



Nature tourism marketing
on Central Baltic islands

Baltic Sea Development & Media Center

Nature tourism marketing on Central Baltic islands

Tallinn, 2011

Nature tourism marketing on Central Baltic islands.
Tallinn, 2011.

ISBN 978-9985-9973-5-2

Compilers: Rivo Noorkõiv
Kertu Vuks

Cover photo: Aerial view on Osmussaar, NW Estonia (photo: E. Lepik)

© Baltic Sea Development & Media Center

© NGO GEOGUIDE BALTOSCANDIA

E-mail: baltoscandia@yahoo.com



EUROPEAN UNION
EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND
INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE



**CENTRAL BALTIC
INTERREG IV A
PROGRAMME
2007–2013**

Release of this report was co-financed by European Regional Development Fund and NGO Geoguide Baltoscandia. It was accomplished within the framework of the CENTRAL BALTIC INTERREG IVA Programme 2007-2013.

Disclaimer: The publication reflects the authors views and the Managing Authority cannot be held liable for the information published by the project partners.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATURE TOURISM.....	6
2.1. THE HISTORY AND TERMINOLOGY OF NATURE TOURISM.....	6
2.2. NATURE TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS.....	7
2.3. DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES OF NATURE TOURISM IN BALTIC SEA AREA....	10
2.3.1. THE MARKET SITUATION OF ESTONIAN TOURISM SECTOR.....	10
2.3.2. TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GOTLAND, ÅLAND AND TURKU ARCHIPELAGOS	13
3. OVERVIEW OF THE TOURISM RESOURCES IN THE CENTRAL BALTIC REGION.....	16
3.1. HIU COUNTY / HIUMAA ISLAND.....	16
3.2. LÄÄNE COUNTY.....	16
3.3. SAARE COUNTY / SAAREMAA ISLAND.....	17
3.4. PÄRNU COUNTY.....	17
3.5. ÅLAND ARCHIPELAGO.....	18
3.6. STOCKHOLM ARCHIPELAGO.....	19
3.7. GOTLAND ISLAND.....	19
3.8. TURKU ARCHIPELAGO.....	19
4. PRODUCTS OF NATURE TOURISM ENTREPRENEURSHIP.....	20
SERVICES.....	20
5. PROMOTION OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS THROUGH E-ADVERTISING AND E-COMMERCE.....	23
6. THE ROLE OF EU FUNDING IN DEVELOPING TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE CENTRAL BALTIC AREA.....	24
6.1. TURKU TOURING.....	24
6.2. BRANDING SCANDINAVIAN ISLANDS.....	25
7. RECOMMENDATIONS TO NATURE TOURISM SERVICE DEVELOPERS.....	26
8. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRATICES.....	29
8.1. ESTONIAN NATURE TOURS.....	29
8.2. PÄDASTE MANOR HOUSE.....	31
8.3. HERITAGE TOURS.....	32
8.4. ANGLA WINDMILL PARK AND THE HERITAGE CULTURE CENTRE.....	33
8.5. NAMI NAMASTE.....	33
8.6. RATSUKIEVARI.....	34
8.7. ALGALLIKA GUESTHOUSE.....	35
8.8. GOTLANDNATURE.COM.....	36
8.9. FISHYOURDREAM.COM.....	36
8.10. ARCHIPELAGO ADVENTURES TURKU OY.....	37
8.11. BACKARO GUESTHOUSE.....	38
SUMMARY.....	39

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the forecast of the World Tourism Organisation, the number of various travels increases considerably by 2020. Therefore, we can expect growth in the importance of the Baltic Sea region in European tourism market, bringing along a greater number of tourists, and greater challenges to local service providers. This trend influences nature tourism, the growth potential of which has significantly raised hopes for regional development of peripheral and countryside areas, including islands. Generally, tourism based on nature or natural sights refers to utilising natural areas and resources in their natural ways or in ways that involve little human intervention, with the objective to enjoy nature. The main pull factor and motivation of nature tourism lies in the variety of tourism services¹.

General contemporary tourism trends in the world can be described as follows:

- Changes in demographic and socio-economic situation (age, education, marital status, income etc), which puts forward the need to develop new tourism products based on target groups. As the number of elder travellers increases, comfort is becoming a more influential aspect.
- Changes in the life style, expectations and needs of the visitors, which produces and develops new tourism trends, including increasing demand for products of experience. When picking a destination, a concrete activity, e.g. a hobby or getting specific knowledge, is becoming a more and more important argument for the decision. That is the reason why growth is expected in tourism to both distant and exotic countries as well as places near home.
- Consumers become more critical in choosing the offers and pay more attention to price/quality ratio.
- Being environmentally friendly, safe and with its own characteristic features – these are important factors in choosing travel destinations. It is essential to offer customised services, to meet customers' wishes and to have a diverse selection of quality services.
- Travel preferences and the average length of trips are changing, making use of more flexible working time and free time. These developments support travels that are shorter both distance and time wise.

1 C. M. Hall et al. (2009). "Nordic Tourism, Issues and Cases", p 134

- The use of Internet has increased and social media has been taken into active use.

In order to remain competitive, it is necessary to have constant development in tourism sector, to increase its effectiveness and quality, and to develop new tourism products and offers to the market.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATURE TOURISM

2.1. THE HISTORY AND TERMINOLOGY OF NATURE TOURISM

Nature tourism was introduced as a specific brand in the tourism industry at the beginning of the 1980ies. Originally, it was a field of tourism where activities happened in the nature, in order to introduce specific areas worth seeing. At the beginning, nature tourism developed in educational perspective; however, today it is not the only perspective where the attention is focused. The concept of nature tourism has expanded and it has become a separate field in tourism industry.

Nature tourism can be defined as a form of tourism that is characterised by responsible travelling, which supports the preservation of natural and cultural heritage and the well-being of local inhabitants. Nature tourism includes primarily the activities that take place outside of major tourism destinations. It is a facet of rural tourism that focuses on nature-related experience and uses natural environment for it². A narrower client-centered definition of nature tourism is given by UNWTO³: *"Nature tourism is a form of tourism which is primarily motivated by the observation and appreciation of nature"*.

Nature tourism can be described as a process where the main focus is on seeing and experiencing nature, but it also takes into account the environment, conservation, education, equitable social benefits, and community responsibility⁴. It has to be understood that it is one of the subcategories of tourism, which is different from mass tourism. Its key words include *"responsible travelling"*, *"preserving nature and cultural heritage"*, *"activities away*

2 www.ecotourism.ee/61010_ruukel-loodusturismist.ppt

3 EAS "Eesti loodusturismi pakumise uuring 2008"

4 <http://naturetourism.allegoheny.edu/additionalinformation.html>

from usual tourism establishments", "welfare of local people". To conclude, nature tourism can be characterised as an activity, which takes place in nature, which offers nature-related experiences and uses nature for the purpose of business. The special feature of nature tourism lies in the fact that the resources for it are open to everyone and the activities usually take place on the common property of people and countries. Therefore, as a rule, the resources are accessible and usable for free. But, in most cases, they are very sensitive resources, which need special care and protection so that they would not perish. Nature tourism developers have great responsibility for the future. It should also be noted that business profit from nature tourism is shared with community members on whose territories the activities take place.

