

American Swedish Institute



Findings from Interviews with Nordic Handcraft, Nordic Table, and Specialty Tours Participants

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Summary and recommendations

From May-July 2020, Wilder Research examined participant perceptions related to three of ASI's programs: Nordic Handcraft, Nordic Table, and Specialty Tours. Nordic Handcraft workshops allow participants to explore crafting with various materials, such as wood, textiles, birch bark, glass, and more. Nordic Table workshops allow participants to prepare and share a meal together as well as learn about the role that food plays in our lives. Lastly, Specialty Tours refers to private group tours of special exhibits and specific areas of the museum and facilities.

In total, we conducted 19 interviews (7 with Nordic Handcraft participants, 6 with Nordic Table participants, and 6 with Specialty Tours participants). These interviews focused on participants' perceptions of the workshop or tour they participated in, their motivations for participating in the workshop or tour, and their ideas for improving or changing workshops or tours in the future. The findings from these interviews suggest a number of recommendations for ASI. These recommendations include:

1. Elevate and more deeply engage instructors and guides. All respondents talked about the importance of the instructors and guides for their workshop or tour experience; a number of respondents said that they signed up for a workshop because they had previously taken workshops with the instructor or otherwise knew of their work. To continue growing the Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table programming in particular, we recommend that ASI elevate their instructors as well as intentionally engage instructors in the long-term planning of ASI's programming.

In regard to elevating instructors, ASI should consider pursuing a digital and print writing series comprised of short articles authored by recent or regular instructors. These articles could focus on upcoming workshops that the instructor is teaching, or on other parts of the instructor's life or practice (many respondents appreciated knowing about their instructor's life and work outside of the particular workshop they attended).

By "intentionally engaging" instructors, we mean ensuring that they have a voice in planning conversations regarding the future of Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table programming. We expect that doing so will result in stronger relationships between ASI and its instructors and promote instructor retention. We also expect that such engagement will provide ASI staff with insight into the kinds of workshops that instructors are most interested in teaching, and will identify where instructors' interests align with ASI's goals.

2. Focus on instructor and guide development. As noted in the previous recommendation, instructors and guides were immensely important for participants' experiences. As such, we recommend that ASI focus on the development of instructors and guides based on

participant feedback regarding what kind of instruction or teaching they appreciated. In particular, participants identified a few approaches of effective instructors and guides, including engaging the participants, using varied and individualized instruction techniques, effectively structuring and organizing workshops or tours, and showcasing and sharing their technical expertise.

At minimum, we recommend that ASI provide information to instructors and guides regarding the importance of incorporating these and similar approaches into their workshops and tours. We expect this information might be particularly useful when instructors and guides are planning their workshop or tour, or when they are revising their instruction or engagement plans from previous workshops or tours.

We also recommend that ASI consider developing an instructor and guide development approach that is focused on 1) recruiting and developing early career instructors/practitioners, 2) maintaining and sharing the expertise of seasoned instructors/practitioners, and 3) professionalizing the field of experiential craft and food workshop design and delivery. From our interviews with respondents, it is clear that instructors often teach at multiple organizations; we expect that this experience results in instructors having a deep level of knowledge and a robust skillset for providing instruction in a variety of settings and for a variety of audiences. An instructor and guide development program could serve as a way to centralize and share this expertise and to develop the next generation of instructors and guides.

3. Diversify how participants learn about workshops and tours. The majority of respondents said that they learned about ASI's workshops and tours through ASI's printed materials, such as the course catalog. While it should be noted that most respondents were ASI members (and so were perhaps more likely to prefer receiving information via the mailed catalogs), we recommend that ASI pursue strategies to diversify how potential participants learn about workshops and tours by improving its digital communication strategies and by exploring how to incentivize word-of-mouth advertisements.

We understand that ASI has a robust website and social media presence, and sends regular email communication to members and past participants. However, the number of respondents who primarily receive information about ASI programming through mailed communication suggests an opportunity to improve these digital communication strategies. A few respondents said that the website was difficult or cumbersome to navigate, with one respondent in particular detailing specific challenges they experienced with the website, such as having to input registration information multiple times and noticing that the website displayed different offerings than the mailed catalog. Please see the Marketing section of this report for the full quote from this respondent.

Additionally, we recommend that ASI consider capitalizing on how close-knit the craft and foodways community is by incentivizing word-of-mouth advertising from satisfied participants. For example, one respondent mentioned that they learned about a Nordic Handcraft workshop by talking with a fellow participant at a similar workshop at a different organization. ASI could learn more about word-of-mouth, person-to-person advertisements like this by asking participants about them during registration. Further, ASI could incentivize word-of-mouth advertisements by offering a discount to previous participants who bring a new participant to their next workshop.

