part of determining where to go. And in any case they agree on the chosen direction based on the already presented predictions” (Informant 4).

During participant observation on one of the “hunting” experiences, attempts at actively involving the individuals and the group became evident. In the introduction phase of the experience the group had to come to a united decision on where to go, through the expert guidance of the experience stager, the guide. The group was presented with scientific facts about the Northern Lights, then a Northern Lights forecast for the night, as well as a weather forecast to base the decision on. The impression that the guide is skilful, and knows his business is already established through the short presentation given earlier on. Throughout the whole trip the group was asked to keep an eye on the sky looking for stars, and as soon as someone would say “I see stars”, the bus would stop and the group would get out of the bus and have a closer look for Northern Lights, and to confirm that the right direction is chosen.

In other types of Northern Lights experiences it might be easier to involve the tourists and maybe even treat the tourist as a temporary “employee”, having the tourist do some of the actual work.

“And in the evening I take the guests with me in the dog yard, get them to meet the dogs and help out, feeding them, cleaning the dog yard....tourists are very active. We also have a small bonfire in a corner, where we sit down and talk. They should in a way be a part of our lives and experience how it is” (Informant 3).

“Grownups are like kids again when they try the slate cutter/scissor. It fascinates them when I explain how we cut stone with scissorsis it possible? It excites them. I cut a roof tile, and they learn to cut their own souvenir. Then they have experienced something while waiting for the Northern Lights and that is always a success ... they've created their own slate souvenir, and when back home they can say I cut this in Alta .. with slate scissors” (Informant 2).

One of experience providers stages their dog sledding activity by creating an opportunity for closer connections with the dogs. Tourists are put together in teams and given a note with the names of the dogs. Then they have to harness the dogs they are using for the ride. During participant observation on one of these trips I really “felt” the joy, the feeling of mastering something unfamiliar, the feeling of “I did it”. And for someone not being too fond of dogs (me), ending up feeling the connection created strong feelings. On this same trip there were no Northern Lights. This is the trip from the researcher point of view explaining some of the feelings that surfaced during the trip:

“We all get head lamps and a note with the names of the dogs we are going to use and we get to work. Every dog has a house with its name on it. This gives us a more personal relationship with the dogs. The two dogs we will put in the front will be our leaders. It is great fun and the dogs are great and easy to handle. Several guides are there to help us. In pairs we harness every dog. When our 4 dogs are harnessed we put them on the line in front of the sled. They are jumping up and down, eager to get started, but also eager to be petted while waiting. In 20 minutes the dog teams are put together and we are on our way” (PO).

“One is driving the sled and the one sitting in the sled is covered by a reindeer hide to keep warm. The scenery is so beautiful, pine forest, open spaces, the river, small hills up and down, turns here and there. It feels challenging, but fun. Half way we change “driver”. We even drive a short period without our head lamps on. Wow, it is just

amazing. Suddenly I can see the landscape in the moonlight, but still no Northern Lights. The nature, lit up by the moon, is breathtaking” (PO).

“I checked the Northern Lights forecast before the trip, so I know that it is low tonight. The woman sitting in my sled does not have time to take photos even though she brought her camera. She tells me that she loves the trip, the dogs, and the surroundings and that she wants to come back to Alta with her husband later on this winter to experience it all. Keeping up with riding the sled is more than enough of a challenge for me.....not much time to look at the sky. When returning the sky turns cloudy and we know the chance of seeing the Northern Lights are gone. Still, I see a lot of smiling faces around the campfire” (PO).

The group did not get to see the Northern Lights. For the couple from Taiwan it was a bit of a disappointment, but they had been here for several days without seeing the Northern Lights, and they were well aware of the possibility of not seeing it. In hindsight, the closeness to the dogs, the surroundings, and the effect of the natural surroundings, the mastering, and the learning element; it was all part of staging this experience for us. We were active participants in bringing this experience to life, creating a memorable experience - for ourselves.

Walking about in the woods on snow shoes, crossing a snow bridge, listening to the river under the ice, seeing the fox, maybe even walking in the dark just to “feel” the nature, feeling the frost bite in your face, getting to hear personal stories from a guide that lives and breathes this kind of adventurous outdoor life. The different northern lights experiences aim to engage participants emotionally, mentally, through education and through play (L. Mathisen, 2013a). The guide is the facilitator and the narrator, sharing personal stories and making an effort to connect with the tourists. Staging natural environments presupposes knowledge and understanding of the local surroundings in terms of nature, culture, and history (L. Mathisen, 2013a:178).

4.2.1 Extraordinary Northern Lights experiences in Alta

As already explained, the climatic conditions in addition to its location under the Northern Lights oval, makes Alta an attractive nature based destination for experiencing the Northern Lights. It is assumed that these facts, combined with great nature based experiences, a history

linked to the Northern Lights research, stable climate, as well as magnificent natural surroundings, are important pillars in attracting tourists. Bendix (2002:476) claim that tourist destination receives customers through the narrative morsels it plants itself or that are put in circulation by others, whether glossy tourist marketing, the narratives of guide books, or personal stories by happy tourists. For example, several of the companies in Alta use social media to distribute Northern Lights photos on-line in order to expose themselves and to attract tourists to Alta - these narratives support Alta as a great destination for seeing the Northern Lights.

Of the five key experience-design principles introduced by Pine & Gilmore (2011) we will focus on the last one – engaging all five senses. By attempting to engage all five senses of the tourist - see, smell, hear, feel and taste - memorable experiences can be created within the tourist. All the experience providers in question seem to have focus on engaging all five senses.

“Just to get up here, to experience the silence, to look at the stars, and to experience the mountain plateau... The moon might be shining... you can get a glimpse of an enormous landscape. Then they are completely captivated” (Informant 5).

”Sometimes I ask them not to talk, to be silent... just to stop and listen to the nature. It might crack in the trees, and who knows, it might be the moose leaning up against a tree. And can you see some eyes over there in the dark? It might be the fox looking for food. So, I try to create images in their heads” (Informant 3).

All the providers incorporate something to eat during or on the end of the experience, and it is usually local, homemade cake of some sort, “mørlefse” (flat cake with butter, sugar and cinnamon filling) for example, and coffee, sometimes even served fresh out of the coffee pot hanging over the bon fire.

The next step is to look at the four characteristics of a memorable experience and how some of these are expressed in the Northern Lights Experiences. An experience should be *entertaining*, meaning that the tourists in some way or another should be entertained, passively. It can be storytelling for instance, or seeing a collage of beautiful Northern Lights pictures.

