

Southern Finland as a tourism gateway from Russia to the West

The Center for Markets in Transition at the School of Economics has conducted a study analysing Russian tourists travelling through Southern Finland to the West. The study provides information for the Finnish tourism industry about Southern Finland's position as a tourism gateway from Russia to the West and outlines ways for marketing Finland as a part of tourism to the West. This study is something of a mirror-image of the previously published "Southern Finland as a tourist route to St. Petersburg – Life cycle of the gateway concept in tourism to Russia" (HSE B-47), which analysed Southern Finland's role in Western tourists' travel programs to St. Petersburg. This study was financed by the Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation.

The study analyses Southern Finland's role in Russian tourists' travel routes to the west and clarifies Southern Finland's role and life cycle as a gateway between the east and the west. The geopolitical gateway concept is analyzed from the functional perspective from the tourist's viewpoint. The study is based on questionnaires addressed to 1020 Russian tourists travelling from Russia to the West via Finland between the summer of 2004 and the winter of 2004/2005 in Southern Finland's harbours, trains and the Helsinki-Vantaa airport. The questionnaires illustrated:

- What is a Russian gateway tourist like?
- What is Finland's role in Russian tourists' travel programs?
- As a gateway, how strong is Finland's competitive edge compared to the Baltic States and Poland?
- Are tourists interested in using the Baltic Sea Region as a holiday destination?

As a result, **three tourist types** were identified (as in the previous study):

1. **Finland tourists** (18% of the respondents, predominantly from Other European Russia and the Moscow area): Finland is the main destination. For this type, the main reasons for coming to Finland were vacationing and visiting friends and family, for which 40% used accommodation services in Finland. Half of the Finland tourists were travelling independently and half with a tourist group. Finland tourists arrived in Finland by bus, car, train or airplane and extended their trip by ferry to Sweden or other Nordic Countries. Finland Tourists chose to travel via Finland because they wanted to visit Finland and/or their friends and families had recommended Finland as a route or destination. Finland tourists actively used Finnish tourism services and facilities. Finland Tourists found Nordic Countries interesting, but Finland was still their main destination. The Baltic States or Poland weren't interesting as a travel destination or as a travel route.
2. **Gateway tourists** (50% of the respondents, predominantly from St. Petersburg and Moscow areas): Finland is one interesting destination in a touring trip. The Russian gateway tourists travelled with a tourist group and were slightly inexperienced as tourists. Gateway tourists chose to travel via Finland because they were participating in a ready-made package tour, they wanted to visit Finland, and they thought Finland is the fastest way to get to their destination. Also recommendations from friends and family influenced their decisions. Gateway tourists arrived in Finland by bus and continued their trip onward by ferry to Sweden. Gateway tourists were interested in linking Finland into a larger Nordic touring holiday. Finland alone was not an interesting enough destination. The main goal was Sweden or touring in Nordic countries or Europe. Although gateway tourists were more interested in the Baltic States or Poland than other tourist types, interest was still weak.

Gateway tourists mostly stayed in Finland 1-3 days and only one fifth of them used accommodation services in Finland.

3. **Transit passengers** (32% of the respondents, predominantly from the St. Petersburg area): Finland is just a transit country to a final destination. Most of the transit passengers stayed in Finland just a few hours to change airplanes. Only 10% used accommodation services in Finland. For transit passengers, travelling through Finland was a conscious choice because most of them had purchased their trip by directly contacting the service providers. Travelling through Finland was the fastest, cheapest and most secure option. Transit passengers would be interested in travelling from Russia directly to the destination, but the route via Finland is still the most convenient. Transit passengers rarely used tourism related services in Finland. They weren't interested in the Baltic Sea Region as a holiday destination, nor were they interested in alternative Southern routes.

The study shows that Finland's gateway position from Russia to the West is experiencing declining popularity. However, there is still a large group of Russian tourists who want to travel via Finland to the West. Rather than being a mere transit area, Finland's role could be transformed to more of a touring destination. For the time being, the competing Southern routes via the Baltic States and Poland don't provide a threat to Finland. Finland's position in Russian tourist's travel plans is based on availability of trips to Finland (and beyond), interest in visiting Finland, and Finland's good transportation and tourism infrastructure.

The study recommends marketing Finland to four distinct Russian tourists segments:

1. Finland Tourists: Measures should be taken to facilitate individually tailored trips by offering the means for people to organize their own trips to Finland, including offering necessary travel services from the Finnish side. Finland could be marketed as a holiday destination, not forgetting Finland's good connections to the West. The greatest number of potential tourists for this segment is to be found in the Moscow area and other parts of European Russia.
2. Gateway Tourists: Ready-made Finland and other Nordic Country package trips should be prepared that include at least one night in Finland. Gateway tourists are inexperienced travellers who want to see many destinations and countries in their journey. They are ready to travel to Finland even from remote areas in Russia.
3. Transit Tourists: Measures should be taken to market Finland's good flight and ferry connections to the West. For transit tourists it is also worthwhile to provide information about various tourism activities in Finland that are suitable for short visits. The most potential for this tourist segment is found in areas neighbouring Finland, like St. Petersburg.
4. Unrealized Tourists: Finland can also be marketed in South-West Russia where there are several million cities and lots of potential tourists. For them Finland is still an unknown and relatively new destination.

The research report is published in HSE publications: Kosonen, Riitta, Paajanen, Malla ja Reittu, Noora (2005): Etelä-Suomi venäläisten turistien länsimatkailussa. Helsinki School of Economics Publications, Series B-59.

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