4. Explore ways for participants to “continue the experience” after a workshop or tour. Many respondents talked fondly about their memories of ASI workshops and tours, and Nordic Table participants in particular talked about using the recipes and skills they learned after they attended the workshop. At minimum, we recommend that ASI make workshop instructions and recipes available for Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table participants to revisit after they have completed a workshop. Additionally, ASI might consider other ways to “continue the experience” for participants, perhaps by preparing a cookbook of recipes from Nordic Table workshops that is available for participants to purchase, or creating a publication of Nordic Handcraft projects with instructions for those interested to complete on their own. Moreover, a few respondents said that they appreciated when instructors kept in touch with them after the workshop, even if only to provide a life update or some information about a current project that they are working on. This suggests that participants may appreciate more efforts from ASI to build relationships and share stories and resources among instructors and participants.

5. Build on the “specialness” of ASI’s programming. Many respondents enjoyed the “specialness” of ASI’s programming, referring to the personalized touches that ASI included as part of its workshops and tours. Specifically, participants said that they appreciated the hands-on and experiential participation, the relationship-building among participants and instructors, the decorations that were thematically aligned with exhibitions or holidays, and the specialized food and drinks that were offered as part of the workshop or tour experience. Respondents also said that they appreciated the relatively small number of people in workshops and tours, saying that having just 10-15 people total made the experience feel particularly special.

The few critiques offered by respondents about ASI’s programming were often centered on instances when this “specialness” was not present. For instance, one respondent mentioned that, due to how busy FIKA was, they could not get coffee or a snack during their workshop’s morning break nor could they get food during the lunch break—and so the “specialness” of having access to food and drinks from FIKA was lost. Similarly, a respondent also said that the instruction space felt somewhat cramped due to the large number of participants and the lack of optimal space for the medium (watercolor painting).

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Introduction

In 2019, the American Swedish Institute (ASI) contracted with Wilder Research to facilitate organizational learning in regard to audience development, evaluation capacity building, and neighborhood engagement. As part of this work, Wilder Research conducted interviews with past participants of ASI's Nordic Handcraft Workshops, Nordic Table Workshops, and Specialty Tours. These participants also completed a pre-interview questionnaire to gather preliminary quantitative data regarding their experiences with ASI.

This report highlights the seven themes that arose from our analysis of the interviews and questionnaires. These seven themes include: 1) participant interests and interesting programming, 2) instructors and guides, 3) personal development and cultural learning, 4) socializing and cultural practice, 5) logistics and amenities, 6) marketing, and 7) online learning.

Learning methods

In partnership with ASI, Wilder Research designed an in-depth interview protocol and accompanying questionnaire. ASI provided a list of 119 past participants who had agreed to be contacted for audience research activities. We sent an interview invitation to all 119 past participants and we interviewed the first 6-7 participants who agreed to an interview from each of the three programs (Nordic Handcraft, Nordic Table, and Specialty Tours); these participants also completed the questionnaire. We interviewed seven Nordic Handcraft participants, six Nordic Table participants, and six Specialty Tours participants.

Respondents completed the pre-interview questionnaire and phone interviews throughout May 2020. The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of several open-ended questions that prompted conversations about respondents' perceptions of the workshop or tour they attended, their motivations for participating in the workshop or tour, and their ideas for improving or changing workshops or tours in the future. The questionnaire was administered online and consisted of close-ended questions. The questionnaire asked respondents about their experiences at the workshop or tour as well as their participation preferences. In particular, the questionnaire collected information about when they last participated in ASI programming, how they heard about that programming, who they attended with, when they prefer to attend ASI programming, the adequacy of their transportation to and from ASI, their ideal programming duration, and how much they feel comfortable paying for a workshop or tour. As a thank you, all respondents received two complimentary tickets to ASI as well as their choice of a \$30 gift card to the ASI museum store or Target.

About the respondents

Of the 19 total respondents, 15 were ASI members, 3 were not members, and 1 didn't know whether they were a member. Of the 17 respondents who provided their zip code, 11 lived in Hennepin County, 2 lived in Ramsey County, 2 lived in Dakota County, and 2 lived in Washington County. Figure 1 displays the number of workshops or tours that participants attended in the last 12 months.

1. Number of workshops or tours participants attended in the last 12 months

	Respondents (n=19)
1 workshop or tour	8
2-4 workshops or tours	9
5 or more workshops or tours	2

About Nordic Handcraft, Nordic Table, and Specialty Tours

ASI is a gathering place for all people to share experiences around themes of culture, migration, the environment, and the arts, informed by enduring links to Sweden. Nordic Handcraft, Nordic Table, and Specialty Tours are three strategies by which ASI achieves this mission. Please see below for brief descriptions these programs.

Nordic Handcraft

ASI's Nordic Handcraft workshops are Nordic-inspired and grounded in the Swedish handcraft tradition. Led by passionate and knowledgeable instructors, workshops allow participants to explore handcrafts using various materials, including wood, textiles, birch bark, glass, and more. ASI offers 1-2-hour Nordic Handcraft workshops as well as half- and full-day workshops.

Nordic Table

ASI's Nordic Table workshops are Nordic-inspired and grounded in traditional Swedish foodways. These workshops allow participants to prepare and share a meal together and to learn about the role that food plays in our lives. Led by knowledgeable instructors and professional chefs, participants in Nordic Table workshops try their hand at Nordic-inspired cooking and baking, and at the end of the workshop they share and partake in what they made. ASI offers 1-2-hour Nordic Table workshops and events.