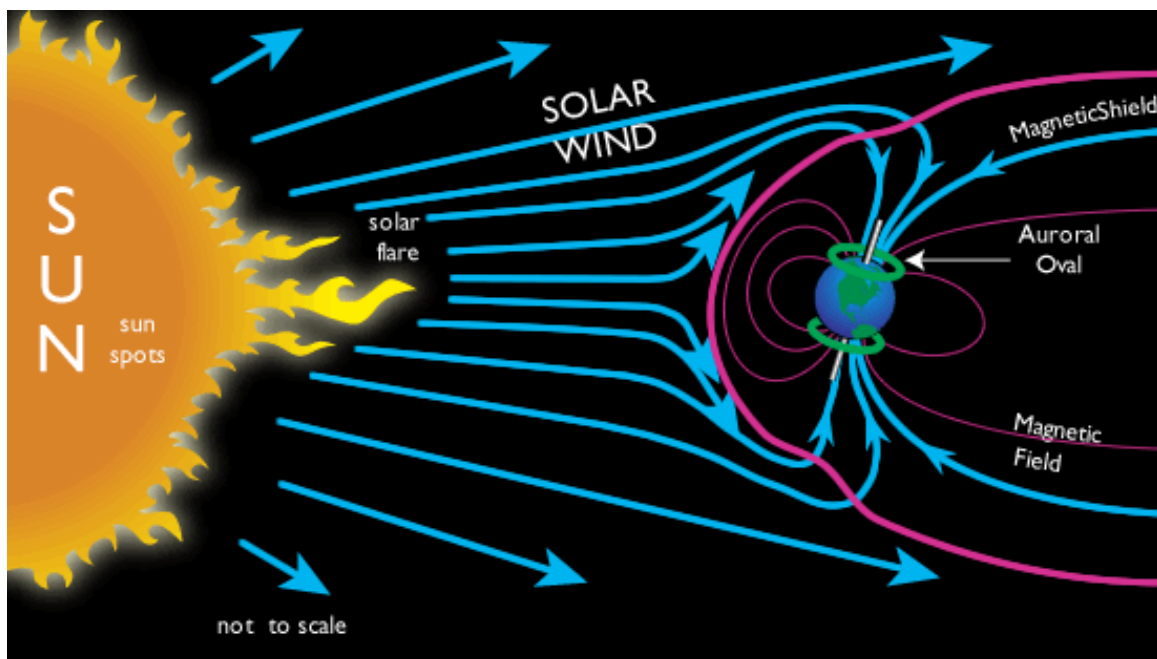
“We have a snow wall with a screen that shows the Northern Lights and where a projector will show a Northern Lights movie (Informant 2).

The characteristic *educational* is especially expressed through the narration of the Northern Lights experience, like introducing the experience through a scientific explanation for the phenomenon for example. But it can also be through learning about the local culture, how things are done, or other aspects of the society.

”I want to create some curiosity, not just about the Northern Lights, but also about the Sami culture, how do the Sami people live, where do they live, reindeer herding. So, if they don’t see the Northern Lights they are still left with knowledge... they have learned something” (Informant 3).

”We give a briefing on what the Northern Lights are, how it looks like, why it usually looks green on pictures, but maybe not so often in reality. And we explain how the Northern Lights occur” (Informant 4).

“The presentation we got before the “hunt” started was about how the northern lights occur. How electrical charged particles from solar storms hit the magnetic field of the earth and create Northern Lights” (PO).



Picture: eurorahunter.com

A similar picture to this was used to explain the appearance of Northern Lights.

The educational aspect can be so many things, like learning how to harness a husky, how to drive a husky team, learning how slates are cut or which stars are where looking through a telescope. If the narrating gets too detailed, or takes too long, and becomes too complicated, the tourist might lose interest.

Aesthetics is about the person being immersed or engaged by the environment, for example when opening the door to the ice hotel and entering to another world:

“When they open the door to the ice hotel, they think it’s unreal. They don’t think it’s possible to create something like this, because it doesn’t look very nice from the outside. When you open the door you enter a totally different world” (Informant 5).

Even watching the Aurora shoot across the sky can create strong emotions.

“The northern lights are just tremendous. I have seen it many times, but this is more than ever before, with all kinds of patterns and green and pink at the edges. We are all amazed. I feel ecstatic and elated (PO).

The final characteristic is *escapism*, like role play, involving a much higher degree of customer immersion. This is about active participation, like stepping into the role as a dog musher for a few hours for example, being part of the job that has to be done in order to go dog sledding.

“We get instructions on the sled, how to ride it, and how to harness the dogs and then we are paired two and two together. It’s exciting, a bit scary even, will we manage? We all get head lamps and a note with the names of the dogs we are using and we get to work. Every dog has a house with a nameplate. It is great fun and the dogs are great and easy to handle. Several guides are there to help us. When our 4 dogs are harnessed we put them in line” (PO).

This way of organizing the activity is of course a fine line between knowing what the tourist is comfortable with, and how the individual will react to the interaction with the staged event

(L. M. Mossberg, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). If the person is intimidated by dogs for example, this kind of staging might create the opposite feelings than hoped for. If the tourist does not achieve the feeling of “mastering”, or if the experience provider fails to provide circumstances that enhance the customers’ experience, extraordinary experiences will not be created.

Northern Lights experiences in Alta seem to fit two or maybe even three different categories:

- Hunting the Northern Lights (core activity = Northern Lights)
- Northern Lights experience (core activity = different nature based experiences with Northern Lights)
- Accommodation (in the wilderness) hoping to see the Northern Lights

It is of interest to have a closer look at these different types of Northern Lights experiences with the intention of pointing out some of their characteristics, also concerning chances of seeing the Northern Lights or risks of not seeing them.

- ***“Hunting” the Northern Lights - by bus***

The “hunting” metaphor is quite catching for the Northern Lights experience, giving associations to an actual hunt, where the game is not necessarily within reach, as goes for the Northern Lights. An effort has to be made in order to increase your chances. This kind of activities usually has a longer season due to the fact that it is not dependent on snow and winter. They are ready to kick-off as soon as the Northern Lights appear, usually in September.

On the “hunting” experience, the core activity is the Northern Lights. Tourists do not only experience the Northern Lights, but also the story behind it, the frame of this staged experience. The core experience therefore consists of all the different elements surrounding the Northern Lights, just to mention a few; the bus tour, the stops looking for stars, spectacular nature, the serving of coffee and cake, photo session etc. In addition to these elements, there are also other services and products that have importance in relation to how the experience as a totality is experienced, for example if the car is clean, if toilets are available, if the cake is good. We recognize the peripheral experience as important, but will not pay more attention to them in this study.

“The experience started with a presentation about what the Northern Lights are, how it occurs, and what it takes to see it. Then the guide explained a little bit about what to look for to find Northern Lights, like stars for example, being a sign of clear skies. He also gave an update on the weather forecast which was not so promising tonight. With that in mind, and as guidance, the group had to be part of taking a decision in which direction to go. Then the guide starts driving in the direction agreed on by the group. While driving, the guides’ narration varies between stories about the area, the people here and local customs, as well as working as a facilitator for conversation in the car, asking questions, leading the group to engage in the conversation” (PO).

According to the guide, the tourists are “star hunters”, referring to the fact that the sky must be clear in order to see the Northern Lights. This experience involves a great deal of expertise about weather and Northern Lights conditions, and the guide, or the experience stager, is the key to how the experience is narrated to its full extent. The bus trip goes to different places, involving different stories depending on the area. Being on the Finnmarksvidda plateau generates stories about the Sami and the reindeer. Driving south generates stories about the copper mines in Kåfjord and the Northern Lights observatory at Mount Haldde, or even stories about WWII and Tirpitz. Every area has its stories. The trip consists of 4-5 different “stages”, meaning 4-5 stops along the way, with different stories and events and changing natural environments.

The dramaturgy in the experience helps build anticipation and expectations, but at the same time always followed by caution, meaning narrating about the uncertainty of the phenomenon. When the conditions are challenging the narration of the Northern Lights changes between building expectations and hope on one side, and then making sure the tourist understands that chances are slim. It is like a roller coaster – hopes up, hopes down, hopes up again, and it continues like this until the very end of the experience.

“We are on the plains (wide, open, no light, cloudy sky, we can see the moon shine through the clouds now and then, our eyes get used to the dark, we can see small trees, some light in the horizon from Alta far away, it is quite cold). If the Northern Lights are faint and we can’t see them, maybe the cameras can? The guide takes a test shot –

no Northern Lights, but we do get to see evidence from last night – smiling people in front of the Northern Lights” (PO).

How long the trip will last is often depending on whether or not one can see the Northern Lights.

