



# SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL PLAN FOR RUKA-KUUSAMO

**Plan written by:** The Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association and Naturpolis Oy

**Updated** 16 December 2021

**Valid until** 2025

# Sustainable Travel Plan for Ruka-Kuusamo

## 1. Introduction

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

**Visit Finland has announced that Finland will be striving to become the most sustainable travel destination in the world by 2025.** Ruka-Kuusamo has made it its mission to be one of the pioneers in working towards that goal.

**The goal of the Ruka-Kuusamo tourism region is to receive Visit Finland's Sustainable Travel Finland certification, 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 with regard to, for example, procurements, water and electricity consumption and employee well-being. We firmly believe that this collaborative effort will take us far and make Ruka-Kuusamo even more attractive for the tourists of today and tomorrow.

The main goals of the responsibility work in the region are to get over half of the region's tourism businesses on board with long-term sustainable tourism development and to implement the Traveller's Etiquette written by local operators for visitors to Ruka-Kuusamo. The Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association also wants to integrate sustainability work in its own internal operations by undergoing the EcoCompass certification process.

## 2. Description of the current state

The region has been engaging in social responsibility work for decades, but it has not always been systematically documented. Rukakeskus, as a carbon-neutral ski resort (since 2018) and a leading company in the region, has been setting a great example and following its own responsibility programme since 2008. Likewise, local national parks have been embracing the protection of natural and cultural diversity since their establishment (Oulanka National Park 1956, Riisitunturi National Park 1982 and Hossa National Park 2017). At the beginning of this new decade, an increasing number of corporations have also decided to make their operations more sustainable.

The most concrete measures are visible to the naked eye. These include, for example, the stored snow piles on Saarua slopes in the summer and autumn seasons. This recent innovation guarantees that the skiing season can begin in early October and significantly reduces the amount of energy and water needed for snow cannons. To promote transportation services, the region provides a number of easy and environmentally friendly alternatives to using personal vehicles. These include the scenic gondola powered by green electricity, carbon-neutral skibuses and airport buses and, in the summer, the national park buses.

Hotels encourage their guests to recycle their waste. Starting from autumn 2019, the Ruka village became the first tourist destination in Northern Finland where recycling biodegradable waste is possible! The Kuusamo energy and water cooperative has helped develop the tourism infrastructure in Ruka-Kuusamo. Examples of this include district heating powered by biofuel and the new wastewater treatment plant constructed in 2016, which utilizes high-level technology to process wastewater.

Efforts have also been made to foster cultural heritage. An increasing number of Kuusamo's village schools and old border posts have been given new life as attractions where family companies can provide tourist services while celebrating the cultural history of the region.

By operating in a responsible manner, the Ruka-Kuusamo tourism region aims to preserve the area and its national parks, local culture and beautiful landscapes for the future generations. We need to ensure that, hundreds of years from now, our region will continue to draw outdoor enthusiasts and provide them with the opportunity to enjoy the shifting seasons and natural phenomena. At the same time, the region's culture and the well-being of locals must also be taken into account when developing the tourism industry. In 2019, Visit Finland published its Sustainable Travel Finland programme, which acts as a set of guidelines for the sustainable development of the Finnish tourism industry. Ruka-Kuusamo was one of the pilot destinations participating in the programme. The programme shows a clear path for sustainable tourism development and, over the course of 2019 and 2020, our region and individual businesses operating in it took their first steps along that path. To support this development, we launched the *Matkailuyritykset kestäväälle kehityspolulle* ("Steering tourism businesses towards a sustainable future") project, valid from 15 April 2020 to 31 December 2021.

### **3. Ruka-Kuusamo's responsibility principles**

#### **3.1 Principles**

These responsibility principles describe Ruka-Kuusamo's attitudes, values and principles regarding sustainability, as well as the direction we want to take in the future. **By signing Visit Finland's 10 sustainable tourism principles, listed below, we are making the commitment to work comprehensively towards a more sustainable Finnish tourism landscape.**

##### *1. We will collaborate fairly*

We will develop local tourism in collaboration with other actors in our region and industry. Together we are able to 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 decisions that also benefit future generations. We will give everyone just and equal treatment and only practice fair and honest trade.

