

Guiding in a nature destination

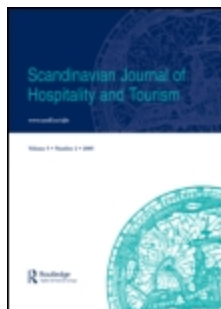
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Guiding in a nature destination

Introduction

The role of guides is a topic rarely addressed in research on tourism in Iceland, while the literature on guiding is growing internationally (Black et al., 2019; Galí & Camprubí, 2020). Iceland has traditionally been a nature destination, which draws attention to nature conservation as an important sustainability issue in tourism. The research question posed in the study is whether and how, nature conservation is addressed a) on guided bus tours in Iceland, b) in the information material tourism companies provide guides with and c) in guide education.

Iceland is a volcanic island in the subarctic with geothermal and glacial landscapes an alpine ecology and a cold climate (Benediktsson, Lund, and Huijbens, 2011). The slow growing alpine vegetation with a short growing season combined with volcanic and volatile soil, makes for conditions prone to erosion. Wounds in the vegetative cover, particularly in moss, take long to heal and damage to geological formations can be irreversible (Environmental Agency of Iceland, n.d.). Waste such as paper and organic materials take a long time to break down in the cold climate. The consequences of mass tourism in such a fragile ecosystem can be devastating for the environment.

Nature attractions in Iceland have few public access limits. The public right of passage is the rule, stated in the Nature Conservation Act 60/2013 that anyone can pass through uncultivated land if the passage causes no damage to property or disruption of the peace. Iceland is sparsely populated, distances are vast and maintaining sufficient infrastructure for the growing number of tourists has proven a challenge. Hence trampling and soiling becomes a serious issue leading both public authorities and private landowners to measures to restrict and regulate access to heavily visited sites (Environmental Agency of Iceland, n.d.).

Nature-based tourism

The motivations of tourists visiting nature attractions vary; some seek particular landscapes, others seek peace and tranquillity in nature while yet others are looking for excitement and adventure (Huijbens and Benediktsson, 2013, Lund, 2013, Mackenzie and Hodge, 2019, Óladóttir, 2020). Tourist awareness of and curiosity about nature phenomena also varies from special interest tourists seeking a particular experience such as bird watchers while others are more serendipitous nature lovers.

Broadly speaking nature-based tourism is any form of tourism where nature is the main attraction and the engagement can vary from looking at landscapes through a car window to sleeping in nature, mountaineering or river rafting. It can be consumptive such as berry picking and angling or non-consumptive such as hiking or bird watching (Randall and Rollins, 2009, Benediktsson et al., 2011, Pereira and Mykletun, 2012, Rantala and Valtonen, 2014, Ardoin et al., 2015). This broad definition is not value based; it is anthropocentric and utilitarian which for many scholars is a shortcoming as it is premised on reducing the nature experience to consumption without regard for nature ethics (Fennell and Sheppard, 2020).

Definitions have emerged that include including the term sustainable, that is nature-based tourism should be any sustainable form of tourism where nature is the main attraction (Lovelock and Lovelock, 2013). This narrows the field as the tourist desire to enjoy nature is no longer

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3 sufficient to define the activity as nature-based; the condition that the activity is sustainable is
4 added. In spite of the positive image of the term the nature-based tourism is often less
5 sustainable, both in theory and practice (Fredman and Tyrväinen, 2010).

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7 It is important to distinguish between deontological and teleological understandings to draw
8 conclusions from our data. Research on codes of conduct for wildlife tourists in Iceland
9 suggests that teleological messages, that is explaining the reasons why some behaviours are
10 preferable while others are not, is more effective than merely giving instructions i.e.
11 deontological approach (Marschall et al, 2017). This relates to studies that show that tourism
12 products designed to provide experiences that engage and offer an opportunity for growth and
13 learning through cocreation are valued in the tourism market (Prebensen et al, 2018).

