



Pórdís Kolbrún introduces Varða/Sites of Merit: A comprehensive approach to destination management

Pórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir, the Minister for Tourism, Industry and Innovation, today presented a new integral approach to destination management: Varða/Sites of Merit. The first destinations that are in the process of becoming Sites of Merit are Gullfoss, Geysir, Thingvellir National Park and Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon.

With Varða, a foundation will be laid for exemplary destination management. Sites of Merit will be destinations in Iceland that are considered unique at national or global level. Their main attraction is their natural phenomena and/or cultural-historical monuments that form a unique landscape.

“The Icelandic name of the Sites of Merit project is Varða which means cairn and refers to the many cairns that are to be found in Icelandic nature. Sites of Merit are well known and part of the country's image. Cairns preserve history and heritage. They are built with local materials, are part of the environment, point the way towards a destination and form a route system.”

“Sites of Merit will be marketed to Icelandic and foreign tourists and the intention is to create a well-known label that tourists will look for when planning their travels. The Sites of Merit label is intended to guide tourists on their travels around the country and, at the same time, be a model for other destinations in terms of their management, supervision, planning, facilities, services, nature conservation, safety and other aspects concerning the reception of tourists.”

Places that can become Sites of Merit are popular destinations which tourists visit all year round. Their administration aims to ensure sustainability in all areas: environmentally, socially and economically. The sites must demonstrate a long-term commitment to



implement the set criteria for management and planning, including infrastructure design, accessibility, education, safety, visitor management, digital infrastructure, etc.

Sites of Merit can be places where substantial infrastructure is already in place. At such places there may be limited opportunities to alter what has already been done, as well as established patterns in travel behaviour. There may be considerable economic interests which have developed over a long period of time. It can therefore be more challenging (technically, financially and culturally) and time-consuming to develop them as Sites of Merit.

On the other hand, Sites of Merit can also be places where limited or no infrastructure is in place. These places offer opportunities to steer development towards sustainability from the earliest stages and to build a diversified experience that is in tune with the spirit of the site.

The current plan is to spend ISK 700 million on the project, i.e. ISK 300 million in 2021 and ISK 200 million in 2022 and 2023.

The aim is that from 2022 more places around the country, including privately owned ones, will be able to apply for membership of the system.

The Minister introduced the new Sites of Merit labelling system at a presentation today. Brandenburg designed the logo. You can watch the Minister's presentation (in Icelandic) [here](#).

The design of the logo is based on the same structure as a cairn. The logo depicts the shape of a cairn and symbolises the balance between nature and man-made structures, with reference to Icelandic heritage and patterns. Emphasis was placed on the logo reflecting the history and uniqueness of the various sites in Iceland which may eventually become Sites of Merit. Each cairn is independent, but also part of a whole, which points the way to a destination. This led to the creation of a unique logo that is timeless, symbolic and Icelandic. Varða/Sites of Merit is a collaborative project under the auspices of the Ministry of Industries and Innovation and the Ministry for the Environment and Natural Resources.



Varða
Sites of Merit
Iceland