



Gateway to Kuusamo Lapland

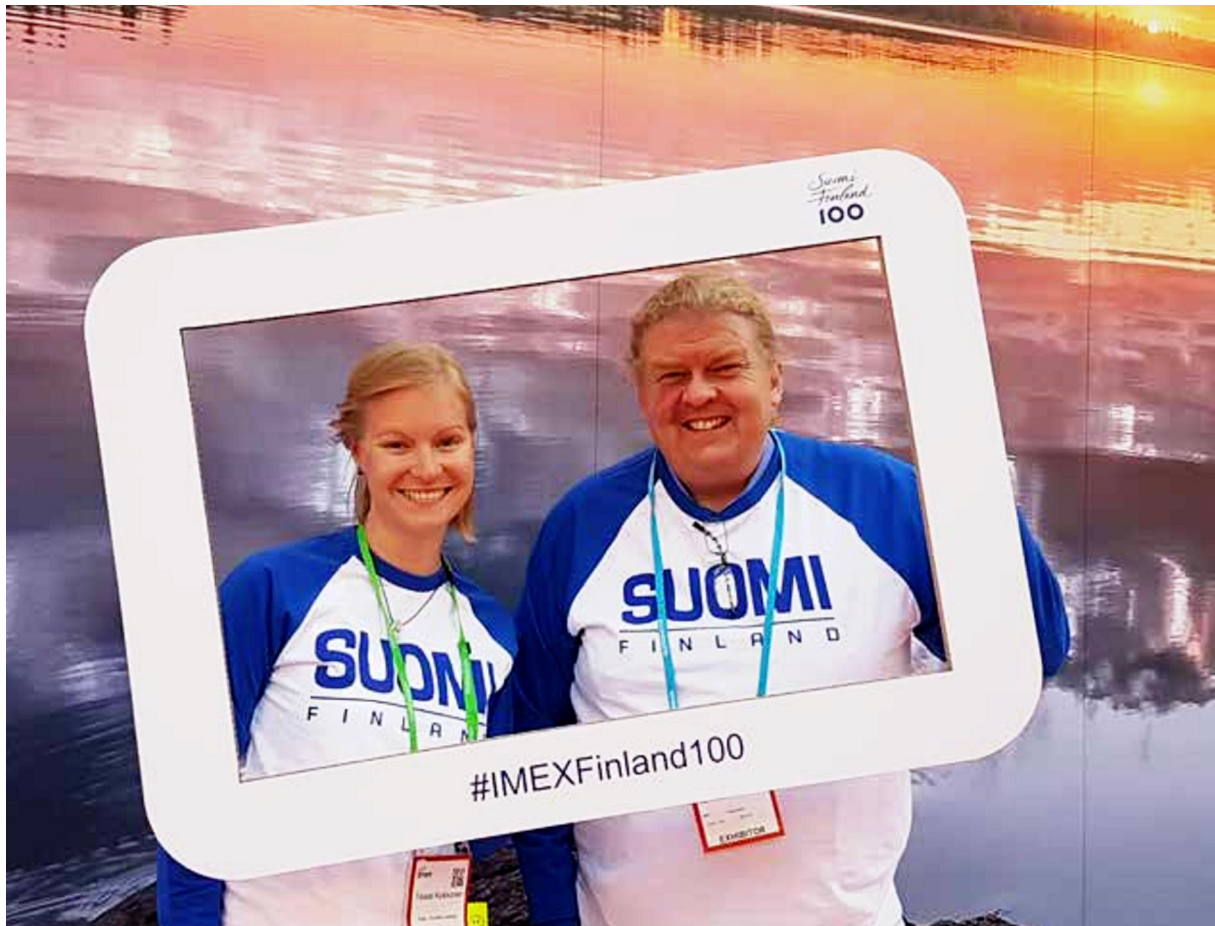
There is a growing number of international visitors to Ruka-Kuusamo tourist region. Collaboration with Asian travel operators has been established. In marketing, cultural aspects are a focal point and new digital services attract international visitors.

