

Finnish attractions



Arto Asikainen, Asia Head, Finland Tourism Board, was in Delhi with an aim of wooing the Indian market. In conversation with Selling World Travel, Asikainen tells more about his future plans, upcoming roadshows and new destinations.

How do you train tour operators to sell your packages to Indian tourists?

We begin by providing tour operators a chance of seeing the products for themselves. Since the last couple of years, we have started arranging educational tours for tour operators from different countries. We also hold regular workshops with Finnish travel and hospitality service providers to give them more information on Finland. Our web portal is also very informative and exhaustive; operators can always update themselves through our website.

What has been the record of Indians visiting Finland in recent times?

The growth rate has been around 28 per cent in the last few years and we are expecting it to grow further. Our target for the current year is 62,000 Indian tourists.

From which Asian country do you receive the maximum number of tourists?

We get the maximum number of tourists from Japan, that is close to 1,30,000 tourists in a year. Next is China, followed by India.

How do you plan to increase tourist inflow from India?

We are going strong in the Indian market with offices in Mumbai and Delhi. We also have partnership with Finnish Airlines for routes to and from India. We have allocated a big budget for marketing and promotional activities in India. Media also plays a vital role in

promoting the destination in the right light. Therefore, we are also encouraging familiarisation trips among the media fraternity. Finland Tourism Board is also participating in many travel fairs in India and conducting various workshops.

How do you plan to attract tourists to the natural saunas of Finland and involve leading hotel chains in developing these saunas into tourism products?

Sauna is an integral part of Finnish lifestyle. It will be difficult to make it a travel product as most hotels already have their own saunas. However, there are special saunas like 'smoke sauna' which is a big hit among tourists. It is the oldest form of sauna where traditional mode of heating is employed rather than the electric systems. It takes five to six hours to heat the sauna. Similarly, there are many more special saunas in Finland which can be popularised.



Arto Asikainen

How is the new spa in Helsinki shaping up? How was it conceptualized?

A private company is starting the spa in the Helsinki airport. This will add to the travellers' comfort and also reflect Finnish culture.

Apart from Rovaniemi, Lapland, Northern Lights, Santa Claus, lakes, adventure sports – which new products do you want to promote?

In winters, Lapland is a very popular destination but I don't see much Indians visiting the place. We are lately promoting the city of Kemi. It has a snow castle and ice breaker cruise. Ivalo, a northern city, has Igloo hotels for tourists. Helsinki is again a very nice and popular destination.

In summers, our lake region is very good with its element of water and water sports. We also want to promote Tukru, the ancient capital of Finland with medieval castles and churches. It has an interesting history from the Swedish era as well.

Price wise, how cost effective is Finland for Indian tourists?

Looking at it from the financial angle of an Indian tourist, Finland is equivalent to any European country. Of all the Scandinavian countries, Finland is the cheapest. ■

Text by: Soumya Jain