14 15 16 17 The role of guides

18 The conceptualization of the role of guides can be based on the logic of a service economy. Ap
19 and Wong (2001) confirm that tour guides are the front-line employees, who bear the
20 responsibility for the overall satisfaction and impression with the tour services, the essential
21 interface between the host destination and its visitors. While service and hospitality are certainly
22 core values in all tourism, guiding cannot be fully explained as service. The shift from service
23 to experience as the core quality has reshaped the tourism industry and this is highly relevant
24 for guiding.

25 The logic of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) calls for design that embeds
26 opportunities for enjoyment, emotionality and social reflection in the product. Experiential
27 design facilitates the affective and cognitive processes that are the basis of experience formation
28 to please, move, engage, delight or surprise to such an extent that it gives new preferences, an
29 extended experience horizon and a greater self-understanding (Jantzen and Vetner, 2007). The
30 role of co-creation in tourism that is engaging tourists with the service providers in creating
31 memorable experiences is central in experience-based tourism products (Prebensen et al, 2018).
32 Numerous scholars agree that guides are critically important in tourism experience design and
33 delivery (Reisinger, 2006, Mak et al., 2011, Bryon, 2012, Jonasson and Scherle, 2012, Zillinger
34 et al., 2012, Weiler and Black, 2015, Parsons et al., 2019).

35 According to Tilden (2007), the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
36 He describes interpretation as “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and
37 relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative
38 media, rather than simply to communicate factual information” (2007, p. 33). Describing what
39 he calls the interpretation end game, Ham (2013) advocates thought-provoking interpretation
40 through theming, the message that matters to them and they care about. Zátori (2016) builds on
41 this by AIM; a model that stands for provoking attention; engaging and involving; and making
42 consumers discover. Tilden (2007, p. 59) explains the purpose of interpretation “to stimulate
43 the reader or hearer toward a desire to widen his horizon of interests and knowledge and to gain
44 an understanding of the greater truths that lie behind any statements of fact”. In other words,
45 interpretation aims to change people and is based on value propositions such as nature
46 conservation.

47 Interpretation and communication can enhance visitor experiences, can manage visitor impacts,
48 support tourism development and aid in sustainable tourism development (Moscardo, 2015).
49 Guides are the group of tourism workers that have most opportunity for dialogue with tourists
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3 and are often perceived as having a unique opportunity to impart knowledge, understanding and
4 create experiences. That is, interpretation that makes a difference and contribution to the
5 destination's sustainability (Pereira and Mykletun, 2012). This calls for the recognition of
6 training and education that emphasizes interpretation over reciting information and stating facts
7 (Furunes et al., 2012, Pond, 1992).
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10 Guides as agents for sustainability and conservation