2.2. NATURE TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

People's relationship with nature can be looked at from various perspectives, even in the context of today's triumph of environmental awareness. On a very general level the relationship with nature can be divided into two: it is either looked at from people's focus, or seeing individuals and societies as part of the surrounding nature. The four main theoretical approaches to wilderness areas are the following: utilism, humanism, mysticism and bio-

Table 1. Four attitudes to wilderness areas

	Objective	Justification	Wilderness image
Utilism	High standards of social and human well-being by increasing production.	Unrestricted right of man to exploit wilderness areas to promote his/her well-being and production.	A source of raw materials and fuels.
Humanism	Human perfection and mental balance.	Unrestricted right of man to exploit wilderness areas to promote his/her perfection.	A valuable opportunity that people should develop through their own actions.
Mysticism	Unity of man and nature.	The highest value of human life is to aim at the sacred state embodied in the unspoilt nature.	Basically a large and spiritual entity.
Biocentrism	Safeguarding the inherent value and functions of wilderness areas.	All species are equally valuable – man has no special position.	A total ecological system with an inherent value of its own.

centrism. The most common of the four is the first one, utilism⁵. Saying that, it doesn't mean that the utilist people-nature relationship concept wouldn't allow for people's environmental awareness. Rather, the question is whether nature is regarded respectfully as a live and essential-for-life system.

Environmental awareness is becoming one of the core pillars in the functioning of today's societies. Having clean living environment and close-to-nature lifestyle is not just one of the many possible contemporary lifestyles, but it is also a resourceful and sustainable way to keep oneself healthy and the environment clean. Environmental aspects have reached virtually every field of our lives, starting from everyday activities and work, and ending with holidays and recreation. Deriving from that, based on people's increasing desire to spend more of their free time in fresh air and untouched nature, the alternative field of tourism – nature tourism – is gaining increasingly more popularity. People's attitude towards nature has become more down-to-earth and personal. In many communities there is a strengthening identification of oneself as part of local nature, and there is less and less feeling of separation.

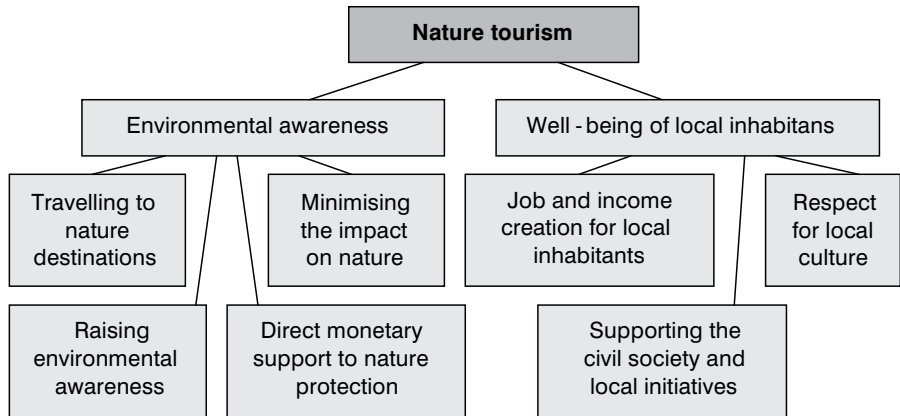
Similarly to people's different attitudes towards nature and relating oneself and nature, there are also many kinds of subcategories of tourism, having more or less connection with nature. As implied earlier, nature tourism has the closest connection to untouched nature. Close to it there are wildlife tourism (i.e. dealing more specifically with wild animal watching and hunting), and adventure tourism (activities of more adventurous character).

In nature tourism there are two main focuses – environmental awareness, and supporting local community (the well-being of local inhabitants) and its culture. These two focal points are based on six core concepts or reasons, which motivate communities and organisations to offer nature tourism services (Graph 1).

Graph 1. The projected impact of nature tourism on local development⁶

5 C. Michael Hall et al. (2009). "Nordic Tourism, Issues and Cases", p 136

6 J. Highram. (2007) „Critical Issues in Ecotourism“, p 28



Nature tourism is widely recognised as a mean for achieving economic income, local community development, and nature protection – all simultaneously⁷. At the same time, depending on the exact tourism service, it will still have more or less impact on natural environment. Hereby it should be mentioned that the goal of nature tourism is not to achieve zero impact on the surrounding environment. There is undoubtedly some effect that comes with offering nature tourism services, or even just with the presence of human beings. Moreover, if the little impact that is created on nature will be balanced with the increase of welfare for the local community, it is also considered justified. The objective is to minimise the environmental impact and to avoid irreversible damage. That is important because often nature tourism services offer people the access to protected areas, where the influence on the environment would be especially strongly felt. Thus, it is crucial to find a balance between economic benefits and developing the local community, between nature protection and preserving its diversity. Nature tourism does not just mean getting new knowledge about nature, but also shaping people's values via offering emotional experiences from pure nature. "Mediating" nature is closely aligned with the objectives of environmental education, which include valuing diverse environment, understanding the relationship between people and nature, and contributing to the development of people who behave in responsible manner.

7 R. Buckley (2004), „Environmental Impacts of Ecotourism“, p 5

2.3. DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES OF NATURE TOURISM IN BALTIC SEA AREA

2.3.1. THE MARKET SITUATION OF ESTONIAN TOURISM SECTOR

In order to describe the current situation of Estonian tourism sector and facilitate its development perspectives, the Estonian national tourism development plan 2007–2013 has been prepared, being the most important strategic development document in this field. The goal of it is to present the balanced development plan of tourism as an economic industry for the years 2007–2013, focused on supporting the economic growth of Estonia via increasing the international competitiveness of Estonian tourism sector. The main strategic directions are a) increasing the awareness of Estonia as a travel destination, b) promoting tourism product development (growth in awareness and quality, diverse innovative products and activities, the creation of cooperation networks), and c) developing tourism information system.

While describing the current situation of tourism in Estonia, it is important to note that at the moment the general economic decline of the past years is being overcome and the tourism economy is once again growing both in terms of demand and supply. Nevertheless, it should be continuously taken into account that Estonian tourism economy is significantly depending on foreign visitors, although the travelling of local people is noteworthy, too. As many foreign visitors are only one-day-visitors, it is first and foremost necessary to develop the services that meet their needs, including the services which are connected to nature tourism.

In the context of Estonian tourism development plan and the tourism development plans of Hiiu county, Lääne county, Pärnu county and Saare county, it can be said that the development of nature tourism and services connected to it is a great priority of Estonian tourism sector in the next couple of years. This is due to good natural preconditions as well as to the increasing demand. The potential of nature tourism has not been realised yet. At the moment one of the problems is the narrow scope and uneven quality of the services. It is important to develop diverse services and nature-tourism offers many interesting opportunities for that. It is also beneficial to learn from the practices of other countries.

The tourism development plans of Hiiu county, Lääne county, Pärnu county and Saare county mention proximity to the sea, heritage and nature tourism as part of the strengths of the area, offering great opportunities for nature and health tourism services' development. These are supported by strong special character of the region and the already-existing good image as a sea nature tourism destination among some of the main target markets. Additionally, some brands have developed in the region: Kuressaare, Haapsalu, Kaali crater, Kõpu lighthouse, Vilsandi Island etc⁸.

Based on the tourism development plan of Hiiu county, the special characteristics of this region lie in the richness of forests and the many nature reserves. Its main strengths, similar to Saare county, also include its openness to the sea. The specific brands are also emphasised: Hiiumaa, Kõpu lighthouse and Kassari. As the opportunities, making use of the growing interest in nature tourism and active holidays are mentioned, and using natural resources more effectively and in a way that would be able to create more experiences to visitors. As its current weaknesses, the low number of attractive products and services is mentioned, together with insufficient development of information and marketing. So far, little attention has been paid to wellness tourism.