“During this trip the guide tells about his life, and he asks the guests about their lives. Personal relations are made. It is a guided trip in Northern Norway in a way, where the goal is to find Northern Lights. When we find the Northern Lights early, sometimes the trip is finished earlier than usual. They have plenty of pictures, they have seen it come and go a few times, and they are satisfied. If the conditions are hard we won’t be back at the hotel until way after midnight” (Informant 4).

Flexibility within knowing where to go, according to weather conditions and so on, is crucial to increase the chances of seeing the Northern Lights. One does not have to participate on activities to see the Northern Lights, but according to the industry it will increase the chances, especially if the conditions are challenging.

This is how one of the hunting the lights operators market their experience:

“Would you like to capture the splendour of the Northern Lights /Aurora Borealis? Join us and we will help you finding the best places and the best ways to experience it!”

The “hunting” experience is apparently the kind of Northern Lights experience with the highest chance of seeing the Northern Lights, especially if the conditions are challenging. The flexibility and radius to cover bigger areas in the “hunt” is the key.

“When you drive you have 100% flexibility because you can go as far as you like and anywhere you want. With the snow mobile you are restricted to the snowmobile trails that exist, and you therefore don’t have the same range. And with the dogs it’s even more difficult, and with snowshoes it’s in a way even more difficult. But anyway, if the Northern Lights are there and you go on a snow mobile, dog sledding or snow

shoeing, then it's fantastic. But... to get the best chance to see the Northern Lights it's important to have as much flexibility as possible” (Informant 4).

“If tourists have participated on other kinds of activities, but not yet seen the Northern Lights, sooner or later they will go on hunting the Northern Lights with XXX, and then the chances of seeing the Northern Lights are greater....that is at least my impression” (Informant 6).

The challenge with this kind of experience is particularly high whenever the Northern Lights are not present, because what is the tourist left with, what is the experience without the Northern Lights? Since data are not collected from the tourists themselves, it cannot be said with a 100% certainty, but it appears as if most of the providers with other Northern Lights experiences that involve some kind of nature based activity, consider their activity as “With us they get another experience even though they can’t see the Northern Lights”. This might imply that the core activity is not necessarily the northern lights, but rather dog sledding, hiking trip with snow shoes and such. If no Northern Lights they have other experiences to rely on – a safety net one might say. Without the Northern Lights, the narrative and the staging strategies are that much more important to secure memorable experiences.

- “Other” nature based Northern Lights experiences

However, Northern Lights can also be experienced by doing other kinds of nature based experiences where the Northern Lights are part of the package, for instance snow mobile safaris, dog sledding trips, ice hotel experiences, snow shoeing or skiing trips, or maybe slate production. The “other” activity will be the main focus or the core activity, leaving the Northern Lights as a possible “bonus”. In some cases, especially when strong Northern Lights are present, the core activity might shift from the actual activity like for example dog sledding, to Northern Lights. This would imply that the character of the experience can change in an instant because of the Northern Lights.

There seems to be an uncertainty among some of the providers as to which role the Northern Lights have or should have in their experience and what the tourists are looking for. Even though the main focus of this trip is the dog sledding, or some other kind of nature based experiences, it seems like tourists buy these kinds of experience in order to see the Northern

Lights. The question that rises is whether these kinds of experiences qualify as Northern Lights experiences. Maybe not in the purest form, but the strong focus on the Northern Lights have made tourists see them as possible Northern Lights experiences, hence they are regarded as Northern Lights experience.

“It is probably primarily a dog experience they are looking for when visiting us, but at the same time many of them say that they are here to see the Northern Lights, but wanting to also do other activities” (Informant 1).

“A lot of our customers used to be dog-people that wanted to drive dog sled because they were so into dogs. The new draw is the Northern Lights, and then suddenly we have a lot of customers that are not primarily interested in dogs, but when they go dog sledding..., and see the Northern Lights, then it makes the experience even more powerful experience” (Informant 6).

These kinds of activities does not usually have a wide transportation radius, like driving around in a bus would in cases where a solution would be to escape certain kinds of local weather conditions in order to see the Northern Lights. They are therefore depending on good weather conditions, and as with absolutely all Northern Lights Experiences, the Northern Lights must be present on a clear or partly cloudy sky. These kinds of providers do not promote the Northern Lights as their core activity. On longer trips, marketing is often focusing more on the Northern Lights, because prolonging the stay increases the chances of seeing the Aurora.

“On the 3-days trip the focus is more on the Northern Lights, but also here we make sure to write that if it is cloudy we will not see the Northern Lights. So they can’t get me on that” (Informant 1).

Another interesting question surfacing here, is whether this is a “safer” way of doing Northern Lights experience, not for the sake of increasing chances of seeing the Northern Lights, but for the sake of experiencing “something more” than the Northern Lights, in cases where the Northern Lights are a no-show? The risk of not seeing the Northern Lights is always there, but since the core activity of these kinds of experiences are often the “other” activity, like dog,

snow mobile, or snow shoeing, tourist will most likely be able to have memorable experiences even without the Northern Lights present.

- ***Accommodation in the wilderness - hoping to see it!***

The third way of experiencing the Northern Lights is to choose accommodation outside the typical residential areas where the “light pollution” is minimized, meaning that one gets away from all the lights in the city and residence areas, in order to get the best possible conditions for seeing the Northern Lights (One can of course also choose accommodation in the city, but all the lights will make it even harder to see the Northern Lights). This might be considered a non-commercial version of the Northern Lights experience. Well, the accommodation is of course commercial, but seeing the Northern Lights are expected to happen without having to go on some kind of paid experience.

“When they arrive here, I’m very conscious to convey that it’s not like pushing a button and the Northern Lights will show. It’s a natural phenomenon and we are at the mercy of the weather gods, the circumstances and the solar explosions. We simply just have to wait and see, and we will inform you if there is a possibility of seeing it. You can also use the Northern Lights forecast on storm.no” (Informant 3).

The wilderness, as it is characterized by many, allows people to enjoy the natural environments while waiting for the Northern Lights. I choose to describe this way of experiencing the Northern Lights as a third experience opportunity since these providers often offer accommodation in addition to Northern Lights activities, and more “do it on your own” activities, like shorter hiking trails, benches out in nature, kick-sled to get around, or just “existing” or “being”, giving opportunities for relaxation while waiting for the Aurora.

The core activity in this kind of experience might be “relaxation”, the “wilderness”, an “accommodation experience”, or maybe even “local culture”. The Northern Lights are then part of the core experience and will be assessed as part of the total experience by the tourists.

Hoping to see the Northern Lights this way leaves the whole Northern Lights experience up to chance. In order for memorable experiences to be created, personal relationships with the

staff, making the natural environment accessible, relaxation, and delivering excellent food, will be important parts of this “accommodation experience”.

Staging proves to be one of the key elements of the Northern Lights experience. In order for memorable and extraordinary experiences to be created there needs to be some interaction that eventually will engage tourists in a personal, memorable way. For the Northern Lights experience every event through the entire experience is a staged event, where the experience stager (guide) provides stages for action to unfold. For nature based experiences, like the Northern Lights experience the staging often takes place in the natural environment.

For the “hunting” experience, every time the bus stops, and everybody get out of the bus to look for the Northern lights, it is a staged event. Every event is a new opportunity for narration and activity for the tourist to engage in. It is all about finding the Northern Lights, therefore the stager needs to choose the “right stages” for the different events, meaning that depending on the Aurora forecast and weather forecast, suitable surroundings must be chosen for the event, according to where the best possibilities are. If bad Aurora forecasts, the environments with the best “cues” for storytelling must be chosen, in order for memorable experiences to be created. The experience will then rely on how well the experience stager manages to organize and narrate the trip. Behind every staging there is a story. The stages used and the staging of the trip changes drastically when the Northern Lights are not present, as when they are present.

