



BEST PRACTICE: AARHUS, DENMARK



Key Challenge

Limited financial resources to support sustainability activities in tourism.

Type of Solution

Stakeholder participation and management.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Mixed

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 99.4 km² (468 km² Municipality)

Population | 367,765 in Aarhus Municipality

Type of Tourism | Cultural; City.

Tourism Organisation | Destination Management Organisation (DMO) is a Public-Private partnership, representing Aarhus and the surrounding area.

Main Stakeholders Affected | Local residents; Tourists; Accommodations; Restaurants and bars; Other tourism service providers; Local businesses.

Additional Challenges Covered | Deterioration of the destination image; Maintenance and conservation of cultural heritage sites; Lack of community participation in tourism activities.

Context & Background

Aarhus is located on the East coast of Jutland and is Denmark's second largest city with 367,765 inhabitants. The economy is predominantly knowledge and service based, with culture and education playing an important role. Tourism is steadily growing and in 2023, around 1.38 million overnight stays (73.8% domestic) were generated. Sustainability is an important trend for the municipality and the DMO, which focus on creating value for the people, the planet and business.

Key Challenge

A survey among tourism companies in the Aarhus region (2022) revealed that they needed more financial and human resources to make tourism more attractive. Moreover, it is an ongoing concern for the city and Destination Management Organisation (DMO) to ensure that the destination's tourism evolves in a way that benefits and strengthens the local community.



Implementation of Solutions: Because of the growing interest in sustainability and the increased involvement of local people in the development of the city, in the new tourism strategy, tourism and local life have been closely linked.

SOLUTION

In preparation for the [European Capital of Culture 2017](#), the ReThinker volunteer programme was launched. Due to the positive response, the programme was further continued and is now managed by VisitAarhus (DMO). Volunteers support the [city's cultural and economic sectors](#) (e.g., museums, sports and cultural events, festivals, cruise tourism) in various hosting roles, for the benefit of both visitors and locals themselves. Today, the program includes over 2,000 volunteers.

The volunteer community is strengthened through various initiatives such as:

- [ReHelper](#), an online marketplace where volunteers can search for and choose tasks and a digital tool for organisers to create schedules and display the available volunteer tasks.
- *ReThinker* newsletter to inform about upcoming volunteer opportunities.
- [Speed meetings](#) held once a month to bring projects and volunteers together in person.
- Regular surveys to assess participant satisfaction.

Replicability potential: Very high (requires strong collaboration and networking).

Cost & funding source: Four full-time equivalents in the Aarhus department of ReThinkers funded by the City of Aarhus, the Salling Foundation, Denmark's Business Promotion Board and cooperation with event organisers.

Success Factors & Barriers

Success factors: Prioritising sustainability at the top management level; Fundraising; Flexibility of volunteers.

Barriers: No barriers were encountered.

Results and Impacts

- High satisfaction rate among volunteers (86% are satisfied or very satisfied with being volunteers).
- Companies from various tourism sectors are supported without financial contribution; the volunteers take on around 200 tasks every year.
- Positive tourism attitude of Aarhus residents and more interaction with guests.
- Volunteers enhance the guest experience. According to a survey of cruise guests, 83% said they "had already spoken to a volunteer welcome host," and 97% of those said, "the volunteer welcome hosts made a real difference to them."

Recommendations by the Destinations

- A general and holistic strategy for sustainable tourism is essential.
- With their welcoming attitude and hospitality, volunteers have a huge impact on the perception of tourism in the city.
- Volunteers are grateful to be able to do this work because they experience a strong sense of identity, community and belonging through being part of the Rethinker community.

Useful Links

[Rethinkers](#)

Contact Person

Lund, Ulla, Head of Community Engagement, ul@visitaarhus.com