



Sustainable Travel Plan for Taivalkoski 2021- 2025

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Introduction

The sustainable travel plan is an important tool for promoting sustainability in Taivalkoski. It examines the current sustainable travel operations in the region and lists the core areas of development. Based on an analysis of the current situation, we have defined the ideal state for our tourism region and the related goals. This plan includes the measures needed to achieve these goals, their implementation schedule, and available financial and communication resources.

Visit Finland has set out that Finland aims to reach the position of the world's most sustainable travel destination by 2025. As a tourism area, Taivalkoski wishes to do its share in promoting the achievement of this objective. Furthermore, Taivalkoski's goal is to reach Visit Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland programme's regional certification in the near future, the criterion of which is that over half of the tourism businesses in the area need to follow sustainable practices.

This requires that the entire tourism region and the companies operating in the area participate, change their thinking, and develop and monitor the sustainability of their operations regarding procurements, water and electricity consumption, and employee well-being. We strongly believe that this interesting development work will carry far into the future and sustainably make Taivalkoski even more attractive to tourists today and in the future.

The genuine easy-going atmosphere in Taivalkoski - description of the current state

Taivalkoski has year-round tourism, which takes place all around its extensive municipality. There is no single, large concentration of tourism. However, the city centre and the area of Taivalvaara, which is situated in its immediate vicinity, can be considered to be a tourism centre. The disparity is due to the fact that the establishment of tourism businesses is largely based on Kalle Päätalo's literature production. The village of Jokijärvi, which in the 1800s has also been a chapel parish of Jokijärvi and its own municipality, is nowadays known as a cultural village. Kalle Päätalo's childhood home, located in Jokijärvi, has become a museum, and two of the first tourism businesses were established in the village.

The area has far-reaching traditions in hiking, fishing, canoeing and other outdoor activities. Nature is close, and people have learned to live in harmony with it. Sustainable business is not a new or separate matter in the area; but instead, it is generally the foundation of operations. Tranquillity and the sense of space are the area's absolute trump cards - and growing trends in the field of tourism. Tourism businesses in Taivalkoski can offer safe, sustainable, and competitive tourism products for various customers and, thus, respond to the needs of changing tourism.

Nature tourism and cultural tourism play the main role in Taivalkoski. Domestic visitors are mainly individual travellers. As of now, international visitors have mainly come through travel agencies, but individual tourism is expected to become more common among international travellers too. International travellers are attracted by the area's comprehensive dog sledge service operations. A lot of domestic travellers arrive in the area to familiarise themselves with author Kalle Päätalo's museum and the author's childhood home Kallioniemi. Taivalkoski's largest public event Päätalo Week is organised during the summers. The active summer theatre operations also attract visitors.

Hiking and outdoor routes are available directly from the city centre and canoeing along river Iijoki, which runs through the centre. Almost all the tourism businesses are located near waterways. River Iijoki and the

lakes belonging to the waterway offer opportunities for summer activities. In the centre of Taivalkoski there is also a unique canoeing centre and the oldest store of Finland.

A big part of Syöte National Park is situated in Taivalkoski, and the other parts are also rather close. Part of Hossa National Park is also located in Taivalkoski. Finland's oldest hiking area, Kylmäluoma, is in the southeast part of Taivalkoski. Riisitunturi and Oulanka National Parks are also approximately a one-hour drive away.

There is a diverse range of accommodation options in the area. There is a hotel in the vicinity of the slopes of Taivalvaara ski center, and there are two hostels on the outskirts of the city centre. You can find hotel-level accommodation and tourism companies that provide other services in the village of Jokijärvi. There are camping areas in Kylmäluoma, Jokijärvi and Kolmiloukko (along Highway 20), and a motorhome stopover next to Taivalvaara ski center. There are cabins available to rent around the municipality, such as in Jokijärvi and the Kylmäluoma hiking area.

The main identified development areas are the improvement of waste management and recycling and communications. Sustainability could almost be considered self-evident; "we've always operated in this way" is a common saying among the entrepreneurs in the area. More information about sustainable travel products and services should be provided to customers and other stakeholders too.

Taivalkoski's responsibility principles

These responsibility principles describe Taivalkoski's sustainability-related attitudes, values, and principles, as well as the direction we want to take in the future. By signing Visit Finland's 10 principles of sustainable travel, presented below, we comprehensively undertake to work in favour of a more sustainable Finnish tourism landscape.

- **We will collaborate fairly**

We will develop local tourism in cooperation with other actors in our region and the industry. Together we can better influence the future of society and travel. We want to make our region a good place to live and visit now as well as in the future, so we will make sustainable decisions that also benefit future generations. We will treat everyone respectfully and rightfully, and we only practice fair and honest trade.