The main activity, which should design the development of tourism in Hiiu county is offering a unique and quality tourism product that would differ from competitors and would be based on nature tourism, heritage tourism and sea tourism. The product should be offered year-round, initiating additional seasons next to the peak season. For such activity, the best opportunities are related to active holidays: bicycle trips, hikes, canoe trips, horse riding trips and horse riding sports, berry and mushroom picking trips, ice trips (Finnish sledge safaris, ski hikes, ice golf, fake seal hunting with bows and arrows and targets on frozen sea, under-ice fishing), photography trips, bird watching trips, spring trips, painting and photography camps. Where possible, it is considered important that the hikes would be carried out under the supervision of competent guides. Also, the wellness-packages based

8 Tourism development plan of Hiiu county, Lääne county and Saare county 2013 (original title: "Hiiumaa, Läänemaa ja Saaremaa turismi arengukava 2013"), pp. 22-24

on local produce and environment are considered subjects for expansion: including massages, baths (using local curative mud), mineral waters, fasting and being in nature. Hunting tourism and using local produce is prioritised. In sea tourism, yacht and motor boat routes are prepared for the areas surrounding Hiiumaa and connecting it to the Baltic Sea. Also, sea trip routes close to the land are prepared, where the main aim of canoe, kayak or boat trips is to observe the landscape, plants and birds. For children and people with greater interest in nature, nature education trainings are planned.

In the tourism development plan for Lääne county, nature, safe and stress-free recreation environment and proximity to the sea are emphasised. Health tourism and its long traditions of spas are focused on, together with rich historic and cultural heritage and connections to Coastal Swedes. Haapsalu town holds an important place in the tourism of the region, although the whole Lääne county is also known as a destination for bird watching tourism.

Analogous to what has been said about Hiiumaa, the goal of tourism related product development in Lääne county is offering a year round tourism product, which is unique and of high quality, which is different from competitors and which is based on nature tourism, sea tourism, heritage tourism and health tourism. Yacht and motor boat routes prepared for the areas connecting Lääne county to Hiiumaa and Vormsi islands, and the Sea of Straits (Väinameri). Also, packages are planned in cooperation with sea tourism service providers in Tallinn and Haapsalu. The activities involve sea trip routes close to the coast, where the objective of the canoe, kayak or boat trips is to see the landscape and watch plants and birds. Fishing tourism is supported. Increasing the demand and supply during the out-of-season period is emphasised. Kayak sea trips, yachting camps, Finnish sledge trips, ski trips, skating trips, ice golf, ice sailing are encouraged. Hunting tourism is predicted to increase, the development of both wild animal hunting and bird hunting are considered important, added to the "bloodless hunting" – animal and bird photography. There is the desire to expand food production related to the food heritage of the county and its local produce. Organising summer theatre productions is considered significant, too, in cooperation with different theatres and people in the field of culture who live or spend their

holidays in the county. It is considered important to empower the activities related to environmental education: plant and landscape observing, drawing creative inspiration from nature, and the skills for moving around in the wilderness. One part of it is tackled by painting and photography camps.

The most important tourism resources of Pärnu county are connected to diverse natural resources including large wetlands, crooked coastline, islands, diverse landscapes and habitats. Especially the coastal areas and the sea make up one of the most attractive and diverse package of resources for Pärnu county, which can be put into a wide range of uses. The development strategy for Pärnu recreation and tourism economy 2009–2013 is based on the framework of the concept of Pärnu county's "Sun circles", whereby the Estonian summer capital, Pärnu town, is going to be connected to the four areas of the county in order to become a tourism region that is united, holistic and provides high quality experience to the visitors.

The strategic objectives of tourism development in Saare county for 2013 are connected to increasing the quality of the tourism products and services, their diversification and alignment with the principles of sustainable development. Opportunities related to nature tourism are emphasised, taking into account the tourism carrying capacity of the county. Also, it is important to increase the significance of sea related tourism. For the development of tourism in Saare county, the quality and sustainability of the existing transportation connections is very important; plus, new connections are anticipated.

2.3.2. TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GOTLAND, ÅLAND AND TURKU ARCHIPELAGOS

Nature tourism has a long history on Gotland and on the islands of Åland and Turku archipelagos, therefore their examples provide good role models for all tourism developers who are interested in developing nature tourism.

In the strategy for Gotland community 2010–2025⁹, in the chapter for tourism development, the development of sustainable and environmentally

9 "ByggGotland – översiktsplan för Gotlands kommun 2010–2025"

conscious tourism has been stated as one of the most important objectives. Similarly to other islands in the Baltic Sea, Gotland's natural environment with its own character creates good preconditions for offering nature tourism services. In the strategy it is emphasised that the attractiveness of nature tourism should be increased among tourists, targeting various groups of tourists (considering their age, income, interests etc). Gotland has earned a very good reputation among visitors. Every year the number of guests increases; in order to sustain that, relevant preconditions have to be developed: infrastructure, labour force, clean drinking water etc. It is noteworthy how important the island's diverse development is considered in the Gotland strategy. There are no areas of prioritised development; as much as possible, even provision of the selection of services is valued across the whole island. Attracting tourists also during the low-season is a considerable challenge – in order to ensure the year-round usage of the infrastructure, and the income from tourism industry. Similar wish has also been expressed in the tourism strategies of Estonian islands.

For the development of Gotland's tourism potential, there are several outdoor activities: nature tourism, sports tourism, culture tourism and rural tourism, in the development of which sustainability, nature protection, local community and cultural heritage should be taken into account. The well-keeping of nature and local characteristic features is important for keeping Gotland attractive for tourists. The main nature tourism activity in Gotland is fishing together with activities related to it.

In the development of nature and eco-tourism in Gotland, a separate brand has been created. "*Nature Best*" marks all the products and services which are of quality, protect nature and are sustainable.

In the image of Gotland, the key words for the island include "*nature-centered*", "*offering various opportunities*", and "*all year round*".

Finland's national tourism strategy 2020¹⁰ is a source for describing the current situation and the future developments of the Turku archipelago as one of the most distinct group of islands in the Baltic Sea.

10 "Finland's Tourism Strategy to 2020"

Turku archipelago is seen as one of the most attractive nature tourism destinations in Finland. The preservation of clean and untouched nature is set as an important objective, making up one of the main strengths and advantages of the region. Similar to Gotland, the offering of sustainable tourism services is valued, together with the fields of tourism related to it, including nature tourism, culture tourism and rural tourism. Not surprisingly, all-year-round services are emphasised, in order to attract tourists also during low seasons and to keep the facilities in use.

The objective that is set for Åland archipelago by 2016 is for it to become the most attractive group of islands in the Baltic Sea. Similarly to Gotland and Turku archipelago, and the Estonian islands, nature tourism development is associated with lots of potential in this area. Natural environment and its opportunities are considered an important strength of the region. It is important to develop services that are sustainable, environmentally friendly and offer the visitors activities all year round. Similarly to Turku archipelago, Åland is referred to as the best fishing spot in Nordic countries. Among nature tourism services, most attention should go to developing kayak trips and other water trip services, together with long-distance skating. In general it is found that all nature tourism products should be marketed better. As the main weaknesses of the tourism sector, low product development and low level of services are mentioned. Also, it is challenging to connect nature tourism and rural tourism to cruise tourism, which is very wide-spread field of tourism in the area. At the same time with developing and marketing distinct tourism services/products, it is also important to increase the quality of infrastructure, especially the quality of accommodation. It is desired that Åland became a more attractive destination in the future¹¹.

All in all, the common objective that is set for the small islands of the Baltic Sea is to develop the fields of tourism which are sustainable, environmentally friendly and which preserve local traditions. Nature tourism offers opportunities to achieve it. Together with it, it is important to ensure diverse services/products all year round, and to take into account the wishes of as many various target groups as possible.