For “other” nature based experiences, the events throughout the experience can be many and varying, a dog sledding experience for example. Being taught how to drive the sled is one staged event, harnessing the huskies is one, driving the sled is another, and the storytelling session back at camp is one. These kinds of trips seem to have more of a set pattern of events, meaning that the sequence of events is the same on every trip, almost without exception. In general, weather conditions can lead to changes in the staging, bad weather leading to change of snow mobile tracks through the forest instead of the open plateau. The range of these kinds of activities might not be far enough for escaping cloudy skies, so they depend on the Aurora to be present, and for the sky to be clear, and if not they rely on other experiences undertaken during the trip.

During participant observation an interesting discovery emerged. During a trip with the Northern Lights present, the staging is quite different than on the same trip without the Northern Lights present. It is like the Northern Lights take over the role of the experience stager – the guide, and the guides' role is more of a facilitator. Told stories are fewer, and the light itself seemed to outshine the role of the guide. There was no time for that. Pictures had to be taken, views had to be captured. The dramatizing of the experience did not work since the experience started with the climax of the experience. After the first hour with stunning Northern Lights, it just got less and less until it finally died out at the end of the trip. Still, me and my fellow group mates felt content and happy.

For memorable Northern Lights experiences to be created, it appears as if the key to making this happen is the experience stager (guide), and flexibility towards how the experience is staged. It seems like, the more the experience is depending on the Northern Lights to appear, like the “hunting” experience, the more flexibility is demanded in the staging of the experience. The same will probably apply for narrating and storytelling.

4.3 Narrative and storytelling in the Northern Lights experience

The different Northern Lights experiences in Alta seem to be constructed through a narrative framework designed to lead the tourist through a structure of stories where the goal is to evoke the desired emotions in the tourist, and to lead to the climax of the experience before returning home. The end goal is obviously to see the Northern Lights, but the outcome can just as well be the opposite. The frame of the experience allows the provider to present different stories, building around the same structure.

An important context under investigation is the different narratives (other than Northern Lights specific stories) used in typical Northern Lights experiences. This study shows that different companies use different narratives, often related to the “base” of the company, for example owners' background, family history, occupation, hobbies, and even in relations to the location of the actual company. Different guides might also tell different stories based in their own interests and what goes on in society at the time being.

When doing the interview, the informants were asked if the narratives used on the trip were set, if all trips had the same narratives. The answer was somehow surprising:

“Not necessarily. Apart from the introduction....and the thing about building tension and excitement....and the end. And a little bit of customs, shaking hands and greeting. The frame of the experience is set, but what stories are told during the trip depends on the guide and what we are individually interested in” (Informant 4).

The dog musher with a background from Northern Europe’s longest sled dog race, Finnmarksløpet naturally bases the storytelling in that expertise, making the “race life” of a dog the focal point of the story; Dog-welfare, how the dogs surprisingly enjoys the harsh conditions and the challenging distances.

“When safe back at the husky pound there is a camp fire outside and we get coffee and cake, and we are told about the training for the Finnmarksløpet race. How the race works, the long distance with healthy, happy dogs, how the dogs are taken care of, the experience from a musher’s perspective, and how the musher almost stand sleeping on the sled at the end of the race. The stories are very interesting and keep everybody listening. We are also told that some of the dogs we have used today are participating on a race tomorrow – impressive” (PO).

But in order for Northern Lights experiences to be Northern Lights experiences, they need Northern Lights stories.

4.3.1 Contrasting narratives used in the Northern Lights experiences

A Northern Lights experience without narration and stories about the Northern Lights itself seems farfetched. There are many ways of doing this, and some interesting contrasts in narration have emerged in this study. The differences in narratives used by different providers have great variety, spanning from the science perspective, to the mythical perspective, to the historical perspective where ancient, historical narratives claimed to be true stories are presented, like the Vikings using the Northern Lights as navigation for instance (Egeland et al., 1997). One of the informants stated that:

“I mostly talk about the mythical side of the Northern Lights, what my parents used to say when we were children about not “teasing the Northern Lights”, what the Sami culture say about the Northern Lights, and the Finnish folk tale about the Arctic fox

creating sparks (Northern Lights) with its tale when running across the mountains. It creates a magical atmosphere. The technical side of the phenomenon most people can read about themselves” (Informant 3).

Through more than 100 years of thorough science and research we now know what the Northern Lights are and how it appears, but the myths about the dancing Aurora is still a strong part of the phenomenon and the narratives surrounding the Northern Lights. As a counterpart to the former example, one of the other informants’ prefer the technical or science side of the phenomenon. They see this as their biggest asset by bringing in expertise and high profile personas to gain credibility.

“History is embedded in my genes. I am interested in history and astronomy, everything out there (pointing to space). When guiding I show a film and tell about how the Northern Lights occur, what happens and why we have Northern Lights. It is about more than just seeing the Northern Lights...we try to make it interesting...to share knowledge... it’s a joy to tell about our history, about stars and so on” (Informant 2).

Even though some providers are more specific on their Northern Lights narration, others choose to be on a more general level, touching in on both historical, mythical and science related narratives in their storytelling. This was also confirmed by participant observation. Guides touch in on different Northern Lights narratives throughout the trip, often on a general level depending on the interest level of the group and questions they ask. According to several of the informants the typical tourist groups are not interested in too specific and detailed technical explanations about the Northern Lights. On most Northern Lights experiences, the explanation of the Northern Lights are presented thoroughly, but still not too advanced making sure the interest level is kept up. As Bruner (2005a) expresses, tourists do not really want an ethnographic perspective, not even those on educational tours.

“We find that some of our guests know a lot more about the Northern Lights than we do. We know the basics and what is important. And we explain about the Big Dipper and the Stella Polaris and so on” (Informant 4).

“The best tourists, if that is an expression, are those that don’t have too much knowledge, but are interested. They start asking questions about how the Northern Lights are created, and they are interested in the unique history we have here in Alta” (Informant 2).

“On our Northern Lights safaris we have discovered that people are not necessarily interested in learning a lot about the Northern Lights. They are interested in seeing it. But, after seeing it, they start asking more questions about it. We then explain about the Northern Lights, but not too detailed or too much” (Informant 5).

“If you have a story to tell, it can’t be too long or too complicated. You have to capture the interest, but it shouldn’t be too much talking” (Informant 6).

The experience providers’ choice of stories about the Northern Lights seems to spur from the owner or the guides’ personal interests and the natural surroundings of the experience. The main story to introduce the phenomenon can be scientific, mythical or historical. Even though the main focus is the scientific explanation of the Northern Lights for instance, they are likely to also narrate on a more general level about myths for example.

The nature lover for instance, mainly uses the mythical stories both because of personal interests, but also because these stories can be tied to own background, like Sami inheritance for example, making the experience even more personal.

“The mythical stories create a magical atmosphere. People start asking questions and wonder... about the Sami culture for instance. Suddenly you have switched from Northern Lights to a different theme, Sami culture for example. One thing leads to another in a way. It gives me much more to “play with” in my storytelling” (Informant 3).

The history and science interested narrate around the local history of Alta, like Northern Lights research on Mount Haldde, the slate industry in Alta and the copper mines in Kåfjord.

“We have stretched it a bit further than just hunting for the Northern Lights. The slate production is the foundation for this company. I think it is important to allow tourist to do something, be part of the activity. While waiting for the Northern Lights we go into

the slate workshop. I show how we cut slate, and they get to cut their own souvenir. I have made a conscious choice to focus on the history of Alta, and tell the world about the Northern Lights history of Alta. That is the foundation for building the Northern Lights experience here” (Informant 2).