##### *2. We will look after nature*

We will protect the environment, landscape and biodiversity of our region. We will not place unnecessary strain on nature with our operations, but strive to ensure good living conditions and preserve the purity of our local operating environment. We will also look after the well-being and respectful treatment of local wildlife.

##### *3. We will respect cultural heritage*

We will protect 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.

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

We will treat our employees, visitors and local residents equally and respectfully regardless of their background. We will take the special needs of individuals into consideration in our operations. We will train, instruct and encourage our personnel to act responsibly.

## *5. We will favor local providers*

We will support local products, services and businesses, and strive to provide jobs for locals. We will favor food made from Finnish ingredients. We will engage local residents and companies in the matters that concern them.

## *6. We will invest in safety and quality*

We will look after the safety of local residents, our employees and tourists and ensure compliance with laws and official instructions. By making quality our priority in developing our services and products, we are laying the groundwork for our continuous operations.

## *7. We will consider our impact on the climate*

We will make choices that are good for the environment and reduce our carbon footprint. We will monitor the stress that the travel industry places on the environment and strive to use energy and resources more efficiently through active monitoring.

## *8. We will communicate transparently*

We will openly communicate about any social responsibility related action taken by the travel industry as well as our future plans and visions. We want to make Finland known for its sustainable tourism worldwide. We will not be afraid to report on our challenges in addition to our victories.

## *9. We will work to continuously improve the vitality of the tourism industry in our region*

We are prepared to renew our services and products in order to ensure future demand. A stable economy and ethical industry provide a foundation for sustainable development.

## *10. We will commit to the principles of sustainable travel*

We will assume an active role in promoting sustainable travel and implementing these principles of sustainable tourism. We will draw up a plan for sustainable travel and operate systematically in accordance with it in the future. We will commit to these measures and continue learning more in the future.

### **3.2 The Traveller's Etiquette**

[An etiquette for travellers](#) (set of ethical guidelines) visiting our region has been published in the summer of 2021. Its core messages are as follows:

1. Be mindful of safety matters
2. Be responsible when moving around and using the services in the area
3. Allow others to also enjoy the peace and quiet of nature
4. Put your waste in a waste collector, sort and recycle whenever possible
5. Favor local food and try local products and services

The etiquette compiles a set of central guidelines under each of these core messages. The traveller's etiquette increases tourists' awareness and understanding of local environmental matters as well as the political and social atmosphere of the local community. More specifically, the goal of the etiquette is to explain local values, manners, cultural traits and norms to tourists. By directing tourists towards local products, we are helping local businesses increase their profits. The etiquette was written in collaboration with stakeholders to ensure it matches the specific challenges related to the behavior of tourists visiting our region.

The etiquette is based on the voluntary participation of the visitors, but in part also on Finnish legislation. The etiquette strives to promote smoother and more sustainable coexistence between locals and tourists while avoiding the negative impacts of travel. The traveller's etiquette serves as an important tool for promoting sustainability and social responsibility.

The finished version of the traveller's etiquette will be attached to this plan in 2021. The measures for implementing this plan are outlined below (section 4. Plan of measures).