Specialty Tours

ASI's centerpiece is the 33-room Turnblad Mansion, which houses exhibits and historical objects and allows visitors to learn about daily life in a turn-of-the-century Midwest mansion. ASI provides daily, volunteer-led tours of the Turnblad Mansion that are free for all general admission guests. In addition, ASI offers private group tours of special exhibits and specific areas of the museum and facilities. Specialty Tours often include food or beverages from FIKA, ASI's in-house Swedish café.

Findings

Participant interests and interesting programming

We asked respondents about why they were motivated to attend a workshop or tour and what they enjoyed or remembered most about ASI’s programming. Their responses communicated two related ideas: respondents’ personal interests and what programming they thought of as interesting. Rather than attempting to artificially separate these two ideas, we opted to honor the intertwined ways that respondents talked about them in our analysis. This analytical approach resulted in four subthemes: 1) previous experience or interest in topic or medium; 2) general interest in craft, food, or art; 3) hands-on and personalized experiences; and 4) exclusivity and limited opportunities.

Previous experience or interest in topic or medium

Many respondents noted that they were motivated to participate in a workshop or tour because of their previous experience or interest in the topic or medium. For example, a respondent who bakes bread was interested in learning more and took a Nordic Table workshop about baking. Similarly, a Specialty Tours respondent was interested in a photography exhibit because they are a photographer. On the other hand, one respondent said that they like the outdoors—hiking and trees, for instance—and so they were drawn to a birch bark workshop offered by ASI.

I like to make bread once in a while, but not often enough to where I'm really good at it—so I thought I wanted to take a class. –Nordic Table participant

When they announced that the photography show would be happening, I was very interested in it because I am a photographer. –Specialty Tours participant

As I walked out of ASI, I saw a catalog or newsletter and I went, “What a fascinating topic...” The topic itself is what drew me into the class. I like being outside, I like hiking and trees, and I like gardening. I have a heavily treed lot with several birch trees. It was just very unique topic.

–Nordic Handcraft participant

General interest in craft, food, or art

A number of respondents said that they were interested in participating in a workshop or tour because of their general interest in the kind of programming that ASI offers—that is, programming that focuses on craft, food, or art. These responses highlighted a slightly different motivation: it wasn’t the specific topic or medium that was interesting, but rather that the workshop or tour fell within the realm of what they were interested in. For example, one respondent said that they have always been interested in arts and crafts, and

another talked about a large variety of crafts they have tried and so they were motivated to try a food or craft program.

I have always been interested in arts and crafts. I have done drawing and paintings over the years.
—Nordic Handcraft participant

I think my Christmas tree is basically all Scandinavian ornaments, straw ornaments. I thought, “Well, it was a new craft that I haven't tried. I have done carving, ceramics, Sami bracelets, felting, birch bark, cardholders, watercolor basics. This was just a new craft and thought it'd be good to learn.
—Nordic Handcraft participant

Hands-on and personalized experiences

Many respondents said that they appreciated the hands-on nature of ASI's workshops and tours as well as the attention ASI paid to personalizing these experiences. For example, one respondent said that they were thrilled to step behind the ropes and handle objects on their tour. Another said that they enjoyed being able to create a historically accurate Viking meal.

It was great just being able to get your hands dirty and do the work yourself. We created something decorative, beautiful, and lasting. It was unique!
—Nordic Handcraft participant

He let us go to the dining room and go behind the ropes at the table. We didn't sit down at the table, but the table was decorated with all these beautiful artifacts and he said, “Here, pick one up!” and we were like, “Really?” That was super fun. It was so up close.
—Specialty Tours participant

They had some toys out for the kids. It was really cute. They gave all the kids a wooden teething ring and with each part of the exhibit they got a new ribbon to tie on to it. I was really impressed, I thought it was really well done.
—Specialty Tours participant

We cooked outside and did a typical Nordic feast cooking over Nordic fires on the lawn, using materials, foods, pots—everything that they could do as closely possible to how the Vikings feast would have been done 500 years ago. It was amazing!
—Nordic Table participant

Exclusivity and limited offerings

Another draw for numerous respondents was the perception that such programming was exclusive or limited. While some Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table participants alluded to exclusivity (by mentioning that workshops often fill up quickly), it was primarily Specialty Tours participants who said they appreciated this exclusivity.

That was also the thing about the ASI tour—they kept it smaller. There might have been 12 or 15 people, but it wasn't too big. You could really ask questions. You could get close to the work, you didn't have to stand back five feet. It was great being able to see things that other people never see in the museum.

—Specialty Tours participant

It was fun getting to see behind the scenes. We were up in the attic in the winter. It was super cold and there was a chair that was valued at \$2 million just sitting there because they didn't know what to do with it. I like fun things like that—that you feel like are unique, things that not everyone that goes on a tour learns.

