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# The Tourist Destination Periphery in a Comparative Context: in Quebec and Northern Scandinavia

Jan O. Lundgren\*

## Introduction

The tourist phenomenon can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and for very different purposes. Since social scientists started to study leisure, recreation and tourism in earnest in the 1950s the field has become quite filled. Being a geographer, I became interested in the tourism phenomenon some 25 years ago upon my arrival to Montreal, Quebec and Canada from Sweden. The fact that I was migrating from one boreal environment to a similar one on this side of the Atlantic must have been an influence. Also, the fact that recreation and tourism - historically - had been a major factor in the landscape transformation in a region close to Montreal - the Laurentians - was living proof of the force of tourism upon the landscape - its geography, its resources, and its economy. Thus, the Laurentians - one of the older tourist regions in Canada - came to serve as a conveniently located laboratory for the observation of recreation and tourism on a regional level and in a particular landscape context.

## The purpose of this analysis

This Teoros colloquium on tourism has as its general theme the study of tourism in geographically peripheral destination conditions. The reason for this orientation is quite obvious - tourism in Canada and in Quebec usually involves travel movements centrifugal in character, starting from centrally located travel-generating areas and moving out *toward* the periphery, i.e. less populated, often uninhabited destination zones often also located toward the North. Thus, one gets the general impression, actually an erroneous one, that the built-in centrifugal power of tourist travel flows *on the whole*, is oriented toward remote and underpopulated regions, and consequently play a lesser role in centrally located destination environments, such as Hull, Montreal, Trois Rivières,

Quebec City - the economic-industrial center spine in Quebec's economy. This is of course not the case at all: the economic dimensions of the tourism phenomenon and tourist industry in many of the major urban centers are probably larger than those of more peripheral destination regions. However, *in relative terms* tourism matters more to the regional economies in peripheral destination, be they in the Eastern Townships, the Laurentians or along the two shorelines of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, including the Gaspésie, the venue for this colloquium.

The objective of this paper is to present a regional comparison of peripheral tourist destinations, the assumption being that we can benefit from experiences of tourist-based development processes that have operated - and still operate - under comparable tourist - geographic settings and in locations, where in many respects factors that impinge upon the destination region are similar, but where, nonetheless, *the regional results* have turned out differently. The methodology for this comparison is simple: *first*, a set of principal variables will be defined and their role relative to the development process will be elaborated; the *second part* of the analysis involves a short comparative overview of the characteristics of the development process as such in N. Sweden; a *third part* is more of a conclusion statement, in which «lessons» will be identified and their possible application to regional peripheries in Quebec will be evaluated. It is assumed that the principal features of Quebec's peripheral tourist development processes are well known to the reader.

The Scandinavian periphery used in this comparison includes «the Swedish Border Mountain Zone» (SBMZ) - an area, which has its most southern part approximately 400 km northwest of Stockholm. From there it stretches north for a distance of over 800 km hugging the Norwegian border, with an average depth of some 200 km. North of the Arctic Circle the area widens into a broader, rectangular space that extends all the way to North Cape in Norway.

Most of the zone resembles the Quebec wilderness zone northwest of the Ecumene settlement zone - the Canadian shield including the Laurentians. In geographic terms the SBMZ compares with the distance of Montreal - Gaspé, or Montreal - LG2, or Quebec City - Sept-Îles. However, and here the notion of periphicity enters the picture, most of the zone is accessible from a baseline of urban centers located along the Bothnian Gulf, from Gävle in the south to Luleå in the north at an average distance of 250 km - in some instances even less - indeed a manageable «approach journey» by car over a high quality road system. Further, the combined population base for the larger counties along the Bothnian Gulf shoreline amounts to approximate 800 000 inhabitants, which translates into a substantial tourist travel market. Toward the north, the mountain zone widens into the broader Nordkalotten region - an extensive territory of some 650 by 500 km, that in tourist promotional literature usually is treated as a separate area.

## The tourist periphery concept

The notion of a tourist periphery is a central concept, not simply to this colloquium but in the tourist literature in general. A few introductory comments on the concept and the way in which it has developed may be useful before starting our comparison.