## 4. Plan of measures

### 4.1 Responsibility measures and goals for Ruka-Kuusamo

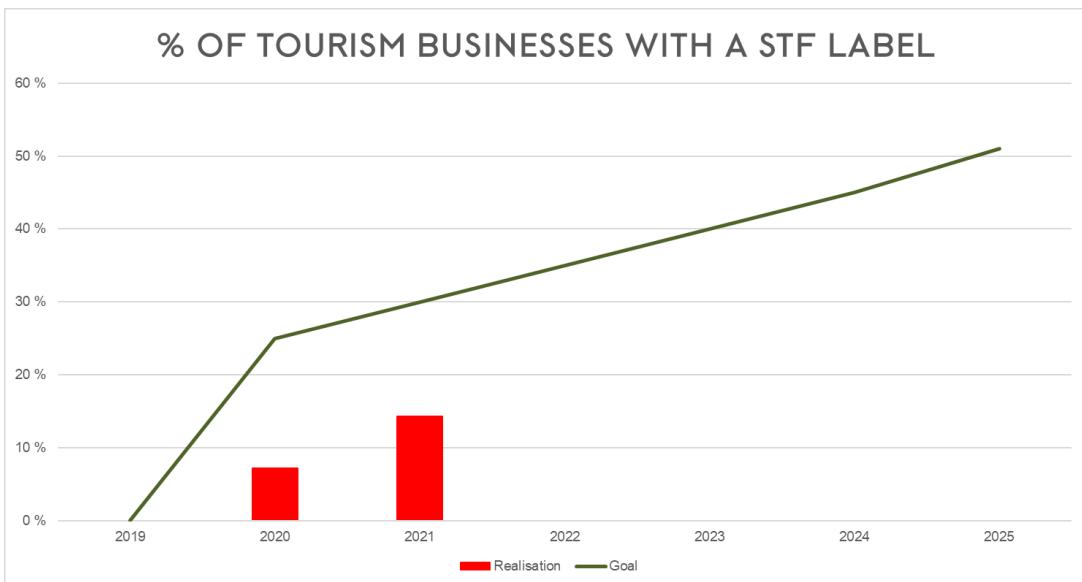
In April 2020, the region saw the implementation of the **Matkailuyritykset kestävälle kehityspolulle** project ("Steering tourism businesses towards a sustainable future"). The project was a shared endeavor by Naturpolis and tourist associations. During the project period, Ruka-Kuusamo took measures to prepare the region for environmental and quality certification, with the goal of getting at least 51% of local tourism businesses to participate in these measures. In addition, businesses and their employees have been educated in environmental awareness, reducing their carbon footprints and communicating about the carbon handprint.

The goal of these measures is to promote collaboration between tourism businesses and develop their practices, products and services in accordance with the principles of sustainable tourism. Doing so will also improve the region's reputation as a sustainable destination among tourists, which ensures the future competitiveness of the region and its businesses.

The **traveller's etiquette** for Ruka-Kuusamo and its surrounding regions, drawn up in cooperation with the University of Oulu, was implemented during year 2021 through various means, such as video footage. The materials were designed to respond to current challenges and supplement existing guidelines, such as the outdoor etiquette by Metsähallitus. The materials are available to the tourism businesses in the region.

The project "Steering tourism businesses towards a sustainable future" ended in December 2021. From the beginning of year 2022 the enhancement of the sustainability work in Ruka-Kuusamo area has been led Gateway to Land of National Parks project, contact person being the project planner of this project.

The Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association is **participating in the Visit Finland Sustainable Travel Finland (STF)** programme at a regional level. In order for a tourism region to receive the regional STF label, at least 51% of the tourism businesses in the area (including the ones with the highest turnover) must have the business-level STF label. This applies to the tourism businesses that work with international tourism. In the fall of 2021, our network of tourism businesses included 95 companies, meaning that at least 48 of them need to receive the STF label in order for the region to qualify for the regional STF label. The goal of this plan is to achieve this by the end of 2025.



To work on the STF programme, Ruka-Kuusamo has assembled a **responsible travel work group** consisting of representatives of regional organization, tourism companies and other local stakeholders. The purpose of the group is to act as a team of experts that participates in developing sustainable tourism in the region in various contexts, such as drawing up this plan. The group will convene on a regular basis to go over current topics related to sustainability in the region. Naturpolis Ltd (separately named project planner) is responsible for assembling the work group for a meeting.

The Finnish waste legislation was reformed during 2021 based on the implementation of the waste management package approved by the European Union in the summer of 2018. Kuusamo town is aiming on achieving both national and EU level goals, planning to recycle 65 % of the waste by year 2035. According to the new regulations, each property must collect biodegradable waste, cardboard, glass, metal, paper and plastic separately. The transition period has been arranged so that for terraced houses and single-family homes in urban areas (the town centre and Ruka) these regulations have been effective since 1 June 2021. For other properties, these regulations will come into effect on 1 January 2023. As part of the project to steer tourism businesses towards a more sustainable future, we have been informing local tourism businesses on these reforms together with the town of Kuusamo and the local waste management companies.

