

# Sustainable Travel Plan for Suomussalmi 2021- 2025

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## Foreword

The sustainable travel plan has been prepared as guidelines for developing Suomussalmi's tourism. Suomussalmi is involved in the Sustainable Travel Finland programme developed by Visit Finland. Visit Finland's vision is that Finland will be one of the most sustainable travel destinations in the world by 2025. Suomussalmi is working towards that goal. Therefore, Suomussalmi's tourism shall be developed in an even more sustainable direction with the area's tourism entrepreneurs.

Suomussalmi's active approach in environmental matters has been visible in, for example, avoiding the clear-cutting of forests and the pioneering of wind farms. Suomussalmi is a partial implementer in several projects aiming to promote sustainable and responsible operations in the area. These include the Kahina project, which supports carbon neutrality, the Vitality from tourism project and the Gateway to Land of National Parks project. The sustainable travel plan is part of the Matkailuyritykset kestäväälle kehityspolulle project ("Steering tourism businesses towards a sustainable future"). This is the summary of the plan. If you would like to familiarise yourself with the full version of the plan, please contact the plan's responsible person, Tiia Mustonen (tiia.mustonen@suomussalmi.fi).

## At the birthplace of Finnish determination in Suomussalmi - Description of the current state

Suomussalmi's tourism and the production of experiences are based on combining the area's stunning nature, history, and rich culture. Locality, local products, and services play an essential role. The area's operators are mainly small family-run businesses for whom responsibility is one of their operations' main values. Some of them have joined a common development path.

Travel industry is a vital livelihood in Kainuu, but it is strongly based on domestic visitors. Hossa hiking area became a national park in 2017 and it was a significant change for the travel industry in the region. The new national park tripled the number of visitors to the Hossa area and affected traveller numbers in the entire municipality.

Due to long distances, private car transport plays an essential role in accessibility, but work is actively carried out to improve public transport. The Hossa bus significantly enhances the opportunity of those travelling without their own car to visit the national park. The Kuusamo-Suomussalmi-Kajaani bus route travels via Hossa, and the schedules have been developed so that tourists can easily continue their journey by train to Helsinki.

### Be enchanted by nature

Hossa National Park is Suomussalmi's main attraction, but the area also has a wide range of less-visited hiking routes, for example, from Jumalissärkkä, Säynäjäsuo, Varisjärvi and Pesiö.

Accessibility has been particularly considered in Hossa in accessible routes, campfire sites, rental cabins, a camping area, toilets, and platforms. In addition, the nature centre has two electric scooters and one walker available to hire and the possibility to charge wheelchair batteries. Other accessible routes can be found, for example, in Patokoski and Soiva Metsä (The Musical Forest).

The attraction of nature tourism is increased by attractive programme services, such as guided hikes, reindeer farm visits and fishing excursions. In addition, the untouched wilderness nature provides a good framework for bear watching which is a popular tourism experience in Suomussalmi. The ethicality of animal

tourism is a topical subject of debate in the field of tourism. It involves challenges, and their identification has increased, but comprehensive research on the matter has not yet been carried out.

### Be entranced by the history

A touch of history can be sensed throughout Suomussalmi: Hossa Värrikallio Cliffs and the prehistoric findings at the shores of Lake Kiantajärvi ooze the Stone Age, at Raate Road, visitors step back in time to the sites of the Winter War's final battles, to the origins of Finnish hero stories. The Viena Karelia route, which has been protected under the Antiquities Act, is one of Finland's oldest and most well-known passageways, which has been marked on the map. Author Ilmari Kianto's artist residence, Turjanlinna, can be visited by travelling on an old logging tugboat, which moved over to passenger traffic in 1975.

### Encounter culture

The instrument collection of Soiva Metsä is a unique visiting destination, which represents a special local culture of the Suomussalmi residents by combining its natural site with impressive landscapes and offering experiences to people of all ages.

Suomussalmi's summer theatre is situated in the same area, in Kaunisniemi, and it attracts visitors from all around Finland. During the winter, culture is offered by Theatre Retikka, which is praised in many acknowledgements for bringing out the local culture and for the work done for it.

Another interesting and impressive attraction is the thousand-person The Silence People, which was awarded the cultural Finland award in the spring of 2021. The unique spatial art piece is a great example of the lively voluntary work tradition and active sense of community.

## Responsibility principles and vision

"Suomussalmi is Northern Kainuu's lively centre and well-being community, which is an internationally known nature, sports and wilderness travel destination, the most interesting war history travel destination in the Nordic countries and the home of entrepreneurs."