But are the stories and narratives already set before the trip starts? No, it does not appear that way. The choice of narration is very much up to each guide and their personal interests. One of the providers explains it like this:

“I tell stories from my world of interests...doing my “thing”. Other guides have other interests that will make their stories interesting, so we don’t necessarily tell the same stories on every trip, except the basic introduction of the Northern Lights. The frame of the experience is set, but the stories are different depending on the guide and the interests within the group. That’s one of our advantages I think” (Informant 4).

4.3.2 The natural surroundings – cues for storytelling

What more or less seems to be applicable for all the providers is the use of natural surroundings as cues for narrative and storytelling. The gazing qualities of the Arctic landscape are according to Mathisen (2013a) obvious assets, but this landscape also offer other assets that should be recognized when designing Northern Lights experiences - the winter darkness for instance, as well as the ability to escape the over-illuminated city and residential areas. This is also emphasized by several of the providers:

“If there is no Northern Lights on one of our snow shoeing trips, the highlight for them is definitely when we ask them to turn off the head lamps, get used to the dark for a few minutes, and then let them walk in the dark. It’s about feeling the wilderness and listening to nature. Even though we are not too far away from the houses, we can’t see any lights, so it’s like being in the middle of nowhere” (Informant 3).

“We have great opportunities to see the Northern Lights here because of our location (in the wilderness outside Alta). If we see the Northern Lights we turn off all electrical lights outside to make it pitch black. We also have a short hiking trail down to the

river. Tourists get head lamps and they can walk down to some benches and sit there watching the Northern Lights” (Informant 5).

It is obvious that the absence of electrical lights is an advantage when wanting to see the Northern Lights, and that one therefore should seek out less light-polluted areas. During participant observation it was obvious that the aim of several of the trips was to seek out less light-polluted areas, in order to get the best possible view of the Northern Lights.

The darkness in itself seem to be considered an effective instrument in evoking feelings connected with sensing the wilderness and the tourists’ ability of sensing the Arctic landscape.

“When people come from the big city, and have never been in the woods before, and they think it’s a bit scary, I say to them: let’s turn of the head lamp, wait a few minutes and follow me. Try to stop and listen to the nature. The feeling of being alone in the woods is for many a challenging nature experience” (Informant 3).

“When you get up on the mountain you see a much bigger area. Maybe it’s 8-10 minus, no wind, clear skies. It is just amazing. Several times when we have not seen the Northern Lights, but it is starlit ... moon....and just the silence.....the feeling of the plains. You can see the huge landscapes. We can’t begin to imagine what it must feel like to come from a big city being surrounded by noise all the time. Then they come here, turn of the snow mobile and the silence is total” (informant 5).

“When driving the dog teams back we stop on a big field. The sky is lit up by the moon. The guide asks us if we would like to turn off our head lamps - our eyes will get used to the dark. Wow, it is just amazing. Suddenly I can see the landscape in the moonlight. It is not dark at all. The nature lit up by the moon, is breathtaking” (PO).

“We are on the plains (wide, open, no light, cloudy sky, we can see the moon shine through the clouds now and then, our eyes get used to the dark, we can see small trees, some light in the horizon from Alta far away, it is quite cold. The guide tells stories about which direction to look for the Northern Lights, points out where Alta is, and a little bit about the reindeer headers and the reindeer. One of the members of the group

says that he enjoys the open scenery and the silence. He explains how he is not used to this kind of silence, coming from a big city in Denmark” (PO).

These statements explain a bit about the dimension of the natural surroundings, and what the experience providers believe that the darkness and the silence can affect people in the process of creating memorable experiences.

4.3.3 Narratives – more than told stories

But narratives can be so much more than told stories. Narratives can be integrated in the physical surroundings of the experience, like design, props, architecture, or other elements that can be sensed within the space of the experience. Like the typical wooden houses people live in, the kick-sled that you will only find in the Nordic countries where roads are covered with snow half the year, or how the lavvo is designed so that you can stay in bed and see the Northern Lights. The bench by the river, the extra winter clothing tourists are provided with, the ice glasses they serve drinks in at the igloo hotel. Domestic animals like dogs or cats being part of the environment. The list is endless. All these narratives are part of constituting the experience, and making sense of the experience for the tourists.

The ice hotel with all its ice sculptures for example, the home made bench by the Alta river, the moose stew for dinner, the shape of the luxury lavvos, the pictures of former guests with Northern Lights in the back ground. These elements all expresses their own stories and help constitute the entire narrative of the Northern Lights experience. Even the experience stagers; how do they relate to people, how they tell their stories, how are they dressed, how they portray being the “locals”. It is all part of the perceived story.

Narratives can also be pictures and film. For example pictures showing the history of a place or maybe even showing guests with the Northern Lights in the back ground. A very important part of an experience is to capture the essence in a photo. Why? For the tourist it is important to be able to create the basis for a future personal story of their experience of being there, according to Bruner (2005a). Photographs and souvenirs that tourists gather perform the key function of providing tourists an opportunity to tell and personalize the story of the journey. Photographs taken of tourists proudly smiling in front of historical sites or familiar icons (Bruner, 2005a), or in this case with the Northern Lights as a back drop, are not just shown,

but they serve as important devices for storytelling. The telling of travel stories serves to construct the teller as a tourist, and will therefore work as excellent souvenirs.

According to most of the informants, great Northern Lights photos are just as important for the tourists as for the experience provider. For the experience provider such photos serve as a great marketing tool, and for the tourist it is about personal engagement and souvenirs to remember the trip by. Some tourists have great cameras, but often lack in photographing skills, and they are unable to get good shots without some help from the guide on how to set the camera. Especially on the Northern Lights hunting trips, one segment of the trip is about photography and how to set the camera to get good photos in the dark. Other tourists do not bring their own cameras, or they do not have cameras that can be set for these kinds of conditions. Most people are very eager to get some photos from the company afterwards.

“Having someone else (meaning the guide for instance) take your picture in front of the Northern Lights is ranged as second best. It has to do with...well...this is “mine”, “I took this photo”, do you understand? I have taken this photo and this is what I will show to others, bad quality or not. Then you also have the second best, neat and tidy, but the one you took is a personal souvenir” (Informant 2).

“For many it is obvious that they cherish taking own pictures, but that’s for the once bringing good cameras and that are used to taking pictures. Most people are happy with getting that.... especially where we take photos of the person in the Northern Lights” (Informant 4).

Travellers on tour are not always living in the moment, according to Bruner (2005b), but they rather direct their attention toward accumulating material for future stories, or post-tour narratives that will be told. This was recognized by one of the guides on a trip, stressing to the group;

“Don’t miss out on seeing the actual Northern Lights while becoming too focused on setting the camera for the perfect shot. I will also take good pictures for you so that you can enjoy the sight now” (PO).

For the experience provider great Northern Lights pictures will be part of placing the company and the destination on the map.

“Northern Lights pictures usually end up on facebook and places like that, and that is also part of our goal. I think it's one of the reasons Tromsø has reached so far. If they have 2500 aurora guests per week, each with hundreds of friends they share pictures with, then someone comment on it, and the picture is shared again. It gives Tromsø as a Northern Lights destination a very powerful social voice” (Informant 4).

“The guide took pictures of the group with the Northern Lights as a background, and we had fantastic photos placed on facebook” (Informant 5).