**In accordance with Kuusamo's city strategy (2021 - 2028), harmony and coexistence with nature is the basis for Kuusamo's sustainable growth.** Kuusamo's natural resources are utilized in a sustainable way. Kuusamo welcomes companies that take responsibility for nature. The city is rapidly zoning areas for tourism, sustainable industrial activities such as bio- and circular economy, and clean energy production. The city has also promised to actively promote cooperation between companies that use natural resources sustainably and the city, and to make investments of more than 200 million euros in sustainable industries in 2021-2025. The city's vision is that Kuusamo will be among the first to achieve carbon neutrality and waste-free in 2030.

With regard to the aforementioned measures, the practical implementation of the current plan will primarily take place in 2021. The next major updates will be made, at the latest, as part of the next major update to the plan (strategic update).

#### 4.2 Measuring and reporting

Setting goals and striving towards them with the measures outlined in this plan is not enough if the results cannot be measured and assessed. The plan includes indicators that have been designed to correspond as closely as possible to the indicators that will be published by the Visit Finland STF programme over 2021.

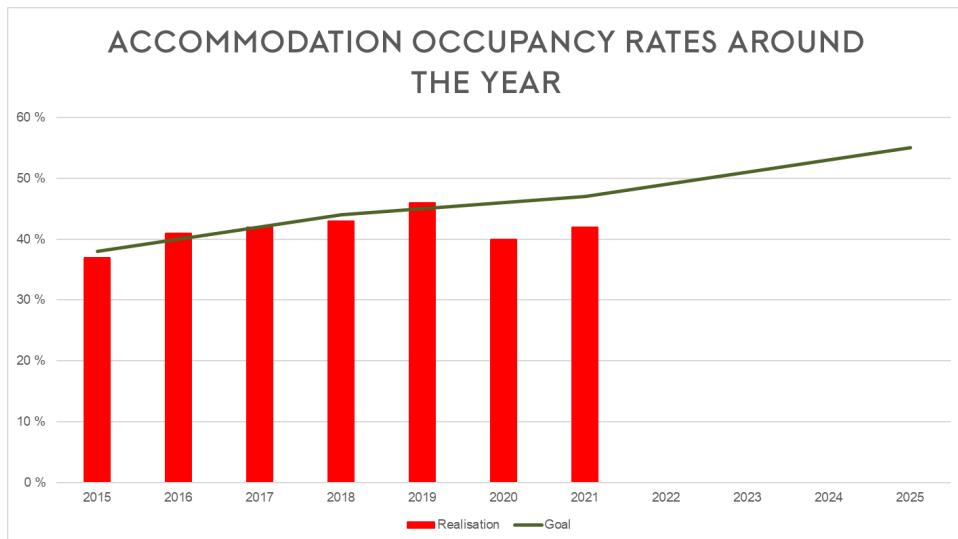
These indicators cover all areas of responsibility, meaning environmental, sociocultural and economic responsibility. Other influential background factors include Visit Finland's principles of sustainable travel and the [objectives of the UN's Agenda2030](#).

The regional tourism organization cannot steer our region towards sustainable operations on its own. That is why we will also be monitoring the development and management of sustainability at the business-specific and town-wide levels. This helps us assess to what extent various companies and the town of Kuusamo are adopting sustainability as part of their operations. The mission of the regional organization is to promote the sustainable development of the local tourism infrastructure and operators.

