

CULINARY TOURISM READINESS ASSESSMENT

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Interreg

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BothnianCoastalRoute.com



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bothnian Coastal Route project set out to enhance the visibility of the coastal corridor surrounding the Bothnian Bay and crossing the Kvarken strait, with the goal of positioning the region as an attractive, sustainable gastronomy destination for both international visitors and area residents. The project focuses on strengthening the appeal of the participating destinations by showcasing their gastronomy assets, expanding their tourism offerings, and supporting long-term economic and environmental sustainability.

As part of this initiative, a gastronomy tourism assessment was conducted for six priority destinations, namely Vaasa, Kalajoki, and Oulu in Finland, and Luleå, Skellefteå, and Umeå in Sweden, and their surrounding areas. The purpose of the assessment is to evaluate the current food tourism landscape, identify growth opportunities, and provide strategic guidance to help the region better leverage its culinary strengths.

By leveraging its culinary culture and heritage, the BCR will create a stronger sense of place, which:

- increases arrivals (quantity and quality of visitors);
- increases destination brand equity;
- enhances local pride;
- generates export demand for the region's food and beverage products; and
- creates a significant and long-lasting economic impact on the area.

These assessments support the broader objectives of the project, including increased destination awareness, stronger collaboration among local stakeholders, and greater readiness to attract new visitors through unique, experience-driven travel.



ACTION ITEMS [1-10 of 15]

This list is a summary of the most important action items we identified in our analysis. Remember that it is not a substitute for all suggestions within this report. The items below are presented in no particular order.

1. **Establish** a formal culinary mentorship program to provide motivated students with personalized, real-world training while supporting sustainability and strengthening the local food sector.
2. **Bring** experienced journalists directly into the BCR region and educate them about the diversity of *Nordic* cuisines to generate more accurate press coverage, improve destination visibility and correct common misconceptions.
3. **Create** (or support the creation of) authentic, high-quality video content about local chefs, producers and food experiences to strengthen the BCR's identity as a distinctive culinary destination and inspire more travelers to visit.
4. **Brand** the BCR as "The Republic of Bothnia" to create a memorable identity that unifies the region, simplifies communication with travelers and offers a fresh, creative way to stand out in the crowded global tourism market.
5. **Elevate** the visibility of Sámi culture in the northern parts of the BCR through respectful, Sámi-led experiences to offer visitors a meaningful connection to the region's heritage while ensuring economic and cultural benefits remain within the Sámi community.
6. **Use** English or the target market's language first when naming food and beverage products to make regional offerings more accessible, increase engagement and encourage greater interest from international visitors.
7. **Focus** on a signature dish or culinary experience that authentically represents the BCR to create a powerful identity for the region and offer a more effective, memorable way to attract international visitors than pursuing costly Michelin recognition.
8. **Advocate** for modernized alcohol laws to stimulate economic growth, encourage innovation in hospitality and tourism and make the BCR region more attractive to international visitors while still promoting responsible behavior.



ACTION ITEMS [11-15 of 15]

Continued from the previous page.

9. **Pursue** permanent culinary destination certification to help secure long-term international recognition for the BCR region, strengthen its culinary brand and sustain tourism interest well beyond temporary awards or one-time events.
10. **Strengthen** Finland's culinary visibility by developing and promoting a broader range of iconic food and beverage products to help the country compete more effectively on the global stage and attract greater interest from international travelers.
11. **Create** passion product routes focused on local specialties like mushrooms, berries, seafood and vodka to offer travelers a unique, authentic food journey that sets the BCR region apart from other destinations.
12. **Offer** specialized entrepreneur training and internship partnerships to help culinary and hospitality businesses improve their marketing, branding and visibility, making the BCR region more attractive and memorable for visitors.
13. **Develop** year-round tourism experiences to break the seasonal cycle, attract visitors during quieter months and create a stronger, more sustainable economy for the BCR region.
14. **Engage** local residents as active ambassadors for the region's culinary experiences to build community pride, generate authentic word-of-mouth marketing and strengthen the BCR's overall appeal to visitors.
15. **Protect** proactively culinary authenticity through name regulations and certification programs to safeguard the BCR's reputation, ensure quality experiences for visitors and support the long-term success of the region's food culture.



Good to Know

About Us

The World Food Travel Association (WFTA) is a global, non-profit, non-political organization whose mission is to work with destination marketers and their stakeholders to facilitate the discovery and appreciation of unique culinary cultures by travelers. Founded in 2003, the WFTA is the world's leading authority on gastronomy tourism and the global voice of the industry. Every year, the WFTA provides insights, resources, tools, research, and events to a network of just over 100,000 professionals in over 150 countries to help the industry grow. The Association's knowledge, tools, and training assist professionals, organizations, and destinations in leveraging their culinary culture and heritage to create a stronger sense of place, which increases visitor arrivals, strengthens a destination's brand equity, boosts local pride, generates export demand for the area's food and beverage products, and makes a significant local economic impact.

Caveat

The observations and the opinions in this report are those of one analyst. While we are highly experienced with all aspects of culinary tourism, the comments herein may be influenced by limited time onsite, as well as observations made under artificial conditions (i.e. as a guest of the tourism office). Nevertheless, the analyst is trained to survey each situation objectively. And one experience (positive or negative) does not speak for all possible experiences in a destination.

If anything is unclear, please ask for clarification. We are happy to update the report with clarifications as needed, as well as to correct factual errors, or update anything that might possibly be considered offensive or controversial.



Publishing Information

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**"The only source of knowledge is experience."
– Albert Einstein**

Erik Wolf, Executive Director & Founder
help@worldfoodtravel.org
+44 7827 582 554 (WhatsApp and Telegram)



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