11 Sustainable tourism depends on the concerted work of the industry's many stakeholders
12 (Furunes et. al., 2012). While the study focusses on guides, it must be emphasised that they
13 perform their roles in a business environment that both restricts and enables their agency.
14 Guides generally work in what has been termed a gig economy of workers without employers
15 (Friedman, 2014) that is a noninstitutionalised, unregulated work environment, which gives
16 them considerable scope and flexibility in how they enact their roles. While this makes the work
17 creative and appealing for many, it also has a drawback in that as guiding is not a recognized
18 profession and the rights and duties of guides are not clearly defined.
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22 This applies to the situation of guides in Iceland. They are mostly self-employed and the bulk
23 of their workload is in high season that is the summer months. Guiding is not a certified
24 profession in Iceland, and consequently tour operators can hire whomever they like as a guide.
25 The president of the Iceland Tourist Guide Association states, "certification of the professional
26 title of guides would strengthen guiding in general, be a quality brand of companies that want
27 to emphasize good guiding. Certification of the profession would contribute to the quality and
28 reputation of Icelandic tourism" (Þorláksson, 2018).
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31 Randall and Rollins (2009) explored guides' potential to contribute to nature conservation in
32 protected areas by educating the tourists based on nature interpretation and exemplary
33 behaviour in nature. All the guides modelled environmentally responsible behaviours but only
34 a few used the term "leave no trace" to educate their tourists. Pereira and Mykletun (2012) also
35 examined guides contribution to nature conservation and sustainability and their results showed
36 that the guides made little reference to nature conservation and gave limited interpretation on
37 the value of the ecosystem visited in international context.
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40 Guides may not have the skills, attitudes and knowledge to perform all their roles where a gap
41 may exist between what nature guides *should* do on the job and what they concretely do (Black
42 and Ham, 2005). Nature guide can also mean many things, the definition of an ecotour guide
43 may differ from that of a wildlife guide and the latter have different roles depending upon
44 whether they are operating in a consumptive (fishing, hunting) or non-consumptive (watching,
45 observing) context. In the definition of ecotour guide Black (2007 p. 317) emphasises the
46 relation that the guide has with a tour operator: "a nature-based guide who is working for an
47 ecotour operator and is therefore expected to guide in a manner consistent with the principles
48 of ecotourism". Central in this definition is how the tour operator defines the business.
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52 While it is recognized that tour operators and guides can play an important and influential role
53 of informing, interpreting and as conduits for natural resource management (Randall and
54 Rollins, 2009, Furunes et al., 2012, Lackey, 2016) they do not always define their roles and
55 responsibilities clearly. Environmentally specific leadership in tour companies can influence
56 employees' pro-environmental attitudes and perceptions about their roles as green agents,
57 leading to their pro-environmental behaviour (Tuan, 2018). Tourism operators make a lot of
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3 decisions regarding logistics such the mode of transport, group size on tours, suppliers and
4 schedule. The guiding profession, let alone an individual guide, may thus feel relatively
5 powerless to make a difference in contribution to the sustainability of a particular activity, tour,
6 business, community, industry or environment (Weiler and Black, 2015, p.73).
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9 10 Research method

11 A qualitative, mixed methods approach was used to explore tour guiding with special emphasis
12 on guides' contribution to nature conservation. The qualitative methodology seeks depth over
13 breadth and attempts to learn the subtle nuances of the topic of investigation where the focus is
14 on small number of cases where typically a number of data-gathering and analysis methods is
15 used to build an in-depth picture (Creswell, 2017; Veal, 2011).
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18 In this case data was triangulated from participant observation, interviews and documentary
19 analysis. The desk research involved analysing written documents promoting the guided tours,
20 tour operator information for guides and the curricula of guiding education in Iceland. The main
21 purpose of reviewing these was to investigate whether and how they address nature
22 conservation and sustainability. A combination of interviews and participant observation
23 captured the guides' perceptions and practice of tour guiding. The research started with field
24 work in the form of participant observation on guided tours. This was to study the guide at
25 work, the behaviours, interactions and the guiding narrative in the working environment of a
26 tour. Observations or field studies contribute to more valid knowledge of what people actually
27 do than merely asking subjects about their behaviour (Kvale, 1996). The qualitative research
28 interview seeks to describe and understand the meaning of what the interviewees say, to obtain
29 nuanced and immediate descriptions, get specificity and focus (Kvale, 1996). The interviews
30 complement the participant observation and the desk research with the perspective guides have
31 on their practice and their position on nature conservation.
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37 Participant observation

38 The participant observations were undertaken by a researcher on day tours offered by Icelandic
39 tour companies. The tour companies were contacted by telephone to get permission for
40 participant observation. After the initial phone conversation, more detailed information about
41 the study was sent by email to the coordinators of the day tours. The tourism companies' contact
42 persons were responsible for informing their guides about the researcher's participation in the
43 tours. The participant observations were conducted on eight tours during high season in summer
44 time. In two cases, the guides did not have formal guiding education, which is rather common
45 in Icelandic tourism. These tours were to well-known and popular nature attractions in the
46 southern part of Iceland and to nature-based attractions in the highlands.
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51 Table 1 shows a schematic overview of the implementation of the tours with basic information
52 on each tour. The shortest tour observed was 8 hours and the longest lasted for 17 hours. The
53 group sizes varied from 60 people in a big bus, accompanied by two staff and the smallest
54 groups were seven people accompanied by one driver guide. Passengers were mostly female
55 from diverse countries and a wide age range.
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58 *Table 1: Overview of the day tours observed.*
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Name of day tour	Tour operators	Vehicle	Hours	Passengers	Staff
Wonders of Snæfellsnes National park.	Operator A	Minibus	13	9	Male driver guide
The Golden Circle Classic Tour	Operator B	Bus	8	60	Male guide and male driver
The South Tour	Operator C	Minibus	10-11	13	Female driver guide
South Coast, Jökulsárlón, glacier lagoon and Diamond beach	Operator D	Minibus	17	14	Two male drivers
Lake Myvatn	Operator E	Bus	8-9	40	A foreign group manager, female guide, male driver
The Diamond Circle Classic Tour	Operator F	Minibus	10-11	7	Male driver guide
Landmannalaugar	Operator G	4x4 jeep	8-9	7	Female driver guide
The Askja tour	Operator H	4x4 bus	11-12	22	Female guide and male driver

