



Helsinki Travel Seminar 2026

Brief summary of the event





Helsinki Tourism at Record Pace – Focusing on Year-Round Appeal and Bold Growth

Helsinki's tourism year has been exceptionally strong, successfully leaving behind the challenges posed by the pandemic and geopolitical tensions. Mayor Daniel Sazonov and Tourism Director Nina Vesterinen presented figures confirming that with over five million registered overnight stays, Helsinki has successfully surpassed pre-pandemic levels. The visitor willingness to recommend the city (NPS) is hovering near an impressive 60, and the city has once again been ranked as the world's most sustainable tourism destination. The primary strategic goal for the future is to extend visitor stays and strengthen the city's year-round appeal—finding ways to make Helsinki an attractive destination well beyond the summer season and turning concepts like “dark exoticism” into a commercial advantage during midwinter.

Hannu Krook, CEO of SOK, challenged the tourism industry to set the bar even higher. According to Krook, the goal for Finland's tourism exports should be to double international tourism from the current five billion to ten billion euros. This would create up to 40,000 new jobs and two billion euros in new tax revenue. The macroeconomic significance of tourism is immense, and the industry's potential should be recognized more strongly in political decision-making and on state export promotion trips. Krook reminded the audience that what we consider everyday luxury—such as pure nature, walking on frozen water in the winter, or seeing the Northern Lights—serves as an extraordinary attraction globally.

From Sustainability to Regenerative Tourism

Sustainable development has long been a fundamental requirement for tourism, but in an increasingly competitive global environment, it is no longer enough. Guy Bigwood, CEO of the Global Destination Sustainability Movement, challenged industry stakeholders to shift from traditional sustainability to regenerative tourism. Regenerative tourism does not merely focus on minimizing environmental harm (“do no harm”), but actively strives to leave the local community and environment in a better state than before the visitors arrived. An excellent example of this approach is Taiga Times, the winner of the Helsinki Tourism Company of the Year 2026 award. Not only has the company garnered top-tier customer reviews, but it has also invested heavily in regenerative tourism principles, earning the respected STF and Green Activities certificates.

Smooth Accessibility and Travel Chains

For international tourism to thrive, smooth accessibility is essential. During the afternoon panel discussion, Kimmo Mäki (Finavia), Ville Haapasaari (Port of Helsinki), and Antti Karjalainen (VR) emphasized that Helsinki's geographical location imposes special requirements on travel chains. Passengers arrive by sea or air, which highlights the need for the seamless integration of different modes of transport—ships, flights, and trains. Traffic operators also see extending the length of stay as a key objective; for instance, “turnaround” cruise passengers, who start or end their cruises in Helsinki, create significant added value by staying in the city for extra nights. The green transition in transport, such as new fuel solutions and shore power for ships, as well as carbon-neutral trains, strongly supports Helsinki's goal of sustainable tourism.

Design and Maritime Nature as Unique Competitive Advantages

The deepest core of a tourism experience stems from distinctiveness, and in Helsinki's case, this culminates in architecture, design, and its unique maritime character. Kaarina Gould, CEO of the Finnish Architecture and Design Museum Foundation, highlighted the significance of the new museum opening in the early 2030s and the potential UNESCO status of Alvar Aalto's sites for the city's international appeal. Judith Portier, founder of the Montreal-based Studio Overall, demonstrated how temporary and tactical design can act as a powerful catalyst for revitalizing urban spaces and fostering a sense of community even in challenging circumstances.

With over 300 islands and an extensive coastline, Helsinki offers a globally rare potential that has yet to be fully commercialized. Vili Tuomisto from the City of Helsinki and Ville Wäänänen from Lonna Moments called for significantly bolder pricing and productization within the industry. Maritime Helsinki should not be seen merely as an affordable recreation area, but as a high-quality, boldly priced attraction that serves as the primary reason for tourists to visit the city.

As was concluded at the end of the seminar, a vibrant and growing tourism sector can only be created through strong network cooperation.