—Specialty Tours participant

Instructors and guides

Many respondents said that the instructor or guide for their workshop or tour was a very important part of their ASI experience. While numerous respondents mentioned instructors or guides without prompting (for example, when we asked about why their ASI experience was memorable), our interview protocol also included questions that focused explicitly on ASI's instructors and guides. Based on our analysis, this theme has three subthemes: 1) characteristics of effective instructors and guides, 2) approaches used by effective instructors and guides, and 3) participants' awareness of or familiarity with particular instructors and guides.

Characteristics of effective instructors and guides

When talking about instructors and guides, some respondents mentioned characteristics that they appreciated. Often, these characteristics were related to the instructor or guide's first-hand experience or their holistic understanding of the topic or medium they taught.

I thought, "I can take a tour with the actual photographer, with the artist. That should be fun." He was a wonderful guy and told a lot about the photos, about how he did them.

—Specialty Tours participant

The teacher owns a bakery in Anoka. We were both so interested that we wanted to go and visit the bakery. My wife and I went to check it out. The fact that she was a baker and had unique bakery, and that she's from Sweden. She came over and started the bakery with her husband.

—Nordic Table participant

They had an incredible respect for the materials. An appreciation of what can be done with the materials. Their education about how and why it's harvested in a certain way was very fascinating.

—Nordic Handcrafts participant

She understands the importance of food, and what that means in terms of identity, what that means in terms of relationships and family. The concept of food along with identity, and the connections it brings—she understands all of that.

—Nordic Table participant

Approaches used by effective instructors and guides

Many respondents appreciated the pedagogical approaches used by instructors and guides. According to numerous respondents, how instructors and guides interacted with students or visitors was just as important—if not more so—than the content of the workshop or tour. The effective approaches highlighted by respondents included: engaging the participants, using varied and individualized instruction techniques, effectively structuring and organizing workshops or tours, and showcasing and sharing their technical expertise.

Depending on the theme or topic, often she'll ask everybody to share a story or tradition or custom of theirs that's related to that theme.

—Nordic Table participant

The best part was their absolute patience in teaching us the skill. They were able to help 15 people at a wide range of skills and abilities. They were able to work with each individual.

—Nordic Handcraft participant

She does demonstration paintings at the different levels and stages. You can follow along with what she's doing before you actually do your own work. That is extremely helpful because you can see a professional putting it together. You can watch her mix the paint, do the sketch, do it all in phases. After she does all that she takes a break and you start doing your own. As a learning artist, you want to see how the pros do it. That's what I remember the most. That's why I continue to be drawn to her.

—Nordic Handcraft participant

She's ultra-organized, which is great. You know where you should be in your project during the day. She had a great selection of colors. Her pattern was really great. Overall, the organizational part of it was really helpful.

—Nordic Handcraft participant

The audience was interacting with them. We asked a fair number of questions and they always had an answer or knew where to go where to find the answer. It was very good.

—Specialty Tours participant

He planned an intensive weekend course on birch bark. It was my first encounter with something really technical, to the point of telling me how to hold my hands. After that, I just really wanted more. I wanted to learn it very well.

—Nordic Handcraft participant

Awareness of particular instructors or guides

Overall, Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table participants noted their awareness of their instructors more so than Specialty Tours participants did. In fact, a number of respondents said that they wanted to participate in a workshop because they had previously taken a workshop with the instructor or were otherwise aware of instructor. According to respondents, this awareness was often due to the instructor's reputation as a high quality educator or practitioner.

I've done a lot of courses with that instructor and she just is always really fun. It's very engaging. She always has an interesting twist on things.

–Nordic Table participant

I had taken a class from the instructor once before over at Wet Paint in Saint Paul. So I was familiar with the instructor and when I saw she was teaching another class at ASI, I wanted to take another class with her.

–Nordic Handcraft participant

Going to the Nordic Table event and seeing top local chefs there was really exciting.

–Nordic Table participant

Sometimes it's hard to tell prior to getting there if an instructor will be good. You read their biography and that stuff, but most of it is word-of-mouth. Over time you ask people and you hear about the guy who's really good at Adirondack chairs. You get a reference for people.

–Nordic Handcraft participant

Personal development and cultural learning

We asked respondents about the knowledge and skills they gained from participating in an ASI workshop or tour. Overall, respondents talked about knowledge they gained in conceptual terms, such as cultural learning, and they talked about skills they gained in tangible ways, such as describing the details of specific techniques or telling stories of using the skills they learned in their daily lives. Based on our analysis, we identified three subthemes: 1) knowledge gained, 2) skills gained, and 3) using knowledge or skills after the workshop or tour.

Knowledge gained

When asked about knowledge they gained, numerous respondents talked about learning about different cultures and about the materials or techniques used by the instructors and guides. For instance, one respondent noted that they learned about how Native Americans in Minnesota view birch bark. Another respondent learned about how flowers are sourced and which flowers are local. Lastly, one respondent mentioned learning more about digital photography, saying that seeing works of digital photography catalyzed philosophical thoughts for him.