A check list of items relevant to the role of guides in nature conservation was designed, based on a literature review (Pereira and Mykletun, 2012, Weiler and Black, 2015, The Iceland Touring Association, n.d. and The Environmental Agency of Iceland, n.d.). The list consists of 32 items describing, explaining and interpreting natural resource management, warnings and information about the dangers in Icelandic nature, its fragility, nature conservation and sustainability, respect for nature, modelling responsible behaviour, motivation and environmental interpretation.

The observer used the checklist to document the guide's actions, behaviour and their verbal guiding. All guides used English as their main language. During the bus tour the observer listened carefully to check if the guiding narrative matched to an item in the list, if not, a short note was written. The observer tried to be unobtrusive but it wasn't always easy to follow the guide's behaviour and speech outside the bus. The presence of the observer on the tours has probably had some impact on the guides as Icelanders rarely take part in guided tours along with international tourists so this could have led to the Hawthorne effect (McCambridge et al., 2014). However, very few guides asked the observer what she was doing by participating on the tour. The analysis of the participant observation was made by counting and categorizing incidents of the checklist that corresponded to the behavior of the tour guide in question and notes registered by the observer.

Interviews

Semi structured interviews were conducted with seven professional guides who are members of the Iceland Tourist Guide Association. The criteria for membership are to have education from acknowledged Icelandic schools in guiding or experience up to twenty years in guiding. The members list was at this time visible for everybody on the association's website, www.touristguide.is with contact information, as well as information about their experience and the language they use in guiding.

As the aim of this study is to provide an in depth understanding rather than to generalize findings, criterion sampling (Veal, 2011:370) was used. Every 10th name from a random starting point on the members list, was selected. The sampling interval was calculated by dividing the population size by the desired sample size, i.e. 100 on the list, 10 interviewees. If no phone number was available or the person didn't answer then the next name on the list, was chosen.

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3 The seven selected guides were initially contacted by text message providing very short
4 information about the research and a request for participation. Email communications were used
5 to set a date, time and location for the interview. For various reasons the interviewees could not
6 always make the appointments so the search continued during the interview period until an
7 acceptable sample size was obtained. All those who participated in the study gave informed
8 consent verbally, cf. Act on privacy and handling of personal information, no. 90 from 2018
9 (Icelandic Data Protection Authority, n.d.). The interviewees were informed about the purpose
10 of the investigation, their right to withdraw from the research and that it was conducted by
11 Hólar University.
12

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15 Three women and four men, aged 27 to 61 years old were interviewed. The guiding experience
16 ranged from having completed the first summer of guiding to 30 years on all kinds of guided
17 tours, general guidance for groups, recreational, incentive and hiking tours. Five interviews
18 spanned over an hour and one was 30 minutes. Questions asked were i.e. about the main roles
19 of guides; their education and development as guides, and whether and how they address issues
20 of sustainability such as nature conservation.
21

22
23 All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Content analysis of the interviews was
24 thematic, first a coding of predefined themes and later a more nuanced reading of main themes
25 and subthemes. While the most obvious way to code a theme is by the reference to it in the
26 transcript, we also looked for the omissions and silences that is absence of mention of
27 predefined themes. Emerging themes were noted and analysed, the most prevalent of those was
28 related to the guides' relations to the tour operators and working conditions.
29