This is what people desire and the essence of travel. This makes the so called “Kodak moments” more important than ever. The camera enables the tourist to “story” their experiences so that they can be transport back to the moment of joy and happy memories far away from real life (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Making room for “Kodak moments” in the experience should therefore not be taken lightly by the experience stager. This seems particularly important for the tourists travelling north to see the Northern Lights, and often to capture the Northern Lights on camera, primarily with the tourist in front of this natural phenomenon. According to Urry (2011), the resent digitalisation and internet boom, makes photos widely produced and distributed from computers and mobile phones on-line in different social media. It makes people able to share their moments and experiences with their friends all around the world instantaneously, as the experience unfolds, more or less in real time. For companies that manage to incorporate these kinds of moments in their experience, there will be great advantages in the future marketing as well as sales.

For “other” nature based experiences, the Northern Lights often are a bonus, and other kinds of stories and narratives become more important as long as the Northern Lights cannot be seen.

“The Northern Lights are a secondary product....not our focus when selling the product. If it's snowing, I know that we can't see the Northern Lights. I don't want to say: come to me and see the Northern Lights, and then they might not see it. I don't have that kind of conscience” (Informant 1).

Choosing not to mention the Northern Lights, when it is probably not going to show because of bad weather conditions is also a used “survival” strategy;

Narrative and storytelling seem to be another key element of the Northern Lights experience. An experience with no stories is no experience, and the narrative framework of an experience is designed to lead the tourist through a structure of stories.

The “hunting” experience for example, might consist of about 5-6 events all together. The aim of the experience is to see the Northern Lights, and that is also what most of the storytelling and narrating is about. It is a constant “battle” between stories related to the uncertainty of the phenomenon, as well as building hope through narrating about chances of seeing it, the group yesterday saw this – showing last night’s pictures. If the Northern Lights show however, words become redundant. The need for stories to tell you what you can already see is strangely enough not necessary. Some of the “responsibility” for creating memorable experiences is suddenly in the hands of the Northern Lights. If the Northern Lights are not present however, the need for storytelling seems to be even greater. The guide is left with the total responsibility of creating memorable experiences, demanding structure and narrating in order to engage the tourist. These sudden changes in the experience must be demanding to handle for the experience stager.

4.4 Negotiating with nature and negotiation strategies

The Northern Lights experiences in Alta are quite versatile in content, varying from guided hunting the Northern Light bus tours, to winter activities like dog sledding, ice hotel, snow mobile, skiing trips, as well as husky safari where the Northern Lights deliberately is under-communicated as long as the Northern Lights are not in sight. But they all share common grounds; the Northern Lights, as a natural phenomenon, cannot be guaranteed in the Northern Lights experience. This was emphasised as a huge challenge by all the informants. The experience providers always carry the risk of not being able to give the tourists what they really came for, or what they expect and want, either because the sky is cloudy and one can therefore not see the Northern Lights, or simply because the Northern Lights activity is minimal and the lights are not visible even on a clear sky. These simple, technical facts cannot in any way be controlled. They rather have to be dealt with.

It appears as if nature conditions the production of the Northern Lights as a nature based experience. Still, the experience providers do have a certain influence, meaning that they somehow manage to create memorable Northern Lights experiences despite the unruly forces of nature. To illustrate this, some of the most interesting findings during participant observation will be explored. The intention was to participate on the same experience two different days with the hopes of maybe observing differences in the staging and narration strategies applied by the experience stager (the guide), but also with the hopes of seeing different prerequisites based on natural conditions and constraints of the natural environment. The luck was on our side. Not only did Mother Nature show both sides of the medallion, one side on each trip so to speak, but there were also different guides on each trip.

The result was imaginable but surprising. One experience seems like two totally different experiences when the Northern Lights get taken out of the equation. Doing the same experience twice, with different guides, ending up with one experience with no Northern Lights in sight, and one with spectacular Northern Lights. It was evident that different staging and narrative strategies had to be applied on the experience in order for memorable experiences to be created.

Since the guide (here the experience stager) does not know the outcome of the experience either, in relation to the Northern Lights, other than the forecasts at hand, he will have to choose between different staging and narrative strategies guiding the tourist through the events of the experience.

First of all, the importance of both pre-tour narratives as well as on-tour narratives containing information about the uncertainty of the Northern Lights is crucial in order to clarify expectations. From the companies point of view it is very much a case of giving the best possible information, and to highlight the fact that seeing the Northern Lights is not guaranteed. This has been exemplified throughout the study several times already.

4.4.1 No Northern Lights in sight –firmer structure and creativity in storytelling

Through interviews it has been pointed out that the structure of the experience and the narratives, are more important when the Northern Lights are absent and hard to locate through

a cloudy sky. This is quite demanding and requires more improvisation in narration, and how the narratives are presented.

“Ultimately it could be quote:” a shitty trip”.....as long as you get to see the Northern Lights. The demands for having a structure, a system and a story are far higher if the conditions are difficult. If there are Northern Lights from the start you as a guide can almost just “sit in the car and be on facebook all the time”. That’s how it feels at least...” (Informant 4).

“I would argue that the guide is much more important if you don’t see the Northern Lights than if you see it. If you don’t see Northern Lights you have more of a challenge, explaining more detailed why we didn’t see it. Of course, they pay good money to see the Northern Lights so we have to make the best of it and do a good job and maybe get some other good experiences out of it, other than seeing the Northern Lights. Maybe telling stories, and doing things you don’t have to do when seeing the Northern Lights. When seeing the Northern Lights they are more occupied with that” (Informant 5).

“Post-tour reflections: the Northern Lights were huge and at its best. It hit me that we were so occupied with looking at the sky and trying to take good pictures, that other stories were redundant....or maybe I didn’t pay attention because I was so preoccupied? It all revolved around what happened in the sky. The guide acted more as an assistant; taking pictures, helping us with our cameras, making sure we were safe crossing the road etc.” (PO).

The guide’s role is of another character when seeing the Northern Lights. More of a facilitator, making sure everything is ok, helping, answering questions. The responsibility of creating memorable experiences somehow shifts from the guide to the Northern Lights. That is how powerful this natural attraction is. The job is far more challenging and complicated, and demands much more creativity in storytelling, when the conditions are difficult. The responsibility of creating memorable experiences is then all resting on the guides performance and ability to stage other possible, memorable experiences on the way.

Bruner (2005b) reflects on what is meant by improvisation or creativity in storytelling while on tour. Improvisation might just be following a different script, but I will also argue that improvisation might be just that, using cues from the natural environment for example to tell new stories, maybe even related to own personal back ground. This is also expressed by several of my informants. While the frame of the experience preferably remains the same, the narratives used and presented by the guides should be partly improvised based on the guides personal interests, and as unexpected events emerge, a good guide should be able to improvise their narration accordingly.

“When I’m on a tour with guests I try to find out what they would find interesting. If I drive past a skiing stadium I might ask: What are your national sports? Then I ask: What do you think is the national sport of Norway? Several might answer; it must be some kind of skiing. And I time it so that I stop at the stadium. And here you see the reason why we are good skiers; Lots of kids skiing at 8 o’clock in the evening”. In a way they get to see something new, we are back-stage in a way, and they got something they didn’t see coming, something extra (Informant 4).

Others don’t want to involve too many guides because they want the essence of narration to be the same on every trip, maybe not the same narratives, but the basis for the narratives being from the same background, values, and family back ground.

“I want to be in control of everything that happens here. I am a people person, and I find out relatively fast what people are interested in. And someone that doesn’t have those relations to nature and the surroundings..... I don’t think that make good experiences. Thus, 90 % of the product is the person behind the product. So I try to meet and greet everybody that comes to us” (Informant 3).