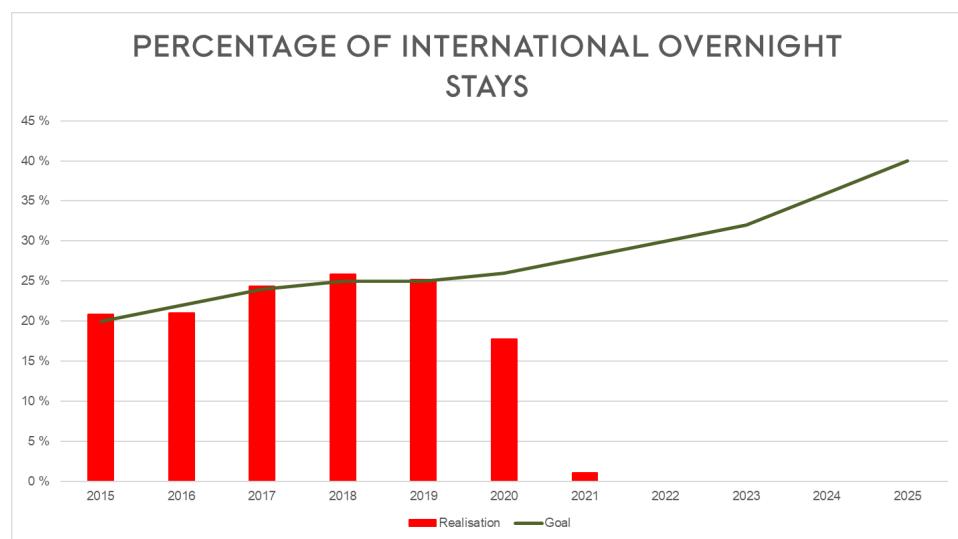
The table below shows the indicators currently included in the plan for measuring sustainability in the region as well as their objectives. You will find more detailed written and visual explanations of the selected indicators below the table. For more information on the monitoring schedule and sources of the indicators, please contact the person responsible for the plan. The results of the measurements will be reported in a separate table and reviewed whenever the plan is updated (see 5. Monitoring and updating). New indicators will be added to the plan as their background data becomes available and measurable. The sociocultural dimension in particular will be emphasized more once Visit Finland's indicators are published.

<b>Area of sustainability</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Objective</b>
Destination management	% of tourism businesses with a STF label	At least 51% of the companies in the STF programme network by 2025
	The designated person responsible for the plan	Will continue to be designated, even during any personnel shifts
Financial value	Number of overnight stays per month and year	Promotion of tourism around the year. Doubling the 2019 number of overnight stays between May and October by 2025.
	Accommodation occupancy rate and its growth (%)	The average occupancy rate of accommodations around the year will be 55% by 2025
	The share of international overnight guests of all tourists	The percentage of international overnight guests will be kept at a maximum of 40% in accordance with the tourism strategy.
	Segmentation – dependency on a specific demographic	As diverse demographic segmentation as possible (based on nationality)
	Number of summer months the tourism businesses are open (May through October)	Current average (2019) 4.7/6. Target average 5.5/6 by 2025 (in accordance with strategy)
	The share of businesses that are open around the year	Growth in line with occupancy rates
	Average number of nights spent at the destination	Current average (2019) 3.2. The goal is to maintain the current number until 2025, re-evaluation when the strategy is updated
	The direct impact of tourism on the general employment rate in the region (%)	The starting rate (2017) is 16% or 591 man hours. The goal is +250 man hours by 2021 (approx. 2 years of data received retroactively)
Social and cultural impact	Regional tourism strategy	Regular updates, continuing to consider social and cultural values
Environmental impact (region observed: the Kuusamo municipality)	Overall annual water consumption in the region	Increasing the amount of data
	Overall annual energy consumption in the region	Increasing the amount of data
	Greenhouse gas emissions measured in the region	Increasing the amount of data
	The share of nature reserves and national parks of the tourism region's area	Currently (2020) 58,393 ha or 10% of the area is protected area or area reserved for nature preservation. Our intention is to maintain these numbers and make sure that areas with valuable nature and wildlife are protected. However, in accordance with the principles of Metsähallitus, the goal is not simply increasing the number of protected areas, but monitoring their condition.

The overall sustainability of Ruka-Kuusamo as a tourism region has a significant impact on the performance of individual businesses as well. The length of the tourists' stay, measured in nights spent at the destination, is one of the most important indicators for accommodations. Longer stays lead to higher occupancy rates, which serve as another major indicator for accommodations. The longer the stay, the higher the returns for the investments made into sales and marketing and the greater the impact on business operations. The length of the stay can be influenced through advertising our versatile and attractive region through regional marketing. In addition to the immediate profits generated by tourism consumption, one of the greatest positives of tourism is that it generates new jobs, especially in sparsely populated areas.