30 31 32 Documentary analysis

33 Three main bodies of documents were analysed in the desk research; promotional material and
34 information for tourists; information packages for guides compiled by the tour operators and
35 curricula for guide education in Iceland. Information provided by tourism companies for the
36 guides before the guided tours was collected via email.
37

38
39 Four guiding education programs are offered in Iceland, two at secondary and two at tertiary
40 level. All are offered as continuing education, but only one is part of a degree program. The
41 curricula and information on guiding programs are accessible on websites of three of the
42 schools. These documents were analysed thematically with focus on whether the students got
43 education in nature conservation and sustainability.
44

45 46 Findings

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48 In this section data from participant observation, interviews with certified guides and
49 documentary analyses are presented.
50

51 Participant observation

52 The observations showed scarce mention of environmental issues in the guides' commentary.
53 For example, the growth conditions for Icelandic flora and the effect of trampling, which is a
54 concern in the public discourse, was not mentioned. The tourists were not informed of this issue
55 before disembarking at the destinations and some of the guides had difficulties managing their
56 groups in the field. Only one guide gave a teleological guiding on the reasons why it is important
57 to keep to the trails to protect the flora. The same guide showed good example by picking up
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trash on the walk and encouraged the tourists to do the same. Off-road driving was another topic she/he discussed, showed the consequences, explained that it is illegal, and informed about the fines.

Some examples showed very misguided practices such as a case where the group leader (not the guide) gave the tourists plastic shoe covers before disembarking at a muddy site. This was not to protect nature, but to reduce the soiling of the bus and the footwear. Some of these plastic shoe covers were not returned, presumably littering this nature-based attraction for the next visitor.

For an overview table 2 summarizes the findings from the participant observation on nature conservation. As the table indicates, guides “left the sites as they found them”, but if there was litter when they arrived, it was still there when they left. The guides usually followed the paths when walking with the group, though with some exceptions. Some guides didn’t walk at all with the group, others a short distance, seemingly to show which path the visitors should follow, while others walked with their group from a – z.

Table 2: Guides’ reference to nature conservation in their commentary.

Topic mentioned	Number of times	Topic mentioned	Number of times
Informs about the fragile nature before leaving the bus.	2	Picks up litter.	1
Warns about dangers in nature.	6	Asks guests to bring all litter with them.	1
Visible role model in responsible behaviour in nature.	1	Asks guests not to collect stones. Just leave footprints.	1
Relates Icelandic nature to nature in the visitor’s country	2	Leave sites as they found them	7
Mentions the word „nature conservation “.	2	Responds to the bus’s running engine in stops.	0
Walks with the group, part of the path.	5	Educates about the fragile nature.	5
The group walks alone.	7	Mentions National Parks/protected areas.	3
The guide lets the group walk in a line	0	Explains conservation plans in Parks and protected areas.	2
Motivator for responsible behaviour when walking in nature.	2	Enhances visitors understanding and value on fragile nature.	2
Stresses walking on paths.	3	Environmental interpreter; able to change the visitors’ attitude.	2

Source: Pereira and Mykletun, (2012), Weiler and Black, (2015), Iceland Touring Association (n.d.). Environmental Agency of Iceland (n.d.).

For some guides it was difficult to set limits for the visitors. One guide felt rather embarrassed advising the visitors not to step over the ropes demarcating the path. A ranger intervened and instructed a visitor to follow the path after he had stepped over a rope. Even after this incidence the guide didn’t stop two visitors from walking on a path that was obviously closed with visible ropes.