The notion of periphicity is not applicable exclusively to the domain of tourism studies or tourist geography. The concept can be related to other social science related fields as well, but is then often hidden under other terms; in economics, for instance, one refers to marginality or diminishing returns; in behavioral geography - a field that touches upon aspects of consumer behavior and travel movements - one talks about «distance decay» - the power of distance over consumer travel movements; in agricultural economics, reference is often made to «marginal lands» - to mention some broader applications.

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In tourism geography the periphery concept was introduced in the mid 1950's by W. Christaller (1954 and 1964) who established the principal outbound «centrifugal» characteristic of European vacation travel. The same findings occurred in F. Cribier's *La grande migration d'été des citadins en France* (1969), which stressed the hierarchal, «pluricentral» system of travel-generating urban centres and the emergence of distinct destination peripheries as a function of urban rank size. The periphery concept thus established becomes a function of travel behavior on regional or national scales. The ultimate elevation of the same behavior to the global level was done in L. Turner/J. Ash's *The Golden Hordes* (1975) that refers to the «tourist belt which surrounds the great industrialized zones of the world» (p. 11), a phenomenon that today for the first time is «starting to merge into one giant, global Pleasure Periphery, where the rich of the world relax and intermingle».

Tourist Peripheries are not homogeneous phenomena, a fact that is easily observable both in theory and practice, as F. Rajotte and Miossec stress in their application of the centrifugal character of the tourist travel movement. Rajotte develops her differential destination zonation centered on Quebec City (1973) which actually specifies the «wilderness» recreation zone (= tourist zone); Miossec points to different kinds of destination zones surrounding a generating core, where also *the periphery* can generate tourist travellers and in the process create its own destination periphery!

### Some factors at play - Case Northern Scandinavia

For the tourism phenomenon to function in a spatial and geographic context, three functions must interact, sometimes at a high degree of coordination/integration over the tourist's travel itinerary. Pearce has identified them as basic to the tourism system - 1) *the travel-generator*, where the travel demand is produced; 2) *the transport carrier* (in the form of private/individual or bulk transport modes - the car, the train/bus, the passenger aircraft); and 3) *the tourist destination* which varies depending upon individual travel preferences. In analyzing and comparing the Scandinavian situation with that of the Quebec tourist

periphery, the above functions can serve as a useful structure.

First then, *The Tourist Resource Base* of the Northern Scandinavian tourist region differs from that of Northern Quebec, especially that of the Northshore zone in a number of ways. First, in terms of landscape and vegetation features both southern and northern sectors of the SBMZ are characterized by distinct sequential elevation zones: as the tourist visitor drives toward the mountain zone, he first traverses *an extensive, forested plateau landscape*, which in many respects resembles the whole of the Canadian Shield landscape, except the fact that it is less extensive. From a touristic resource perspective this zone has a limited outdoor recreation potential, although sometimes substantial tourist facilities have emerged. However, other factors than landscape potential often account for their existence: convenient proximity (ex.: Hammarstrand), settlement history and a certain regional/cultural significance (ex.: Jokkmokk), and even urban association (ex.: Gallivare the mining town); the *second* and *third* landscape zones takes the traveller straight into «above timberline» topography. The former mostly lacks the jagged alpine character of the Canadian Rockies and rather features a rolling, smooth topography which can easily be mastered by the hiker - a promenade wilderness if you like. North American comparisons are difficult to find: perhaps the easier parts of the peak zones of the Gaspésie would qualify, or the Mount Kathadin district of Northern Maine. The latter zone has sharper, more jagged features, especially north of the Arctic circle along the Swedish - Norwegian border where peaks reach over 1500 meters elevation with effective verticals from valley floors often in the range of 500 - 1000 meters. Still, from the point of view of the hiker or climber, even this terrain is mostly manageable without specialized mountaineering equipment in summer; with some care in trail selection the average touring skier can negotiate most of this zone as well. Other physical geographic variables give the zone its tourist appeal: extensive lake systems, which toward the north, borrow their appearance from the North Italian lakes, but on a slightly large scale add to scenery while with the lakes go parallel river systems that in theory can carry you down to the coast, from where you, the tourist, perhaps came. The seasons are distinct as in the Canadian subarctic regions, with short, six week

summers, with long shoulder seasons, a dark winter that only brightens up in March, when the skiers start to come. Summer and winter temperatures are comparable to those around Quebec City and the Lac St. Jean region perhaps with the difference being a harsher winter weather season on this side of the Atlantic.

