



**REPORTS 180**

**FINLAND AS A TOURIST DESTINATION  
THROUGH THE EYES OF THE JAPANESE**  
- AN INTERVIEW STUDY ON JAPANESE PEOPLE LIVING IN FINLAND

ANNE MATILAINEN AND SAANA SANTALAHTI





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# PREFACE

The CAITO (Meta cluster for attracting the Japanese tourism market) project is an international project that aims to promote and support tourism companies in entering the Japanese tourism market by strengthening their capacity and cooperation in three Baltic Sea countries (Latvia, Estonia, and Finland). The project is coordinated by the Estonian University of Life Sciences and includes partners from all three countries. In Finland the partnership consists of the University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute, Laurea University of Applied Sciences and Visit SouthCoast Finland. More information on the CAITO project can be found from: <http://caitoproject.eu/>.

In order to develop successful tourism products, the project aims to find out more about Japanese people's expectations and interests with regard to Finland and the Baltic countries. To achieve this, in summer 2017 the University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute implemented an interview study focusing on Japanese people living in Finland, seeking their impressions about the country and opinions on interesting tourism attractions. In total 21 Japanese persons living in Finland were interviewed. The main aim was to find indications of what kind of new products there may be demand for. Another objective was to find out how rural tourism fits into this market group, what impressions there are of rural Finland, and what improvements are needed in the current product provision.



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to get an impression of the image of Finland from those Japanese who already have some knowledge on the country. As many Japanese tourist only use the Helsinki-Vantaa airport as a transfer airport to Europe, there is a need to consider how to keep the Japanese in the country. Thus, there is also a need to understand why the tourists visit the places they do. This is question this study aims also to answer. The study was carried out by interviewing Japanese who have been living or staying in Finland for more than three months but no more than five years. As the purpose was to find interviewees who had more experience from Finland than an average tourist, but had not yet fully integrated to the Finnish society, this timespan was seen as the most suitable. The data was then analyzed by using qualitative thematic analysis.

The results of the interviews showed that the reasons why the respondents had come to Finland were quite similar; most came to Finland due to studies, work or because their spouse moved. Safety, English language skills and good education system were the most common reasons why Finland was chosen. The general opinion of Finland as a tourist destination was positive and most would recommend visiting Finland to their friends. Opinions on Finnish culture and people were positive as well. Over half of the respondents said that they would visit Finland again in the future. Those who wouldn't, said that they would probably choose another Nordic country. Bureaucracy, darkness during the winter, difficulties finding friends and job and learning the Finnish language were mentioned as negative aspects related living in Finland. As for

the image about Finland, the most commonly mentioned "Finnish things" were sauna, Moomin and forests and nature.

The respondents had traveled relatively lot around Finland. Most had visited different cities reachable by public transport and different destinations in Lapland. Porvoo, Turku and Tampere were mentioned as the memorable because of their beautiful sceneries, old towns and history, and Lapland because of its nature. Places where the respondents had not yet visited but would like to were mostly in Lapland and archipelago. Defining 'rural area' was found difficult to the respondents, but the impressions of it were still positive. Places the respondents would like to show or have their friends experience were diverse. Most were in the Helsinki area and experiences included sauna and forest scenery. When asked to describe and experience the respondents would like to create for their Japanese friends or family if there were no budget limitations, most would like to tour around Helsinki area and after this visit Lapland and other parts of Finland. Quite many would also like to combine other countries such as Sweden, Norway and Estonia to the tour.

There is definitely a need to improve tourist information available in English and especially in Japanese. This lack of information can be the reason why rural areas were hard for the respondents to comprehend. The results of the study were generally in line with previous studies about important product characteristics for Japanese tourists. However, the results also brought up new insights on potential tourist attractions and ideas for developing existing and new products.



# TIIVISTELMÄ

## SUOMI MATKAILUKOHTENA JAPANILAISTEN SILMIN NÄHTYNÄ

Tutkimuksen tavoite oli saada käsitys siitä, millainen kuva Suomesta on japanilaisilla, joilla on jonkin verran tietoa maasta. Koska Helsinki-Vantaan lentokenttä on isolle osalle japanilaisista vain pysähdyspaikka matkalla muualle Eurooppaan, on syytä miettiä, miten saapuvat matkailijat saataisiin pysähtymään pidemmäksi aikaa Suomessa. Tutkimuksen toinen tavoite olikin selvittää, miksi japanilaiset vierailevat juuri niissä paikoissa, joissa vierailevat. Tutkimus toteutettiin haastatteleamalla japanilaisia, jotka ovat olleet tai asuneet Suomessa enemmän kuin kolme kuukautta, mutta vähemmän kuin viisi vuotta. Koska tavoitteena oli löytää haastateltavia, joilla oli enemmän kokemusta Suomesta kuin tavallisella turistilla, mutta jotka eivät vielä olleet täysin ”suomalaistuneet”, tämä aikaväli katsottiin sopivaksi. Tulokset analysoitiin käyttäen kvalitatiivista temaattista analyysiä.

Haastateltavien syyt tulla alun perin Suomeen olivat hyvin perinteisiä. Suurin osa tuli Suomeen opintojen tai työn vuoksi, tai puolisonsa perässä. Useimmiten Suomi valikoitui kohteeksi turvallisen maineensa, hyvän englanninkielen tason ja hyvän koulutusjärjestelmän vuoksi. Yleinen mielipide Suomesta matkailukohtena oli positiivinen, ja suurin osa suosittelisi Suomea vierailukohteeksi ystävilleen. Lisäksi yleiset mielipiteet suomalaisesta kulttuurista ja suomalaisista ihmisistä olivat positiivisia. Yli puolet vastanneista valitsi Suomen uudelleen kohteekseen. Ne, jotka eivät tulisi uudelleen Suomeen, valitsivat todennäköisesti jonkin muun Pohjoismaan. Byrokratia, talven pimeys, sekä vaikeudet työn ja ystävien löytämisessä sekä suomenkielen oppimisessa mainittiin usein negatiivisina asioina. Yleistä Suomi-kuvaa kysyttäessä sauna, Muumit, sekä metsät ja luonto mainittiin suomalaisimmiksi asioiksi.

Tutkimukseen vastanneet olivat matkustaneet suhteellisen paljon ympäri Suomea. Suurin osa

oli vieraillut kaupungeissa, joihin pääsee helposti julkisella liikenteellä ja eri kohteissa Lapissa. Mieleenpainuviksi vierailukohteiksi mainittiin mm. Porvoo, Turku ja Tampere niiden kauniiden maisemien, vanhojen kaupunginosien, sekä historian vuoksi. Lappi mainittiin mieleenpainuvaksi luontonsa vuoksi. Paikkoja, joissa vastanneet eivät olleet vielä käyneet, mutta haluaisivat käydä, olivat Lappi ja saaristo. Se, mitä tarkoitetaan ”maaseudulla” koettiin vastaajien joukossa hankalaksi, mutta mielikuvat siitä olivat kuitenkin pääasiassa positiivisia. Vastaajia pyydettiin myös kertomaan, mitä he haluaisivat näyttää Suomessa Japanista käymään tuleville ystävilleen tai sukulaisilleen. Suurin osa kohteista oli Helsingin alueella, ja kokemuksista, joita vieraille haluttaisiin tarjota, mainittiin useimmiten sauna ja metsämaisema. Kun vastaajia pyydettiin kuvailemaan kokemus, jonka se tahtoisivat tarjota ystävilleen tai perheelleen, mikäli mitään budjettirajoituksia ei olisi, suurin osa haluaisi ensin kierrellä Helsingin alueella ja sen jälkeen vierailla Lapissa ja muissa osissa Suomea. Osa olisi myös sisällyttänyt reissuun jonkin toisen maan, kuten Ruotsin, Norjan tai Viron.