Three tours were either near to or within National Parks. In two cases the guides passed the National Parks without informing the tourists about their existence although the groups visited some areas of the parks. Three guides mentioned that the visited area was protected but didn’t

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3 explain what it meant e.g. the prerequisite of the protection or nature conservation. Nature
4 conservation was only a topic of focus for one out of eight guides. Protected areas were barely
5 mentioned, even once within a protected area.
6

7 Interviews with certified guides

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9 While the participant observation and documentary analysis showed scarce mention of nature
10 conservation it was a more prevalent theme in the interviews.
11

12 *I choose to tell people in the bus to stay on the paths instead of blaming the tourists for*
13 *bad behaviour in nature. Only few sentences are needed to enhance people's sense for*
14 *nature conservation. It is our duty to protect Icelandic nature. (Interview 01).*
15
16

17 Other guides were not as adamant about the duty to protect nature, giving some licence to pick
18 souvenirs.
19

20 *I teach people to walk on the paths, not to walk on the moss or the sensitive flora. I do*
21 *not allow people to take lava or rocks in much travelled parts of the country, but in the*
22 *highlands on the road's verge, it's okay. (Interview 05).*
23
24

25 Lastly some guides do not see it as their responsibility to manage the behaviour of their tourists
26

27 *I try to make it clear that we shall respect the nature by using the paths. I can't take it*
28 *on me if people decide to do what is forbidden. (Interview 04).*
29

30 Some of the interviewed guides mentioned having plastic bags in the buses to pick up litter.
31

32 *Guides need to be good role models and follow laws and regulations. I tell the guests*
33 *not to leave anything but footsteps, and only take-home memories and pictures. I pick*
34 *up trash where I walk. (Interview 06).*
35
36

37 The guides in this study, mostly saw themselves as facilitators of the tourist experience but with
38 an emphasis on service that is keeping the customers happy:
39

40 *To educate about the country and the nation, history and nature. Be the tour operator,*
41 *take care of the timing and safety if something happens. (Interview 04).*
42

43 *Create an experience for the tourist and try to make the most of the tour, enjoy, learn*
44 *and entertain. Let the people get more than expected. (Interview 02).*
45

46 *To put the information about the country and the nation in a lively form. The people are*
47 *on vacation, they shall have fun and we must keep them happy. Service is the essence of*
48 *the job. (Interview 07).*
49
50

51 The main finding from the interviews is that it seems that the guides focus on their responsibility
52 toward the tourists more than responsibility toward nature.
53

54 Documentary analysis

55 Analysis of the promotional material from the tour operators highlighted the scenery with
56 descriptions that praise the landscape and lava formations. Information about nature
57 conservation was completely absent though the title of a tour included the words "national park"
58 and some places, belonging to the relevant national park, are visited.
59
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Information packages from tour operators included e.g. number of passengers, time schedule for destinations, important phone numbers in case of emergency and only in one case pages of text about nature, history and local stories, to help the guide prepare guiding on the tour.

Table 3 shows the tour guiding curricula contribution to nature conservation and sustainability. While there is considerable emphasis on imparting knowledge about nature phenomena there is very little visible emphasis on nature conservation and sustainability with the exception of the programme at the University of Iceland, which is the newest programme. This may to some extent explain the guides' lack of attention to nature conservation and sustainability in their guiding.

Table 3: Guiding programs and their emphasis on nature conservation and sustainability.

Iceland Tourist Guide School	University of Iceland	University of Akureyri	Icelandic School of Travel
Curricula from 2004.	Annual curricula.	Curricula from 2004.	No curricula, website.
Nature conservation mentioned.	Nature conservation mentioned.	Nature conservation mentioned.	Nature conservation not mentioned.
Sustainability not visible in curricula.	Sustainability and tourism carrying capacity visible.	Sustainability not visible in curricula.	Sustainability not visible on the website.

Discussion

As nature is stated as the main reason for tourist arrivals in Iceland (Óladóttir, 2020) guides in the country should in effect, be nature guides (Weiler and Black, 2015) and nature-based tourism well developed. As Table 2 shows it seems that guides pay little attention to management of the nature and environment. Analysis of the curricula for guides according to Table 3 shows that they should have the knowledge base for guiding about Icelandic nature and nature conservation. While the knowledge base about nature is solid, there is a lack of emphasis on nature conservation and sustainability. This suggests that nature conservation has not found its way into the policy for guide education expressed in the curricula and that the nature conservation policies already in place are not enacted in guide practice. Pereira and Mykletun (2012) found similar results, indicating a missed opportunity to enhance tourism sustainability (Moscardo, 1999, 2015).

