

“META CLUSTER FOR ATTRACTING THE JAPANESE TOURISM MARKET”

CAITO project kick-off meeting in Tartu

The CAITO project aims to promote and support rural tourism companies to enter Japanese tourism market by strengthening their capacity and cooperation in the three Baltic Sea countries: Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. to promote and support rural tourism companies to enter Japanese tourism market by strengthening their capacity and cooperation in the three Baltic Sea countries: Latvia, Estonia, and Finland.

The project partners' meeting in Tartu, Estonia, was hosted by projects' lead partner - Estonian University of Life Sciences.

The meeting started with greetings from **Aret Vooremäe**, director of the Institute of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Estonian University of Life Sciences. The manager of CAITO project, **Lea Sudakova**, opened the work session by introducing main activities done since project start in July and thought regarding to the JATA Tourism EXPO 2016 visit in Japan in September. JATA is one of the world's largest travel events. It is organized in order to further stimulate the demand for overseas travel, inbound tourism to Japan, and domestic tourism by bringing together the power of the tourism industry and all related industries and regional communities. 185 844 participants were visiting JATA in 2016.

Anne Matilainen from University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute, presented an overview of main results of interviewing travel agencies during JATA Tourism EXPO 2016 and thought from seminar „Japanese Overseas Outbound Travel Market“. The main conclusions are:

- 12,8% of Japanese travel overseas, of this approx 94% come from the major cities.
- After the record year 2012 (18,49 million overseas travellers), the overseas travel has declined a bit. Travel agencies aim to increase the amount to 20 milj. people by 2020.
- The safe destinations are leading the trend at the moment – increased interest for Australia, Taiwan and New Zealand, the travel to France and Belgium has decreased 60-70 %
- Japanese tourists are already quite familiar regarding to Finland, but, Baltic countries are still a bit unknown;
- There is an interest to visit several countries at the same time.
- The first time traveller typically go for the main tourist attractions, however the number of repeat travellers is high.
- Travellers typical stay is 5-6 nights per trip
- Local food, nature relaxation are the main attractions

Asnāte Ziemele, Latvian Country Tourism Association „Lauku celotajs“ gave an overview of composing the image brochure. Developed by: "Baltic Country Holidays", Estonian Rural Tourism association, Regional tourism association in southern Finland "Visit South Coast Finland". The image brochure gives introduction about the Baltic States and southern Finland and describes rural tourism products such as Nature's Experiences, Touring, Country Life, Countryside Accommodation, Baltic sea cuisine, Wellbeing tourism.

Roger Evans, Estonian University of Life Sciences discussed topical questions regarding to the Japanese travellers' Customer Journey. At the moment the main barriers for tourists in Baltic Sea regions are related to the lack of awareness of how/where to find information, how to use our on-line services and how to travel around at local level (public transport, car- road signs, parking, right side give way rule, driving on opposite side of the road). Important issue is also lack of knowledge about where attractions and tourism facilities are in relation to each other in terms of distance and travel times. The solutions may be as follows:

- Information provided in Japanese and orientated to towards the needs of NON Europeans
- Internet links must be easily understood by non-Estonian/Finnish/Latvian speakers

- Joined-up thinking and collaboration established between stakeholders: providers/tourism operators; travel companies, tourism agents and tourism operators.
- Secret shopper approach may be used to identify weak points in the Customer Journey

Suvi Sivén from Laurea University of Applied Sciences talked about a series of mentored workshops for SMEs. The aim of workshops is to provide rural tourism product providers with will have acquired knowledge of working with Japanese customers; understanding the expectations of Japanese tourists, and creating products & services suitable for Japanese market. The first workshops will be organised in 2017.

Zane Bulderberga, representative from Latvia University of Agriculture, presented the main activities for project communication plan and several versions of CAITO logo. The most favourite logo design was chosen by all partners and will be used in future.

At the end of first meeting day, the all participants were invited to experience some of rural tourism products - sailing trip on barge "Jõmmu" by river Emajõgi along the Tartu city. The 'Jõmmu' barge is a timber goods vessel the likes of which sailed on Estonian waterways from Hanseatic times until the mid-20th century.

On the second day partners continued discussions regarding activities and tasks for achieve the project overall objective - to promote and support rural tourism companies to enter Japanese tourism market by strengthening their capacity and cooperation in the three Baltic Sea countries: Latvia, Estonia, and Finland.

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