

## Nordic Insights - Christina Guggenberger Eps 18

**Satu:** [00:00:01] Welcome to Nordic Insights.

**Satu:** [00:00:03] How do you build an award winning travel destination for a nice segment? My guest, Christina Guggenberger, the co-founder of Stockholm LGBT, has 25 plus years experience in creating successful award winning marketing campaigns for the city of Stockholm. We discuss her successful career progression and what have been the winning strategies for Stockholm to make it one of the most diverse and inclusive destinations in the world for the LGBT community.

**Satu:** [00:00:39] Let's welcome Christina.

**Satu:** [00:00:44] Hello, Christina. Good morning to Stockholm. Lovely to have you here as my guest.

**Christina:** [00:00:49] Hello, Satu, it's wonderful to connect with you.

**Satu:** [00:00:52] So how are things in Stockholm? You are turning into autumn and this winter is not there yet. But the autumn should be very lovely in Stockholm.

**Christina:** [00:01:02] But Autumn is my favorite period in Stockholm because of the colors, this particular very dark blue, but very intensive blue sky and all the colors on the trees. But we are heading towards winter and it's getting colder.

**Satu:** [00:01:17] Well, autumn has been also my my favorite time. First of all, if you can tell us our our listeners a little bit about yourself and your background.

**Christina:** [00:01:28] Well, I'm born and I'm living in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, and I've been working with the hospitality and marketing my whole life almost over 30 years. And my first job ever was actually looking after 4000 US and Canadian Boy Scouts when they visited Stockholm before going to a jamboree in Norway.

**Satu:** [00:01:53] Oh, my goodness. That's a handful. Yeah, yeah.

**Christina:** [00:01:57] That was a handful. I can tell you that was hard work, 4000 boys, but it was a lot of fun and I learnt a lot, actually.

**Christina:** [00:02:06] And another memorable work I had, it was that the Ericsson, the phone company, when they celebrated their 100th year, 100 year anniversary, they invited people from their most important clients from all over the world. And we had to set up a full program with interesting things to do and take care of them. That was a bit different from the Boy Scouts, but that was, I can tell you, much harder work being passionate about my hometown, Stockholm, and I really wanted to work with with the city. So then I started to work with the marketing organization for the city. Today, it's called Visit Stockholm and Doing Different Marketing Projects.

**Christina:** [00:02:49] And then one of the first thing I did was to be part of creating and developing a press department for Stockholm to be more visible within the international media, travel media, of course. And I would say that our big breakthrough came for Stockholm when we were the European cultural capital in 1998. That meant a lot for Stockholm, you know, spreading the word about our capital.

**Satu:** [00:03:19] It was very successful, wasn't it?

**Christina:** [00:03:21] Very, very successful. And I think for destination, that was a really good thing back in the days to be a culture capital because you had a lot of focus on interesting media that wanted to come and spread the word.

**Christina:** [00:03:33] And Stockholm has always been perceived as. Best during summertimes with with a very, very light night, the long, long days. So we have a lot of visitors during summertime and when I got the opportunity to join the team and our mission was to only focus to market Stockholm for the winter period, for the off and shoulder seasons. So we did that for three years. And that was also a big change for us, because from that time on, we are really all year round city with destination. So that was also very interesting. And after that I go there. I was the marketing manager also within the system for the southern Europe, for Italy, Spain, France was my markets as well as Russia. So I did a lot of traveling. I met a lot of people. And it was during one of these trips on affair in Italy, actually, where I met colleagues that work and targeted the LGBT travelers. And I thought, this is what I want to develop for Stockholm, because

Stockholm is the perfect destination for our core values are to be open and welcoming diversity and respect. Yes. You know, it's one thing to say that you are gay welcoming.

**Christina:** [00:05:03] It's a totally other thing to be part of the global LGBT community. Mm. I started to talk with my boss and say this is really something that we should do, it will strengthen the branding of. We have to do this. And it's also a very interesting target segment because the LGBT travel, there are so many surveys, they are saying that they are very affluent travelers. Yes, they they are also very loyal consumers. They have repeat visits if they like a place and they are also transacting. So it is in many ways a very interesting segment to target. So in 2005, I was able I got the go ahead to start a project who are stuck on gay and lesbian network. The mission and the aim was to have partners within the travel industry in Stockholm that would put up with time and of course, also money to build up like a platform of know how to make marketing strategies and communications. So I was able to get, you know, starting maybe with 10 partners, but growing up to thirty, thirty five partners within hotels, restaurants, attractions, of course, the Stockholm gay community. We had our allies working with our allies.