When data from participant observation and from interviews are compared, there is a mismatch between what guides interviewed say and what the guides observed do in regards to being and behaving in nature. A mixed methods approach reveals the common condition that people don't always act in accordance with their beliefs. Ap and Wong (2001) indicated that one of the guides' role is to be a facilitator, i.e. the one who knows how and when to fulfil the role as a leader, an educator, an ambassador and a host, but of these roles that of host best describes the guiding observed. The results suggest that awareness of teleological principles and nature ethics expressed in interviews is not manifested or embodied in the guiding, tour design or execution.

The guides interviewed all claimed to care for nature, but only some of them say they give their tourists information on how to behave while others say that they are not giving any instructions or forbidding anything. Education is a premise for conservation and the opportunities guides have to contribute to nature conservation lie in the guiding, particularly on the nature walks that

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3 they take with their groups –if they walk with the group. This was not always the case, which
4 meant a lost opportunity for guiding.
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6 Guides act as informal educators and at their best interpretive guides have the potential to
7 stimulate tourists' interests by raising their awareness and alter visitor behaviour, providing the
8 transformational element at which sustainable development aims i.e. through diverse tour
9 guiding styles (Tsaour and Teng, 2017). The curricula for guiding education are quite heavy on
10 imparting facts with little attention to experience design. The participant observation was often
11 of passive communication at the expense of interpretation through experience design, concept
12 development, storytelling and performing in mediation. This suggests that Icelandic guides
13 could become better at the interpretation end game (Ham, 2013) and that perhaps there is a gap
14 in their training where it comes to the teleological approach aiming at a deep engagement with
15 nature.
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19 As mentioned in the introduction, guides are hired by tour operators who have power over the
20 design of the tour. This caveat aside, our contention is that guides do have both right,
21 responsibility and occasion to promote nature conservation on their tours. The contribution of
22 the tour operators to nature conservation was negligent as there was no mention of the issue in
23 the documents received from them in the research. The interviews indicated that guides wish
24 for more dialogue with the tour operators on improving the tours, the collaboration between the
25 actors producing the tours both in terms of common interests, benefits and quality. Thus, there
26 seems to be an underexplored opportunity for collaboration on nature conservation within the
27 industry.
28
29

30 Conclusion

31
32 Maintaining a course for sustainability calls for the engagement of many stakeholders and
33 actors. Guides and tour companies offering guided tours are important stakeholders and
34 frontline actors with a unique opportunity to promote and practice nature conservation and other
35 aspects of tourism sustainability, with tourists. Hence the practice of guiding, both of tour
36 operators and guides as well as their beliefs and attitudes about nature conservation are of great
37 importance.
38
39

40 While the guides interviewed all expressed their interest in nature conservation this interest was
41 not evident on the tours observed. With few exceptions, the verbal and tacit performance of the
42 guides did not inspire to nature conservation or discuss sustainability. This must be placed in
43 context with the priorities of their employers, the tour operators. Nature conservation is absent
44 in the promotion of the tours and in the information tour operators provide their guides with.
45 Similarly, the topic is negligible in the guiding curricula.
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48 This may become a serious quality issue in guided tours and on the most popular nature
49 destinations. The fact that the guides are trained and belong to a professional organization
50 should place them in a position to rise to the challenge; provided that nature and nature
51 conservation is put on the agenda of the tour operators and in a prominent position in the
52 curricula of guide education. Tour operators in Iceland have completely free rein in how they
53 select, reward and retain guides and their responsibility in regards to nature conservation is
54 considerable.
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57 Engaging and well-designed guiding for more sustainable nature-based tourism can be achieved
58 through the joint efforts of these three parties, the guide education programmes, the tour
59 operators and the guides. Nature conservation should be a topic in the guiding curricula, tour
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3 operators must emphasise it to their guides and in their design of tours and the guides need to
4 address the topic with the tourists.
5

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For Peer Review Only

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