Cold water island tourism:  
A new initiative to promote, celebrate and help develop tourism on small cold water island destinations around the world.

“We are Islands but never too far, we are Islands, Islands never been to before and we climb so high to where the wild birds soar.”

‘Islands’ — Bonnie Tyler with Mike Oldfield.
Cold water island tourism destinations of choice — making a difference: an opportunity for collaboration

CONTEXT
For many cold water maritime countries, in both the northern and southern hemispheres, their islands make a valuable contribution to the overall tourism experience and the economy.

In the Northern Hemisphere this is especially the case in most of the North Atlantic (Scandinavian, Germany, Netherlands and Baltic nations as well as Scotland, Ireland, Wales and, to a lesser extent the rest of the UK).

In terms of our understanding of the value, market demand and economic impact there has been relatively little research. Most of the published work, and indeed the focus of most travel writers, is upon ‘warm water island’ tourism. This is also the case for many of the conferences that take place on this subject.

The AIM is to redress this situation.

The ‘cold water islands’ face common tourism opportunities and challenges. There is real potential for collaboration, sharing knowledge and developing a common research agenda.

We need to raise the status of tourism in the context of economic development in maritime countries. This is best done through improving our understanding of the potential for growth in the context of:

- Market trends
- Innovation
- Investment
- Climatic issues
- Sustainability
- Accessibility

THE TIME IS RIGHT
The EU’s ‘Blue Growth Strategy’ is highlighting the importance of developing all aspects of the marine environment for economic development. This is supported by a new focus on “Cold Water Islands” as part of the EU programs 2014–2021.

Two major international conferences have recently been announced to consider future of Island communities. There is a real opportunity to influence these agendas.

For many island communities, tourism is the main stay of their economy. It is a sector in growth and offers considerable scope for enhanced sustainable development. As a result, there is now a growing interest at the level of national Governments to take advantage of these island assets.

Tourism is becoming increasingly segmented with a diversity of markets and interest groups, which increases the opportunities for cold water islands.

THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION
Most island communities have a strong heritage and cultural resources. As a result of their heritage of having to be self sufficient there is generally a good asset base of local crafts and produce creating a very compelling sense of place.

Island tourism businesses tend to be micro / SMEs. They are often marginal businesses but the cash generated is vital for the overall survival of island communities. Much of the appeal and product base is also small scale. It takes the form of special interest tourism and events, often featuring indigenous art, music, history, archeology, hand crafts and sport.

There is now a unique collaborative opportunity to DIRECTLY assist island tourism. We need to develop a robust and innovative programme of activity designed to help tourism professionals.

The potential for UHI and the Danish Centre for Coastal Tourism with NHTV to lead in this initiative is compelling. UHI has a fine reputation for action-focused research linked to a dispersed campus with representation on a number of Scottish Islands. The Danish Centre for Coastal Tourism has also pioneered research in this field.

Knowledge transfer and sharing sits comfortably with the notion of international cooperation.

At the same time there is scope to jointly develop events and festivals across a wide geographic area that can develop tourism visits. It is possible to design and develop events to be hosted at several islands - to create innovation, quality and reduce costs.

A key element of a collaborative approach is to develop fresh appropriate methods for measuring and evaluating ‘success’. In particular, there is the potential to develop a new Island ‘Livability Index’ and to understand tourism’s contribution to this ‘index’.

ORGANISING GROUP
Lars Olsen — Videncentret for Kystturisme (Denmark)
Alastair Dobson — Visit Arran (Scotland)
James Gibbs & Donna Heddle — UHI (Scotland)
Terry Stevens — Stevens and Associates (Wales)

Vision
Making small cold islands tourism destinations of choice helping to making them sustainable (financial, economic, social and environmental) and attractive places to live and work.

Mission
“Creating a unique network of cold water small island destinations in order to benefit from having a representative voice of influence and forging collaborative working and sharing practical solutions based upon successful actions and evidence.”

Aim
To give this mission with a starting point by organizing the first ANNUAL European Conference on ‘cold water island tourism’.

Objectives
— Share knowledge of successful practical projects;
— Create networks of expertise and information;
— Discuss common issues and opportunities to grow the value of tourism;
— Identify innovative solutions to underpin sustainable growth;
— Celebrate and recognise best practice project;
— Develop a common agenda for support and development;
— Promote awareness of cold islands as tourism destinations;
— Influencing eu programs and policies.

Desired outcomes
— Establishing and growing an on-going network and dialogue between destinations
— Creating a central and accessible pool of research, knowledge and case studies
— Holding regular symposia, conferences and workshops
— Promoting the interests of these destinations
So....
The aim is to create a vehicle for collaboration and networking for small cold island destinations.

Audiences – who should attend?
As delegates:
— Private sector drivers of tourism
— Investors
— Public sector policy makers
— Politicians and civic leaders
— Destination managers and marketeers
— Educationalists and researchers.

As Speakers:
— Tourism Operators
— Investors
— Public sector policy makers and implementers
— A limited number of politicians
— Destination managers
— Academics (through selection of speakers and posters from submission of a proposal/abstract)

THE CONFERENCE STRUCTURE (DRAFT)
Location: The Island of Arran, Scotland
Venue: Auchrannie Hotel / Conference Centre / Arran School
Date: 17-19th March 2015
Numbers: 150 plus speakers and sponsors

Day 1 —
Arrival, welcome, registration, reception, informal networking.

Day 2 —
Conference with keynote speeches and 3 concurrent case studies.
Conference social event based on Arran’s unique heritage and culture.

Day 3 —
A day of workshops on key subjects.

Themes
The conference defines three over-arching themes and a number of subthemes within each. These are:

i) Opportunities from Life, Culture and Heritage
— Material culture past and present
— Shared maritime heritage ‘a future for the past’
  (Vikings, the sea, trade, fishing, wars)
— Natural heritage – landscape, flora & fauna
— Island lives – real people in real places life, work, play, arts, sports)

ii) Access and sustainability
— Access and accessibility
— Policy and planning
— Sustaining uniqueness of Island life and environment
— Infrastructure for communities and businesses

iii) Business Excellence
— Segmenting our markets
— The Island Brand Portfolio
— Competitive positioning
— Creating exceptional visitor experiences
— Challenges of developing staff
— Destination management in the island context

Examples of case studies
— Arran (Scotland) food and drink
— Orkney (Scotland) Viking Heritage
— Fanoe (Denmark) event tourism
— Ameland (Netherlands) sport tourism
— Isle of Wight (events)
— Isle of Man (group tourism)
— Angelsey (Wales) renewable energy and tourism
— The Aran Islands (Ireland) The Wild Atlantic Way
— Losinj – island of vitality (Croatia)

Other elements for the event
— Conference social
— Exhibition of case studies
— Showcase of local Arran products
— Information exchange forum and networking
— Unique social media platforms to promote the event
— Publish conference proceedings and case studies
— Publish edited book
— Establish TASK GROUP to carry forward the agenda
— Establish group to organise next Conference

Potential for sponsors and affiliates
Please see website: www.cwit2015.com or contact organisers for sponsorship information.