11 „Attraktiva Åland. Idedokument om den åländska turismens framtida utveckling“

3. OVERVIEW OF THE TOURISM RESOURCES IN CENTRAL BALTIC REGION

In the following paragraphs, the nature tourism potential is discussed in the context of Estonia, Sweden and Finland, bearing first and foremost in mind its development opportunities on the islands of the Central Baltic area. This overview deals with the following areas:

- Estonia – Hiiu, Lääne, Saare and Pärnu counties
- Sweden – Stockholm archipelago and Gotland
- Finland – Turku archipelago and Åland archipelago

3.1. HIIU COUNTY / HIIUMAA ISLAND

Natural, historical and cultural heritage, as well as active holidays and characteristic events are the main attractions in Hiiu county. Its unique strengths include separation and privacy.

The nature in Hiiumaa is diverse and very rich in different species. There are sand dunes and coastal slopes. The island has the highest point in West Estonia (Kõpu, 68 m). There are several hiking trails and other natural sights: small islands, beaches (Tahkuna, Luidja), the sea, Kassari, Sääre tirp. For those who are interested in active holidays, there are several opportunities; in summer though, there may occur some limitations, since there may not be enough service providers for riding, boating etc.

3.2. LÄÄNE COUNTY

Lääne county is an active host of health and recreation tourism, active holiday, nature holiday, and products of cultural and historical heritage. It is its diverse natural heritage – beautiful sandy beaches in the north, and meadows rich in birds, pine forests rich in mushrooms, and well maintained bogs with cranberries in the south – that gives the area its own character. The coastal sea is shallow and rich in islands with beautiful views over the landscape. Lääne county has Matsalu National Park and Silma nature reserve together with bird watching towers and bogs for hiking. Lääne county is known for its characteristic islands and islets, the biggest of which are Vormsi

and Osmussaar. Historical and cultural heritage carry considerable weight in the county as well (strongholds, manor houses and churches), together with traditional events and festivals (White Lady Time, Matsalu Nature Film Festival etc).

Coastal Swedish culture and the small islands are of primary interest to Swedes, who are attracted by the connections to their home culture and discovering their similarities. Also, sea tourism is expanding.

3.3. SAARE COUNTY / SAAREMAA ISLAND

The specialities of Saaremaa include Kuressaare with its long tradition of spas and traditional cultural events. As to the latter, among them there are Saaremaa Opera Days, Sea Days, Chamber Music Days and Saaremaa rally. The most important objects of historical and cultural heritage are Kuressaare bishop castle, various manor houses and churches. The strengths of the county lie in its characteristic natural resources and rich heritage culture. Of natural sights, Vilsandi National Park and Kaali meteorite crater are worthy of special mentioning. Saaremaa is also a popular destination for nature tourism, especially bird and seal watching. Thanks to its location, there are also possibilities for diving, kite surfing and windsurfing.

3.4. PÄRNU COUNTY

The most important tourism resources in Pärnu county are related to natural and cultural heritage. In Pärnu county there are wide ranges wetlands, coastal area, varied landscapes and fauna. Soomaa National Park is probably the most attractive natural sight, which is well exposed to visitors. The town of Pärnu is known as a resort town with long history.

Kihnu island is notable because of its distinctive culture, having also been included in the UNESCO cultural heritage list. The visitors have the opportunity to get acquainted with the traditional life style of local inhabitants.

3.5. ÅLAND ARCHIPELAGO

Tourism is one of the major industries in Åland archipelago (it makes up about a third of Åland's GDP), unlike mainland Finland where tourism as a business sector has only an average significance. Almost all of the tourism enterprises (altogether over 300) on Åland islands are members of the Åland Tourism Board. The board's main objectives are to market Åland as a travel destination and to develop tourism on islands together with the local tourism industry.

The Åland Tourism Board is responsible for managing the communication through a common web site called *Destination Åland* (www.visitaland.com). This portal is a very efficient mean of communication, presenting its main objectives as follows:

- to market and profile *Destination Åland*, taking into account its member companies' interests
- to represent the tourism industry in communication to authorities
- to provide tourist information
- to stimulate member companies' product development and service quality

The marketing of Åland archipelago involves different activities such as trade fairs, advertising campaigns and other marketing and PR activities.

As for nature tourism, the Åland islands are described¹² as *"the islands where you can experience more sunshine hours than anywhere else in Scandinavia. Around midsummer the sun rises at 3.30 in the morning and it doesn't set until around 10 in the evening. In the summer it is so hot that visitors flock to the beach. In winter the days are short, but the snow lights up the land and seascape spectacularly. Winters are generally mild, but sometimes the sea freezes and it is possible ice skate all around Mariehamn. Åland's archipelago is one of the largest in the world. The 6,500 islands seem to never end and there is always something new to discover. There is plenty of space in Åland, even in the high season in July, and the rest of the year you have even more of the unspoiled scenery to yourself. There are opportunities to*

¹² Source: www.visitaland.com/en/do

hike in the woods and open meadows, to cycle along winding paths, to surf, to paddle a kayak, and to dive down to well-preserved ship wrecks".

3.6. STOCKHOLM ARCHIPELAGO

Stockholm Archipelago promotes the area with the slogan "*Pure Adventure – Pure Nature – Pure Quality*". Their web portal helps the visitors to book trips and accommodation in order "*to experience one of the world's most beautiful natural areas, stretching from Örskär in the north to Landsort in the south, across an area of 19,320 square kilometres, through nine municipalities and consisting of about 30,000 islands, skerries and rocks*".

3.7. GOTLAND ISLAND

The web site www.segotland.se presents in-depth descriptions of 177 outstanding nature and cultural heritage sites on Gotland well worth of visiting by nature tourists. This comprehensive website was launched by the County Administrative Board of Gotland in cooperation with the Municipality of Gotland, the Gotland Tourist Association and the County Museum of Gotland.

3.8. TURKU ARCHIPELAGO

The Åbolands Tourist Association advertises the Turku Archipelago with a slogan "*A journey across the sea is a journey without limits*" and the region's nature is described like this: "*You are surrounded by land, big islands, little islands, cliffs and rocky islets by the dozen – in fact there are far more islands than people! The sea, wind and waves give a special sense of freedom. But the islands are not completely without signs of life and bustle. Some people live here, while others come to work here. Others spend their holidays here. Some just pass through the and others return time after time. No one can remain untouched by the magnificent surroundings. This is the boundary between land and sea ...*".

4. PRODUCTS OF NATURE TOURISM ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Nature tourism has developed differently on different islands. On bigger islands such as Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Gotland the tourism service providers are local entrepreneurs. For smaller islands, specialised nature tourism companies offer their services. Hiking, bird watching, fishing, kayaking, and yachting are of greatest interest. The following table provides an overview of the nature tourism services that can be enjoyed on the islands.

SERVICES

RUHNU ISLAND	
Liise farm	Guide/excursions, bicycle tours
Bulders farm	Nature hikes
West-Bullers farm	Horse riding, boat trips
Muuluka farm	Paintball, tubing, boat trips, photo hunting

VORMSI ISLAND	
Horse tourism on Vormsi island	Horse riding (including carriage), hikes
Elle-Malle guest house	Guide/excursions
Rumpo Hill farm	Guide/excursions, sailing on historic Vormsi ruups, archery

MUHU ISLAND	
Vanatoa tourism farm	Horse riding, visiting ostrich farm, boat trips, wild animal and bird hunting
Tihuse horse tourism farm	Horse tourism
Meedla Tourism	Canoe sea trips, hikes, kayak sea trips
Väinamere Uisk	Sea tourism
Pädaste Manor	Bicycle rental, hikes, boat trips, water bike trips, in winter: snowy carriage trips
Lõo tourism farms	Horse riding, visiting ostrich farm, boat trips, wild animal and bird hunting
Matsi holiday house	Bicycle rental, hikes, canoe trips
Muhu Jaanalind (Ostrich)	Mini zoo, horse riding trips