**Satu:** [00:06:28] But was it hard to, first of all, get get the go ahead to how long would it take you to do that? And also from from your management and so buying from stakeholders. So what was that experience like for you?

**Christina** [00:06:42] First of all, I had a hard time to get a go ahead to start a project because, you know, we are living in countries where you respect other people for who they are and they didn't understand why should we have a marketing project targeting the LGBT traveler? Because everybody is welcome here, everybody. But the thing is that I always said it's not what you have to think. It's not where are you going to? It's why you're traveling from. What do this travel group have in the back package? What do they have? What do they bring? Maybe they come from countries where they are not respected. Maybe they come from countries where they can't be and show their love for who they love. So it's very, very important to understand where the traveler travels from, where they come from. And also know I didn't actually have a problem with partners. You have to build slowly because it's also I have to show what I can deliver, that I can handle a project like this, that I can set goals and deliver on goals. But it's I would say it's not everybody could join the project. I really wanted to have products that could

deliver for the segment what the LGBT traveler are looking for. And also one very important point was that we had like call sensitivity training. I had trainings on dos and don'ts to think about when you welcome gay travelers. It's not that I mean, the gay traveler, they want to have what all travelers want. They want to feel safe. They want to feel comfortable. And there are no easy to to make them to say something that you don't mean, which is a bad thing. But but you put the question. So the guests captain uncomfortable. So the sensitivity training has been also very crucial. And that was also very important that my partners took part in the when we had the symposium, some sensitivity training for that.

**Satu:** [00:08:46] You had to do a lot of research, obviously, to learn yourself all this. So how did you go about finding all of this information and doing the research?

**Christina:** [00:08:56] The research was more when I travel and met people because in the beginning I was still handling the Southern Europe and Russia market. And I met a lot of people, you know, in the travel industry. And many of my colleagues were LGBT within the Rainbow family. And I learnt a lot from them, you know, how they experienced when they travel, also seen work and but my passion and my really what I read my passion was that Stockholm is the perfect destination because we have these very, very important core values. And that was the thing that I built the project. And also, you should know that also with the partnerships, many almost all of my partners, they also joined the project because they understand that it was business. They could have business, of course, but it was also important for their branding, not only towards clients coming from all over the world, but also for the people, internally, for the people working there, because they have a lot of people that work within the community. And it was important for the company to show that we we stand behind you. We are proud to welcome, LGBT travelers, and we are proud to be within, you know, an ally to the LGBT do.

**Satu:** [00:10:18] So, there were many reasons you're selling points that we're providing totally new opportunity for the city, but also totally new opportunities for all of these companies and suppliers that are we're part of it to show that and care and pull corporate social responsibility angle of it. So, yeah, that's very interesting.

**Christina:** [00:10:38] Yeah. You should know. It's also difficult to you know, you have you have goals, you have set up goals and you have a budget to work with. And for the LGBT know, usually you say, oh, we have X amount of hundreds of thousand coming from France to spend three days in Stockholm. But you can't measure if they are from France and LGBT people, you don't do that kind of statistics. So that has also been difficult for me. Also, when it comes to partners, how can I how can I prove that we are doing a good job and that we are successful with the segment? So we have to find other kinds of measures to to develop?

**Satu:** [00:11:22] Yes. So because it's never ending cycle of of utilizing new technologies and strategies and search optimization, advertising and promotional campaign. So it's it's very challenging. And of course, because the the Travellers', you know, they're changing a lot. The the the market is shifting a lot. So I'm sure all this this time that you've developed, it has a lot of things have changed, of course, as well. I'm sure.

**Christina:** [00:11:50] Of course, when Stockholm started in 2005, we were one of few cities that really did like marketing activities specifically towards the LGBT travelers. And we were the only ones that have been like a partner network working so very closely with the travel industry to have this long term commitment. In the beginning, I had like, you know, I had to work like one year with one a budget for a year. And you didn't know next year, oh, you have to start again to get your partners on board. But the thing was that the project grows so much. So in the end, this is stuck on my bosses. They said, no, this is very important. We do this three year project and this is what you can do full time. So you know it because we were so we were so successful actually also that there were so many partners that really wanted to be part of the project.