I liked learning about culture and about Indigenous peoples. In Minnesota, birch is so symbolic for so many great things. Indigenous peoples hold birch in high regard. It's a symbol of Minnesota.

–Nordic Handcraft participant

We had to wait a long time for the water to drain out of the skyre, so the instructor had a slide show about the Icelandic culture and the Nordic people who migrated to Iceland 1,000 years ago. It was a fun and interesting way to fill in the time while the water drained.

–Nordic Table participant

The instructor talked about the history of the various dishes, how they were created, why they were created. You got a lot of history about the food, the region, and the culture. That was fun.

–Nordic Table participant

Because of the class, I look at flowers in stores differently. It stopped me from purchasing products that are not local and that are out of season. It's given me more of an awareness of what I'm buying and who I am supporting.

–Nordic Handcraft participant

I realized that I was behind the curve in digital photography. It opened my eyes to all kinds of things. It was very philosophical. The images were strange, but they made you think. It made you want to do something to help out and reminded you of what is important in the world.

–Specialty Tours participant

Skills gained

Many Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table participants talked about the skills they gained; this theme was less common for Specialty Tours participants. In particular, workshop participants attributed their learning of these skills to the hands-on and participatory pedagogies used by ASI's instructors. For example, the three participants whose responses are highlighted below talked about working with dough to bake bread, preparing birch bark for crafting, and learning to use a knife and glove for carving.

We actually made a loaf of bread. Everyone got to handle the dough. And how it feels, what it's supposed to feel like. We were kneading it and some people were unfamiliar with that. You don't just roll it up and put it in the pan. There are certain ways to put it in the pan. She taught us about the exterior of the loaf, that there's a spine that makes it look nice.

–Nordic Table participant

I now know how to process birch bark. They would come in and have it in strips, and you would have to peel away several layers. And so I learned how to prepare the materials they brought to class.

–Nordic Handcraft participant

I made a Swedish tabletop tree carved with ornaments. That was the weekend class, Saturday and Sunday, eight hours each day. I'd never carved before. I was being instructed in how to use the knife and the glove, learning how to carve this tree that stands about 18-20 inches tall. And then make a dozen ornaments—trees and candles that hang from the branches. That was the most involved workshop that I've ever been to.

–Nordic Handcraft participant

Using knowledge or skills after the workshop or tour

While some Nordic Handcraft participants talked about practicing their craft after or between workshops, it was primarily Nordic Table participants that offered specific examples of using knowledge and skills they learned in a workshop in their daily lives. For instance, one respondent frequently makes a condiment they learned about in a workshop, and another respondent said that they have made a carrot and squash dish multiple times since taking the workshop.

It was a condiment that we made that is super simple, but I never would've thought of it. It's stuff that I usually have around, so I make it all the time now. It's kind of a game changer. It's lingonberry remoulade. It's a little mayo, a little cider vinegar, some Dijon mustard, some lingonberries, lingonberry jam, and capers. You mix it all up and it's super delicious. I put it on sandwiches all the time now.
—Nordic Table participant

One of the dishes he made was cutting up carrots and squash into long ribbons. Then you roll them up into a disk that is about one inch wide and three inches across. And then you tie them and bake them with butter. It's something I had never seen before and I've probably made them 5-6 times in the two months since learning about it.
—Nordic Table participant

Socializing and cultural practice

Some respondents talked about their participation in ASI's workshops or tours as a way to socialize and practice their culture. According to pre-interview questionnaire responses, just over half of respondents (10 of 19) attended the workshop or tour with a friend or family member. By "practice their culture," we mean that respondents noted their Scandinavian heritage and enjoyed maintaining a connection to their cultural background through ASI's programming. Respondents highlighted three subthemes: 1) meeting new people, 2) deepening relationships, and 3) practicing culture.

Meeting new people

A few respondents talked about meeting new people through ASI's workshops and tours, saying that they enjoyed meeting people with whom they have a shared interest. In particular, one respondent said that the longer or multi-day workshops are particularly amenable to getting to know classmates.

I've taken some courses that are a week long. That, for me, is really great. You're invested in being there. You're getting to know the people you work with.
—Nordic Handcraft participant

They had the longest table ever and everyone sat together. It was really good food and it was great talking to your neighbor at the table. I liked the chance to talk to your tablemates; it was fun.
—Nordic Table participant

I'm always looking for ways to connect with other moms in the community. There's not a lot of options that you can do with kids under two years old. I've kept in touch with one of the moms that I met and we plan to sign up for another event.
—Specialty Tours participant

Deepening relationships

Some respondents, mainly Nordic Table participants, mentioned that they deepened existing relationships by participating in a workshop or tour with a friend or family

member. For instance, two respondents noted that they signed up for the workshop with the intention of participating with a family member and a friend.

I saw they were offering the class and I thought it would be a fun class for my daughter and me to take together. –Nordic Table participant

After signing up, I talked a friend of mine into taking it as well. He does baking and cooking as well. We both liked it. –Nordic Table participant

Practicing culture

A few respondents noted that they have Scandinavian ancestry or that someone they are close to is Scandinavian. These respondents said that participating in ASI’s workshops or tours was a form of cultural expression for them as well as a strategy for maintaining a connection to their culture and family background.