We want to keep Ruka-Kuusamo an interesting destination for international tourists within the framework of sustainable growth while avoiding dependency on a specific demographic categorized by nationality. Domestic tourists are Ruka-Kuusamo's largest demographic categorized by nationality.



The tourism industry consumes a lot of natural resources, such as water and energy, which are nonetheless essential for tourism. The limited quantity of natural resources and their overconsumption cause issues on a global as well as local scale. Through this monitoring, we will increase awareness of resource consumption at the local level.

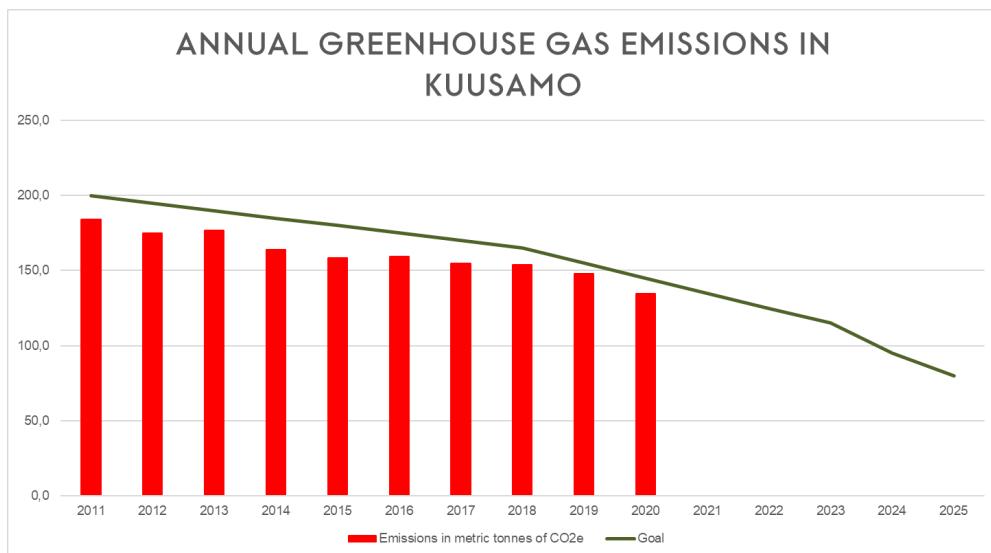
Tourism also creates greenhouse gas emissions, most of which (around 75%) are caused by transportation in its various forms. One fifth of Finland's overall greenhouse gas emissions are generated by transportation.

Road traffic accounts for about 94% of the emissions from domestic transportation. Sea traffic is responsible for about four per cent and domestic air traffic for about two per cent of the emissions. Air traffic falls under the EU Emissions Trading System. Rail transportation generates less than one per cent of all emissions from transportation. (Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2020)

The Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communications has been working on a roadmap for fossil-free transport. Its principles for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from road traffic, air traffic, sea traffic and inland water traffic will be decided on in 2021. The goal of the roadmap is to cut the greenhouse gas emissions from domestic transport in half by 2030 and eliminate them entirely by 2045.

In order to achieve this goal, the consumption of fossil fuels needs to also be cut in half by 2030. The national efforts towards this goal include introducing alternative sources of power (biogas and electric cars) into the mainstream. Additionally, there are plans for new incentives for emission-free technology and fuels, a more efficient traffic system and tax and price adjustments that direct consumers towards more sustainable choices.

Pursuing these national goals will hopefully result in reduced greenhouse gas emissions at the regional level as well. The emission monitoring included in this plan is built around national goals (Agenda 2030) and, at the municipal level, the Hinku measurements of the town of Kuusamo. Kuusamo is participating in the Kahina project (2020-22), which is helping municipalities join the national Hinku network. The goal of the municipalities who have joined the network is to reduce their emissions by 80% from their 2007 levels by 2030.



Nature reserves are an important asset to the region's tourist products. Thriving biodiversity helps ensure the sustainability of natural areas, improves the image of the destination and attracts tourists. By monitoring the number and condition of the protected areas and working with the environmental services of Metsähallitus, we can collect important data on fostering biodiversity.