Suurin kehittämiskohde vastaajien mukaan on ehdottomasti turisteille suunnatun tiedon lisääminen englanniksi ja erityisesti japaniksi. Saatavilla olevan tiedon puute lienee myös yksi syy siihen, miksi maaseudun ja maaseutumatkailun hahmottaminen oli vastaajille hankalaa. Tutkimuksen tulokset ovat pääosin samassa linjassa aiempien, japanilaisille turisteille suunnattujen tuotteiden tärkeimpiä ominaisuuksia kartoittaneiden tutkimusten kanssa. Tulokset kuitenkin toivat esille myös uusia näkemyksiä potentiaalisista turistikohteista ja ideoita jo olemassa olevien ja uusien tuotteiden kehittämiseen.



## BACKGROUND

In 2015 there were approx. 454 000 Japanese visitors to Finland, which equals 5% of all foreign arrivals and makes Japan the 7<sup>th</sup> most important market for Finland. Of the Japanese visitors, 193 000 were stopover visitors and 140 000 visited Finland as a main destination. As there are excellent direct flight connections from Finland to three major Japanese cities, Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, these were also the main areas the visitors come from (over 90 %). Helsinki-Vantaa airport is often used as the transfer airport in Europe on arrival (Tilastokeskus, 2016; Visit Finland, 2016a) and therefore even though the arrival numbers of Japanese visitors to Finland are relatively large, there is a need to consider how to "keep them in the country", even for a day or two, before continuing to other European countries. The majority (68%) of those for whom Finland was the main destination also visited other countries during the same trip.

Of the trips made to Finland by the Japanese, around two-thirds are for leisure. Japanese holidays are short: the average time spent in Finland is only 3,8 nights (stop-overs and day visitors not included). Leisure visitors stayed in Finland for only an average of 3 nights while visitors staying with friends or relatives spent longer in Finland (8,1 nights). Over half of the Japanese visitors use a hotel or motel for accommodation and only around 10 % rent a cottage or stay over in a campsite or in a hostel. Around 25 % of visits were package holidays. (Tilastokeskus, 2016).

At the moment, only approx. 2/3 (70% in 2015) of Japanese travelling to Finland used the Internet for booking accommodation or travel (Visit Finland, 2015). However, especially among the older traveler groups, physical travel agencies still play a big role. The share of Internet is rapidly increasing and mobile booking is getting more and more popular in Japan all the time (Korhonen & Tuovinen, 2015; Tilastokeskus, 2016; Visit Finland, 2016). Typically, Japanese tourists in Finland visit the capital area (68%), Lapland (22%) or the archipelago and coastal areas (<5%) (Visit Finland, 2015). Lately the Saimaa area has also begun to draw more Japanese tourists.

According to the previous studies and reports, three different groups of Japanese travelers can be

identified: independent and young women, elderly people, and generation or family tourists (Suvanto et al., 2017). Independent 20-50-year-old women and especially women in their 20s and 30s are defined as one new and potential target group. These women are often unmarried and living at home, which leaves them more money to use, or they have higher incomes and education than the average Japanese women (Clammer, 1997, p. 227; Visit Finland, 2014). Elderly people, on the other hand, have leisure and wealth to travel frequently and at length (tours). Senior passengers are especially fascinated by the harmony of nature (Maine International Trade Center, 2015). Lack of language skills is still a problem among elderly Japanese tourists, but the problem is decreasing. They also appreciate safety, routines, guides and group travels. Generations or family tourists are the third important tourist group. This group can include mothers and adult daughters, grandparents (typically grandmothers) with grandchildren, groups of three generations (an increasing trend), young families (parents under 35 years) or couples without children. Families have been found to prefer Lapland, nature, welfare, aurora borealis, Moomins and Santa Claus in particular.

There has been a clear change in the Japanese tourist profile within the past years. While in the middle of the first decade of the 2000s most were still elderly people travelling in groups, by 2015 tourists under 35 years old had become the biggest group (Matkailun vuosi 2015). This calls for new approaches to the tourism products targeted at Japanese markets. The number of FITs (Fully Independent Travelers) has been growing worldwide in recent years (Buck & Conrady, 2009). At the same time, demand for individualistic and authentic products is increasing. Also, along with the worldwide trends of health, wellness and natural values, product provision focusing on these aspects has raised interest within the Japanese market. This provides new opportunities for rural tourism in particular. However, it also entails challenges. The rural tourism provision must fit into Asian customers' needs and demands. There is a need to understand the reasons why the tourists visit the places they do, not just what they visit and how

often. This study aims, for its part, to answer that question. The aim is to discover ideas for and indications of new potential products and services related to Japanese market segments as well as to get an impression of the image of Finland from those

who already have some knowledge of the country and its culture. The focus of this study is Finland, but similar studies will also be conducted in Latvia and Estonia during autumn 2017-spring 2018 within the CAITO project.

# MATERIAL AND METHODS

The interview material consists of 21 interviews with Japanese people living or staying in Finland for more than three months but no more than approx. five years. As the purpose was to find interviewees who had more experience of Finland than an average tourist, but had not yet fully integrated to the Finnish society, these were seen as feasible criteria. The study was qualitative in nature and in-depth interviews were used as the research method. A joint interview guide was created in co-

operation between University of Helsinki, Ruralia Institute, Estonian University of Life Sciences and the Latvian Agricultural University.

The interviews were conducted during July-August 2017. They lasted from 45 minutes to 1,5 hours and were conducted in Japanese. All the interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent and partly transcribed first in Japanese and afterwards translated into English. The characteristics of the interviewees are summarized in table 1.

**Table 1.** The background characteristics of the interviewees.

	sex	age	location	length of stay in Finland	knowledge of Finnish/Swedish language (self-reported)
H1	female	30s	Capital region	1-2 year(s), previously 3-5 years	no
H2	male	30s	Capital region	less than 1 year	is learning Finnish
H3	male	30s	Capital region	less than 6 months, previously less than 6 months	speaks Finnish a little
H4	female	under 20	Capital region	3-5 years	is learning Finnish
H5	female	40s	Capital region	1-2 year(s)	has studied Finnish for 2 years
H6	male	20s	Central Finland	1-2 year(s)	is learning Finnish
H7	female	30s	Capital region	1-2 year(s)	is learning Finnish
H8	female	50s	Capital region	3-5 years  Occasionally worked as a tour guide for Japanese tourists.	speaks Finnish
H9	female	20s	Capital region	1-2 year(s)	has learned Finnish

H10	female	30s	Uusimaa region	1-2 year(s)	is learning Finnish
H11	female	20s	Capital region	1-2 year(s)	is learning Finnish
H12	female	30s	Kymenlaakso region	3-5 years	speaks good Finnish, has studied Swedish
H13	female	30s	Capital region	3-5 years	speaks good Finnish
H14	female	30s	Päijänne Tavastia region	3-5 years	is learning Finnish and Swedish
H15	male	40s	Capital region	1-2 year(s)	knows a little Finnish
H16	female	30s	Uusimaa region	less than 1 year	is learning Finnish
H17	female	30s	Capital region	less than 1 year	no
H18	female	30s	Capital region	over 5 years	speaks good Finnish
H19	female	40s	Capital region	over 5 years	is learning Finnish
H20	female	40s	Capital region	1-2 year(s)	no
H21	male	20s	Southwest Finland	1-2 year(s), previously 1-2 year(s)	has studied Finnish

The data was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. This means that the topics of the interview guide were used as the themes under which the re-

sponses were collected and analyses made (Patton, 2002). To illustrate the results, some quotes from the interviews are also presented in the text.