SAAREMAA ISLAND	
Anni tourism farm	Nature hikes, seal watching hikes, fishing, horse riding
Järve tourism farm	Hikes, wild animal observation and photo hunting, hunting, bicycle tours
Aavikunurga tourism farm	Hikes in the bogs
Kipi-Koovi hiking centre	Hiking, bicycle tours, animal watching
Muraka holiday house	Guide/excursions, hiking
Saare holidays	Various activities from canoe and sea trips to trout fishing
Toomalõuka tourism farm	Fishing, snorkeling, bicycle tours, kayak sea trips, mushroom picking
Västriku holiday house	Canoe trips, sea trips, nature hikes, sea cruises
Uno Vait's tourism farm	Yacht and canoe trips, nature hikes
Tamme ecofarm	Tours to the sacred forests on foot and by horse carriage
Ratsukievari	Horse riding trips, bicycle tours, bird and nature hikes, jeep safari, carriage trips
Pilguse manor	Nature hikes, seal watching, horse riding, golf
Jurna tourism farm	Hunting, horse riding, boat trips to Abruka, special programs for nature lovers (www.naturetours.ee)
Islander	Boat trips to Vilsandi, sea trips, diving trips
Miku forest park	Eco trips and hikes
Heritage Tours	Various thematic hikes, boat trips, seal trips, rubber boat trips
Haikaranpesä homestay	Guide/excursions
Jaagu holiday house	Picking mushrooms, berries, apples; ball-games, forest hikes, compiling hiking routes
Värava farm	Bicycle trips, hiking
Praakli-Reedikü farm	Participating in farm work, hiking together with a guide
Pidula Trout holiday village	Canoe and sea trips
Pädaste manor	Snowshoeing, horse riding, hunting, carriage tours, fishing

HIIUMAA ISLAND	
Pihla tourism farm	Hikes, birdwatching
Sõru holiday village	Hunting, sailing
Sinima holiday village	Nature hikes
Kalana holiday village	Nature hikes in cooperation with Ristna nature centre, sea cruises, birdwatching
Randmäe guesthouse	Hunting, photo hunting
Kauste holiday houses	Wild boar watching, photo hunting
Pauka holiday houses	Excursions on the land and on the sea
Moonsund Eco	Eco and nature tourism
Salinõmme guesthouse	Horse riding, hunting, fishing
Mäeotsa farm's summer cottage	Bicycle tours, fishing
Kassariotsa guesthouse	Boat trips, picnic at sea
Kassari horse riding hikes	Horse riding, hiking camps

GOTLAND ISLAND	
MC Safari	Motosafari
Fish Your Dream	Fishing, fishing trips, fishing instruction etc
Gangvide farm	Bird watching, horse riding
Gervider Gard	Horse riding
HovLeden	Horse riding
Upplevelsepaket	Hikes, canoeing, bicycle rental, hiking packages
Gotlands Upplevelser	Adventure tourism, nature camps, team work trainings etc
Evenmang Gotland	Bicycle tours, bicycle safari, fishing
Mc raft	Sports and adventure events, bicycle tours
Stall Anggarde	Horse riding

ÅLAND ISLAND	
Skarpnåtö Turistanläggning	Bicycle tours, excursions to the sea, fishing
Alandfishing	Fishing
Anderssons båt & fiskecharter	Fishing
Asterholma holiday village	Seal safari, fishing, sheep farm visiting, bird watching

Boman Stugor	Fishing
Norrö Fishing Camp	Fishing
Silverskär	Bird watching, archipelago safari, fishing, hunting
Svinö Stugby	Hunting, fishing
Stall Aftonsol	Horse riding

In addition to nature tourism services, many service providers offer accommodation and catering. Often it can be assumed that nature tourism is not the main source of income for the entrepreneurs.

5. PROMOTION OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS THROUGH E-ADVERTISING AND E-COMMERCE

E-advertising and e-commerce can be considered as key success factors in modern tourism, both domestic and international¹³. It means that tourism services are increasingly learned about, reserved and paid through Internet. All over the world, the majority of tourism enterprises are small and thus seldom have resources that are needed to build the comprehensive and effective Internet presence. Nevertheless, information can be regarded as one of the most critical strategic resources in knowledge and information intensive industries such as travel and tourism, where communication technology gives tourism providers the means to create and sustain competitiveness on both local and regional level.

Building Internet presence is a hard task, given the reality of scarce resource: it is demanding and resource-consuming. Therefore, the promotion of local tourism businesses (including nature tourism businesses) through comprehensive tourism destination portals in the Central Baltic area is often carried out by using governmental funding. The examples of such tourism portals are:

- Estonia – www.visitestonia.com
- Åland – www.visitaland.com

¹³ Buhalis, D., 2003. eTourism: Information technology for strategic tourism development. Prentice Hall, Harlow

- Gotland – www.gotland.net, www.destinationgotland.se, www.gotland.info, www.segotland.se, www.visitsweden.com
- Turku Archipelago – www.turku.fi, www.saaristo.org, www.travel.fi/saaristomeri
- Stockholm Archipelago – www.visitskargarden.se

6. THE ROLE OF EU FUNDING IN DEVELOPING TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE CENTRAL BALTIC AREA

In the development of tourism industry (including nature tourism) around the Baltic Sea area, EU structural funds have become a key resource in developing infrastructure at tourism destinations, as well as an instrument for promoting cooperation among tourism networks. EU funding is often the main catalyst for cooperation among different actors in tourism industry networks, representing private, public or the third sector and regional, national or international level¹⁴. EU funding provided through collaborative Interreg projects has enabled the marketing and promotion of tourism destinations (including brand building) on a considerably large scale whereas the networks established have acted as educational hubs for small tourism businesses. Turku Touring represents one of best examples of sales and marketing organisations in the Central Baltic area that has wisely used EU funding to develop tourism products and thus enabling local communities to increase their tourism revenues.

6.1. TURKU TOURING

The regional tourism destination marketing organization for the southwestern Finland is Turku Touring (www.turkutouring.fi). It is a marketing and sales organisation that covers regional tourism for the entire province and provides expert advice on tourism in South-West Finland, both for local tourism entrepreneurs and for visitors to the region. The organisational structure of Turku Touring is built up in a way that the major local tourist industry actors are its principal shareholders. However, only the tourism director is directly

¹⁴ A. Lemmetyinen, 2010. The Coordination of cooperation in tourism business networks. Series A-4: 2010, Turku School of Economics

hired by the company, while the rest of the people are the employees of the Turku City Council. With that, Turku Touring serves as an example of a tourism destination marketing organisation whose management represents a mixture of private and public sectors.

Besides being a regional marketing, sales and tourism promotional organisation, it also acts as a coordinator for several EU funded tourism related projects. Currently it is involved in three major EU-funded projects:

- Turku – European City of Culture,
- Flagship Project 12,7: Attract tourists to rural areas, especially the coastal ones. The main goal of the Flagship 12,7 project is to promote joint sustainable rural and coastal tourism packages (e.g. farm, food tourism, hiking, winter sports and nature based tourism).
- Branding Scandinavian Islands.

6.2. BRANDING SCANDINAVIAN ISLANDS

Branding Scandinavian Islands (www.scandinavianislands.com) is a Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme 2007–2013 project, currently implemented by five project partners from coastal Sweden, Åland archipelago and Southwestern Finland: the Municipality of Haninge, Sweden; Öppen Skärgård Association, Sweden; Åland Tourism Board; City of Turku and Turku Touring, Finland and the City of Väståboland, Finland. This large EU funded project develops the cooperation between tourist organisations in the archipelago areas of Finland, Sweden and Åland.