Secondly, *a long settlement history* adds to the tourist resource base, unless one is searching the pristine environments untouched by man. The SBMZ, as it is the case also for areas outside the zone, have seen both an aboriginal population and, over the past 250 years, colonizers from the South use the lands, especially the valley floors, that often have agricultural potential. Numbers have, however, been quite small. Most of the terrain above the treeline was (and is) used by the migratory Sami and their reindeer flocks. Starting around 1900, resource industries have been active in the North in general, and have in some cases located well inside the mountain zone: water reservoirs for hydro power development were constructed in the 1960s and 1970s and as early as 1900 many rivers saw strings of hydro power plants established. The same era saw mining developments, which rarely entered the mountain zone, but were primarily located on the forest plateau - from Kiruna and Gallivare in the north to Laisvall and Boliden further south. Tourism emerged as a regional factor with the construction of strategic railways, the first phase at the turn of the century. Thus, a discreet network of small villages and periodical market places developed throughout the regions, usually linked into road networks that in turn connected with major regional centers and coastal towns. Consequently, trade and interaction could occur in both directions - inbound *and* outbound - which made the zone less of a traditional «cul-de-sac» destination. And one could always, by crossing one more mountain range and the Norwegian border descend into the magnificent fjordscape on the Atlantic side, which made for an international tourist experience - journeying literally from coast to coast. The climate is typically boreal - the Lac St. Jean-Chibougamau-Manicouagan-Sept-Îles corridor comes to mind, with summers that can occasionally be warm, and winters that are cold and crisp.

Thirdly, *the access question - the transport function* is an essential ingredient to the tourist development process. In Quebec's

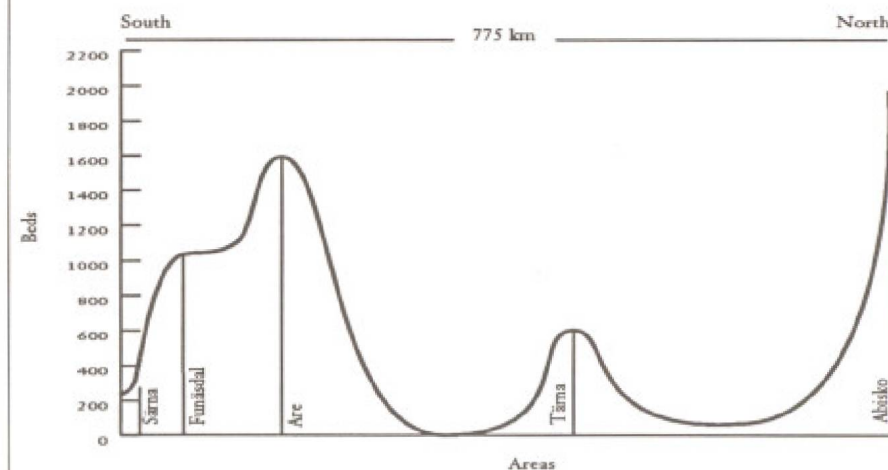


tourist space, communications lines tend to run east-west and only occasionally perpendicular to the Ecumene settlement corridor. There are of course exceptions as of recent decades and also earlier: *le Petit Train du Nord* going into the Laurentians, the Chibougamau rail link and more recently (1952) the Sept-Iles-Schefferville line. The strategic access links by rail into the SBMZ were initiated around 1900 - the Storlien-Trondheim connection in 1902, the Lulea-Kiruna - Narvik line in 1904. Major road building in the 1970's produced a number of internordic travel loops catering to the motorist, which in some instances have produced too much traffic into or through ecologically sensitive areas. Thus, in the postwar period the whole zone has opened up to tourist access on a new level, which also has increased the appeal of visiting.

Fourthly, *destination area services* represent with the destination as such the important third function that must be in place for the basic tourism system to function. Here rests perhaps a fundamentally different and unique feature in the SBMZ which requires a bit more of an elaborate evaluation than simple calculations of bed capacities and similar standard procedures. Here we have to delve into not only the existence of facilities but also the organizational and development structures that have brought them into place. In peripheral areas this is a critical factor, because a proper backward integration with an effective marketing organization is essential factor for the successful venture on a large scale. The voluntary National Touring Membership Associations enter picture not only in the Swedish North but also in the Finnish and to some degree the Norwegian!