**Satu:** [00:12:49] So how did you did you measure your success? Because you said it's hard to measure it in a way.

**Christina:** [00:12:55] You can't. You can't. You can't count bednights. That's impossible. So what we did when we measured, we worked. One focus was also to build a very strong global network with media, with, say, important LGBT networks, organizations, to have them as our allies.

**Christina:** [00:13:16] So and also that was one thing. So we measured a lot with media results. How often and how much did Stockholm show in different media for the segment? But also our partners could see an increase in business.

**Christina:** [00:13:35] They could really measure that. They saw within different periods that they had a lot of LGBT visitors.

**Satu:** [00:13:45] Oh, that's great.

**Christina:** [00:13:46] And also what we did was to really promote Stockholm within the global network was that we were pitching for because there are always different you know, you are awards. So we pitched for a lot of awards to be the best gay romantic destination. And we won the British LGBT award, which is all LGBT people can vote for their best destination. And we were competing with Paris, with Miami, you know, big, big destination and stuck on one. So we did that. We had a lot of awards that we can show that Stockholm is really visible and people really want to go that.

**Satu:** [00:14:32] Yeah, and you got the the feedback from actual actual customers. Yeah, that's great. That's the testing.

**Satu:** [00:14:48] What do you think are the main reasons that you've been so successful would have been those highlights that you think that has made this project so successful?

**Christina:** [00:15:00] I think that Stockholm from the beginning, you know, when in 2005 when LGBT promotion was actually more gay promotion towards the gay community with the guys with their breast muscles for the advertising, we didn't do that at all. You know, with all the rainbow flags and stuff. We started out with black and white advertising and having beautiful photos of Stockholm in black and white. And we realized that within the segment there are so many segments and we targeted the lesbian. So we were actually the first city to provide lesbian guide and official lesbian guide, which we were you know, we had a tremendous breakthrough within the lesbian travelers.

**Christina:** [00:15:52] So and also we did campaigns like leading ladies and really targeted toward the lesbian. And that was, I think, our biggest success.

**Christina:** [00:16:02] Oh, that's great, because we got yeah, we got really recognition for that. I think we were one of the first. Absolutely. Destinations that realized that you can't attract ladies traveling with showing off bare breasted men and just talk about gay travel.

**Satu:** [00:16:21] Yes, and so what do you think are those features that that really attracts gay community to Stockholm? So, you know, what are they like in Swedish and Nordic characteristics that you think that are so attractive for Stockholm to be so attractive destination?

**Christina:** [00:16:41] I think LGBT travelers are looking for the same thing as all travelers, but also to be safe. And what I think with Stockholm is the beauty Stockholm. That's what I hear. I get so I have had so many journalists coming and well, when they talk back with me, it's it's the beauty and it's also, you know, with the water and the green areas and that it's safe and that it is really open. And the diversity we have no such as a gay neighborhood, it's very integrated. Everything that is what I get the people really like about Stockholm that we don't have, like a gay neighborhood. It's integrated. They feel very welcome. We have also targeted a lot of same sex families because it's to some destination. It is a big problem or it's more difficult to travel as far as to two moms with the kids or to dads with the kids. So we have targeted a lot of the family. And their experience is that it's it's very integrated, it's very safe and it's beautiful. And, you know, like either you travel and you're super interested in eating good with good food or you're super interested in culture or just have a short city break and.

**Christina:** [00:18:00] Do the most, and that's exactly what LGBT travelers also want to do, and I think, you know, as I said in the beginning, it's a big difference to say that you are gay welcoming or to be a part of the global LGBT community.

**Satu:** [00:18:16] Yes, I studied know the website, which is great, because, for example, it talks about the gay friendly hotels and restaurants and gives lots of experiences and places and things to do, which is which is really targeted initially to community. So

you've done a great job. Now, you said that you run the project about 10 years. First for the city of Stockholm.