The fields of cooperation are product development and joint international marketing. By increasing the value of the trademark "Scandinavian Islands", the project intends to increase the tourism in the area and to also open up possibilities for the development of investments in the travel and tourism industry. The goal of the project is to attract visitors to the Scandinavian islands (the island chain incorporating Stockholm, Åland and Turku archipelagos), but also taking into account that in order to assure the long-term profitability of the archipelago, local tourism industry needs to be involved in protecting this unique natural environment.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS TO NATURE TOURISM SERVICE DEVELOPERS

The core of nature tourism lies primarily in connecting the environmental sustainability aspect with the interests of local community and the interests of tourists.

At the start of strategic planning of a region's nature tourism, it is important for nature tourism developers to ask themselves these questions:

- Which are the conditions for nature tourism development in the region? Which are its competitive advantages compared to other regions?
- What is the market demand for nature tourism like and which products and services can be offered to potential clients based on available resources?
- Who should be involved in nature tourism development?
- Which principles should be taken into account in nature tourism development?
- What are the planned outcomes of nature tourism and what do we want to achieve with them?
- How will the marketing and sales for nature tourism services be organised?

Answering these questions will help the developer to clarify whether (s)he is ready to take up the role and responsibilities of a nature tourism entrepreneur.

The analysis of nature tourism companies showed that the main obstacles for development are the following:

- Nature tourism is seasonal and depends significantly on weather conditions. It is necessary to combine nature tourism with other tourism related activities.
- Nature tourism entrepreneurs are focused on relatively specific territories. That has resulted in rather modest wider cooperation of tourism entrepreneurs.
- There has been little involvement of local community, which could enable the more diversification of the services and increase the authenticity of the visits.
- There is only limited information available about nature tourism ser-

vices. In most cases these services are offered as complementary services, and therefore their descriptions are rather incomplete.

- The most common nature tourism services are hikes and trips (on foot, by bike, by boat or canoe, horse riding), nature and bird watching, fishing and sailing. At the same time, there are many more opportunities in this area (nature photography, watch equipment rental etc) which are not used yet.
- The feedback from clients is relatively poorly communicated. The experiences and comments from nature tourists could be used a lot more in the products' and services' descriptions, both in written words and in photos.

Here are the positive aspects of nature tourism development in the region:

- Nature tourism has acquired an important place in the life on the Baltic Sea islands. There is a significant number of service providers and the selection of services is relatively wide, offering the consumers a good selection.
- The full potential of a region has been put into use more and more, involving local inhabitants and cultural heritage. There is a trend towards involving the visitors to local activities, providing personal and authentic experience.
- Nature tourism entrepreneurs are joining cooperation networks, nature tourism activists are getting united in umbrella organisations and they participate in international cooperation networks. Practical experiences are introduced and the spreading of good practices is supported.
- A network of expert advisers has come into existence. Consultancy and training services are offered and it has become possible to learn nature tourism in a systematic way.
- Nationally funded support schemes have been introduced for beginner entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship related information is easily accessible either for free or with minimum price.
- There are support schemes for tourism development. It is possible to propose projects and receive funding for them. Tourism entrepre-

neurs are active in acquiring funds, which has resulted in wider cooperation networks of people who are involved in nature tourism; public, private and the third sector are involved more and more.

Recommendations for the development of nature tourism related activities:

- Developing new marketable nature tourism services and products, combining them with the activities of local community. Making use of the synergy effects in order to employ local human potential and natural and cultural heritage on an all-year-round basis in a sustainable way.
- To overcome the seasonality and the instability of weather conditions, combining nature tourism services with other tourism products, preparing complex visit packages (e.g. observing and participating in farmhouse activities, participating in the workshops of local small producers etc).
- Developing valuable natural objects into diverse visit destinations, ensuring the appropriate infrastructure (the construction of hiking and study trails, bicycle roads, bird watching towers, labelling nature objects and providing introductory descriptions, providing well organised and environmentally friendly access – signposted trails, arranged parking etc).
- Providing trainings for nature guides and hike leaders, developing the relevant evaluation system.
- Expanding the communication between tourism entrepreneurs, support organisations and trainers. Carrying out more cross-sectoral projects, which are aimed at increasing the cooperation between stakeholders from various fields and contributing to better understanding and meeting the customers' needs.
- Developing the competence of nature tourism workers systematically and according to the objectives, carrying out nature tourism related trainings, including the introduction to environmentally friendly management models.
- Developing nature programmes and curricula, promoting outdoor learning and providing the necessary infrastructure.

- Systematic monitoring of the expectations, needs and satisfaction of the stakeholders interested in nature tourism (local governments, entrepreneurs, local inhabitants), and developing their competence.
- Carrying out activities that involve the community, increasing trust and cooperation between nature tourism entrepreneurs and local people. Example activities may include volunteer work, involving local inhabitants into offering services. Developing a shared vision, including local inhabitants, local authorities and tourism entrepreneurs.
- Developing environmentally friendly management of nature usage, carrying out relevant research and analyses, becoming aware of the best practices and putting them into use locally.
- Expanding cooperation in the field of nature tourism with other relevant actors around the world, getting to know the best practices and putting them into use locally.
- Introducing the values and opportunities of nature tourism as environmentally friendly lifestyle, expanding the base knowledge of nature tourism through environmental education.
- Making better use of e-opportunities in marketing activities. Significantly expanding information sharing via Internet and social media, answering enquiries and accepting bookings.
- Preparing brochures/books, films, games and curricula about nature and promoting them.
- Inviting media representatives to experience nature tourism first hand – organising dedicated trips and sharing experience through media.
- Continuing working out nature tourism labelling, expanding the systemic use of the labels.

8. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRATICES

8.1. ESTONIAN NATURE TOURS

Estonian Nature Tours (www.naturetours.ee) is a ground tour organiser specialised in bird watching and nature study tours on all year round basis since 2003, located in Lääne county, Lihula. It is a well-known and recog-

nised tourism enterprise whose service providers are experts in birds, animals and plants. The mission of Estonian Nature Tours is to introduce the natural heritage preserved by moderate human activity, to design ecological thinking and awareness of nature and to improve local tourism services. Estonian Nature Tours' vision is to develop into a well-known and respected trademark of sustainable tourism in Europe. One of the trademark features of the company is being able to make use of the specific natural opportunities of West Estonia while following the principles of environment protection and conservation.

Estonian Nature Tours offers services to customers with highly varied expectations – both children and adults. All the services rely on the values of direct experience, environment protection and respect towards local traditions. Examples of tours include the following: "*Brown Bear tracking and watching*", "*Beaver Photography*", "*Steller's Elder Watching*", "*Flying Squirrel study trip*", canoe trips in Matsalu. Tours are also organised to protection areas – to the islands of Kesselaid and Osmussaar. The company also provides custom-made tours and trips.

In addition to providing interested individuals with support and knowledge, Estonian Nature Tours also participates in the development of local networks, Väinameri project and it cooperates with the local community. Estonian Nature Tours claims to inspire its clients to value the activities and services of local people. They also offer gourmet experiences of Estonian food – the food provided during the tours is freshly made, using local produce.

Communication with clients takes place in Estonian, English and Finnish. In addition to its home page, Estonian Nature Tours has its Facebook page. The former includes Nature Calendar which provides added value by giving monthly overviews of suitable tours for that particular period, complete with the list of highlighted birds and animals and natural phenomena of the time.

In 2008–2009 the President of the Republic of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves recognised Estonian Nature Tours for the development of nature tourism.

Feedback to Estonian Nature Tours featured on their home page:

"Thank you! Kesselaids was a great experience. The food was the best I have ever had on such tours – starting from the freshly baked bread with herbal butter and topping it off with terribly good pancakes with fresh strawberry jam, not mentioning the rest."

"Once again the tour has exceeded all expectations. Your tour leader was very good – with a good sense of humour, detailed, understanding, knowledgeable etc. I have also had prior experience with your high level organisational skills and interesting packages. I will definitely recommend your tours to my colleagues!"