Maybe not surprising, but interesting to see the big differences in narratives used, depending on ownership background, and life. One of the companies built up some of their narratives around the longest sled dog race in Europe - Finnmarksløpet. This is familiar to them because the owner has done the race many times, and this is part of their expertise. Another company did not care too much about this race, even though they have also been involved in the race several years back. Their narratives were built up around the location of the company by the

riverbank of Altaelva, the local wildlife like the moose, and the “happy dog” – narratives involving the life of a typical dog in the dog yard, and what makes him a happy dog.

CHAPTER -V-CONCLUSIONS

With rapidly increasing tourist numbers, the potential in commercialising the Northern Lights has grown immensely over the last few years. This is also recognized by the experience providers. With new camera technology and new ways to reach an audience through social media, one can only imagine what possibilities the future holds for professional Northern Lights experience providers.

However, there are some major challenges that the Northern Lights experience providers have to deal with, and that is the instability of this ever shifting phenomenon. The experience providers cannot guarantee sightings of the Northern Lights even if the ideal winter conditions of clear skies prevail (Edensor, 2010). Despite the fact that nature seem to be in total control of these resources, experience providers manage to find ways to work around the sometimes missing Northern Lights in order to design extraordinary Northern Lights experiences. The aim of this dissertation was to first identify the key elements of the Northern Lights experience, and secondly to uncover possible negotiation strategies used in dealing with the natural conditions and constraints of the Northern Lights.

The research has pointed out *Staging* and *Narrative* to be key elements of the Northern Lights experience. Both elements are crucial in experience design, connecting the tourist with the experience and its natural environment, and at the same time enabling the tourist to make sense of the experience.

Through *staging* of the Northern Lights experience, the goal is to engage the tourist through interaction with the natural environments, with the intention of creating extraordinary or memorable experiences. Staging in the Northern Lights experience is done through actively using nature as a resource. The Northern Lights experience is constructed through a sequence of events, which are played out on different stages, in this case referring to the different natural areas where the action takes place, for example every stop the “hunting” experience makes. The tourists get to see and feel the effect of the landscape, and different scenery every time there is a stop. Through these natural environments, as well as the affect of the natural environment, and the cues provided for storytelling, there are indefinite opportunities for the body to feel, to part take in activity, to take in new impressions, to personally get engaged..

The star of the show is of course the Aurora Borealis, but in cases where the Aurora does not show, it seems like there are plenty more opportunities to stage the events of the experience in such a way for tourists to be engaged personally in an emotional, physical, intellectual or even spiritual way (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). However, the presence of the Aurora seem to “remove” some of the pressure on the experience stager, or perhaps it is the time for the experience stager to let the Aurora speak for itself, and only to provide the perfect stage for the show to play out.

The Northern Lights experience is constructed through *narrative* and *storytelling*, and this narrative framework leads the tourist through the events of the experience. Depending on personal interests or the origin of the company, the experience providers choose different angles when presenting the Northern Lights, varying between scientific, mythical or historical explanations for the phenomenon. However, the study shows that the narration of the Northern Lights experience is about much more than the phenomenon itself. It is about creating an interesting base for the experience. Some of the experience providers use a set of fixed narratives as in introduction to the experience, and these stories are used every time. It is part of the frame of the experience. The experience providers, without exception, see their natural surroundings as assets in their experience production, and they use narratives based in what they find interesting or what is particular about their company; where they are located (by the Alta river for example), the natural surroundings, the darkness, the weather, and local wild life (moose, fox, reindeer), the sound of the forest and the vast plateau, and even the “sound of silence”. The accessible wilderness is an essential part of the Arctic narratives and the stories presented. Other stories are based on guides’ personal interest, news and society in general, and identity and the history of the region for example. This means that the experience stager (guide) has an essential role conveying the intentions of the Northern Lights experience, and even more so when the Northern Lights are a no-show.

Now we are down to the essence of this study. Designing Northern Lights experiences proves to be challenging when the main attraction, the Aurora Borealis, cannot be guaranteed in any way, and the absence rather have to be dealt with. Findings show that even though it appears as if nature conditions the production of Northern Lights as a nature based experience, the experience providers still have a certain influence, by trying to work around the unruly forces of nature. This seems to be done through negotiation strategies, meaning to make use of certain staging and narrative elements in order to handle the absence of the Northern Lights.

In the absence of the Northern Lights, the structure of the experience and the narratives appear as even more important, especially for the “hunting” experience that relies on the Northern Lights. These negotiation strategies consist of staging and narrative elements. Things can change fast, and flexibility within staging and narrating is called for. It is essential that this is a dynamical system that can be adjusted according to the natural conditions. For the Northern Lights experience to be successful, the flexibility is a prerequisite.

REFERENCES

- AltaMuseum. Nordlysobservatoriet på Haldde. Retrieved 01.03, 2014, from <http://www.alta.museum.no/sider/tekst.asp?side=142>
- Altman, R. (2008). *A theory of narrative*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Anderson, B. (2009). Affective atmospheres. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2(2), 77-81. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2009.08.005>
- Arnould, E. J., & Price, L. L. (1993). River Magic: Extraordinary Experience and the Extended Service Encounter. *Journal of consumer Research*, 20(1), 24.
- Arnould, E. J., Price, L. L., & Tierney, P. (1998). Communicative Staging of the Wilderness Servicescape. *The Service Industries Journal*, 18(3), 90-115. doi: 10.1080/026420698000000034
- Bendix, R. (2002). Capitalizing on memories past, present, and future: Observation on the intertwining of tourism and narration. *Anthropological Theory*, 2(4), 469-487. doi: 10.1177/14634990260620567
- Bitner, M. J. (1992). Servicescapes: The Impact of Physical Surroundings on Customers and Employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 56(2), 57-71. doi: 10.2307/1252042
- Bruner, E. M. (2005a). *Culture on tour : ethnographies of travel*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bruner, E. M. (2005b). *The Role of Narrative in Tourism*. Paper presented at the Berkeley conference, On Voyage: New Direction in Tourism Theory, Berkeley.
- Byhring, P. (Writer). (2011). How The Northern Lights Are Created [Film]. In U. i. O.-D. o. Physics (Producer). forskning.no: Universitetet i Oslo.
- Cohen, L., Morrison, K., & Manion, L. (2004). *A guide to teaching practice*. London: Routledge.
- Company. (2013). Northern Lights Safari. Retrieved 20.02, 2014, from http://altaskifer.no/english/northern_lights/

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*: New York, Harper & Row.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2010). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers*: Rowman Altamira.
- Edensor, T. J. (2010). Aurora Landscapes: Affective Atmospheres of Light and Dark. . In K. Benediktsson & K. A. Lund (Eds.), *Conversations with landscape*. Farnham: Ashgate (pp. 227-240). University of Aberdeen, UK: Ashgate.
- Egeland, A., Henriken, E. K., & Henriksen, T. (1997). *Temahefte om nordlys - "Vår strålende verden"*. Oslo: Fysisk institutt, Universitetet i Oslo.
- Friedman, R. M. (2010). Making the aurora Norwegian: Science and Image in the Making of a Tradition. *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews*, 35(1), 51-68.
- Gyimóthy, S., & Mykletun, R. J. (2004). Play in Adventure Tourism. The Case of Arctic Trekking. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31(4), 855-878.
- Hansen, T. L. (1996). The northern lights-what are they? Retrieved 03.02, 2014, from <http://geo.phys.uit.no/articles.html>
- Harris, K., Harris, R., & Baron, S. (2001). Customer participation in retail service: lessons from Brecht. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 29(8), 359-369.
- Jacobsen, J. K. S. (1997). The making of an attraction: The case of North Cape. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24(2), 341-356.
- Leithe, I. (2013a). Mange vil se nordlyset i sitt beste år. Retrieved 22.01, 2014, from <http://www.forskning.no/artikler/2013/januar/345883>
- Leithe, I. (2013b). ScienceNordic: Peak tourist year for northern lights. Retrieved 21.01, 2014, from <http://sciencenordic.com/peak-tourist-year-northern-lights>