I come from a Nordic family and being able to do ASI’s programs with my family has been a special thing. –Nordic Table participant

My husband was born and raised in Sweden, so Swedish traditions have always been part of our lives and having them in the home. –Specialty Tours participant

Logistics and amenities

In the pre-interview questionnaire, we asked respondents a number of questions about the logistics of participating in a workshop or tour. Overall, respondents preferred Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings for programming as well as Saturday mornings or afternoons (Figure 2). Additionally, the large majority of participants (12 of 13) said that preferred Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table workshops to be two hours in length. Regarding Specialty Tours, three respondents said they preferred tours to be one hour in length while another three respondents said they preferred them to be two hours long.

2. Days of the week and times participants preferred programming to occur (n=19)

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Morning	16%	32%	37%	32%	37%	37%	58%
Afternoon	42%	26%	26%	26%	37%	26%	53%
Evening	26%	26%	53%	58%	58%	42%	32%

Regarding registration for workshops or tours, 14 respondents registered online, 3 registered by phone, and 2 registered in person. Of those 19 respondents, 17 said that it was relatively easy to register. These respondents rated the ease of registering as a 1, 2, or 3 on a 10-point scale, with “1” being “very easy” to register. Two respondents noted that it was

difficult to register; these respondents rated the ease of registering as a 7 and 10, using the same 10-point scale.

In the pre-interview questionnaire and in interviews, we asked respondents about ASI’s amenities and how they affected their workshop or tour experience (Figure 3). Overall, respondents noted that each of the four amenities we asked about were at least somewhat important for the ASI experience, with more than half of respondents saying that the parking lot and FIKA were very important (81% and 53%, respectively). Nearly half of respondents (47%) also said that the museum store was very important and about 2 in 5 respondents (42%) said that ASI’s facilities in general were very important.

3. Importance of ASI amenities for programming experience (n=19)

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
Using the parking lot	81%	16%	0%
Having food or beverages at FIKA cafe	53%	37%	11%
Browsing or purchasing items at the museum store	47%	47%	5%
Experiencing ASI’s facilities, such as the Turnblad Mansion or the Nelson Cultural Center	42%	47%	11%

These responses to the pre-interview questionnaire were supplemented by interview findings. In particular, many respondents appreciated going to FIKA when they visited ASI and they enjoyed the food and drink offerings that were integrated into ASI’s programming. It should be noted, however, that one participant said it was difficult to purchase food or drinks from FIKA during breaks in their workshop because of how busy the restaurant was.

FIKA has a reputation for being very authentic. The dishes are homemade with really exciting ingredients. We eat there once every year. We go out to spend money and really have a nice evening. —Specialty Tours participant

They have the restaurant at ASI and we had a Thursday-Friday-Saturday class. FIKA can get pretty busy on Thursdays, but we did a morning break and you could get a coffee, no problem. On Friday, it was difficult to get a coffee and also hard to get lunch there. On Saturday, forget it—it was overwhelmed by people during the morning break and at lunch. —Nordic Handcraft participant

During interviews, respondents likewise noted the importance of ASI’s spaces for their programming experience. In particular, a number of Nordic Table respondents said that they enjoyed doing workshops outdoors during the summer. Additionally, some respondents noted that ASI’s indoor spaces were comfortable and that they appreciated when ASI decorated their indoor spaces for the holidays or to align with exhibition themes. It should be noted, however, that one respondent said that for a Nordic Handcraft workshop the instructional space was cramped. This respondent compared his experience to a class he

took at the Grand Marais Art Colony, noting the spaciousness of the room in which instruction occurred in particular.

They did a workshop on the porch outside in the summer. It was a lovely evening outside the castle and the tables were set in such a beautiful way. That was one of those very special classes and evenings. –Nordic Table participant

There's something welcoming and homey about ASI. That's a really nice draw. –Specialty Tours participant

I was there for a clothing designer tour. All over the museum, they had the clothing on the mannequins and they decorated the rooms in the same color combinations that were being shown in the clothing. I mean they really go all out! –Specialty Tours participant

I think the fact that it was decorated for the holidays was the best or most interesting part of the experience for me. That's not something you see there all the time. –Specialty Tours participant

I was at the Grand Marais Art Colony for a watercolor class. They have an old repurposed church that overlooks the lake. There's a big open space. It's a perfect setting for an artist. I take 1-2 classes up there every summer. It's very pleasant, always memorable. Back to doing an art class at ASI, it was a good room, but it was pretty tight. When you have a class like that, you need a table for yourself because you have a lot of stuff. You need to spread out. –Nordic Handcraft participant

Marketing

In the pre-interview questionnaire, we asked respondents about how they first heard of the workshop or tour they participated in (Figure 4). Most respondents heard about the workshop or tour through ASI's course catalog. Please note, however, that 15 of 19 respondents were ASI members, which likely affects how they hear about ASI offerings.