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European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

Leverage from
the EU
2014–2020



Ruka-Kuusamo welcomes more international visitors

The tourist region of Ruka-Kuusamo keeps renewing itself. The latest breakthrough is widening the international target markets and attracting visitors especially from Asia. The local SMEs are part of the success. The traditional markets have been Finland and Russia. When the region's operators wanted to activate wider international marketing efforts, they planned a development project for ERDF funding.

"We wanted to focus our efforts particularly on Central European and Asian tour operators", says Tessa Kokkonen, Project Manager at Naturpolis Ltd.

Change in the tourism industry

Keeping up with the competition requires travel operators a wider range of expertise than ever before. They need to understand the modern marketing and the tourists' interest in local characteristics. Modern clients report their

experiences online and hence it is important to keep all visitors contented. Quality is key to everything from marketing to service provision.

Attracting international visitors requires targeted marketing. Ruka-Kuusamo has decided to focus on China, Japan, South Korea and Central European countries. Prospective international travel operators need to visit the area to experience first-hand the tranquility and cleanliness of the region, especially the national parks. The main task in the project is to build mental images of the quality brand of Ruka-Kuusamo. Local operators can set up meetings and seal deals.

"We have a broad range of activities for people from the smallest one-man companies to international corporations. We help them with marketing campaigns", says Kokkonen.

From great plan to great results

The project has produced many significant results in its first two years. International overnight stays have grown by 25% in a year, according to Statistics Finland 2017. Finavia reports a 47,5% growth in international visitors flying to Kuusamo in the same period. Charter flights have increased and Lufthansa started new direct flights from Frankfurt in December 2017.

The success in the travel industry is reflected in the local SMEs, who have recruited new staff and made new investments. Online services offer a solution to many growth-related challenges particularly for the smallest businesses. Ruka-Kuusamo sets a great example of an ERDF project producing significant economic impact for its wider community.



Objectives

In addition to long term benefits, the objectives of the project in its running period are the following:

- ten new travel operators to take the destination on their agenda
- 10% growth in international overnight stays
- two new direct charters
- Kuusamo airport to reach 100 000 visitors yearly

Results

The following results in the first two years of the project:

- 32 new travel operators have taken the destination on
- 25% growth international overnight stays in 2017
- 5 new direct charters
- Kuusamo airport reached 87 752 visitors in 2017 (+14,2%)

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Project code: A72000

Naturpolis Ltd, Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association, Parks & Wildlife Finland of Metsähallitus and the University of Oulu

1.8.2016. 30.4.2019

Total budget: **1 299 940 €**

ERDF funding from the Council of Oulu Region: **909 957 €**



Oulu Regional Council allocates funding for regional development from the ERDF

Oulu Regional Council is a Managing Authority for the Sustainable growth and jobs 2014–2020 – Finland’s Structural Funds Programme in Northern Ostrobothnia.

European Regional Development Fund’s (ERDF) main objectives are to improve the competitiveness of SMEs and produce and use the latest information and knowledge.

‘Sustainable growth and jobs 2014–2020 – Finland’s structural funds programme’ has two priority axes and seven specific objectives for ERDF. Each project must deliver at least one of these specific objectives.

ERDF priority axes and specific objectives:

1. Competitiveness of SMEs
 - Generating new business
 - Improving transport and logistic connections that are important to SMEs (Eastern and Northern Finland)
 - Promoting growth and internationalisation of enterprises
 - Promoting energy efficiency in SMEs
2. Producing and using the latest information and knowledge
 - Development of the centres of research, expertise and innovation on the basis of regional strengths
 - Strengthening innovation in enterprises
 - Developing solutions based on renewable energy and energy-efficient solutions

More information on Structural Funds in Finland from the dedicated website www.rakennerahastot.fi