



Helsinki

Press kit for media and tour operators

Helsinki – the world's most sustainable travel destination

This press kit is designed for professionals in the media and the tourism industry. It provides structured and verifiable information about Helsinki as a sustainable travel destination.

The material is designed to support content production, communications and international cooperation. Its aim is to help journalists, tour operators, businesses and other stakeholders share information about sustainable tourism in Helsinki in a fact-based, effective and, above all, consistent manner.

The most sustainable travel destination in the world

In 2024 and 2025, Helsinki was ranked number one in the GDS-Index, which evaluates the sustainability performance of travel destinations. In 2025, it was also the first big city in the world to be granted the Green Destinations GSTC certificate. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) standards are the world's strictest set of sustainability criteria for travel destinations. In 2026, Helsinki continued its success by earning the national Sustainable Travel Finland label.

Achieving the sustainability goals set out in the Helsinki City Strategy in 2021 has required determined cooperation between various stakeholders in the city, as well as a strong commitment to the wellbeing of the environment, people and local businesses.

The achievements prove that in Helsinki, sustainability is not only a green claim used for marketing purposes but part of the structure and everyday life of the city.



Fact bank

Sustainable Travel Finland (STF)

- A seven-step sustainability program developed by Visit Finland that provides Finnish tourism companies and destinations with concrete tools for developing and communicating their sustainability efforts.
- To receive the STF label, a destination must not only complete the program but also either hold GSTC certification or ensure that at least 51% of the region's tourism businesses have already received their own STF label. Helsinki meets both criteria.
- The label is not a one-time achievement; rather, it requires regular audits and continuous improvement of operations.

Helsinki ranked number one in the GDS-Index in 2024 and 2025

- The Global Destination Sustainability Index assesses the sustainability of travel destinations using 77 indicators.
- It compares around 100 destinations across the world.
- Helsinki's top-ranking score was 93.52/100 in 2025.
- The aim of the index is to help travel destinations improve their sustainability performance from environmental, social and economic perspectives.

[Read more](#)

GSTC-certification

- The Global Sustainable Tourism Council standard is the world's strictest set of sustainability criteria for travel destinations.
- The criteria include more than 280 questions across all aspects of sustainability and examine operations from the perspectives of environmental, cultural, social and economic sustainability as well as sustainable governance.
- Globally, there are three GSTC-accredited certification bodies for travel destinations: Green Destinations, EarthCheck and Vireo Srl.

[Read more](#)

Helsinki is the first big city to be awarded the Green Destinations GSTC certificate

- In spring 2025, Helsinki became the first city with over half a million residents to receive the certificate.
- Achieving certification requires full compliance with the criteria.

The EU monitors greenwashing

- The EU is tightening legislation that requires companies to provide verifiable sources for their environmental claims.
- Helsinki demonstrates the reliability of its sustainability performance with the GDS-Index ranking and the Green Destinations GSTC certificate – while observing EU regulations.

Why does sustainability performance need to be verified?

Sustainability has become a key selling point in marketing – and commonly an area for misleading claims.

Consumers expect sustainability claims to be based on reliable data, not empty words. Helsinki is a trendsetter in this development. Travel destinations can use the GDS-Index and GSTC certificate to communicate their sustainability performance to various stakeholders in a transparent manner. The national STF label helps international and domestic travelers identify and choose responsible operators.

Measurements are not just for internal development processes, they also benefit the public. Consumers, media and tour operators need reliable information. Sustainability claims can only be credible if they are backed by impartial evidence. In Helsinki, evidence has been gathered systematically, and results are not based on opinions but reviewed and audited analyses.

What is Helsinki especially good at?

Since the GSTC certification can only be achieved through full compliance with the criteria, it can be concluded that Helsinki is good at everything.

It is clear that Finland and Helsinki's deep, years-long commitment to investing in sustainability has laid the foundations for success. **Sustainable tourism depends on a society that functions well in all aspects.**

Helsinki has often performed very well in the GDS-Index. The GDS index uses 77 indicators to assess a destination's sustainability performance in four key areas:

- Environmental sustainability, such as CO2 emissions, waste management and biodiversity
- Social sustainability, such as labour conditions, community wellbeing and inclusion
- Supplier sustainability, such as support for local businesses and economic impacts of tourism
- Destination management and planning, such as strategies and goals to promote sustainability

In 2025, Helsinki achieved first place **in the themes of environmental, business, and social sustainability, and ranked second in destination management.**

Helsinki has also received other well-earned recognition, being named the European Capital of Smart Tourism in 2019, achieving the top ranking in the 2023 Urban Mobility Readiness Index and coming second in the Access City Award in 2022. Finland has topped the world happiness rankings for nine years.

Sustainability in action

Tourism businesses in Helsinki have done a great job promoting sustainability. Most hotel rooms in Helsinki are sustainability certified, and our travel attractions, meeting and congress facilities and other tourism operators are world leaders when it comes to investment in sustainable tourism.

Accommodation

More than 97% of hotel rooms in Helsinki are sustainability certified. Many hotels participate in the Sustainable Travel Finland programme. Many hotels also use renewable energy, take steps to reduce water use and minimise food waste.

Travel

Helsinki city centre is pedestrian-friendly: the city is committed to sustainability and encourages residents and tourists to walk, cycle or use public transport instead of driving.

[Read more](#)

Waste treatment

Urban planning in Helsinki makes sorting easy, recycling effortless and the reuse of items a normal part of life. New areas in the city include communal points for sorting and recycling waste and services that reduce consumption. Restaurants, shops and other businesses are expected to have plans for waste management and waste monitoring in place to reduce general and food waste.

[Read more](#)

Protecting biodiversity

Nature conservation efforts ensure that natural sites and hiking areas, such as the Fastholma nature reserve and the Viikki-Vanhankaupunginlahti area, will continue to attract residents and visitors alike.

[Read more](#)

Experiences and events

Visitors to Helsinki can participate in activities that adhere to principles of sustainability, such as nature walks, tours of the archipelago and cultural events.

Many attractions and museums are involved in environmental certification programmes.

Accessibility

Tourism in Helsinki is developed with the view of making it accessible to all visitors.

The aim is to ensure that everyone, regardless of their age or capabilities, can easily move around the city. The policy is to make all buildings and outdoor areas accessible.

[Read more](#)

Helsinki

Links and materials

[Helsinki City Strategy](#)

[Helsinki tourism and event programme 2022-2026 \(FI\)](#)

[Tourism sustainability in Helsinki on the website hel.fi](#)

[GDS-index Top 40 cities](#)

[Helsinki GDS ranking](#)

[GDS-Index benchmarking methodology](#)

[News about Helsinki ranking first on the website hel.fi](#)

[GDS press release about Helsinki ranking first](#)

[Images, top ranking, Helsinki Partners Material Bank](#)