The STF (the Svenska Turistforeningen/ the Swedish Touring Association) and the equivalent FTF (for Finland) is a membership organization established in 1885 as a idealistic promoter of tourism as a way of discovering your country: «Know your country» is the STF motto. From the start the STF was a truly vertically integrated tourist travel organisation, incorporating market-based travel agency retailing, transport services *and* destination area services in the form of accommodation in both simple and more well equipped facilities. In addition, the STF acted as the recreational organizer by developing the year-round hiking trail system that today spans the whole of the SBMZ, from north

Figure 1 : Swedish Border Mountain Zone Transect



to south, the most well-known part being the King's Trail that connects the Abisko Station with the Hemavan Hostel, a distance of some 300 km - the bulk above the timberline. The organisation is well represented throughout the lodging industry in the area, with both major resort stations (fully fledged resorts) and with the simpler hostel operations, the latter dispersed across the whole country. Of the approximately 10 000 beds in the SBMZ region some 10 % are STF owned, not a dominant factor by any stretch of imagination, nor for that matter the most expensive or luxurious, but nevertheless with a strong market profile aimed at the broad middle-class market segment, and with a strong dose of ecotourism in the promotion. The «stations» are strung out throughout the mountain zone and vary in size but are above average size. The STF stations and the considerable number of other types of accommodation enterprises - some 70 operations altogether - represent the bulk of service industry investments in the zone, discounting other kinds of facility investments - notably ski lifts - and give an idea of the significance of this mountain zone as a tourist destination area. The fact that the operations, with a exception of the Storlien and Are-regions, are fairly evenly dispersed from North to South is an indicator both of the even tourist landscape attractions along the zone and of the generally good access: the baseline cities on the coast play an important role here in alleviating the poorer access that exists with the larger metro-

politan market further south, notably with the Central Swedish metropolitan market.

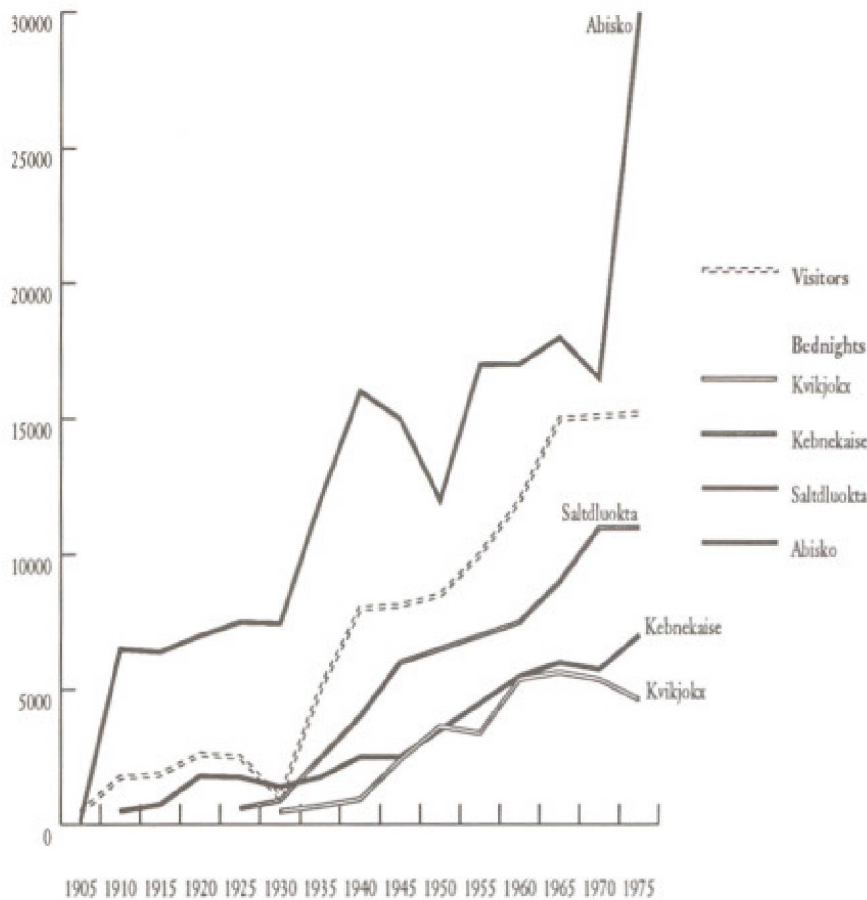
The final point that should be made relates to actual landscape usage of the zone for outdoor recreation - an aspect in which the STF traditionally has been heavily involved. The trail system referred to above was in its original form developed by the STF and it is only in recent years that the maintenance of the system has been transferred to public regional authorities. In addition to the trail markings for thousands of kilometers of trails developed by the STF, a self-service shelter cabin system along some of the more heavily used links in the system has also been set up, which ensures a certain minimum safety, and comfort, to users encountering bad weather conditions or simply in need of more protected overnight facilities.