## 5. Responsibility communication plan

Responsibility communication is integrated into all regional communications of the Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association's communications. The possible sustainability point of view is thought through in all content production. However, in order to focus on monitoring communications around responsibility, we have

included specific areas of communication in this plan. Following this plan, responsibility communication will be carried out at four different levels in particular.

The implementation of the measures included in the responsibility communication plan will be monitored by the Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association's responsible travel team according to their internal work distribution.

The responsibility-related pages on the Ruka.fi website will play a central role in communicating to the customers. Additionally, the responsibility related operations in the region and the collaboration between businesses will be highlighted in the blog and on social media channels.

The member companies of the Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association will receive regular responsibility updates via the member newsletter, and responsibility work will be highlighted at various events whenever possible. Members will be actively encouraged to join in on the responsibility efforts. Companies who have received the STF label will be featured in Ruka-Kuusamo's marketing channels.

The staff in Ruka-Kuusamo area is encouraged to learn about the area's responsibility plan and inform guests about responsibility principles.

From 2021 responsibility themes have been implemented systematically in our marketing campaigns both in Finland and internationally. By doing this we aim to attract more responsible tourists to our area.

## **6. Monitoring, updating and budget**

This plan is valid until 2025 (the next major update).

Person responsible and their contact information: Suvi Juntunen, Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association, suvi.juntunen@rukakuusamo.fi

A person appointed by the Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association will be responsible for updating and monitoring this plan. The plan will be updated on two different levels: basic annual updates and more comprehensive updates whenever the regional tourism strategy is renewed. The plan can also be updated between these pre-determined updates if necessary.

### **1. Annual updates**

- Reviewing the plan of measures and its indicators and updating the numbers as necessary.
- Performing a basic overview of the plan. If any major and urgent changes need to be made, beginning work on them. Special attention will be paid to any projects that are about to conclude.
- Updating the information on the online platform for the STF programme (*Matkailurytykset kestävälle kehityspolulle*) project leader will be responsible for that until the end of 2021). The online platform may also need to be reviewed between major updates, and it would be a good idea for the person responsible for the plan to log in at regular intervals, for example once per month. Visit Finland will inform the regions if the online platform requires their attention.
- Meetings of the responsible travel work group and holding them as needed (about two times per year).
- Ensuring that the sustainable travel plan is taken into account when the Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association draws up their annual operating plan (the plan for 2021–2022 is drawn up in spring of 2021 and approved in June 2021).
- Ensuring that the teams within the organization (administration, international sales, marketing, events and travel consulting) take the sustainability plan into account in their annual operating plans drawn up based on the organization-wide operating plan.

### **2. Strategic updates**

- Scheduled in line with the renewal process of the regional tourism strategy.
- Reviewing all sections of the plan more thoroughly. Making any necessary changes to the description of the current state, social responsibility policy, communication plan and the section concerning updates and monitoring.
- Thoroughly reviewing the list of indicators and, if necessary, adding new indicators and deleting any indicators that are deemed obsolete or unnecessary. Updating all monitoring numbers. Making sure that all areas of sustainability are represented in the indicators.
- The updated plan is approved by the regional responsible travel team and the administration of the Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association. The new plan is valid until the next major update (the next renewal of the strategy).

### **3. Budget**

- The *Matkailuyritykset kestävälle kehityspolulle* project from 15 April 2020 to 31 December 2021, Naturpolis Oy. Overall budget EUR 156,244.40; Ruka-Kuusamo region's share EUR 101,558.86. The project is financed by EU and government funding granted by the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment as well as private funding (the Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association, Taivalkosken Matkailuyhdistys ry and Hossan Matkailuyrittäjät ry).
- Promotion and certification of the daily operations of the Ruka-Kuusamo Tourist Association.

**THE RUKA-KUUSAMO TOURIST ASSOCIATION AND NATURPOLIS OY**

Developing the tourist regions served by the Kuusamo Airport –

Gateway to Land of National Parks project (2019-2022)

Matkailuyritykset kestävälle kehityspolulle project (2020-2021)



Leverage from  
the EU  
2014–2020



The European Agricultural Fund  
for Rural Development:  
Europe investing in rural areas



Centre for Economic Development,  
Transport and the Environment