- **We will look after nature**

We will protect the environment, landscapes, and nature's biodiversity in our region. Our operations do not exceed nature's load-bearing capacity but instead do their share to safeguard the opportunities of a good life and retain a clean operating environment in our area. We will also look after the well-being and respectful treatment of local animals and wildlife.

- **We will respect the cultural heritage**

We cherish the cultural heritage of our region. Our goal is to portray local culture in an authentic and respectful way as well as to revitalize, maintain and strengthen it. We also understand that cultures have always evolved through interacting with and learning from each other.

- **We will promote well-being, human rights, and equality**

We will treat our staff, guests, and local residents equally and respectfully regardless of their backgrounds. We will consider people's special needs in our operations. We will train, guide, and encourage our staff to operate responsibly.

- **We will favour local providers**

We will support local products, services and companies, and our objective is to employ local individuals. We will favour food made from Finnish ingredients. We will engage residents and companies in the matters that concern them.

- **We will invest in safety and quality**

We ensure the safety of local residents, our staff, and visitors and observe legislation and authority provisions. When we develop our services and products with quality at the forefront, we create prerequisites for the continuity of our own operations.

- **We will consider our impact on the climate**

We make good choices in terms of climate, and we reduce our carbon footprint. We monitor the burden caused by tourism on the environment, and with active measurements, we aim for more efficient use of energy and resources.

- **We will communicate transparently**

In our area, we boldly communicate tourism's sustainable acts as well as upcoming plans and visions. We want Finland's sustainable travel to be known around the world. We openly share successes as well as challenges.

- **We will work to continuously improve the vitality of the tourism industry in our region**

We are prepared to reform our services and products to have sufficient demand in the future. A stable economy and ethical sector create a foundation for the sustainable development of operations.

- **We will commit to the principles of sustainable travel**

We take an active role in promoting sustainable travel and in the implementation of these principles of sustainable travel. We shall prepare an operating plan for sustainable travel, according to which we will operate even more systematically in the future. We commit to procedures, and we want to learn more in the future too.

The traveller's etiquette

In the summer of 2021, a common etiquette for travellers was prepared for our region. It was published in as [pdf instructions \(naturpolis.fi\)](#) and [videos \(youtube.com\)](#). Its core messages are as follows. There is an example of each individual instruction under each key message.

1. Be mindful of safety matters

Example: Please only make fires in official and marked locations. The purpose of official fire sites is to facilitate your excursions. On lands not owned by the municipality or the Government, you always need the landowner's permission to make a fire. Please remember that fires are prohibited everywhere during a forest fire warning.

2. Be mindful when moving around and using the services in the area

Example: Please stay on the marked routes regardless of the season. In this way, you will promote your own safety and minimise damage to nature. Please note that many types of road users from all age groups, on bicycle or foot, use the paths, roads, and pedestrian routes.

3. Put your waste in a waste collector, sort and recycle whenever possible

Example: As of now, everyone can enjoy our nature, but this also results in responsibilities. Familiarise yourself with every man's rights and, particularly, the obligations that come with these rights!

4. Allow others also to enjoy the peace and quiet of nature

Example: You can promote peace and quiet by travelling outside the busiest peak times. Local companies can provide you with information on less busy destinations and times.

5. Favour local food and try local products and services

Example: Favour local produce! In this way, you can enjoy different culinary experiences and support the local economy by purchasing, for example, handicrafts from local operators.

The most essential instructions for each topic have been compiled around the key messages. The traveller's etiquette increases visitors' knowledge and understanding about the local community's environmental matters and the political and social atmosphere. The etiquette strives to, particularly, share with the tourists what is important to locals, the local behavioural rules, the special characteristics of the local culture and the norms of the destination. By guiding tourists to local products, the financial benefit for local companies is promoted. The etiquette has been prepared in collaboration with stakeholder groups to respond, as well as possible, to the challenges concerning tourist behaviour in our tourism area.

The etiquette is based on voluntary operations, but it is also partly based on requirements set out by Finnish legislation. The etiquette aims for better and more sustainable co-living between local residents and tourists by communicating as positively as possible and avoiding tourism's negative impacts. The traveller's etiquette operates as a common ambition and a key part of promoting the destination's sustainability and responsibility.

Objectives and procedures

The main short-term goal of Taivalkoski's responsibility work is to get **over half of the area's tourism businesses to participate in the long-term development work of sustainable travel and visibly introduce the traveller's etiquette prepared for the area.**

In April 2020, Naturpolis' and tourism associations' joint ***Matkailuyritykset kestäväille kehityspolulle project ("Steering tourism businesses towards a sustainable future")*** was initiated in the area. During the project, procedures were implemented in Taivalkoski in preparation for environmental and quality certifications, which aim to have at least 51% of the tourism businesses participate. In addition, the skills of companies and employees in environmental know-how, the reduction of carbon footprints and the reporting of carbon handprints are increased. The procedures aim to increase the collaboration between tourism businesses and develop their practices, products, and services in accordance with the principles of sustainable travel. In this way, the reputation of the tourism area as a responsible travel destination will develop among the customers, allowing the competitiveness of the companies and the area to be ensured in the future.