# RESULTS

## REASONS TO COME TO FINLAND

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Most of the respondents came to Finland due to studies, work, or to follow a spouse. Finland was chosen as a place for studies due to the good reputation of the country and the education system. Some also mentioned cheap study fees. Finland was seen as a safe country where English is widely spoken. Some also chose Finland as they had visited the country before and had a good impression of it or had friends in Finland. When asked if they would choose Finland again as a destination, over half of the interviewees stated “yes”. The rest would maybe choose Finland again or not at all. Among the reasons for choosing Finland again were Finnish people and the similarity of social values in Finland and Japan. Finland was seen as an “easy place to live in”. Those who would not choose Finland again mentioned that they would probably go to some other Nordic country or somewhere else for new experiences.

*“I would probably choose Norway now. Norway has more of everything, bigger cities and even more unique nature.” (H9)*

Most of the interviewees stated that they had enjoyed their stay in Finland so far. They liked the relaxed way of Finnish life (compared to the Japanese). The interviewees felt that they have more time to themselves and that there was not always a need to do something. One mentioned that in Finland “*I can be who I am, there is no need to act for other people and no need to think so much about other people’s opinions.*”

Finland was experienced as a clean and safe country with good social security and health care systems. The quality of life was seen as good and the society considered gender- and minority-equal. Japan was still seen as a bit conservative in relation to gender issues, so women can face challenges when applying for jobs or education. In Finland, on the contrary, it was seen that women can both work and have children at the same time, as “*people do not work too much, and there is a balance with other aspects of life*”. The Finnish lifestyle was seen as less stressful.

Abundant nature was also mentioned, especially the beauty of the forests, sea and lakes during the summer. Blueberries also received one mention! The fact that nature is still so close to the cities was highly valued and people were seen to live together with, and at the same pace as, nature. The quietness even in the cities was valued and the fact that there are much fewer people in general than in Japan.

Finnish people, who were seen as somewhat similar to Japanese people, were mentioned as having a “soft/gentle” way of behaving and communicating. The language skills of even young children were valued. The fact that Finnish people respect others’ personal space was also mentioned.

When asked about the difficulties the interviewees had faced while staying in Finland, the responses focused mainly on problems with the bureaucracy (e.g. Kela, resident permits/visa), darkness during wintertime, and difficulties in finding a job or friends as a foreigner. The Finnish language was seen as difficult and the communication style different from that in Japan. In addition, the lack of special shops and services was mentioned, as well as the short opening hours of both public offices and shops. Public transport was seen as problematic as most of the guidance and signs are only in Finnish or Swedish. Similarly, in the restaurants there were no pictures of the dishes in the menus, which was found to be problematic especially earlier, when the menus were only in Finnish. In addition, the price level, especially for eating out, was seen as expensive.

## WHAT DESCRIBES FINLAND?

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The respondents were asked to list three things they considered “the most Finnish”. Sauna and Moomin received the most mentions, followed by forests and nature (inc. lakes, but also the cold, winter, darkness, silence and clean air). Finnish design like Marimekko was also mentioned, as well as typical Finnish food like Carelian pie (karjalanpiirakka), xylitol or salmiakki. The number of drunk people in public places especially during the holidays or events also received a few mentions. The difference

in the people's mentality and activity level during winter and summer was brought out. In fact, one of the interviewees mentioned that *"everyone fusses about the sun, regardless if it is shining or not"*.

The interviewees were also asked to state what they considered the most Finnish thing before arriving in Finland. The results are presented in table 2. These expectations reflect relatively well the comments after staying in Finland (table 3).

**Table 2.** The things that were considered the most Finnish, before arriving in Finland.

Before you came here, what did you think were the most Finnish things? (Presented in random order.)
Moomin
Santa Claus
Education
Marimekko
Cold climate
Forests
Lakes
The Nordic countries as one entity
The "level of society" at least the same as in Japan

**Table 3.** The things that were considered the most Finnish ones at the moment.

What do you think are the three most Finnish things? (Presented in random order.)
<b>Mentioned more than once:</b>
Moomin
Sauna/sauna culture
Forests, spending time in forests
Nature
Summer cottage
Friendly, shy and honest people
Cold winters
Relaxed/non-hurried way of life
Lakes
Santa Claus
The need for a large personal space
Silence
Alcohol and publicly drunk people

Mentioned once:
Darkness
Salmon
Salmiakki
Clean air
Coffee
Xylitol
Carelian pie (karjalanpiirakka)
Spruce
Aki Kaurismäki
Short e-mails
Marimekko
Everyone returns home straight after work or a lecture

## TRAVELLED WITHIN FINLAND?

The interviewees had in general travelled relatively a lot around Finland. Typically, they had visited different cities like Porvoo, Kotka, Naantali, Turku and Tampere. These places are relatively easy to reach by public transportation. The travelling activity was naturally related to the length of the stay

in Finland. Different destinations in Lapland as well as Lapland in general were mentioned several times. Emptiness, tundra nature, small villages in Lapland and northern lights were brought up in particular. The visited places and reasons for the visit are presented in table 4.

**Table 4.** The places visited while staying in Finland in random order.

Place visited	Reason for a visit/what they went to see
Porvoo	Beautiful scenery/city, old houses next to the river, small, old place, second-hand shops, Vanhamoisio village, giant's kettles (Askolan hiidenkirnut), midsummer celebrations
Kotka	Acquaintances live there, the seaside, Café Laituri (opportunity to swim both during summer and winter), the Sapokka waterpark, Meripäivät festival, the Vellamo sea museum
Naantali	The Moomin world, Kultaranta, beautiful old town
Lahti	Desucon event, cute shops, Christmas markets
Hanko	Location by the sea, summer cottage
Lappeenranta	Friends live there, good place to visit on the way to Russia, a big shopping mall
Turku	"Just traveling", easy to visit, buildings next to the riverside, beautiful city, the Turku archipelago, historical capital of Finland, Turku castle, beautiful riverside, scenery, Ruissalo, Ilmiö festival, visiting a friend

