

## Rural lifestyle – the next trend in tourism trade?

The world can change fast, as recent months have shown us. Whether it will ever be the same than before COVID-19 pandemic, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it profoundly changed the tourism sector worldwide. At least for the foreseen future, it seems that the time for mass tourism and attractions for large customer groups is the past. At the same time small, “un-tact” and private tourism destinations and products have raised the interest among new customer groups. Now, more than ever, there is a market demand for attractive tourism products that base on nature, small-scale production, authentic lifestyle and sustainability. These are all attributes that can be easily associated with rural tourism.

This is exactly the potential the new cross-border tourism initiative: *Rural Lifestyle - Creating attractive rural lifestyle destinations* aims to exploit. Nordic and Baltic countries have several specialities relating to the authentic rural lifestyle, which are still largely underused in tourism provision. One of the reason is that especially concerning the foreign markets, small actors, which rural tourism providers typically are, seldom manage to reach the markets on their own. Even though we do not always see it, the same applies also to the countries. The further away the markets are, the larger units are needed to reach visibility and credibility. For example in markets like Japan, the Nordic and Baltic countries are often considered by tourism marketers as one larger unit rather than a destination consisting just of one country. Therefore, the main aim of the Rural Lifestyle -initiative is to join a rural lifestyle, tourism products and destinations of several countries to gain enough quality provision for the foreign markets.

The project develops and compiles together the Rural Lifestyle -products from Sweden, Åland, continental Finland, Estonia and Latvia. These countries have a common history and thus common features in rural lifestyles, such as similarity of natural/cultural heritage, matching values and consequent respect for the environment that can form a coherent product base for wider markets. However, at the same time, there are enough differences to provide a selection of interesting products, rather than repetitions of the same product in all areas. The Rural lifestyle co-operation thus aims to increase the supply and accessibility of quality rural tourism products. As the sustainability of the tourism destination is secured in the best way by attracting visitors and businesses to make them economically viable, the project also makes a strong effort for marketing, especially in Asian and German markets.

*Rural Lifestyle - Creating attractive rural lifestyle destinations* – initiative will be implemented between 2020-2022 among 8 partners from participating countries combining expertise from research and practice. The lead partner is Estonian University of Life Sciences from Tartu. The Åland partner is Företagsam Skärgård. The project is co-funded from Interreg Central Baltic 2014-2020 programme.

Företagsam Skärgård