The values of the residents of Suomussalmi, which are the most important principles of the entire community, which guide everyday choices:

- **Courage**, which evolves from Raate Road's heritage. Pioneership, self-initiation, courage to operate from independent starting points in a resilient and determined manner to achieve common objectives.
- **Sense of community**, the saying of a folk meeting held 100 years ago, is the inspiration and ability to get thoughts heard as a community by openly discussing, respecting others, and making decisions together.
- **Caring for nature and the environment and supporting biodiversity** in the spirit of Hossa.
- **Lively culture and civilisation**, the guiding line of Suomussalmi people's common story is a unique and lively culture, which directs from history to the future and is present in everyday life.

## Objectives and procedures

The implementation of sustainable tourism requires conscious operations from both local operators and tourists. Therefore, the main short-term, concrete objective of Suomussalmi's responsibility work is to get **more than half of the area's tourism companies to participate in the long-term development work of sustainable tourism and visibly introduce the Traveller's etiquette prepared for the area to the tourists visiting Suomussalmi**. The longer-term objective is to **promote year-round tourism, lengthen tourists' stays and a regional level Sustainable Travel Finland label**.

### Destination management

The Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) programme created by Visit Finland operates as a guideline in developing sustainable tourism in all of Finland. Suomussalmi is part of the programme at a regional level and actively encourages tourism companies to participate.

A responsible tourism working group has been convened in Suomussalmi. Their duty is to participate as an expert group in promoting the area's sustainability, for example, by creating this plan.

In the spring of 2020, Naturpolis' and the tourism associations' joint Matkailuyritykset kestäväälle kehityspolulle project ("Steering tourism businesses towards a sustainable future") was initiated. During the project, measures coaching for environmental certifications were carried out, and skills were increased ecologically, financially, socially, and culturally in implementing sustainable tourism. Measures are continued in the Sustainable tourism's Arctic Lakeland Kainuu project, which shall start in October 2021. The Comprehensive accessible nature tourism's steppingstones in Kainuu and the eNature Kainuu - accessible nature tourism projects.

### Economic sustainability

The all-year-round nature of tourism, which currently focuses on the summer season, shall be promoted in accordance with the winter tourism development plan, which shall be completed during the autumn of 2021.

Tourists' overnight stays at the destination is an important indicator when measuring the sustainability of the destination. A longer stay increases the profit brought in by the tourist, leads to a higher level of occupancy, and reduces the percentage of emissions created by travel. Tourists' stays are aimed to be lengthened by diversely and attractively communicating about the area, for example, with the help of the week programme created in the summer of 2021.

### Social and cultural sustainability

Equality is part of the operating method of the Municipality of Suomussalmi, and it is promoted in accordance with the equality plan. Therefore, all people are equal, regardless of their gender, age, physical features, sexuality, religion, or other factors.

The promotion of accessibility is an objective in the Vitality from Tourism project, in which an accessibility survey is carried out. The project also aims to improve, particularly the individually, easily experienced nature experiences, because individual travel is increasing significantly.

Local pride is a tourism trump card, which has been concretised in Suomussalmi by creating the Suomussalmi's Local Pride manual (2020). The manual operates as an image-based factor, and it is utilised to develop the tourism brand.

### Ecological sustainability

Suomussalmi's valuable nature sites are protected and maintained. In accordance with the maintenance and user plan (2020) created by Metsähallitus for Hossa National park, the measures to be carried out in the area include the restoration of wetlands, the restoration burning of forests, the monitoring of endangered species and the condition of cultural heritage sites, the maintenance of the area's service structures, and the guidance of visitor movement, in such a way that the disturbance caused to species and any wear damage is minimised.

The retention of nature's biodiversity and the minimisation of wear is also considered in tourism marketing, and less visited sites are also recommended to visitors. The Suomussalmi tourism office has created the Nature route guide, and it is also used to direct visitors to these destinations. The visitor numbers of nature routes are monitored with visit counts and sometimes also with so-called logger bookkeeping, and estimated on the basis of firewood consumption, visitor book entries and toilet waste.

The municipality's environmental protection authority is responsible for protecting Suomussalmi's environment per its prepared control plan. Risk assessment is used to focus monitoring, in which case monitoring focuses on the main destinations in terms of environmental effects and risks.

### Measurements and indicators

The achievement of objectives is followed and assessed with indicators included in the plan. The national indicators of sustainable tourism, which belong to the Visit Finland STF programme and shall be published later, shall also be introduced in the area. The indicators shall be followed on the STF programme's online platform and in the sustainable tourism working group, where necessary.