Tampere	“Just traveling”, Pyynikki, beautiful scenery, old houses, nice atmosphere, culturally sophisticated, beautiful houses in the city centre, Näsijärvi, walking on frozen Näsijärvi during the winter-time, bars, cafes, the Moomin museum
Hämeenlinna	Häme Castle, summer cottage
Rovaniemi	Northern lights, Santa Claus Village, winter atmosphere, new year’s celebrations
Ähtäri	Zoo, visiting a friend
Koli	Beautiful nature/scenery, the “national scenery” of Finland, hiking in the national park, visiting a friend
Inari	The Siida museum, cruise to Ukonkivi, lake Inari, northern lights, “things to enjoy both during winter and summer”, middle of nowhere, totally dark during the winter
Oulu	Art-related events
Kokkola	Art-related events
Kilpisjärvi	Saana fell (Saana-tunturi)
Ahvenanmaa	Beautiful nature
Ylläs	Beautiful mountains/fells, winter sports, skiing, snow mobile tours
Jyväskylä	The region around Jyväskylä was also mentioned
Kuopio	No special reason mentioned
Savonlinna	Visiting a friend, the castle has been used as a model for a castle in a Japanese video game
Saariselkä	Northern lights, skiing, coldness, snow
Hamina	City planning, lots of cafés, lots of flea markets
Helsinki	City and nature, Kamome shokudoo (a restaurant that was featured in a Japanese movie), Marimekko factory outlet, Kaivopuisto, Seurasaari, Suomenlinna, the market place during summer, Temppeliaukio Church
Espoo	Luukki, close to Helsinki, beautiful, Aalto University, the Emma museum, Nuuksio, blueberries, seaside scenery, shopping (Iso Omena shopping mall, IKEA)

When asked what were the most memorable places the interviewees had visited, Porvoo, Turku, Tampere and different destinations in Lapland received the most mentions. When asked where the interviewees would like to travel in Finland, where they had not yet visited, Lapland and the archipelago were mentioned the most often.

The interviewees were also specifically asked about their visits to rural areas, unless this had come up earlier during the interview. The rural areas were not defined to the respondents beforehand, instead they had a chance to respond freely based on their own impressions. It was a bit difficult for the interviewees to define rural areas, as the following citations show. They did not have much knowledge of them either.

*“Countryside, I don’t think [I’ve been there]. When you say “Finnish countryside”, what do you mean? [...] From what I’ve heard, there’s cottages next to lakes, and people go to the sauna, but I don’t have much [of an image]. Oh! Actually I’ve been to Hanko once. It wasn’t an actual holiday trip, I just happened to go there by chance, but that was probably a rural place.” (H20)*

*“Countryside... if Lapland is considered countryside, then [I have been to rural areas]. But it really felt more like a tourist attraction [...]. I haven’t been [to a summer cottage] [...], but I’d want to go. I’d definitely want to go [...]. It would be good if there was a tour where you*

*could experience a summer cottage, for Japanese people [...]. The Finnish countryside seems very relaxed [...]. [At a summer cottage] people pick blueberries, go to a sauna and drink, that's the impression I have."* (H15)

The nature areas near cities, like Nuuksio national park, were typically mentioned as the rural areas visited. Some considered Nuuksio to still be in the Helsinki area, even though very rural in landscape. Most of the visits to rural areas outside the capital area were related to visiting friends or their summer cottages in different parts of Finland. The comments related to these summer cottage experiences were twofold. Some interviewees appreciated the sauna heated with wood, silence, sitting at the boardwalk (laituri) by the lake, and barbecuing at the cottage. One interviewee mentioned that for the first time they felt that there was nothing urgent that needed to be done and it was possible just to relax. Some, on the other hand, mentioned that the summer cottage was a bit of a cultural shock as there was no shower and only an outdoor toilet. As one interviewee described it:

*"At first it felt inconvenient with an outdoors toilet, no running water or electricity, but it was interesting when you got used to it."* (H7)

Summer cottages were also described as *"not very convenient, but close to nature"*. Naturally there had also been some variation between the types of summer cottages the respondents had visited.

Among the rural places that attracted Japanese respondents as "their own destination" were Fiskars, art-related events in Kalajokki and Oulu, and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Petäjävesi Old Church. Based also on the responses to other questions, the UNESCO label seemed to have a relatively positive and desirable image in the eyes of Japanese tourists.

## IMPRESSIONS OF RURAL AREAS

As mentioned earlier, it was a bit difficult for the interviewees to define what actually is a rural area in Finland. Some also did not have any first-hand experience of it. Impressions of the rural areas were slightly positive though. The rural areas were seen as both similar to and different from the Japanese countryside. It was mentioned that the Finnish countryside seemed to be more developed and that there were more services compared to Japanese rural areas. It was also noted that in Finland peo-

ple go to the rural areas for holidays, unlike in Japan. The houses in rural Finland were considered far away from others, the red wooden houses were seen as "cute" with traditional interior, images included lakes close by and saunas heated with wood and a lifestyle that is in harmony with nature. On the other hand, over half of the respondents mentioned that "there is not much there" and they would not want to live there themselves as rural Finland was seen to be too isolated, quiet and lacking in services.

*"The scenery is beautiful and it's nice to spend some time there, but I would not want to live there."* (H19)

*"How do people living there do their shopping?"* (H4)

*"Rural Japan is, how to say it [...], there's places where no one lives or no one goes to, but in Finland people go to the countryside during their holidays, that's a difference between them."* (H6)

Those who had not been in rural areas (according to their own definition) had maybe a bit more positive image on them than those who had actually visited them. The rural image was a relaxed way of life, summer cottages by the lake, and lots of forests and nature. Some had picked up their impressions of rural areas from the movies, which naturally had an impact on their opinions.

*"I haven't been to any rural areas, but I think there is plenty of nature: forests and lakes."* (H8)

*"Image of a summer cottage and sauna next to a lake."* (H20)

*"There's nothing there [in Finnish rural areas]. But it's interesting, I think it has an interesting feeling to it. For example, Japanese people, my parents' generation, they used to dream of having their own holiday houses, and in that regard, I think that the Finnish countryside and the summer cottages fit them perfectly. The places are not particularly convenient, and things like shopping are not that easily arranged, but there's the impression that you can really relax in these places surrounded by nature."* (H3)

*“Image of rural Finland includes farms, overweight farmers and grannies. This was the scenery from the Finnish movie “Kättilö.” (H21)*

## VISITS TO OTHER COUNTRIES DURING THE STAY IN FINLAND?

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Practically all of the respondents had also visited some other countries during their stay in Finland. Estonia was mentioned the most often, and more specifically the old town of Tallinn. The reasons for the visit to Estonia included affordable prices, delicious food, kvass drink, design and spas. Tallinn was seen as an easy destination for a tourist. It is near Finland but still different. Some interviewees had also visited Estonia outside Tallinn. Two respondents mentioned Tartto (mentioning the old textile factory, ecohostel), Viljandi (mentioning a kantele and rock music festival), Pärnu and Saarenmaa. Latvia also got a few comments, especially Riga, Sigulda (mentioning castles next to the river, green forests, scenery) and Valga. In addition, Sweden got several comments (especially Stockholm), as well as other Nordic countries (except Iceland). Other often-mentioned countries were Great Britain, Germany and Italy. Russia and Saint Petersburg on the other hand received surprisingly few mentions.