4. How respondents heard about ASI programming

	Respondents (n=19)
Through ASI's course catalog or another printed mailing	14
By visiting ASI's website	7
Through an email from ASI (like Klipp, ASI's email newsletter)	5
Through a family member or friend	2
Through ASI's social media (such as Facebook and Twitter)	--
Some other way	3

In order to provide some qualitative insights about ASI's marketing, we also asked respondents in interviews about how they first heard about the workshop or tour they participated in. Respondents talked about learning about ASI programming in two ways: 1) through ASI and 2) through people.

Learning about programming through ASI

In alignment with pre-interview questionnaire data, many respondents said they learned about offerings through ASI's course catalog (though, again, most respondents were members of ASI). One respondent critiqued ASI's website, saying that it was difficult to navigate and that it sometimes didn't match the catalog.

I have been a member for about a year. I immediately got on the mailing list for the catalog and I make it a point to review those in their entirety. I highlight everything I'm interested in and then decide what I want to sign up for.

—Nordic Handcraft participant

I find it easier to look through the catalog than the website. For some reason, the website doesn't have everything that the catalog does. You try to look up something and you can't find it. I always use the paper catalog; I circle the things that I want to sign up for then I go online and sign up. I have to say their website is not user-friendly. I have signed in—so they have my information—but then when you actually sign up for a class you have to type in everything all over again. And you can't sign up for more than one class at a time. You sign up for the one class then you have to go back in and do everything again. Sometimes I want to sign up for 3-4 classes at a time but I don't know why the system doesn't save all my information.

—Nordic Table participant

Learning about programming through other people

Also in alignment with the pre-interview questionnaire data, some respondents in interviews said that they learned about ASI's offerings through other people, such as their friends or family members. The participant whose response is showcased below highlighted how close-knit the Minnesota craft community is, which supplements what another respondent said about determining which workshops to sign up for through personal referrals.

My sister and I went to the Mille Lacs Trading Post for a Minnesota Historical Society class about birch bark baskets. We walked out of there with a basket and one of the women in the class had a birch bark field pouch and she said there's this wonderful woman who teaches classes about how to make them at ASI.

—Nordic Handcraft participant

Online learning

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent social isolation measures, we asked respondents about their experiences with and perceptions of online learning, particularly about taking workshops like those offered by ASI in a virtual setting. Overall, respondents said that they prefer in-person workshops as opposed to online workshops. However, a few respondents noted positive aspects of online learning, such as the ability to review the workshop recording after the workshop ends and increased scheduling flexibility.

It's hard to go beyond basic techniques in a class online. You don't get the experience of smelling and tasting what it should be like. That's what makes an in-person class.
—Nordic Table participant

For an online class, if I got stuck folding or something and couldn't figure it out, I think it would be harder to get assistance the instructor to show me how to do it.
—Nordic Handcraft participant

I'm working at home now and I look at the computer a lot, so spending another couple of hours looking at Zoom in the evening just sounds exhausting.
—Nordic Handcraft participant

When asked about participating in an online workshop with ASI, respondents identified two subthemes: 1) pre-workshop preparation and guidance, and 2) technical aspects and quality. These respondents talked about the importance of adequate pre-workshop preparation, such as ASI providing information about the content of the workshop and the needed materials or supplies beforehand. A few respondents also noted that the technical aspects of the workshop would need to be high quality and that they would like the ability to revisit the workshop recording 3-4 times after completing it the first time.

Any materials that would help me experience the course virtually, I'd want ahead of time. If it has to do with cooking, I would want the recipes beforehand. If it was hands on, like floral arranging, I would want suggestions on where to get materials before the class.
—Nordic Handcraft participant

You'd have to have the tools and ingredients, or whatever you're making, at home. I could see bread baking being one that might work. My wife is a weaver— that would be hard. All the students would have to have the loom and yarn at home.
—Nordic Table participant

I would like to have the ability to replay after the class, to have it available to re-watch for some period. Not forever necessarily, but I'd like to see it 3-4 times.
—Nordic Table participant

The course would need great audio and video. Those are really key—no breaking up or freezing screens. I would want it to be well lit so I can see what is really going on.
—Nordic Handcraft participant

Recommendations

The 19 respondents we interviewed offered many useful insights and suggestions regarding their experiences at ASI's workshops and tours. The findings from these interviews suggest a number of recommendations for ASI to build on the many strengths of its programming, as well as to address the critiques noted by respondents. These recommendations include:

1. Elevate and more deeply engage instructors and guides. All respondents talked about the importance of the instructors and guides for their workshop or tour experience; a number of respondents said that they signed up for a workshop because they had previously taken workshops with the instructor or otherwise knew of their work. To continue growing the Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table programming in particular, we recommend that ASI elevate their instructors as well as intentionally engage instructors in the long-term planning of ASI's programming.