The introduction of the traveller's etiquette for Taivalkoski and its surrounding municipality, which was drawn up in cooperation with Oulu University, will be implemented in the area using video material, other digital material, and printed brochures. The material has been prepared to respond to challenges raised in the current situation and to supplement existing guidelines, such as Metsähallitus' Outdoor Etiquette. The implemented communications' materials are available to the entire area and its tourism businesses.

Taivalkoski Tourism Association is involved in Visit Finland's **Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) programme** at a regional level. To achieve a regional level STF label, at least 51% of the tourism area's companies (including those with the highest turnover) must have a company-level STF label. This rule applies to tourism businesses that carry out the international tourism of the tourism area. In this context, 13 companies have been included in the business network in this connection, and from these, at least 7 companies must have an STF label to

achieve an area-level marking. This objective is wished to be achieved in accordance with this plan by the end of 2022.

The framework of the STF programme includes its own sustainable travel working group, which assembly includes the regional organisation, tourism entrepreneurs and other local stakeholder groups. The working group's duties include participating in promoting tourism's sustainability in various contexts, for example, the preparation of this plan. In addition, the working group shall regularly convene to review topical subject entities concerning the area's sustainability. Naturpolis Oy is responsible for convening the group.

The natural destinations located in Taivalkoski, and their routes, are valuable environments for all locals, entrepreneurs, and travellers. The long-term **objective** of the maintenance and operating plan prepared by Metsähallitus for Syöte National Park is to **develop leisure use and natural tourism** based on demand and **sustainable principles** and the operating environment. Routes and guidance are developed to serve the different forms of use all year round diversely, e.g., opportunities for mountain biking are increased. The service concept is planned together with partners while considering the needs of increasing international travel.

A project is being planned to improve the routes and signs, which aims to reform the natural leisure routes comprehensively, and its aim is for a **comprehensive reform of the natural exercise routes**. The procedures increase the route network's visibility, accessibility, user safety, and multi-purposeness and increase the regional interest of Taivalkoski. In addition, the project brings out a long list of characteristic features and improves the operating prerequisites of small rural companies.

In accordance with the Municipality of Taivalkoski's climate programme (2021), Taivalkoski shall be developed into a carbon-neutral municipality in accordance with the Government's carbon neutrality objectives. As part of these operations, **Taivalkoski shall join the network of municipalities called Hinku**. The aim of the Hinku municipalities is an 80% reduction in emissions by the year 2030 compared to 2007. To promote this objective at a practical level, Taivalkoski is part of the Kahina project (2020-2022).

The Finnish waste act was reformed in 2021 to correspond to the changes required by EU directives. As a result of the reform, the individual collection obligations became significantly more stringent, which means even better waste management services for consumers. The sorting and individual collection of packaging waste and bio-waste will become mandatory for all properties in built-up areas if the property has 5 or more residential apartments. In the sparsely habituated Taivalkoski, the new waste act does not require measures at this point, but it is important for the travel destination to react. Waste management is also due to be improved in accordance with the Municipality of Taivalkoski's climate programme (2020) by making the collection and recycling of waste more efficient, paying attention to different waste types, the sufficiency of collection points and their easy availability.

The **Climate Guide for Taivalkoski residents** shall be implemented in the framework of the climate programme. The climate guide is aimed to be used to provide information to both residents of the municipality and the area's tourists and holidaymakers about their options for more environmentally friendly solutions and to reduce their own emissions.

In the spring of 2021, the **Low carbon emissions guide for holiday homeowners** was created to support communications. It has been made in collaboration with the Matkailuyritykset kestäväille kehityspolulle ("Steering tourism businesses towards a sustainable future") and the Väkky projects. The guide is intended for individuals commercially renting their holiday home, but it is suitable for all cabin-goers. The publication includes, for example, easy, quick, and cost-effective tips as well as renovation and investment ideas.

In March 2021, the **Finnish Government's roadmap for fossil-free traffic** was completed. The roadmap presents the methods in which domestic traffic's greenhouse gas emissions can be halved by 2020 and traffic can be made emission-free by 2045- For example, the availability of electric vehicles' charging points in Taivalkoski is promoted within the framework of the Kahina project.

The Municipality of Taivalkoski shall actively develop the area's tourism services and their all-year tourism. Subjects of development include, for example, **Taivalvaara's caravan area**, which level of use is aimed to be improved with the Best Park concept. In this way, an already existing service is improved, and more overnight stays and longer stays are possibly achieved in the area of Taivalkoski.