When asked which countries they would like to visit, but have not yet visited, Norway, Spain, Greece, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia and Iceland all received more than one mention. As reasons for wishing to travel to Estonia, the old town was mentioned, but also the actual trip there by boat and the time spent on the boat was seen as interesting. Regarding Latvia, impressions of cheap prices, handicrafts and having friends in Latvia were mentioned. One respondent, however, also mentioned that she did not have a clear image of the country, but would like to visit it, regardless.

## FINLAND AS A TOURIST DESTINATION?

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Most of the respondents stated that they would recommend Finland as a tourist destination to their friends. Typical reasons included safety and the fact that women can also travel on their own, and that it is safe to move around the city even during the night. In addition, it was mentioned that the risk of terrorism is very low and that there is no racism or discrimination towards Asian or Japanese

people. Friendly people with English skills were a draw. Cities were considered small enough to tour around by foot, and Finland was considered a suitable destination for both families and experienced travelers who want to experience quietness and enjoy culture, nature and architecture. In addition, Finland was seen as a suitable destination for those who value design. Travelling to Finland was also seen as easy due to the direct flights and a reliable airline (Finnair).

The respondents listed, for example, the following as advantages of Finland as a tourist destination: four seasons/seasonal change; nature in general and more specifically forests, white nights, northern lights, clean air and water; nature activities such as hiking, camping, berry-picking, mushrooms, swimming, winter sports; relaxing in the countryside; “things you can’t experience in Japan”; and the special experiences offered by places outside cities.

On the other hand, Finland was not seen as a very attractive destination for those looking for the atmosphere of big cities or wide shopping opportunities. It was also thought that as many Japanese tourists are mainly interested in famous, widely known sights such as the Eiffel tower or the Colosseum, it may be difficult to advertise Finland to them. Wrong expectations related to e.g. the city scenery can cause disappointments. In the end, Helsinki is not similar to Paris. Perhaps due to this some also suggested that it would be best to combine Finland with another, more famous European destination.

Practical disadvantages included the problems with public transport and the fact that guidance related to its use is sometimes available only in Finnish. Public transportation also received a lot of comment: trains don’t necessarily have English announcements; public transport is expensive; buying tickets on public transport is complicated; there is no public transport to rural places; and there is no good public transport between the Western and Eastern parts of Finland. For example, the nature, highly valued as an advantage of Finland as a tourist destination, can be difficult to reach due to the limited public transportation. On the other hand, some also saw the wide public transport system as an advantage for Finland as a tourist destination.

In general, it was seen that there is not enough tourist information available. One explicit aspect mentioned was the short opening hours of shops. One interviewee also stated that they would not recommend areas outside Helsinki for tourists interested in shopping. Other practical disadvan-



tages were mentioned like frozen roads during winter, lack of restaurants offering Finnish food, and lack of vending machines for drinks. As a suggestion for a new product or service for Japanese target groups, the idea of “sauna hotels” (similar to Japanese onsen hotels, which are hotels built in

connection to hot springs including the spa, but also accommodation and catering) was mentioned, making it possible to have the whole sauna experience without having to book or arrange everything separately.

**Table 5.** Summary of advantages and disadvantages of Finland as a tourist destination (in random order).

Advantages	Disadvantages
Safety, also during the night	High prices, eating out is expensive
No discrimination towards Asian people	Lack of information in other than the Finnish language on public transport, difficult to buy tickets or use public transport
Finnish design, brands, fashion (explicitly mentioned were Marimekko, Iittala, Aarikka, Finlayson, Arabia, Lapuan kankurit, Alvar Aalto)	Not enough tourist information available
Compact cities, in general good public transportation	Sometimes difficult to move around Helsinki with a suitcase (cobble-stone streets)
Friendly people and customer service	Hard to find restaurants or lunch places offering Finnish food
English widely spoken	Does not match the image of “Europe”
Direct flights from Japan	Japanese phones often SIM-locked in Finland
Nature: close to the cities, Everyman’s Rights, berry and mushroom picking, forests, sea, lakes, clean air, white nights in the summer, northern lights	Nature not so easily accessible without a car; difficult for older people to enjoy due to the physical restraints
Finnish food	Roads sometimes frozen in winter so it is hard to walk
Four seasons, winter especially	No clear “old town” in Helsinki
Winter sports	No vending machines available for drinks (in Japan they are everywhere)
Santa Claus	Museums often have the explanatory texts only in Finnish
Moomin	Older people with poor language skills need to hire a translator or guide, which raises the price of the trip significantly
Summer cottage culture	Not much to see, if one is not interested in nature or design
Sauna	Too small cities
Easily combined with visits to Tallinn or Stockholm	Poor shopping opportunities
History between Sweden and Russia	
Tourists are not likely to be scammed	
Trains and buses run according to schedule	



As practical travel tips for Japanese people who plan to come to Finland, the interviewees mentioned that it is useful to find out in advance about public transport and how to buy the tickets. Another practical hint was that it is not necessary to have cash available as there are plenty of ATMs and practically all places accept credit card payments. Printed guidebooks are still important for Japanese tourists, so some comments were related to the lack of updated information in printed guidebooks, and that tourists should use Internet sources to get the most up-to-date info. Weather is also something to take into consideration in advance, and especially during the winter the value of good shoes with no high heels was recognized. Also, the interviewees advised to take along properly warm clothes. Most Japanese tourists were thought to always visit the same places in Helsinki. The interviewees therefore saw it as useful to try to find more unique places (in Helsinki Punavuori, Töölö, Ullanlinna and Kaivopuisto were mentioned), as well as to learn something about the culture in advance. This was seen to improve the quality of the visit greatly. Also, drinkable tap water was mentioned by the interviewees as well as the fact that souvenirs (e.g. Moomin coffee cups) can be bought from supermarkets instead of expensive special shops. One piece of advice was also to spend more time in Finland rather than hurrying through the main sights within a day or two.

*“I think probably most tourists coming from Japan... many of them don't speak anything else than Japanese. [...], information related to Finland offered in Japanese is very limited. For example, I don't think there are any tourists coming all the way from Japan just to visit Lappeenranta, but if they were to go to Lappeenranta, there's sand sculptures and such. That kind of things should be made more internationally known. But [...] there's also that in Japanese guidebooks, the printed books, the information is not really up-to-date [...].” (H3)*

The interviewees were also asked what would they show their family or friends if they visited from Japan. Most of the mentioned places were in the Helsinki area, like Tuomiokirkko (cathedral), the Kallio area, Suomenlinna, the general scenery of Helsinki, and Nuuksio national park. As a special curiosity, supermarkets were mentioned several times. They were seen not only as places where you can buy cheaper Moomin, Iittala or Marimekko products, but also as places where it is possible to get a better peek at authentic Finnish life and lo-

cal food. Sauna and the sauna culture were also commonly mentioned. Doing everything by themselves, starting from chopping the wood and heating up the sauna, was seen as a good experience. Regarding nature, forests and berry or mushroom picking, and the sea and lakes were also mentioned, as well as summer cottages by the lake and experiences related to them. Of places outside Helsinki area, Turku and the Moomin world, the Meripäivät festival in Kotka, and Porvoo were explicitly mentioned.

Of the experiences that they hoped their family/friends would experience in Finland, the most often mentioned ones were sauna, Finnish nature, and experiencing the Finnish culture. Sauna culture is different between Finland and Japan. In Japan, it is typically not possible to control the heat or the steam. Thus, Finnish sauna culture is unknown to the Japanese, and sometimes they do not dare to throw water on the stove as they do not know if it is allowed.