Procedure	Indicator	Objective in 2022	Objective in 2025
Suomussalmi is aiming to achieve a regional STF label.	% of tourism companies that have the STF label	At least 51% of the companies in the STF programme's business network have participated in the programme.	At least 51% of the STF programme's business network companies have gained an STF label.
Sustainable travel plan	The plan is monitored and updated regularly, and it has been appointed a responsible person.	First annual update	More extensive update in accordance with the municipal strategy
Sustainable tourism working group	Regular meetings and communications as necessary	At least 1 meeting	Meeting at least once a year
Guiding tourists towards more sustainable stays: Traveller's etiquette	Traveller's etiquette visible in different channels	The etiquette and sustainable tourism themes are monthly communicated on the internet and social media platforms maintained by Visit Suomussalmi. Basic details are also produced in English.	The etiquette and sustainable tourism themes are weekly communicated on the internet and social media platforms maintained by Visit Suomussalmi. Regular communications for international tourists too.
<b>Financial responsibility</b>			
Increase in all-year tourism	Development plan for winter tourism	Introduction, monitoring and reporting of plan	Monitoring, updating and reporting of plan
Extending tourists' stays using diverse and attractive marketing methods	In 2019, the average overnight stay was 2 nights (Source: Visitory)	Tourists' average stay in Suomussalmi 2.2 nights	Tourists' average stay in Suomussalmi 2.5 nights

Promotion of creating new jobs in the tourism industry (municipality adds resources to develop tourism)	Tourism's direct impact on employment (Initial situation 2018: 70.5 man-years Source: KAMK)	At least 1 tourism company is established in the area each year.	Increase of tourism's regional economy effects 2%/year
Development of nature tourism	Implementation of Hossa's master plan 2015-2025 and its vision	Monitoring and reporting of plan	Nature tourism in the new municipal strategy

Procedure	Indicator	Objective in 2022	Objective in 2025
<b>Social and cultural responsibility</b>			
Development of accessible routes in ongoing projects	Number and quality of accessible routed	The situation of current routes and the opportunities for accessibility are surveyed.	Current routes are maintained, and in addition 2 new accessible routes.
Survey of accessible accommodation sites. Improvement of communications and the increase of accessible services.	% of accommodation services, which have rooms for disabled individuals.	Current, accessible work duties are communicated on the regional landing page of the accommodation services.	The % of accessible accommodation services is growing
Measurement of local pride and its utilisation in the development of the tourism brand.	Local pride manual created in 2018.	The local pride manual is utilised in the development of the tourism brand.	Specification of tourism guidelines in connection with the further update of the municipal strategy and consideration towards local pride.
<b>Ecological responsibility</b>			
Measurement of water consumption/user site and reduction of consumption by increasing information.	Initial situation in water consumption/ user site	The consumption of water decreases	The consumption of water decreases
Using renewable energy	Percentage of tourism companies using renewable energy	51% of tourism companies use renewable energy	100% of tourism companies use renewable energy
Calculation and reduction of carbon footprint	The initial situation is calculated and introduced when the calculator is ready	51% of companies have calculated the initial situation	51% of companies have been able to reduce their carbon footprint
The introduction of a shared composter in Hossa is suggested	Provision of a biowaste recycling option	Introduction of a shared composter	The use of a shared composter continues
Minimisation of hiking routes' wear damages	Guiding visitors to less known routes as well / Monitoring the routes' visitor amounts	Updating and sharing the Nature route guide, marketing on website and social media	Balancing of visitor amounts on less known and most popular routes
Public transport in Hossa	Hossa bus and the Kuusamo-Kajaani bus route travel via Hossa	The possibilities of Hossa's public transport	The possibilities of Hossa's public transport

		remain as before or improve.	remain as before or improve.
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## Responsibility communications

An essential part of responsibility work is communicating about it. Communications increase tourists' and local operators' awareness about sustainable tourism and its effectiveness. With open communications, the path towards a more sustainable travel destination is made more visible, trust is increased, and competitive advantage is created.

Responsibility is a cutting-edge theme in all internal and external communications concerning Suomussalmi's tourism. Internal communications refer to the communications of the area's tourism operators with, e.g., member letters sent by email.

The external channels of responsibility communications that are in use are as follows:

- [Responsibility - Suomussalmi](#)
- [Visit Suomussalmi | Facebook](#)
- [Visit Suomussalmi \(@visitsuomussalmi\) • Instagram images and videos](#)
- [Visit Suomussalmi | Youtube](#)

The [Traveller's etiquette \(link\)](#) is used in responsibility communications, and it guides the tourists of Suomussalmi towards sustainable visits.

The [Holiday homeowner's low carbon emissions guide \(link\)](#) is also used in support of communications. It contains, e.g. easy, quick and cost-effective tips for promoting low carbon emissions, energy efficiency and supporting nature's biodiversity.

Hiking-related responsibility matters and other information about Hossa National Park can be found on ([Hossa National Park - Nationalparks.fi](#)) nationalparks.fi website maintained by Metsähallitus (Finnish forest administration)

