

After a conversation with Göran Grell, CEO of RK Travelgroup, it is a little easier to see bright on the future. Although RK Travelgroup's earnings for 2021 are projected to go from a profit of about SEK 40 million to a loss of about -20 million and they were forced to resign about 30% of the staff, he has **an incredible ability to never give up**.

RK Travelgroup is Scandinavia's leading travel wholesaler with a strong, long and respected role in the industry. Read more about RK Travelgroup: <https://www.rktravelgroup.se/om-oss/>

We know that RK's results and day form reflect the status of their customers'. Swedish tour operators have an incredibly tough time in this crisis and different segments have different challenges.

*"It is not the smartest to win, it's the fastest and most flexible one that does".
Göran Grell*

We asked two specific questions to Göran; 1) What are your **customers' primary needs** now and in the longer term? and 2) What can **Norway's suppliers do to be relevant** when relieving our travel restrictions?

1) What are your customers' primary needs now and in the longer term?

- RK has **quickly changed its priorities to be as relevant to its customers as possible** when the crisis came. The short-term need of the customers was to get help and tips on how the tour operator can survive the first phase. RK has been able to advise its customers on how to control their costs and use the support packages launched by the government. In addition, RK has worked hard with cancellations and contract negotiations with its suppliers in order to provide the most flexible and favourable terms to its customers.

- In the long term, we see that it is the **short journeys that start up first**, that it is time and distance that play a role. Our customers' target group is older, often 70+, and we now see that they are worried and will not dare to travel in the same way as before. It will be a while before they go out into the big wide world again.

- Other target groups that are getting started now are the **associations** that are slowly starting up and also the **local business community with meetings and conferences** - though with great caution.

- The fact that bus travel corresponds to the Swedish traveller's increased awareness of **sustainable travel is good** and we see that many of our customers can benefit from it when travel starts again. Here we may see **new target groups who choose bus journeys**. Families and groups with younger travellers as well as conference groups.

- Differentiating their product range in relation to their competing tour operators is important and we see **demand for packaging unique, authentic and good stories**. Meetings with people

who are local and sharing and that you as a traveller learn something new are appreciated by our customers' travellers.

- Trips where **activities are included is popular**. It is important that the activities are adapted for an older target group. Activities such as electric bicycles, Nordic Walking and walking trips are good. *Göran Grell*

2) What can Norway do to deliver on the needs of tour operators now and in the future and are we a relevant destination?

Göran says that Norway delivering on many of the factors he sees will be important in the future:

- **The short and close journey**. Norway can offer trips with short distances from Sweden, but great contrasts from what travellers can experience at home.

- **Safe traveling**. Norway is regarded as an exciting and attractive destination with many unique experiences. Because it is so close and we understand each other relatively well, Norway is also seen as a very safe country to travel to and from.

- Norway's **nature and the "Wow experience"** on offer are on many 'bucket list' and still in the first ten. This is often the primary motivation for traveling to Norway.

- **Authentic stories and meeting with people**. Norwegians and Swedes understand each other well and therefore we can easily give stories and offer meetings between people in a genuine way. But it is important to point out that we have many unique Norwegian stories to tell and many topics to relate to for an older target group; such as war history, food traditions, culture and the preserved Norwegian living countryside.

Göran Grell

Here are the takeaways from our conversation with Göran:

- **Dare to communicate, listen and be flexible** and open in dialogue with your partners – it will show you new opportunities.

- **Being available and supporting customers** in difficult times provides the basis for good business cooperation in the longer term.

- Norway is on many travellers "bucket list" and if we succeed in packing our fantastic nature with unique and authentic experiences, **we have great chances to get more guests** in the future.

- Swedes increased awareness of sustainable travel is something we believe will affect travel patterns in the near future. **It is to the advantage of destinations that are reached by transport** other than air.

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