*The development process as such* for the SBMZ constitutes the final part of our analysis, in which we try to bring together the various functions, especially the accessibility question and the matter of the development of facilities. Although we are discussing the whole region there is particular focus upon the northern part, where the SBMZ and the Nordkalotten areas overlap, i.e. in the North, the area that actually saw the initial STF developments already at the turn of the century.

The development of tourist facilities - accommodation, trail systems and also in-



Figure 2 : Development in visitor volume at STF Stations : 1905-1975



ternal regional transport services encompasses a long period of a deliberate and very systematic build-up. The Abisko station, for instance, was first established around 1900 and came slowly to emerge as a central hub for a system of accommodation services of more rustic kind within one or two days hiking distance from the Abisko base and railway stop. In other parts of the SBMZ comparable developments occurred, always relying on some other agency to do the major capital investment in transport, usually for reasons that had little to do with tourism. Thus, the rail line Lulea-Kiruna - Narvik (Norway) serviced the Lapland mining operations - the most profitable part of the whole national railway network; passenger trains were mobilized separately only when there was a reasonable market demand in summer and winter. Only in 1985 was the motorway connection with

the Norwegian coast and Narvik established, a fact that has altered quite drastically the tourist business for the area. The rail line further south was a regular international service between (Stockholm) - Ostersund - Trondheim in Norway, which partly serviced the tourist trade, but here also there existed a regular freight operation, which most likely made the whole line economically viable. Toward the southern part of the SBMZ the tourist traffic relied traditionally on the regular road network, with roads usually linking up with the Norwegian network. Thus they permitted «roundtrip» travelling by car - a not unimportant market factor during the summer season.

The travel arrangements for the tourists varied. On, one hand, he could arrange his own independent rail travelling and ac-

commodation. However, as the STF operated on the retail level providing total inclusive charter arrangements on an individual or a group basis such economical packages were promoted with vigor. As a consequence, the total price could be kept at a very competitive level, in spite of fairly long journeys to destinations. With a few exceptions, through most of the decades leading up to World War II, the type of a tourism that flourished was of rustic type - summer hiking from the various mountain stations over the trail system and the same on skis in winter. Numerous methods were used to mobilize new market groups. Thus, in the mid 1920s, city schools started large scale group travel into the SBMZ, both in its southern part and in the Nordkalotten area. The STF was sometimes involved in this, but it eventually developed into a business entity in its own right.

Needless to say, with transport infrastructure - and services - in place, with active promotion of group arrangements and the activation of the school market the SBMZ emerged as a major tourist destination featuring a wide range of destination area services. The geographic extent - and variation - of the bed capacity can be seen in the South-North geographic transect (fig. 1). Even if the transect simplifies the geographic distribution pattern it nevertheless shows the massive build-up in the southern area - a build-up that has relied upon convenient overnight train access from Stockholm into the Ostersund-Are-Storlien corridor. Presently 1/3 of the total SBMZ bed capacity along the transect is actually found in this area, which testifies to the power and importance of comfortable and - in relative terms - inexpensive approach travel costs to peripheral destination areas. In fact, accessibility is crucial on a broader scale, which can be seen in the heavy concentration of accommodations to the southernmost 1/3 of the transect's 775 km that holds almost 70 % of the total accommodation capacity.

The middle zone of the transect is by comparison practically devoid of any major resort developments, which partly can be explained by the more cumbersome transport arrangements required to reach this area, and which therefore can only rely upon tourism generated from the smaller coastal towns, insufficient for truly substantial facility developments.



