

Helsinki – taking smart to new heights

Helsinki and its tourism sector have been growing smarter for decades. Why stop now? We plan, implement and therefore achieve constant improvements. Helsinki is smarter by the day – and that's not only limited to tourism.

Being a leader suits Helsinki. We have been creating digital services, opening data sets, building accessible experiences and developing sustainable tourism for a long time. Becoming the European Capital of Smart Tourism would solidify our reputation for getting things done - in a smart way.

What other city can successfully pull off a summit meeting between two of the most powerful people on the planet – in just two weeks? And during the peak tourism season? That's exactly what we did when the presidents of the USA and Russia paid us a historic visit in the summer of 2018. Moreover, we did it together with local businesses. And we didn't make it all about the meeting either; Helsinki was presented to the world as a functional city with lots to experience.

For us, smart is more than just a buzzword. Our aim is to become the most functional city in the world for everyone – for locals and visitors alike. Our developing city is digitally savvy enough to unite players. We aim to be accessible and agile. That's why we can adapt to multiple needs and transform if that is what is needed. We are stylish and creative, and we have a team mentality: we do things together. Nothing happens in Helsinki without citizen involvement. As stated in the Helsinki city strategy, we are committed to maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the local community about the impacts of growing tourism. Our smartness is our source of pride, and the title of European Capital of Smart Tourism would help us gather stakeholders under one umbrella and define a raison d'être for our efforts.

Our tourism roadmap is ambitious. For example, we aim to completely change how we collect, catalog and share tourism information. Instead of measuring the basics, we are teaming up with players to harness tourism data into a powerful tool to make our tourism thrive. And it's not just business that we will measure. We are looking into new ways of measuring tourism's impact on the environment and its overall sustainability. We want to take the guesswork out of the tourism business. This would function as one of our key initiatives of the title year.

The title of European Capital of Smart Tourism would be a key opportunity for promoting Helsinki in the future. Finland will hold the presidency of the Council of the EU in 2019, when Helsinki will gain a lot of visibility. In August of the same year, Helsinki will host the World Tourism Cities Federation Summit, at which the global tourism industry will meet with the Chinese right here in Helsinki. Also the European Tourism Forum in connection to our EU Presidency will be held in Helsinki in October. This would be the perfect event for presenting the next winner or running down the shortlist? We truly believe that Helsinki would be a perfect match in 2019 to become the first European Capital of Smart Tourism and serve as a model for smart city tourism development.

SMART TOURISM IN ACTION: MyHelsinki digital tourism platform

MyHelsinki is your personal guide to the city – in digital form. All content is real, generated by actual locals. MyHelsinki is all about openness. All information is built on three open databases based on activities, location and events. Helsinki's open data and application programming interface (API) enable businesses to serve travellers with relevant, personalised content and services. It can be widely used by Online Travel Agency (OTA) channels, tour operators and media outlets. Our open API made it possible for Tencent to use our open data for its WeChat MyHelsinki mini program. It makes Helsinki the first city in the world to combine tailored personal recommendations, mobility planning, and purchase options for travellers in one service. Alipay is another major actor that is tapping into our API to create a mini program to make Helsinki a totally cashless city for travellers.

PROGRAMME TIMELINE 2019

We have compiled a timeline of key promotional opportunities for the title year in 2019. Some activities last most of the title year. We want to be smart and sustainable in our programme by mainly latching onto events and high-level meetings that have already been planned for 2019. In this way we can deliver a credible plan that is ready to be implemented. Safe to say, we are fully prepared to take the European Capital of Smart Tourism to the people and to establish the tradition of pushing the envelope, starting from year one.

All year activities:

- Finland will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from July to December 2019, when all eyes will be on Finland and its capital.
- 2018 has been the year of EU-China tourism, but our relationship with the Chinese goes far beyond a single year. Here's one example: Helsinki was the first destination to have a dedicated WeChat mini program. By the end of 2018 the mini program will reach its third iteration, with all public transportation and payments becoming available directly through WeChat.
- A digital inventory of online sales of tourism products will be developed throughout the year. It's a tough task, but we are set to crack it.
- We will bring the Smart Tourism message to the meetings and working groups of the European Cities Marketing association, with which we have been an active partner from the beginning.