8.2. PÄDASTE MANOR HOUSE

One of the most special and interesting nature tourism service providers in the region is Pädaste manor house (www.padaste.ee). It is a manor house with long history, idyllically located in Saare county on Muhu island. The earliest written history of Pädaste manor dates back to 1566. Nowadays, when taken into use as a resort and recreation location, it has won the hearts of both Estonians and foreign tourists. In 2009, Pädaste manor was awarded the title *The Best Tourism Establishment in Estonia* as the enterprise that values constant development, quality service, and enthusiasm which has raised the awareness of both Muhu island as well as Estonia as a whole.

Pädaste offers a varied set of services with particular attention to introducing Nordic islands' cuisine, respecting the seasons and making maximum use of fresh local ingredients. They work with the island's producers and farmers, while many of the greens and herbs are grown in Pädaste's own gardens and green houses. Pädaste manor house is also part of a cooperation network that aims to introduce the cuisine of Nordic islands. The philosophy of the manor's restaurant Alexander is centered specifically around that objective. In 2010 Alexander was nominated the best restaurant in Estonia. In the manor, special product line "*Pädaste Gourmet*" has been developed, and its products are sold in selected supermarkets.

In addition to enjoying local food and accommodation services, there are opportunities for visitors to experience a variety of tourism packages. For

example, there are tours to discover Muhu island and Saaremaa island accompanied by a guide, there are horseback riding and bird hunting packages. All the services can also be booked without the stay at the manor. Various target groups of clients will find suitable services for them – including families with children as well as the elderly. The services together with prices and special offers are described on the home page of Pädaste manor in Estonian and in English, and there is also Pädaste manor's Facebook page.

The manor people also contribute actively to local life – there are public clean-up events, workshops, concerts and performances in the manor house or in its garden.

8.3. HERITAGE TOURS

Heritage Tours (www.parimusmatkad.ee) is an authentic travel agency situated in Loona manor on Vilsandi island. Its mission is to introduce the natural and cultural heritage of Saaremaa, based on the principles of eco-tourism. The leaders of Heritage Tours are local people who closely feel and know their area.

The agency offers highly varied selection of nature tours and hiking packages in Saare county, taking into account the interests of different target groups, adults as well as children. Both regular tours as well as customised packages are provided. The list of standard tours includes the popular trip to see the seals, inflatable boat trip to Vilsandi National Park islands and islets and many more.

Heritage Tours cooperates with Loona manor house that offers catering and accommodation services. Together with other local entrepreneurs traditional arts and crafts workshops are offered, too: coloring with plants, soap-making, stone fence repairing and many more. In cooperation with Private Forest Centre, Miku Forest Park has been open since 2009, where visitors can get acquainted with old forest management practices.

At tourism fair Tourest 2011 Heritage Tours was one of the nominees for *The Best Tourism Promoter 2010*.

Both the Heritage Tours' home page on the Internet and its Facebook page provide the latest news and are open to your feedback about the service quality. Clients are served in Estonian, English and Russian.

8.4. ANGLA WINDMILL PARK AND THE HERITAGE CULTURE CENTRE

Angla Windmill Park (www.anglatuulik.eu) and the Heritage Culture Centre are situated in Saaremaa, Angla village. The place takes pride in the most famous windmills of Saaremaa, and it has four post mills and one Dutch windmill. The windmills have been renovated and are open to public. There is an exhibition that introduces the history of the region's culture of windmills.

People who are interested in culture can spend time at the Heritage Culture Centre, opened in 2011, where national crafts can be learned and Angla rye bread can be tasted. There are opportunities to try out with one's own hands the traditional works which were common centuries ago. There are also events introducing folk traditions.

Windmill Park and Heritage Culture Centre provide services for visitors of different age. In summer 2011, there are opportunities to participate in Reinu pottery workshop, Vildu felt workshop and Viita wool workshop. It is also possible to learn leather and dolostone crafts, making of jewellery and souvenirs. The package for introducing Estonian heritage traditions to children is worthy of special mentioning.

The enterprise also contributes to the local cultural life, organising events during national holidays, different thematic days and events for other occasions. Angla windmill Park and the Heritage Culture Centre can host its clients in Estonian, English and Russian.

In 2010 the leaders of Angla Windmill Park and Heritage Culture Centre were awarded the title *The Best Tourism Promoter*.

8.5. NAMI NAMASTE

Nami Namaste (www.naminamaste.com) is a private farm on Muhu island, Simisti village, what once used to be a fisherman's cottage. It offers cook-

ing workshops and accommodation and is catered to meet the needs of demanding clients. The farm has its herb and vegetable garden, which the visitors can enjoy – at Nami Namaste local produce is used in cooking as much as possible. The important key words for Nami Namaste atmosphere are privacy and peace. All services from Nami Namaste need to be booked well in advance and they will be tailored to the needs of the group, sized 16 people maximum.

The mission of Nami Namaste is to bring people together at a common table. Preparing food relieves stress and unites people. The process is enjoyed by both – those who teach and those who learn.

Nami Namaste's additional services include horse back rides, fishing and canoeing, which are offered in cooperation with neighbouring farms.

More information on services can be obtained from Nami Namaste's home page. The final packages are confirmed after consulting with the client, taking into account the detailed needs. The clients are serviced in Estonian, Finnish, Swedish and English.

8.6. RATSUKIEVARI

Ratsukievari (www.ratsukievari.ee) is a horse farm that offers various opportunities for nature activities, accommodation and catering. Lead by Finnish owners, it is located in Saaremaa's Jõgela village in Lümända rural municipality. Horseback riding services are the most characteristic feature of the farm, providing horse trips of various levels, carriage trips and weekend or even longer horse trips. The hikes are carefully planned, taking into account the riding experience of the clients – in order to offer everyone the best possible enjoyment.

Ratsukievari can host visitors of various age and interests. For those who are not interested in riding, it offers the opportunities for cycling trips to Saaremaa's beautiful natural sights. Popular jeep safaris provide yet another alternative to get acquainted with Saaremaa's nature. For children, there is also a playground.

Ratsukievari services its clients in Estonian, Finnish and English. More detailed information is available on Ratsukievari's home page on the Internet. It has also got a Facebook page, where Finnish is the main language of communication.

8.7. ALGALLIKA GUESTHOUSE

Algallika guesthouse (www.algallika.ee) is situated in Western Estonia in Matsalu National Park. Matsalu National Park has a significance on European level, being one of the most important areas for water birds' nesting and migration. The park has been created with the objective to protect nesting, moulting and migratory birds. Algallika guesthouse is located on the territory of the national park and promotes itself as a place where one can rest in nature enjoying peace and silence; go for hikes on Matsalu paths, get to know the wooded meadows with distinct flora and the coastline, and watch birds. The guesthouse is by the beautiful beach, and it has specialised on organising nature and health camps. Nature protection and environmental friendliness are central principles. The most common themes of the trainings include psychological coaching, creative and spiritual development. There are opportunities for organising independent seminars and trainings. At different seasons and traditional holidays there are also thematic events, for example at Christmas and on Midsummer Day.

The home page and Facebook page of the guesthouse provide the overview of the services it offers. The opportunity to stay overnight at the hay-loft should be mentioned as one of the special ones – taking inspiration from local traditions, being exotic and environmentally friendly. Those interested in nature tourism are offered bird watching tours, canoeing and other trips in cooperation with Estonian Nature Tours. In addition, opportunities are offered for hosting companies' events. Services are provided in Estonian and English language.

Feedback to Algallika guesthouse provided on their Facebook page:

"It is a super cosy place..... especially with snowdrift of such kind ;) It's the life on the edge of the Earth ..."