*“When I tried the sauna in my apartment for the first time, I thought it was really [too] hot, but then I went to Löyly and thought the same, so I left the sauna very soon [...], so a person working there came to me and told me to pour some water on myself, to pour water and then go back, and it feels very good to do it over and over again [...]. Ever since then it's become a habit for me, and when I go to sauna at home I always take a cold shower [...], I finally realized how it's [sauna] supposed to be enjoyed [...]. Next I'll definitely want to try dipping into a lake [...].” (H17)*

Sauna experiences related to the summer cottage in particular were mentioned as one thing the interviewees would like to show to their visitors from Japan. Summer cottage and relaxing at it were also mentioned from other points of view, like having an outdoor barbecue, especially grilling sausages, chopping wood and walking in the forest. These were spoken of as “authentic” Finnish things to do.

*[When asked what they think of the Finnish summer cottage, what they especially like:] “I really like it [...], sauna... sauna and the fact that there's so very quiet and calm... and the sound of birds, what was it called, “kuikka”? And I really like sitting at the laiturilla [laughs]. I've had several friends come over from Japan, and I've taken them to the cottage with me, and every one of them has said that it's a very good experience.” (H12)*

*“One way of spending time in Finland, that I think is not very well known yet, but it would be a very Finnish thing to do, is to take a full week off, or if possible even two months or one month, and spend time in a place where there’s nothing around. A summer cottage with no running water [...], spending time in that kind of place is something I’d absolutely recommend.” (H10)*

Spending time in the nature and forests, picking mushrooms and berries were also mentioned, as in Japan there is typically no open access policy to forests, nor do they have the opportunity to camp in the forest. In winter walking on a frozen lake or sea, ice skating and walking in the snow were seen as “the things to do”. In general, the original Finnish experiences, things “that cannot be done in Japan” were emphasized. One particular piece of advice was to experience places where there are not so many people around.

*“To just take it easy [...], I wonder where, somewhere close to a lake? [...] If my parents were to come here, it might be fun to rent a summer cottage for a week and just spend time there.” (H4)*

*“Of course, when you go hiking in the forest, you grill some sausages, right? That’s something you can’t do in Japan, so I think it’s fun, isn’t it?” (H8)*

Several respondents also mentioned trying Finnish food, especially foods like mämmi, salmon, mashed potatoes, blood sausages and salmiakki. As anticipated, the northern lights received a lot of comments. Regarding winter, Christmas, Santa Claus, cross-country skiing, ice skating and fireplaces were also mentioned. Many Japanese do not have a fireplace in their house or apartment and thus it had an exotic flavour. The full list of topics mentioned can be found in annex 1.

When asked especially about rural Finland and what the respondents would like to show there, the responses were twofold, like the responses related to the rural areas in general. On the other hand, there seemed to not be much knowledge on what kind of sights could be found in rural areas. Amongst those who had an idea, summer cottages and forests were highlighted. Also, rural scenery in general was mentioned. The individual topics are summarized in table 6.

**Table 6.** Responses to the question: Is there anything in rural Finland that you’d want to show to your family and friends?

The topics to show/see in rural Finland	Activities, what the respondents would like their friends/relatives to experience in rural Finland
Forest	Blueberry/berry-picking, mushroom-picking, barbeque (“sausage-grilling”), walking in the forest, eating ketunleipä (plant), silence, skiing in the forest, hiking, camping in the forest, picnic in a park, walking in an old forest, lots of rocks and birches, beautiful, “very interesting for Japanese people and also a rare sight for them”
Sauna	The whole sauna experience starting with chopping the wood for the sauna
Summer cottage	Relaxing, barbeque (“sausage-grilling”) at the cottage, sauna, Midsummer bonfire
Lakes	Swimming in a lake, kayaking, swimming in the lake straight from the sauna
Frozen sea/lake/river	Ice swimming
Sea, the archipelago	Scenery
Lapland	Northern lights, hiking, reindeer, snow, Saana fell, view, nature, husky safari
	Riding a horse
Rural scenery	Fields and flowers, horses, reminds of Hokkaido (in Japan), barbeque, winter scenery, beautiful night sky
Climate	Walking in the snow, coldness

Places mentioned
Helvetinjärvi national park
Häme Castle (in Hämeenlinna)
Fiskars
The Turku archipelago
Stromfors Iron Mill (Strömforsin ruukki)
Kalajoki (frozen sea during winter, beautiful beach during summer, no other people)
Rauma (UNESCO World Heritage Site old town)

*“Perhaps if there was a summer cottage, they’d [parents] be very interested [in rural tourism] [...]. I think my friends would also surely be interested [...]. [...] [if I went to a summer cottage with my parents] I’d like to try swimming in the sea, a sauna and the sea. Also, if it was summer, we could walk in the forest and pick some berries, I’d just want to take it easy.” (H5)*

*[When asked if they think their family or friends would be interested in rural tourism:] “Countryside... A summer cottage would be good for them. Does “rural” also include towns in rural areas? [...] I wonder what they could do... If we would go together, they could do it, but going on their own would be difficult, going to the countryside. They can’t speak the language so it might be hard for them.” (H18)*

However, showing sights or experiencing rural areas was also seen as problematic. Several respondents mentioned that they did not know much about the rural areas. The fact that the holidays in Japan are short was also seen as a problem concerning rural experiences. The respondents mentioned that they think that many people would probably enjoy, for example, going to Nuuksio for a day to pick blueberries, but as the holidays are short they would not be likely to dedicate a full day to Nuuksio. Also, the lack of language skills was seen as a barrier.

## OPINIONS ON FINNISH FOOD AND CUISINE

Opinions on Finnish food varied quite a lot between the respondents, some liked it and some did not. This is very typical in food-related inquiries. Some commented that in general Finnish food is a bit bland as well as simple. It was also stated



that Finnish food contains a lot of different flours, cream, cheese and dairy products and, thus, can sometimes be too heavy or greasy. The food was also seen to relate to the seasons (berries, mushrooms) and somehow “close to nature”. For example, the vegetables are often grown in one’s own gardens. One respondent also commented that Finnish cakes are typically too sweet for the Japanese palate. The likes and dislikes related to the traditional Finnish food items are presented in table 7, and the recommendations for Japanese tourists in table 8. Interestingly even those food items that the respondents themselves did not seem to like were recommended for a try during the visit, just as a typical Finnish experience.

