



BEST PRACTICE: TAHKO, FINLAND



Key Challenge

Appropriate local tourism strategies and policies to accelerate the transition to sustainable and resilient tourism.

Type of Solution

Stakeholder participation and management; Certification; Capacity building.

Case Classification

Type of Destination | Rural

Territorial Level | < NUTS 3

Size of the Tourist Area | 10 km²

Population | Tourist Resort

Type of Tourism | Ecotourism; Adventure; Coastal, maritime, and inland water; Sports.

Tourism Organisation | Regional Destination Management Organisation (DMO) and Destination Development Company, both are public-private partnerships.

Main Stakeholders Affected | Accommodations; Restaurants and bars; Other tourism service providers.

Additional Challenges Covered | Dependence of the local economy on tourism; Degradation and loss of biodiversity; Lack of knowledge and skills of stakeholders.

Context & Background

Tahko is a tourist resort in the heart of Finland, characterised by its wide range of outdoor and sports activities for different target groups. Tourism is the resort's only source of income. In 2023, the 8,500 beds in various types of accommodation generated around 280,000 overnight stays, 90% of which were domestic (before the Ukrainian war, 30% were international tourists, mainly from Russia).

Key Challenge

Since tourism in Tahko completely depends on intact nature, protecting it is of vital importance. Therefore, Tahko considers essential to promote sustainable tourism in the long-term using a systematic approach that also includes economic and socio-cultural aspects.



Implementation of Solutions: To implement a comprehensive and systematic sustainability approach in the resort, Tahko decided to promote and support the certification of the tourism service providers and the destination.

SOLUTIONS

Tahko sought recognition in the national *“Sustainable Travel Finland” (STF)* programme, a comprehensive national sustainability programme that, in addition to meeting a number of criteria regarding socio-economic, cultural and legal responsibility, also requires obtaining an already recognised environmental certification – in Tahko’s case, this is the EcoCompass certification.

- Following a two-year certification process, Tahko’s Destination Management Organisation (DMO) and businesses received the *EcoCompass certification* as its first sustainability certificate. To achieve certification, it was crucial to bring a wide range of experts on board to raise awareness and provide training on sustainable development. Almost 30 companies received an environmental certification in this process.
- The *“Sustainable Travel Finland” (STF)* label, which is awarded by the national tourism association Visit Finland, aims to provide tourism companies and destinations with a sustainable tourism development model that facilitates the introduction and communication of responsible practices. Tahko started the 2-year accreditation process in 2022. Since the destination was already well prepared thanks to the EcoCompass certification and the companies were highly motivated, the Sustainable Travel Finland accreditation process was completed a year earlier and Tahko became the first tourism destination in Finland to receive the Sustainable Travel Finland label. Reaccreditation takes place every two years. Reaccreditations also influence the planning of future sustainability projects such as accessibility, communication networks, and recycling.
- Data collection on visitors and the economic and environmental impacts of their trips is carried out with the support of the *Power Bi app* and a regional analytics company.

Replicability potential: Very high (requires political will and stakeholder cooperation).

Cost & funding source: For the EcoCompass certification around 215,000 euros, mainly funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (the DMO only provided a small share of the funding); The certification fee per company is around 300 to 500 euros annually, plus the audit costs of around 500 to 1000 euros every three years; For the STF accreditation around 40,000 euros, financed from the regular DMO budget available for sustainable development.



Success Factors & Barriers

Success factors: High level of commitment from companies and good communication with all parties involved; The reduced demand caused by the Covid-19 pandemic freed up capacity to focus on the sustainability process; Clear roadmap and structure for certification; Sufficient funding.

Barriers: Financial constraints for some companies due to the Covid-19 pandemic; High burden of sustainability reporting for small companies due to limited human resources.

Results and Impacts

- The spotlight on Tahko as the first certified destination in Finland increased its visibility, especially on the Finnish market.
- The data collected during the certification process made tourism development more transparent.
- In the destination, stakeholders feel an increased responsibility towards environmental and social issues.
- The local economy has been strengthened, resulting in more jobs.
- Other destinations are getting in touch to learn from Tahko.

Recommendations by the Destinations

- It is crucial to involve companies in the project at an early stage (also to set up financing).
- A clear vision helps to implement the activities and measures in the long-term.
- The cooperation of all those involved is pivotal, as such large projects cannot be carried out alone.
- It is important not only to promote responsible tourism at the destination, but also to communicate these efforts to locals and tourists, to increase both the acceptance of tourism among the population and the reputation of the destination among tourists.
- Well-prepared data are critical to convincing stakeholders and effectively explaining sustainability-related concepts.

Useful Links

- [Sustainability in Tahko](#) | [Sustainable Travel Finland](#)

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