8.8. GOTLANDNATURE.COM

GotlandNature.com (www.gotlandnature.com) is a Swedish ecotourism company founded in 2006 with the activities centered around Gotland's nature. Its services include catering, accommodation in hotels and cabins, guiding, tours and experiences. In its operations the company is based on the principles of environmental protection. GotlandNature.com is a member of the Swedish ecotourism society.

Bird watching and botany tours in Gotland have central place in the company's services. During *Eagle Weekends* golden eagle and white tailed eagle are the targets; the chances of seeing them are higher than anywhere else in Sweden. A birding trip to South Gotland's Storsudret and Sundre bird observatory offers the opportunity to see thousands of migrating birds and to get acquainted with the work of researchers. Land Rover safari takes the tourists to abandoned railroads and small roads along the coast. In cooperation with Nature Trek tourism agency, 8-day culture and nature tourism packages to Gotland are offered primarily to the UK market. In addition to the ready-made packages, the clients are offered the opportunity to experience tailor-made holiday packages according to their wishes.

GotlandNature.com nature tours are lead by experienced guides who provide the visitors with the whole picture from ornithology to botany to history. The clients are encouraged to make their first steps in observing the nature. The guides will customise their activities based on the clients' prior experience and wishes. The guides speak Swedish and English, some speak also German.

GotlandNature.com cooperates with Gotland's best hotels, many of which are located in the countryside, right in the middle of nature. There are also opportunities to rent cabins for self-catering and for enjoying the surrounding nature.

8.9. FISHYOURDREAM.COM

FishYourDream.com (www.fishyourdream.com) is a fishing tourism company in Gotland. It belongs to the same group with GotlandNature.com and

operates on same principles. FishYourDream.com is a member of the Swedish ecotourism society and it engages in several conservational projects.

Clients are offered fishing trips of different price ranges and levels of guide's service together with accommodation at cabins near fishing spots. Separate packages have been made for introduction to seatrout fishing, carp fishing and trout watching during the spawning season. One guide serves a maximum of 3 (novice) fishing tourists. That guarantees the safety of the client and the quality of service that she or he needs and desires.

FishYourDream.com is running several conservational projects on Gotland. With pike tagging project the movement, growth, and reproduction of northern pike in the Baltic was studied together with the effects of catch and release on the species. The clients of FishYourDream.com were involved in the project, too. All clients who were successful in the pike-fishing received a release certificate illustrated by Gotland's artist Inger Segerberg. The certificate holds the information about the particular fish and also about the angler making this contribution. If the pike is caught again later on, an e-mail notification will be sent to the angler.

FishYourDream.com cooperates with Gotland County administration on collecting information about sea trout spawning streams. During the spawning season trouts are examined and tagged.

With the efforts of the company, Gotland's only carp lake has been created.

On remote island and national park Gotska Sandön, FishYourDream.com is working with the development of sportfishing as a way of protecting and conserving that unique area.

8.10. ARCHIPELAGO ADVENTURES TURKU OY

Archipelago Adventures (www.archipelago.fi) is a travel and tour agent specialising in Turku and Åland Archipelagos with the experience of over 20 years. It offers professionally planned transport, activities and conference services along with accommodation. Archipelago Tours has been granted a quality certificate, which guarantees safe and high quality practices.

The company has extensive network of cooperation partners, with the help of which the visitors will be able to find the services that they desire. Main coordination and responsibility for the packages remains with Archipelago Tours, guaranteeing the client the best offer. The programs organised by Archipelago Adventures offer holiday makers the experiences of sailing, the opportunity to visit to the village of vikings, boat trips and hiking trips in the wild forests of Finland, and fishing trips.

The core of Archipelago Adventures' services is made up by "*six sea pearls*" – Villa Wolax, Villa Rainer, PensarSyd, Äijälän Rusti, Kavalto farm and Björkholm. All of them are independent companies offering tourism services. For example, Äijälän Rusti combines the diverse tourism services of Rymättylä community, from winter fishing to conference packages. The core activity of Kavalto farm is growing berries. The berries are sold directly from the farm. The farm, having been owned by one family for more than 300 years, has expanded its activities also to organising festive events and catering.

In addition to the "sea pearls" with extensive profile, all offering accommodation and catering services, there are also more specialised tourism service providers who partner with Archipelago Adventures. Fishing trips are organised by Tärppi Matkat, who supply their visitors with fishing boats of different sizes, together with their expert guide. Several cooperation partners organise jeti-safaries in the narrow straits of the archipelago.

8.11. BACKARO GUESTHOUSE

Backaro guesthouse (www.majatalobackaro.com) is located on the island of Nötö within the Turku Archipelago National Park. The guesthouse is a certified partner of the PAN Parks Foundation.

PAN Parks Foundation brings together 11 European protected areas, including Turku Archipelago National Park in Finland and Soomaa National Park Estonia. These are the areas where undisturbed nature has been combined with high quality tourism facilities, well balanced with wilderness protection and sustainable local development. PAN Parks Foundation certifies its partners based on environmental protection standards and their commitment to environmental protection. Backaro guesthouse has the right to use PAN

Parks logo, which ensures the clients that their visit supports environmental protection.

Besides accommodation and catering, Backaro guesthouse offers a variety of active holiday services. The clients can book trips to various islands in the national park. Guided tours on Nötö island introduce the visitors to the island's heritage landscapes and the main local sights. Fishing trips and boat rental are also part of the services.

The guesthouse operates in the renovated Backa gård house. The architecture of the house and gardens has been preserved. In summer, the house's special fish dishes are served on the porch.

The clients are serviced in Swedish, Finnish and English. The homepage of the guesthouse provides more information and the opportunity to give feedback to the services of house.

SUMMARY

Nature tourism development has a great potential in the Central Baltic Sea region, especially on small islands. The main reasons for it include good natural preconditions and the increasing demand of different consumer segments.

Nature tourism has been defined as a field of tourism that is characterised by responsible travelling that supports the preservation of natural and cultural heritage and ensures the well-being of local inhabitants. Nature tourism has two main focuses: environmental awareness and supporting local inhabitants, i.e. their community and culture, which should be continuously kept in mind while developing this field.

Nature tourism is of active interest both for domestic and foreign tourists. Taking into account future perspectives, the development of this field requires more attention, as pure nature is becoming more and more rare in the world. The good prospects for nature tourism are also confirmed by the fact that nature tourism aspects are central themes in the national tourism development documents and regional competitiveness related documents.

Nature tourism can be referred to as an export article that designs the image of the country.

As an important development need, national tourism related development plans and regional (tourism) development strategies mention the development of nature tourism services based on the demand from the clients, making use of the local development potential and managing it all in a sustainable way. From the perspective of tourism development, attention should be paid to local inhabitants, and also to local authorities as well as cultural and natural space. The best solutions can be born in responsible and clear cooperation between public, private and non-profit sector.

In comparison with other regions, the advantages of the central Baltic Sea islands include pure and well preserved natural environment, which has its own distinct character; also the proximity to the sea and existing good reputation as a nature tourism destination. In the further development of nature tourism, the examples from Gotland, Åland archipelago and Turku archipelago could be followed as their traditions of nature tourism have evolved over a much longer period of time than the Estonian practices. It is also possible to find successful examples of entrepreneurs from the whole Baltic Sea region who sustain all-year-round diverse services to various target groups. The practices described in this report could serve as models to tourism developers who wish to focus on nature tourism.

All in all, it can be said that the common objective of the islands of the Baltic Sea is to develop the fields of tourism which are sustainable, environmentally friendly and which preserve local traditions. Taking into account the purity that is at the heart of nature tourism, it cannot become a mass tourism. Deriving from that, it is important to get to know and to learn from the best practices of the tourism entrepreneurs across the Baltic Sea and to develop wide-spread cooperation between tourism entrepreneurs, where the local community would also be strongly involved in.