**Christina:** [00:18:43] Yeah, exactly. For the city of Stockholm. The project ran for 10 years and we were very successful. I mean, Stockholm was in the end, we were between five and top between five and 10, top destination in Europe for LGBT people to visit. We didn't target the whole world with the budgets. You have to, to be specific, what kind of markets you want to work. So our main markets are and was U.K., Germany and the UK because that's our major markets for Stockholm in general. So they decided to for different reasons to close down the project. So I stopped working and I did for two years. I did. I started I wanted to start to work fundraising. But then the Stockholm gay community and also my old partners saw that Stockholm was declining, wasn't visible within for the for the segment. And, you know, to be relevant, you have to be out there talking and working with the ones you want to attract. So in two thousand and eighteen, I found it together with the gay community in Stockholm, a new project, next level project, Stockholm LGBT and most of my old partners joint, you know, hotels, restaurants, attractions, also the gay community. That's crucial, I think, to work with the gay community, to have them in the back to work with us, because even though not everybody travels for big pride events, Stockholm has the biggest pride event in all of the Nordic countries. And it's the biggest yearly event in Stockholm, actually counting to people. So you have to have them because maybe you want to project, develop, have new things to offer. It's not that everybody is coming, but it's really a reason to go that they know that you have events specifically targeted for the segment. So we started and you can say that we are the Rainbow family in Stockholm and we are working with promoting Stockholm towards the LGBT community, but also for all four, because our lives and families and friends are very, very important. Also to me, I work with.

**Satu:** [00:21:08] Oh, that's great. And so the project is going strong. And of course, because of the covid now everything is on hold. But I'm sure when after covid things will pick up again.

**Christina:** [00:21:21] So it covid because it's interesting, we had we are running this project two year period. This was a new period, a new two year period because we had run 2018, 2019, and now we started again for two years with the Stockholm LGBT project. And we had set, of course, a marketing plan, you know, with plans on how to

work, which is how to invite media and everything. And we have to revise, like everybody, our whole marketing strategy. So instead of bringing media in to Stockholm, we have been working so for many years and we have this strong network.

**Christina:** [00:21:58] We got our old friends with the media ambassadors to really share everything that they had done in Stockholm. We had them to make like tell us why they missed Stockholm so much. They wanted to come back to Stockholm. And that was, you know, it was like ten different influencers from different parts of the world that really Reshare. So we have to work with them in another way. We haven't stock market in Stockholm, but we really have to see new ways in working.

**Satu:** [00:22:28] You know, it's fantastic. So what would you say that out of all this, what has been your greatest challenges and obstacles throughout this project?

**Christina:** [00:22:40] The greatest challenges is to build a partnership. It's a challenge to have partners that also are dedicated to and commit themselves, both with budgets, but also with time, because it takes time to, you know, to to be on the scene and be on the market, be part of a marketing strategies and communications. I think that is the big thing, to build very strong partnerships and to get your partners to begin to understand. The things that I said in the beginning, it's where people are travelling from, not where they are going. That is why it is so important to do sensitivity training. Really tell the LGBT travelers out there that you are here and you support and you understand what their preferences are. I think that's that's a challenge to build that strong network today. I mean, there are so many destinations that targeting this segment because it is an affluent segment and that there is a lot of business to get. So the competition is super hard working against markets and cities like Madrid, Paris, big cities that have a huge amount of money and budget to work with that that's that's a challenge. Of course, I am happy because when we started this new project like that, I founded with with the so-called gay community, this is Stockholm. Realize that this is important. So they are actually today supporting this project and are my biggest partner in terms of economy and commitment.

**Satu:** [00:24:26] That's great if you think about destination and marketing and niche marketing in general. So some of those destinations that want to develop something similar, what kind of advice you could give them for them that, you know, how can you

make something so successful that you've been able to make? So what what are the main things that they should to focus on?

**Christina:** [00:24:52] The main thing is that you have to be a welcoming destination or you have to respect for who they are. Work with the gay community. I think that's crucial. You need the network, you need to understand how the gay community in your destination works. What is you know, what are the major things that is going on? Maybe to look into something that you can work together with to develop some new events. Also, it's important to give back to a community that's important. I think that's that's crucial. And to understand where people are traveling from, not where they are traveling to not being self-conscious that, you know, we respect everybody and we are lucky to live here or have this destination. You have to understand where people are traveling from.

**Christina:** [00:25:47] And also, I think it's important to offer for your for your partners or the network education, have education, you know, to learn, because every year we have like, you know, we invite people to talk from all over the world. You need to know how does it look out there? How is the situation? What is what are the trends? How is it how can you see your clients more comfortable when they are doing checking in or. It's small things, but very, very important. It's about actually it's about it's about who I am, not about the people that are coming. You have to really look into yourself.