Outstanding in the distribution pattern is the Abisko area in the far North, not simply by the remarkable capacity of over 2000 beds - (21 % of the total) as such but rather by the peripheral location relative to travel-generating markets. The three major resorts in this remote corner of the SBMZ have bed capacities above 400 on the average, provide practically year round services and cater more than any other operation in the mountain zone to the distant foreign market - the European continent in particular. Still, it is also a popular destination for the coastal city region around Lulea (over 100 100 inhabitants) and for the regional population centered on smaller towns closer to the mountain zone - Kiruna and Gallivaare in particular. The development of the Abisko STF Station reads a bit like a developers dream. As Fig. 2 demonstrates, Abisko, combined with some of the other STF operations of more modest size located in the same area northwest of Kiruna, have featured a fairly consistent growth, with only occasional drops in guest volume due to the war years and to the fate of many resort facilities - fire. Still, it is clear that the approach of modest medium-priced, but well-equipped large-scale facilities, located in such a way that approach travel costs could be successfully reduced through group arrangements during the early development decades, eventually established the STF mountain station system in the «mind of the market». The scale economy that could be achieved by rail transport concentrated the tourist flow upon a few destinations in this area, which in turn made possible a below-average type of pricing policy, which *in turn* provided the chance for a continuous momentum in the promotion and development processes. Abisko, through the decades, and the other facility developments in the same area demonstrate that it is indeed possible to provide both comfort and a outdoors tourism experience in the competitive world of tourism - even in remote locations.

### And how does this compare with Quebec's tourist periphery?

The SBMZ has here served as an example of a real world destination area development *on a substantial scale* in a peripheral destination situation and obviously relates to the theme of this colloquium. What, then can be gleaned from the case pre-

sented and what may, to a degree be relevant to peripheral destinations in Quebec?

To begin with, it must perhaps be stated, that boreal areas in different parts of the world are not necessarily comparable. There are major differences in the Tourist Resource Base composition which must be recognized. Thus, the Quebec periphery is topographically not as imposing as the SBMZ, with admittedly certain exceptions, such as the Gaspé and the Torngat; further, the seasonal climate variations are sharper in Quebec than even the northernmost part of the SBMZ: the winter lows are deeper, the summer highs are shorter, which affects the economic viability for service industry operations; thirdly, with a few exceptions, the SBMZ has a settlement history that dates back through the centuries and embraces most of the territory with sedentary agriculture and low order urban centers. So, the tourist experience will never be an exclusive wilderness experience.

The transport function has developed differently and works differently. The role of the transport infrastructure stands out. The principal areas of development in the SBMZ were highly dependent upon *bulk passenger transport (= train) services*, which tended to direct - and *concentrate* - the tourist inflows to one or two areas. Thus, facility development could almost be guaranteed a substantial flow of tourists. The flow was less dispersed which in turn meant that one could achieve a better economy scale for accommodation services. Third, the role of a vertically integrated business organisation is critical: the STF had a stake *both* in resort facilities in the destination *and* in the retailing of the same resorts through its travel agency system throughout the national market. Thus, it was in the organisation's interest to *produce* travel arrangements that were *competitive*.

Further, but harder to prove: the STF could achieve intra-organisational savings to a greater extent than independent commercial operations. The final factor - important for the STF - was its membership population, that had a direct interest in the particular kind of tourism promoted by the STF. Membership solidarity was important both in the early years but also later, when additional facilities complemented the old ones. The independent

resort operations had a much tougher situation - a situation that resembles the Quebec situation much more. Here, the resort operations must sell their services on their own - a costly operation, where one can never be sure to hit the market right. In contrast, the STF sales campaign has even today a captive market of some 400 000 members to direct the promotion and the marketing toward. No comparable arrangement exists in Quebec and definitely not for peripheral destinations. Ultimately, the Scandinavian market is based on not only a high per capita income, which generates tourist travel as such, but also on a long legal holiday period of a minimum of five weeks. Thus, it is possible for households to organize two or even three special vacation arrangements. As a result, the tourist dollars are more dispersed and can therefore reach into peripheral destinations. In the Quebec economy, in contrast there are built-in constraints that make tourist travel into peripheral destinations less common. If you only have *one* vacation period, then you play it safe! And under such conditions what is the purpose of going to the remote periphery? Nah, let's go South!!! *f*

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