

DESTINATION KVARKEN

Two countries, a world of contrasts



Interreg
Botnia-Atlantica
European Regional Development Fund

General information	
Project title	Destination Kvarken (Kvarken Destinations)
Reference ID	20 201 596
Project duration	2018-08-01 -- 2021-12-31
Priority	Business
Specific objective	Increased capacity for cross-border business cooperation
Project management	Kvarken Council EGTC / 3176207-5
Other partners	Kvarken Council association/ 2148670-8 Umeå municipality/ 212000-2627 Vaasa Region Development Company VASEK/ 1850796-9 Hanken School of Economics/ 0245907-7 Höga Kusten Destinationsutveckling AB/ 556961-4067 Visit Umeå AB/ 556870-2343
Norwegian partners	N/A

PROJECT PARTNERS



Financiers: The European Regional Development Fund via the Botnia-Atlantica INTERREG programme, Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, Västerbotten County Council, Västernorrland County Council, Umeå municipality, Kvarken Council EGTC, Vaasa Region Development Company (VASEK), Hanken School of Economics, County Administrative Board of Västernorrland, Höga Kusten Destinationsutveckling AB, City of Vaasa/Vaasa Region Tourism Ltd. Visit Vaasa, NLC Ferry Ab Oy, Visit Lakeus Oy, Kokkola Tourism Ltd., Jakobstad Region Development Company Concordia Ltd., Kristinestads Näringslivscentral Ab

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Summary of the Whole Project Implementation

Describe the implementation of the project, and how this was linked to the project's "Specific objective", and what the achieved results were. Reconciliate towards the "Primary project objectives" and "Expected results" in your decision letter. Also account for results that were not expected and any good examples.

Based on the project's specific objective, i.e. the **increased capacity for cross-border business cooperation**, we have innovatively, continuously, and systematically managed to link together the project's primary target group, SME's, and destinations into a new, innovative market entity. This entity could be referred to as a new way of organizing business. We have helped the tourism industry's SME's to reach new and larger markets – a feat that they could not have achieved by themselves.

Through cross-border cooperation, we have created a new and shared product range, a "new destination", encompassing seven smaller destinations and their supply mainly in the form of companies/products that participated in the project. It is worth noting that the spillover of such destinations generates synergies that benefit the entity from a general point of view.

Thanks to the project, Kvarken Destinations has joined the competition for international attention amongst other visitor destinations. **Therefore, we have created a more competitive business environment for companies.**

Hanken School of Economics has produced comprehensive materials for the project's target group within the framework of the work packages research and development and digitalization. All studies and research reports have been communicated to the target group and can be found on the project's official website <https://www.kvarken.org/projekt/destination-kvarken/>.

In accordance with the expected result of closer cooperation between the economic life and universities, the materials are to be regarded as bringing additional value to further training and competence development, which can be linked to the specific objective.

Reconciliation Towards Primary Project Objectives:

The primary project objective was to create a concept for joint, intensified marketing efforts in order to increase the amount of tour operators who include the region in their supply. In addition, the plan was to

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arouse media interest in our destination, resulting in increased visibility both towards the desired tour operators and also towards the end-customers in our priority markets. The primary objective's purpose was to increase the amount of visitors in our region.

The concept for marketing efforts is, in practical terms, based on collecting and coordinating the content into an entity and on presenting and selling the project's companies and products in various workshops via direct meetings with tour operators and travel media. The creation of demand was an important aspect in this work.

It has been crucial to identify and emphasize USP's (*Unique Selling Points*) and existing reasons for visiting, but also to encourage companies to engage in new supplementary activities and to combine these activities into an entity that attracts visitors to both countries during the same trip. The basic components have been the products that can offer various activities and create a content program for the visitor. We have chosen to base our work on various themes to meet the needs of different interest segments and target groups.

This required the joint production of marketing materials that were gathered in a shared, cross-border platform. The content on this comprehensive and award-winning platform has formed and continues to form an important sales tool both during and especially after the project. The shared platform is the website <https://kvarkendestinations.com>, which is aimed at the target group consisting of tour operators and travel media.

The website was introduced as a source of inspiration in order to encourage the production of travel packages in the region, and it has garnered deep appreciation. An international jury consisting of tour operators and other tourism experts named the website as winner of the Best Inspiration 2020 category in the international Scandinavian Outdoor Award competition. We proudly display SOA's emblem on our landing page.

The website *kvarkendestinations.com* is a permanent result that lives on after the project for a reasonable number of years (for a website) until August 2024. Businesses and destination companies that participated

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in the project as well as Wasaline, tour operators, and the media can continue to use the website for promotion and cooperation purposes. All seven destination companies that participated in the project, along with the Vaasa-Umeå ferry connection via Wasaline, highlight the platform on their own websites, in turn creating a win-win situation and giving additional value for all parties in cross-border collaboration.

One of the project's expected results was that the project materials are utilized by destination companies, tour operators, and businesses for marketing purposes, which is hereby fulfilled.

The website allows us to increase visibility of the tourism industry's cooperation and simultaneously strengthen competitiveness in the whole region. This also correlates with the expected result of companies more efficiently utilizing existing possibilities in terms of marketing and communication with customers via various digital channels.

The results so far show that circa 15 tour operators have begun to sell and market Kvarken Destinations via their websites. The COVID-19 situation has understandably thrown a spanner in the works, and production has not yet begun in earnest – not to mention its implementation. Just like a travel production, which also requires a certain amount of time to be carried out, we are aware that the work we have done will bear fruit and become visible circumstances permitting. As an expected result, the project's established and large contact network of tour operators will be handed over to destination companies so that production cooperation can be continued and developed.

Travel media is a crucial link in reaching tour operators and consumers. In this respect and in accordance with the primary project objective, the project has managed to arouse interest in Kvarken Destinations, which has paid off in the form of increased visibility already during the course of the project.

One of the project's most significant and simultaneously most unexpected results in the project's final phase is that a Swedish incoming agency (DMC or *Destination Management Company*) has already launched a product for a roundtrip after a tour in the region. The local agency, Best of Scandinavia, has by now packaged and priced a roundtrip that is already on the market. **This is the best thing that could happen!** The project has managed to create demand, but until recently it has lacked a local retailer. **In the final stage of the project, we have successfully engaged a DMC that, in turn, will sell its products to other**

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tour operators in continental Europe. The agency already has plans for several roundtrips with varying themes.

The project duration and implementation has been significantly marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has also had a considerable impact on especially the tourism industry. It naturally affected our planned activities and opportunities to reach our promised results at an earlier stage. Despite this unforeseen and unparalleled obstacle, our project has succeeded in adapting and solving problems in a way that must, ultimately, be seen as positive considering the circumstances. We made the best of the situation.

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