- Lund, K. A. (2013). Experiencing nature in nature-based tourism. *Tourist Studies*, 13(2), 156-171. doi: 10.1177/1468797613490373
- MacCannell, D. (1999). *The tourist : a new theory of the leisure class*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press.
- Mathisen, L. (2012). The exploration of the memorable tourist experience (pp. s. 21-41).
- Mathisen, L. (2013a). Staging Natural Environments: A Performance Perspective. *Advances in Hospitality and Leisure*, 9, 163-183.
- Mathisen, L. (2013b). *Storytelling and story staging: co-creating value in tourism*: UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Faculty of Biosciences, Fisheries and Economics CY - [Tromsø].
- Mathisen, S. R. (2014). Nordlys, Magi og Turisme. *DIN - Tidsskrift for religion og kultur*, 69-92.
- McCabe, S., & Foster, C. (2006). The role and function of narrative in tourist interaction. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 4(3), 194-215.
- Mehmetoglu, M. (2007). *Naturbasert turisme*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget Vigmostad & Bjørke AS.
- Mossberg, L. (2008). Extraordinary Experiences through Storytelling. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 8(3), 195-210. doi: 10.1080/15022250802532443
- Mossberg, L. M. (2007). *Å skape opplevelser. Fra OK til WOW! : Fagbokforlaget Vigmostad & Bjørke AS*.
- Mossberg, L. M., Johansen, E. N., & Sjøbu, A. (2008). *Storytelling: markedsføring i opplevelsesindustrien*. Bergen: Fagbokforl.
- Munar, A. M., & Jacobsen, J. K. S. (2014). Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media. *Tourism Management*, 43, 46-54.
- Nrk.no/nordland. (2008). Joanna skaper nordlysfeber. Retrieved 21.02, 2014, from <http://www.nrk.no/nordland/joanna-skaper-nordlysfeber-1.6343704>

- Pedersen, A.-J. (2012). *Opplevelsesøkonomi: kunsten å designe opplevelser*. [Oslo]: Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- Phillimore, J., & Goodson, L. (2004). *Qualitative Research in Tourism. Ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies*: Routledge.
- Pine, J. B., & Gilmore, J. H. (1998). Welcome to the Experience Economy. *Harvard Business Journal*, 76, 97-105.
- Pine, J. B., & Gilmore, J. H. (2011). *The experience economy*. Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.
- Pine, J. B., & Gilmore, J. H. (2013). 2. Experience economy: past, present and future. In J. Sundbø & F. Sørensen (Eds.), *Handbook on the Experience Economy* (pp. 21-44). Jon Sundbo, Flemming Sørensen: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Pomfret, G. (2006). Mountaineering adventure tourists: a conceptual framework for research. *Tourism Management*, 27(1), 113-123. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2004.08.003>
- Priskin, J. (2001). Assessment of natural resources for nature-based tourism: the case of the Central Coast Region of Western Australia. *Tourism Management*, 22(6), 637-648. doi: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(01\)00039-5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(01)00039-5)
- Stav, T. U. (2014a, 31.01.2014). Skal luke ut «cowboyer» i reiselivsbransjen. Retrieved 12.03, 2014, from <http://www.nrk.no/nordnytt/skal-luke-ut-cowboyer-i-reiselivet-1.11509539>
- Stav, T. U. (2014b). Vil fange lyden av nordlyset. Retrieved 26.01, 2014, from <http://www.nrk.no/nordnytt/vil-fange-lyden-av-nordlyset-1.11492771>
- Sundbo, J., & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, P. (2008). The backstaging of experience production. In J. Sundbo & P. Darmer (Eds.), *Creating experiences in the experience economy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Symington, M. (2012). It's bright up North: Where to see the aurora borealis in the year of the Northern Lights. Retrieved 17.03, 2014, from

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-2092829/Northern-Lights-The-best-aurora-borealis-breaks-2012.html>

Tangeland, T., & Aas, Ø. (2011). Household compositions and the importance of experience attributes of nature based tourism activity products - A Norwegian case study of outdoor recreationists. *Tourism Management*, 32(4), 822-832.

Tangeland, T., Vennesland, B., & Nybakk, E. (2012). Second-home owners' intention to purchase nature-based tourism activity products – A Norwegian case study. *Tourism Management*(0), 1-13. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.10.006>

Tung, V. W. S., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2011). Exploring the essence of memorable tourism experiences. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(4), 1367-1386.

Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2011). *The tourist gaze 3.0*. London: SAGE.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*: Suny Press.

Vespestad, M. K., & Lindberg, F. (2010). Understanding nature-based tourist experiences: an ontological analysis. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 14(6), 563-580. doi: 10.1080/13683500.2010.513730

Viken, A., & Jørgensen, F. (1998). Tourism on Svalbard. *Polar Record*, 34(189), 123-128.

VisitAlta. (2013). The Northern Lights city of Alta. Retrieved 20.01, 2014, from <http://visitalta.no/en/component/content/article/54-english/frontpage/162-the-northern-lights-city-of-alta>

Visitnorway. (2014, 20.05.14). NorwayLights – the mobile app that shows the way to the northern lights. Retrieved 22.05, 2014, from <http://www.visitnorway.com/en/media-and-press/tools-and-assistance/press-releases/norwaylights-the-mobile-app/>

Yin, R. (2003). Case study research: Design and methods. Third Edition. *Sage Publications, Inc*, 5, 11.

Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*. New York: Guilford Press.

ATTACHMENTS

INTERVIEW GUIDE – EXPERIENCE PROVIDER

Research question

What are the key elements of the Northern Lights experience?

- How is the Northern Lights experience staged and narrated, and how do the providers negotiate natural conditions and constraints?

OPPLEVELSENS INNHOLD

1. Beskriv nordlysopplevelsen i din bedrift fra A til Å? (Hvis flere)
2. Hva er de viktigste elementene i opplevelsen, slik du ser det? (nordlys eller annen aktivitet)
3. Bygges opplevelsen opp på en spesiell måte – utdyp.
4. Hvilken rolle spiller guiden i formidlingen av opplevelsen(e)?
5. Hvilken informasjon om nordlyset og muligheten for å se nordlyset formidles til turistene på forhånd og underveis i aktiviteten?
6. Hvilke utfordringer har dere som bedrift i forhold til at nordlyset er uforutsigbart og ikke kan garanteres?

KUNDENS TILBAKEMELDINGER

1. Ønsker dine kunder primært å se nordlyset, eller er det andre årsaker til at de har valgt å komme til nettopp Alta og delta på din nordlysopplevelse?
2. Hvilke tilbakemeldinger får dere fra deres kunder om denne måten å se nordlyset på?
3. Hvilke positive tilbakemeldinger får dere hos kundene deres – eksempel
4. Hvilke reaksjoner får dere når det ikke er nordlys?
5. Har du inntrykk av at turistene skjønner konseptet med nordlyset og at dette er et naturfenomen som ikke kan styres?
6. Merker du forskjell i turistens reaksjoner når nordlyset er til stede – hvordan sees dette både på typiske nordlysturer, men også på andre typer turer hvor nordlyset ikke egentlig er en del av pakken men likevel dukker opp som bonus?