**Satu:** [00:26:25] When you think about Nordic thinking, how would you define that? How in your opinion, Nordic thinking is kind of different than maybe in most of or many of the other Western countries. What do you think is some of the ways that Nordic things are differently, different?

**Christina:** [00:26:43] I think that we are I think we are brought up to be we have a lot of responsibility on your own.

**Christina:** [00:26:51] You are part of a society and you are part of a society, but you are also responsible for all in the society.

**Christina:** [00:27:00] You know, we are we have we are lucky. We have we have the freedom to roam around. We have a lot of nature, but we are also responsible to keep

that nature clean and to see it's like in a very sustainable way of being brought up. I think you are part of a society, but you have a big responsibility for this society to be able to deliver what you want. I think also actually that is why this covid thing that we that you can put on all inhabitants in Sweden, it's your responsibility not to spread this disease. You have to take responsibility. And of course, we have like a Social Security that could could manage for that. But and also this with that we are human rights is very, very important. We you have to respect people for who they are, no matter what kind of religion, what kind of sexual orientation, what kind of from where you are from the world, what kind of color on your eyes or whatever it it's I think that's something that it's deep rooted in most of us.

**Christina:** [00:28:10] Yes. Diversity is definitely the group. Yeah. Diversity. Exactly.

**Satu:** [00:28:16] You said that you got great results and great awards and many of the awards were all with this project. You keep working it. So what's the next phase? So next year to three years, how do you see this project to develop and what are there any any new things coming up? And what are you what are you working on now.

**Christina:** [00:28:37] For for this project? What we had planned for this year was to really because we have been working a lot with media, you know, to put stock on back on the map and to really show our partners and to build up our website with these inspirational text and stuff like that. And we really got a big breakthrough. So this year we had and we have got also, you know, requests now from the sales from from your agents to have, you know, to more package. How can we sell stock? So our the big change this year was really to target all of the sales, not only the medium spread the information, which is we have to rethink for this year. But but I think that is more to facilitate bookings for to come to Stockholm. I think that was one major thing.

**Christina:** [00:29:27] And also to still continue to focus on families, to attract families, because Stockholm is a very good also very good city for or all kinds of families. I mean, there are so many things for kids. And so I think that was also one thing that we really wanted to extend and work harder with more with LGBT families.

**Satu:** [00:29:49] Yes. People who now from the gay community or anyone really who wants to travel to Stockholm, where can they go for find all these fabulous information, things to do and see and where?

**Christina:** [00:30:01] Stay, etc. I think our website, Stockham, LGBT dotcom is a very, very good, because you have you can it's eight percent of all our partners, of course, with so you can have direct links and book directly with with the different hotels and find out about restaurants and stuff like that, but also with inspirational text from different themes. What can you do, what can you see, who can you contacts. And there are also B2B pages to to get in touch. If you want to either cooperate with us or if you want to do a book, it's great.

**Satu:** [00:30:33] And you saw that there's also Instagram page, Instagram page four for you. And so you're also very strong on social media.

**Christina:** [00:30:42] That is our communications channels, Instagram, Facebook, of course.

**Christina:** [00:30:47] But we work so very, very closely with both influencer and traditional media within the LGBT. And also I think it's important not only to focus on LGBT media, but also to be visible for the LGBT travelers, but in mainstream media.

**Satu:** [00:31:04] Yes. Yes, of course. Well, congratulations for your absolutely fantastic project. And let's hope that we will go back to will this new normal and we can start traveling again. And I'm sure that there's also a lot of people from from Australia and from this this side of the world, you know, would love to visit Stockholm very soon.

**Christina:** [00:31:26] You have Australians coming before covid anyhow. But it's we want to have more people from Australia.

**Christina:** [00:31:34] It's a lot of Swedish people travelling to Australia, especially when you have finished school and you want to do like it's very common among young people in Sweden to go for a year abroad and travel around. And there are so many young people going to Australia to work and to to visit for a year. But I suppose you have met them.

**Satu:** [00:31:53] Yes. So let's hope that the borders will open again and we can all travel very soon. But thank you so much. It is really interesting to learn about this project and you know how you really have been able to develop the Stockholm is a great destination for the LGBT community. So congratulations once more and hope you have a fabulous weekend also there in Stockholm.

**Christina:** [00:32:19] Yeah, the same to you, Satu. Thank you very much for letting me have this opportunity. Really. Thank you.