*”Salmiakki [...]. I would recommend it. How to say it, tourists and friends, and well I’m the same myself, they go to see for example the Finnish churches, everyone goes to see the church in Kamppi and such places, and it’s ok to see them once, but more than that it’s things like chopping wood, or eating something disgusting and laughing about it with others, that’s more fun [...]. Because you can feel that you’ve come to Finland. It’s not so much about seeing places, but more about the experiences. Even though it’s [salmiakki] really bad, it’s interesting and that’s why I think it’s absolutely great.” (H2)*

**Table 7.** The likes and dislikes of the respondents related to Finnish food.

Likes	Dislikes
Carelian pie (karjalanpiirakka) (7)	Salmiakki (11)
Salmon, salmon soup, smoked salmon, raw salmon (18)	Blood/black sausage (4)
Reindeer stew (4)	Lakritsi (2)
Doughnuts (munkki) (2)	Christmas food (1)
Macaroni casserole (3)	Casseroles (1)
Carrot cake (2)	Cinnamon and sugar in porridge (1)
Berries (2)	Oven baked sausage (1)
“Coffee bread”, cinnamon roll (6)	Foods made out of liver (3)
Fried whitefish (muikku) (4)	Reindeer (2)
Blueberry pie (4)	Sour milk (1)
Rye bread (1)	“Weird use of rice” (2)
Mämmi (2)	Pickled beetroot (1)
Pea soup (1)	Herring (1)
Mushroom salad (1)	
Chanterelles (1)	
Kalakukko (1)	
Mashed potatoes (1)	
Berry pudding (marjakiisseli) (1)	
Strawberries (1)	
Runeberg tart (1)	
Grayfish (1)	
Salmiakki icecream (1)	
Casseroles (1)	

**Table 8.** The food that you would recommend or not recommend to Japanese tourists

Would recommend	Would not recommend
Carelian pie (5)	Japanese food
Salmiakki (4) - to experience	Salmiakki or lakritsi (7)
“Coffee bread”, cinnamon roll (4)	Blood sausage (2)
Berries, berry juice and berry pies (6)	Food in pizza/kebab places (2)
Different kinds of cheese (3)	
Bread (5)	
Reindeer, reindeer stew (5)	
Salmon and foods made of salmon (8)	
Mämmi (1)	
Soured whole milk (viiili) (1)	
Porridge (1)	
Hesburger food (1)	
White fish and muikku (2)	
Macaroni casserole (2)	
Pyttipannu (1)	
Mushrooms (1)	
Home-made meatballs (1)	

## OPINIONS ON FINNISH CULTURE

Finnish culture was typically connected to Finnish classical music and Finnish design. Music was considered modern and melancholic. Finnish design was seen as simple, and the use of colors and unique patterns were mentioned. Alvar Aalto in particular was spoken of in regard to architecture. Post-war and 1960s design were seen as interesting. Other issues that came to respondents’ mind when asked about Finnish culture were open-mindedness, equality and gender equality. Finland was considered a welfare state with a high education level, a unique language and a culture between Western and Eastern Europe. It came as no surprise that sauna was again often mentioned and especially seen as a cultural feature when it is connected to the cottage by the lake. Finnish culture was also seen to be strongly connected to nature in general. Even young people were seen as liking to spend time in the nature.

Finnish people were seen as being a bit like Japanese people. Family is important to Finnish people. It was also mentioned that Finnish people are not so shy, but rather sincere and direct with each other. People were seen as individualistic and also valuing old things and thus being less materialistic than, for example, the Japanese. Finnish history was seen as interesting by the respondents, especially in relation to independence and the Second World War. As one very concrete feature of Finnish culture, coffee and cinnamon rolls, and especially their role in entertaining guests, was mentioned.

The respondents were also asked what cultural events, if any, they would recommend to Japanese tourists. These seemed to be in many cases those that the respondents had their own experiences of, had liked and thus would also recommend to others. The list of the recommended and not recommended events are listed in tables 9 and 10.

**Table 9.** Are there any events that you would recommend to the Japanese tourists?

Would recommend	Why/to whom
Restaurant Day	Extremely fun event
Vappu in Helsinki, Mantan lakitus	To friends, for fun
Bars, restaurant terraces during the summer	
Events related to Sibelius	To mother
Concerts, music gigs, events and festivals (festarit)	To friends
Midsummer festivals	
Christmas markets	
Breweries	Japanese people like beer
Kauppatori during the market day	
Medieval markets and events	Only for those interested in history

**Table 10.** Are there any events that you would not recommend to the Japanese tourists?

Would not recommend	Why
<b>Vappu</b>	Not much to see, too many people, people are too drunk, not necessarily interesting for tourists
<b>Christmas</b>	Christmas is a family celebration, everyone is staying at home and shops are closed, therefore there is not much to see for tourists
<b>Linnanmäki</b>	Too few rides
<b>Events where people drink lots of alcohol</b>	Uncomfortable
<b>Hanami event in Roihuvuori</b>	Displays weird Japanese culture
<b>“Some strange events”</b>	<i>“There are some strange events, which I would not necessarily recommend, like kännykänheitokisat (“throwing the mobile phone competition”), but I think that it is worth mentioning that these weird events exist.”</i>



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## THE IDEAL HOLIDAY IN FINLAND?

The respondents were also asked to describe what would be the experience they would like to create for their Japanese friends and/or family, if there were no budget limitations. The ideas were mainly related to two different types of tours. Many mentioned Lapland or visits to Lapland combined with other parts of Finland. The others combined visits to several countries during the same trip. Interestingly none of the ideal tours focused only on the Helsinki area, and only one focused entirely on the south of Finland. The interviewees clearly wanted the visitors to have a quite extensive experience of Finland and a variety of different kinds of experiences. Natural elements were included in many of the ideal tours. The following are some examples of the ideas the respondents presented.

### Only Southern Finland

- H1: Would want to visit Ravintolapäivä in Esplanadi park, then go to sauna in Löyly, visit Hotel Kämp's bar and drink a Napue GT there, visit the Robert's Coffee boat in Katajanokka. Would want to visit Fiskars and/or Porvoo. Would also want to go to a forest, and go to Nuuksio for a barbeque (grilling sausage).

### Combination of the capital area and Lapland/other parts of Finland

- H2: Would want to go to Rovaniemi in the winter to see the northern lights and stay at the Arctic Tree House Hotel. During summer, would want to go watch the coastal scenery while sailing with family, just relaxing.
- H3: Would want to spend one day in Helsinki, one day in a forest, and one day at a summer cottage with a sauna. Would also want to visit Lapland, Lappeenranta and Kalajoki to feel the atmosphere of different places.
- H5: Would want to visit Saariselkä and Kilpisjärvi (especially the joint border of Finland, Sweden & Norway). Would also want to visit Rovaniemi, Helsinki and Ahvenanmaa. During winter would want to see the northern lights, during summer would want to see the Ahvenanmaa archipelago. A relaxed holiday with no rush.