Measurements and indicators

The indicators that reach all sub-areas of sustainability shall be introduced in Taivalkoski at a regional level during the year 2022 when Visit Finland publishes the national indicators of sustainable travel belonging to the Sustainable Travel Finland programme. The indicators shall be followed on the STF programme's online platform and internally at the Taivalkoski Tourism Association. The indicators' details, descriptions, and objectives shall be visibly attached to this plan after they are ready and introduced.

For Taivalkoski's sustainability to be monitored and measured as comprehensively as possible and in a manner suitable for the area, these national indicators shall be further finished, where necessary, to be suitable for Taivalkoski. Indicators are monitored at an annual level and other intervals according to the requirements of the STF programme.

Responsibility communications plan

Responsibility is considered in all communications concerning tourism in the most cutting-edge manner. It shall also be considered in the marketing plan to be prepared for the area in 2021. On Taivalkoski's tourism website, you can find [a section on sustainable travel \(www.visittaivalkoski.fi/en/responsible-tourism\)](http://www.visittaivalkoski.fi/en/responsible-tourism), which shall be updated with information about the different sub-areas of responsibility, such as recycling and accessible services. The website has been particularly prepared from a tourist's perspective.

The traveller's etiquette, which was completed in the summer of 2021, shall be used as a key tool of responsibility communication. It shall be used as diversely as possible in communications. Other guidelines relevant to tourists shall also be added, particularly in improving route signs, for example, in the framework of the development project for municipal route networks and signs.

In addition to the website, the responsibility communications channels that are in use include:

- Tuhansien tarinoiden Taivalkoski | Facebook
- @visittaivalkoski | Instagram
- Regular member releases to the area's tourist companies including responsibility information
- Marketing campaigns

Contacts concerning communications are requested to be addressed to Tourism Coordinator Turo Murtovaara turo.murtovaara@naturpolis.fi.

Updates, monitoring and budget

This plan is valid until 2025, at which time the next larger update shall be implemented. The plan's responsible person is Taivalkoski's Tourism Coordinator Turo Murtovaara, turo.murtovaara@naturpolis.fi

The plan is updated at two different levels; at a basic level on an annual basis and more comprehensively in connection with the renewal of the area's municipal strategy. Where necessary, the plan can also be updated between these actual updates.

Annual update

- The procedural plan and indicators shall be reviewed, and monitoring figures will be updated.
- The entire plan is briefly reviewed, and if any essential and acute needs for changes are observed, the changes are immediately processed. Particularly projects that are ending shall be considered.
- The details of the STF programme's online platform are updated. However, the online platform may still require reviews between the actual updates, and for this reason, it is good for the plan's responsible person to log in to the platform, for example, monthly. Visit Finland shall inform if the update of the online platform requires further attention of areas.
- Meetings of the sustainable travel working group and convening them, where necessary.
- Attention is paid to ensure that the sustainable travel plan is considered in connection with preparing Taivalkoski Tourism Association's other plans and, where possible, municipal plans.

Strategy-based update

- Primarily prepared according to the same schedule as the renewal process of the area's municipal strategy, the current strategy is valid until 2021. However, the first update to this plan, in accordance with the strategy, shall not be carried out until in connection with the following municipal strategy, which is estimated to be in 2025.
- All sections of the plan shall be reviewed in further detail. All necessary changes are made to the current situation description, responsibility principles, objectives and measures, communications plan, and the updates and monitoring section.
- Reflection on the indicator listing for the STF programme. The indicator listing is thoroughly reviewed, and any new indicators to be included shall be added, and any expired, or unnecessary ones shall be removed. In addition, the necessary monitoring figures are updated. It is considered that all sub-areas of sustainability shall remain considered in the indicators.
- The updated plan shall be approved by the area's sustainable travel working group and the Board of the Taivalkoski Tourism Association until the next larger update (strategy update interval).

Budget

- Matkailuyritykset kestäväälle kehityspolulle ("Steering tourism businesses towards a sustainable future") project 15/4/2020-31/12/2021, Naturpolis Oy. Total budget 156,244.4 €, Share of Taivalkoski area 18,749.34 €. The project's funding consists of EU and Government funding granted by the Northern Ostrobothnia ELY Centre as well as private funding (Ruka-Kuusamo Matkailu ry, Taivalkoski Tourism Association and Hossan Matkailuyrittäjät ry).
- Sustainable travel in Taivalkoski project, Taivalkoski Tourism Association. The cost estimate of the sustainable travel promoting project is about 8,000€, of which 6,400€ is aid from the regional development fund.

Authors: Naturpolis Oy and Taivalkoski Tourism Association.

