

FINLAND SUFFERS FROM THE LACK OF FOREIGN TOURISTS



April is considered the cruelest of the months, and Helsinki's tourist season eagerly awaits itself. Unfortunately, the expectations for this year are not very high. The number of foreign tourists coming to Finland has fallen by about one-fifth of what it was in 2019.

This has resulted in a significant decline in tourism in Finland. The number of tourists from Russia and Asia has dropped by almost a million overnight stays. **Specifically, the number of foreign tourists from Russia, China, and Japan alone has decreased by more than a million compared to 2019.**

Due to the pandemic and then the war in Ukraine, there has been a significant decrease in the number of tourists visiting Finland. The number of overnight stays of foreign visitors decreased by 20% compared to 2019. Tourist visas for Russians were stopped in 2022 as they were not allowed to enter Finland. Moreover, the land border with Russia is currently closed. According to Statistics Finland, foreign tourists had 7.1 million overnight stays in 2019. Russian guests, the long-time leaders, remained the largest group of foreign tourists in Finnish hotels, accounting for 821 thousand overnight stays.

Also, the journey to Helsinki from Asian destinations has become more complex as flights from China and Japan have had to avoid Russian airspace, thus prolonging the flight time to around 14 hours.

In 2019, tourism revenue, including domestic and foreign tourism, amounted to 16.3 billion euros. However, due to the lack of foreign visitors, this revenue has taken a hit, with Statistics Finland estimating it to have been only 15.3 billion euros in 2023. This represents a shortfall of about one billion euros, almost entirely due to the lack of foreign tourism.

The current situation is challenging tourism companies in Finland. To boost tourism, companies focus on attracting visitors from Europe and North America, with significant growth. Even Finnair, which had previously based its strategy on rapid connections to Asia, has invested in the United States.

Tourism has hit the capital region hardest, losing over 20% of its usual visitors. Last year, hotel stays in Helsinki were down by about 23% compared to 2019, indicating a significant drop in foreign tourists who have not yet returned.

However, **Lapland has seen an increase in foreign tourism, with more visitors than before the pandemic.** This region has been thriving in tourism, and in 2023, it was the only province where the number of foreign tourists was higher than in 2019. Nevertheless, there have already been complaints about excessive tourism in Lapland. The home of Santa Claus is bustling with the growing number of tourists, and the winter season, which gets livelier every year, is already visible in the residents' daily lives.

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