- H6: Would want to stay at the Igloo Hotel, rent a sauna boat, visit the Moomin world and relax at the Naantali Spa. Would also want to stay at Finland's most expensive hotel in Helsinki (cannot remember the name). Would fly with Finnair in business class.
- H8: Would want to visit Savonlinna (Olavi's Castle and the opera), and go to Lapland to see the northern lights if it is winter. Would also want to take photos and hike in Lapland. Would also visit Ahvenanmaa, and some islands with no ferry connection in coastal Helsinki, Sipoo and Porvoo with a rental boat.
- H9: Would want to go to Lapland (Koli) to experience nature. Would then visit Lappeenranta, Naantali, Mikkeli and Saimaa. In Helsinki would enjoy different kinds of delicious foods, and go shopping for Finnish design (for example Fiskars, Arabia, Iittala) and fashion/clothing.
- H11: Would want to visit Porvoo and stay at a fancy hotel, then go to Lapland and rent a cottage, and enjoy winter sports and try riding a dog sled. Would also want to experience a road trip with a car, driving from Southern Finland to the North.
- H14: Would want to go to Lapland, try dog sled, stay at the Igloo Hotel, and see the northern lights. Would also want to stay at a cottage somewhere by a lake, swimming and going to the sauna. Would want to visit Turku, eat at a restaurant there, go to cafes and tour galleries. In Helsinki would want to visit Tuomiokirkko (the cathedral), and if it is summer go have a drink at a seaside terrace.
- H15: Would want to go to Lapland, and stay at the Igloo Hotel and watch northern lights. Would want to ski there, as well as in a forest. Would want to try ice fishing and riding a snowmobile. If it was summer, would want to go sailing in a coastal place. In Helsinki would want to take a tour of the parliament house, and also participate in a brewery/vodka distillery tour, and visit the museums in Suomenlinna.
- H16: If it was summer, would want to go to a summer cottage and enjoy different activities there: berry and mushroom picking, rowing a boat in the lake, barbeque, fishing. If it was winter, would want to go to Lapland or some

other place with lots of snow to ski, and also chop some wood for a fireplace.

- H17: Would want to go to Lapland to see the northern lights. Would want to rent a cottage and swim in the lake. Depending on the time of year, would also want to try ice fishing or picking some blueberries. Would want to go shopping, and visit the Moomin Museum in Tampere. Would also want to go to the Iittala factory (in Iittalan lasimäki) and see the glass-blowing competition (Iittala Cup?).
- H18: If it was winter, would want to go to Lapland, to a husky safari in the wilderness (erämaa), see the northern lights, and stay at the Igloo hotel or some other hotel where it is possible to see the sky from the room. In Southern Finland, would want to rent a luxury cabin somewhere that you have to go with a boat, for example Tove Jansson's island (Klovharu?).
- H20: Would want to go to Lapland to see the northern lights and stay in the Igloo hotel. Would also like to do a "sisävesiristely" (cruises inside the country in lakes and/or rivers) with Silverline or some other company, and look at cities from the boat.

### Combining several countries

- H4: Would want to go shopping at Marimekko, Stockmann, Finlayson, Kalevala-koru and Artek. Would want to take a night train to Rovaniemi (to Santa Claus Village), and go to the mountains (tunturit) with a snowmobile. Would return to Helsinki via Oulu and Tampere, and if possible also visit Norway by car and Stockholm by ferry.
- H7: Would want to make a road trip to Lapland with a rental caravan, also visiting Norway and Sweden. Then would return to Helsinki: Kaivopuisto, touring the city with a tram, nightlife (for example the nightclub in Kamppi's top floor with a beautiful scenery).
- H12: In Helsinki would want to eat Finnish food at a nice restaurant, and then depending on whom they would be traveling with, go see museums, visit Marimekko factory outlet with a tour inside the factory, or get to know the Finnish education and neuvola system better. In Kotka would want to visit Langinkoski (old

Russian villas) and tour around flea markets, also visit Hamina. If it was summer, would also go to a summer cottage. Would also want to visit Estonia.

- H13: In Helsinki would want to visit Suomenlinna, and go to Nuuksio by bus and walk around in the forest. Would want to eat Finnish food at a restaurant, for example in Zetor. Would go to Kotka and visit Café Laituri, the Sapokka water park, the Meripäivät festival and Vellamo sea museum. Would visit Tampere and go to Särkänniemi, do a museum tour in the city centre, watch the scenery at Tammerkoski, and go to Pyynikki and eat doughnuts (munkki). Would also go to Rovaniemi and visit Santa Claus Village and the world's northernmost McDonald's (eat ryeburger (ruishampurilainen) there). Would go to Inari and visit the Siida museum, cruise at Inarinjärvi or if it is winter snowmobile on frozen Inarinjärvi. Would go to Kilpisjärvi to climb Saana, cruise on Kilpisjärvi and visit the joint border of Finland, Sweden and Norway.
- H19: Would want to spend one day in Helsinki and go to Savoy restaurant. Would rent a cottage next to a lake in the countryside (with traditional sauna, swimming). Would visit Turku (walking around the city visiting cafes). Would drive around Lapland looking at the exotic nature, and also visit the border of Finland, Sweden and Norway near Kilpisjärvi. If it was winter, would also want to see the northern lights.
- H21: Would want to go to Rovaniemi during summer to visit Santa Claus, and continue to the northernmost border of Finland, also visiting the joint border of Finland, Norway and Russia, and also visit Ivalo. Would want to see the beautiful nature of Lapland. Would then drive through Sweden to Stockholm and return to Turku.

Even though the respondents obviously did not think about the ideal tours realistically in practical terms, for example with regard to distances and the order of the visited places, many mentioned the typical attractions for Japanese people that have been discovered in other studies (Suvanto et al., 2017) and they relate to the sights of Finland most well known in Japan. However, some interesting insights came out. Firstly, it seemed to be interesting to visit the borders of different countries. This may relate to the fact that Japan does not have an



inland border with any country. Another thing was to enjoy smaller places and events, of which the interviewee had a positive memory. Also, round trips

in Finland were mentioned and it was highlighted in particular that the atmosphere of the visit should be relaxed and without hurry.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study confirmed the previous studies related to the important product characteristics for the Japanese tourists in general. Safety was especially highlighted. This is favourable to Finland as a tourism destination. On the other hand, another often highlighted characteristic of the Japanese tourists, the lack of language skills, plays against Finland. There is definitely a need to improve the tourism information available. Also, the role of guidebooks has maybe been overlooked. Especially if there is a problem with the compatibility of Japanese SIM cards and Finnish mobile networks, online information sources are not enough. One clear result is also that the capability to move around as a FIT traveler seems to have increased among the Japanese. However, this result might be a bit misleading as the participants of the interviews had more knowledge of Finnish society than most tourists. Regardless of the length of their stay in Finland, the rural areas were difficult for some interviewees to comprehend and they did not have too much knowledge of these. This is probably due to the lack of available information, as on the other hand the respondents seemed to be interested in Finnish nature and activities based around it. However, rural areas were not seen as very interesting to the younger tourist groups, but more so to the families and elderly people seeking relaxation.

The summer cottage culture came out in several parts of the study. This may be an underused resource in the product provision for Japanese

market segments. The typical “rent the cottage for a week” approach does not seem very suitable due to the short holidays. Instead some summer cottage programme/experience service that could be implemented in shorter time and with guidance could have more potential. At the same time, it is worth noting that Finland, the Finnish way of life and especially the rural areas are connected to relaxation and “an easy way of life”. Therefore, overly full itineraries may be contradictory to this impression. In general, more information on Finland and its similarities to and differences from more familiar European countries could help the tourists to balance their expectations with the reality before arrival and thus avoid potential disappointments.

When interpreting the results of this study, it must be kept in mind that most of the interviewees lived in the capital area and south of Finland. This probably reflects on their impressions about the country as a tourist destination. Another thing to keep in mind is that due to the qualitative analysis approach, the results do not allow us to make sample to population generalizations, nor can any causal links be verified. That will require more extensive research and likely also the quantitative approach. Instead, the results bring out new insights on the potential tourist attractions and ideas for developing the existing or new products. They also give a peek on the Japanese approach to Finnish culture.

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