2018

7 November: Title Victory

Following the awarding of the title, Helsinki would publicise the title and the issue of smart tourism through an extensive PR campaign utilising all the provided materials available. We would promote the title in all our channels and other communications throughout the year as materials become available.

29-30 November: DTTT in Helsinki ★

The Digital Tourism Think Tank will hold its annual global conference in Helsinki. Helsinki is deeply invested in the event, and the title will be an integral part of all our activities at the event. The event will return to Helsinki in 2019.

4-5 December: Slush 2018 ★

We will present our smart solutions at Slush 2018 – the world's leading startup event – and could easily highlight our title on this occasion.

Late 2018: Launch of the new Sustainable Tourism Study

Helsinki will study how sustainable tourism is being implemented in the city during 2018. Having already promoted sustainability in the city for years, we hope this study will ramp up the development together with all stakeholders. This study will be followed by a new sustainable tourism programme to be launched later in 2019 (see below).

2019

January 2019: MATKA travel fair ★

The largest travel fair in the Nordic Countries, MATKA 2019, will be held in January in Helsinki. The title would be presented on one of the main stages.

February 2019: European Capital of Smart Tourism workshop ★

We want to maintain close ties with other European cities, especially those that are actively developing smarter tourism. We wish to invite representatives from all the shortlisted cities to Helsinki for a workshop on smart tourism. Collaboration is the key: sharing ideas and best practices is the most effective way of making tourism smarter throughout the EU.

April 2019: Launch of the new Sustainable Tourism Programme and webinar

Following the research phase, Helsinki will launch its bold new Sustainable Tourism Programme in April. This would be the lasting legacy of our title year, taking its message far beyond 2019. As a part of the new Sustainable Tourism Programme, we are planning an online webinar open for all European cities that want to develop sustainable tourism.

May 2019: Visit Finland annual meeting

The Visit Finland annual meeting in May is the most important gathering of tourism stakeholders in Finland. At the 2019 annual meeting, we want to present smart tourism and hopefully our title. In this way we want to motivate other Finnish cities to up their smart tourism game and perhaps someday bring the title back to Finland.

Summer 2019: Maritime Helsinki piloting

Helsinki is developing its maritime tourism, especially as old military islands are now being opened to the general public. The goal is that Helsinki's spectacular archipelago will become a favourite among nature-oriented tourists who wish to combine sustainable travel and city experiences into one trip. During summer 2019 we will be piloting new services for the maritime environment, such as a 'Boat Uber', and we would want to make the title a part of these developments.

Summer 2019: Smart City Guidance pilot

Helsinki will pilot the new Smart City Guidance programme, which aims to create a new, smarter way to guide people in the city. Through collaborative work with businesses and digital tools, the aim of the programme is to rethink the way guidance is provided.

Summer 2019: Annual tourism survey

Even though local stakeholders are included in all our projects, we would still like to know them more. That's why every year we conduct a survey among our local stakeholders to know what makes them tick. In 2019 we could incorporate more specific subjects related to the Smart Tourism Capital year.

August 2019: WTCF 2019 in Helsinki ★

The World Tourism Cities Federation, the Beijing-led network of tourism cities, will hold its annual global summit and trade fair in Helsinki in August. Perhaps the most important opportunity for the world's tourism representatives to meet with Chinese delegations, this summit will include many high-level Chinese organisations, from media to airlines, as well as the mayor of Beijing. Helsinki has a unique opportunity to incorporate the title into its summit activities and demonstrate what smart tourism means in Europe. Interesting fact: The first ever commercial flight from Beijing to Europe flew to Helsinki in 1988. Our special relationship since then has only grown stronger.

October 2019: European Tourism Forum ★

The European Tourism Forum will be held in Helsinki in 2019 as part of the official programme of the EU presidency. This would serve as our farewell to the title year and provide an opportunity to present how the title has upped our game in smart tourism. This would be the moment to pass the torch to the next city and show what we have learned.

2019