In regard to elevating instructors, ASI should consider pursuing a digital and print writing series comprised of short articles authored by recent or regular instructors. These articles could focus on upcoming workshops that the instructor is teaching, or on other parts of the instructor's life or practice (many respondents appreciated knowing about their instructor's life and work outside of the particular workshop they attended).

By "intentionally engaging" instructors, we mean ensuring that they have a voice in planning conversations regarding the future of Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table programming. We expect that doing so will result in stronger relationships between ASI and its instructors and promote instructor retention. We also expect that such engagement will provide ASI staff with insight into the kinds of workshops that instructors are most interested in teaching, and will identify where instructors' interests align with ASI's goals.

2. Focus on instructor and guide development. As noted in the previous recommendation, instructors and guides were immensely important for participants' experiences. As such, we recommend that ASI focus on the development of instructors and guides based on participant feedback regarding what kind of instruction or teaching they appreciated. In particular, participants identified a few approaches of effective instructors and guides, including engaging the participants, using varied and individualized instruction techniques, effectively structuring and organizing workshops or tours, and showcasing and sharing their technical expertise.

At minimum, we recommend that ASI provide information to instructors and guides regarding the importance of incorporating these and similar approaches into their workshops and tours. We expect this information might be particularly useful for workshop and tour planning, or revising instruction or engagement plans.

We also recommend that ASI consider developing an instructor and guide development approach that is focused on 1) recruiting and developing early career instructors/practitioners, 2) maintaining and sharing the expertise of seasoned instructors/practitioners, and 3) professionalizing the field of experiential craft and food workshop design and delivery. From our interviews with respondents, it is clear that instructors often teach at multiple organizations; we expect that this experience results in instructors having a deep level of knowledge and a robust skillset for providing instruction in a variety of settings and for a variety of audiences. An instructor and guide development program could serve as a way to centralize and share this expertise and to develop the next generation of instructors and guides.

3. Diversify how participants learn about workshops and tours. The majority of respondents said that they learned about ASI’s workshops and tours through ASI’s printed materials, such as the course catalog. While it should be noted that most respondents were ASI members (and so were perhaps more likely to prefer receiving information via the mailed catalogs), we recommend that ASI pursue strategies to diversify how potential participants learn about workshops and tours by improving its digital communication strategies and by exploring how to incentivize word-of-mouth advertisements.

We understand that ASI has a robust website and social media presence, and sends regular email communication to members and past participants. However, the number of respondents who primarily receive information about ASI programming through mailed communication suggests an opportunity to improve these digital communication strategies. A few respondents said that the website was difficult or cumbersome to navigate, with one respondent in particular detailing specific challenges they experienced with the website, such as having to input registration information multiple times and noticing that the website displayed different offerings than the mailed catalog. Please see the Marketing section of this report for the full quote from this respondent.

Additionally, we recommend that ASI consider capitalizing on how close-knit the craft and foodways community is by incentivizing word-of-mouth advertising from satisfied participants. For example, one respondent mentioned that they learned about a Nordic Handcraft workshop by talking with a fellow participant at a similar workshop at a different organization. ASI could learn more about word-of-mouth, person-to-person advertisements like this by asking participants about them during registration. Further, ASI could incentivize word-of-mouth advertisements by offering a discount to previous participants who bring a new participant to their next workshop.

4. Explore ways for participants to “continue the experience” after a workshop or tour. Many respondents talked fondly about their memories of ASI workshops and tours, and Nordic Table participants in particular talked about using the recipes and skills they learned after they attended the workshop. At minimum, we recommend that ASI make workshop instructions and recipes available for Nordic Handcraft and Nordic Table

participants to revisit after they have completed a workshop. Additionally, ASI might consider other ways to “continue the experience” for participants, perhaps by preparing a cookbook of recipes from Nordic Table workshops that is available for participants to purchase, or creating a publication of Nordic Handcraft projects with instructions for those interested to complete on their own. Moreover, a few respondents said that they appreciated when instructors kept in touch with them after the workshop, even if only to provide a life update or some information about a current project that they are working on. This suggests that participants may appreciate more efforts from ASI to build relationships and share stories and resources among instructors and participants.

5. Build on the “specialness” of ASI’s programming. Many respondents enjoyed the “specialness” of ASI’s programming, referring to the personalized touches that ASI included as part of its workshops and tours. Specifically, participants said that they appreciated the hands-on and experiential participation, the relationship-building among participants and instructors, the decorations that were thematically aligned with exhibitions or holidays, and the specialized food and drinks that were offered as part of the workshop or tour experience. Respondents also said that they appreciated the relatively small number of people in workshops and tours, saying that having just 10-15 people total made the experience feel particularly special.

The few critiques offered by respondents about ASI’s programming were often centered on instances when this “specialness” was not present. For instance, one respondent mentioned that, due to how busy FIKA was, they could not get coffee or a snack during their workshop’s morning break nor could they get food during the lunch break—and so the “specialness” of having access to food and drinks from FIKA was lost. Similarly, a respondent also said that the instruction space felt somewhat cramped due to the large number of participants and the lack of optimal space for the medium (watercolor painting).

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