



## **Covid-19 Impact on Experience Tourism in Finland**

Sara Lievonen-Torvikoski

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

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## Abstract

<b>Author(s)</b> Sara Lievonen-Torvikoski
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<b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b> 42 + 2
<p>Experience is always a personal and individual matter. It always has a positive and meaningful impact on its experienter.</p> <p>The aim of the thesis was to find out how Covid-19 pandemic impacted experience tourism in Finland. The purpose of the work was only to focus on experience tourism in Finland.</p> <p>The thesis consists of a theoretical part which examined the main parts of the work. Experience, what it is, what features you need to have a memorable and once in a lifetime experience and how experience is a part of tourism and which trends are rising for the up-coming year. The theoretical part has an introduction of the companies chosen for the study. Six companies working in the travel and tourism field were chosen. Four of the companies are hotels that see themselves as experience hotels and two of the companies are travel agencies that offers and tailors experience trips for their customers' needs and wishes. The last part of the theoretical framework is about Covid-19. The virus, how it was in Finland and how it affected Finnish travel industries and how it changed traveling in Finland.</p> <p>The author of the thesis used qualitative research method for collecting the data wanted. The companies contact persons were sent a semi-structured interview in a form of a survey which benefited both parties. The survey consisted of five open-ended questions specially tailored for the companies. Three of the six companies were able to answer the survey.</p> <p>In conclusion the results from the survey answered the essential questions of the work. The answers did show that during the Covid-19 years domestic traveling grew and the number of international stayers and clients lowered. The results showed that some of the companies had to do drastic measures to survive, but the customer base didn't change much due to Covid-19.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Experience, experience tourism, Finland, Covid-19

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## 1 Introduction

Experience tourism is a growing trend in the travel industry especially among millennials. This specific age group prefers to invest their money on once in a lifetime experience's rather than buying material things for example homes. The core and main point of traveling has always been getting to know new cultures, learning about their ways and new cuisine. Today many travellers want more than just the basic tourist experience, for example exploring the new city, laying on the beach or by the pool and tasting the local cuisine (Bergstrom 2021).

Experience tourism and travel grew its popularity during the Covid-19 pandemic years. More and more travellers wanted more from their trips. Unique and profound experiences rather than big international hotel chains and the basic travel packages. Today's travellers are willing to spend more money on experiences that they will remember.

The aim of the thesis was to find out what kind of impact Covid-19 had on experience travel industries working in that field. The author wanted to focus on hotels that promotes themselves as experience hotels and on travel agencies that focus on creating memorable experiences for their customers.

The literary review consists of the main points of the work. Firstly, it goes through experience, then the chosen companies in the field and ending with Covid-19. What is an experience what it entitles. The main thing when explaining experience is the experience triangle which consist of different elements and with these elements can be created a memorable experience for the experiencer. Experiences are very much part of tourism. Especially after the pandemic years travellers want to experience new and interesting things. They want to explore more and getting to know the local culture, history, and food. One big part of travel and tourism are the future trends in the field in the up-coming year. Covid-19 changed travel and travellers' behaviour drastically. It changed to a more positive way. Today people who travel consider more the sustainable side and are more interested on discovering new and interesting places in their home city or in a city nearby. Domestic travel and staycations are trending now in year 2023 but they are rising to the year 2024 also.

The second phase of the work was to choose the companies. From the beginning the author had clear ideas on which companies she wanted to include in the work. It was important for the author that the travel agencies chosen were domestic, but still, they operate all over the world. Same went with choosing the hotels. The hotels chosen evoked reactions and feelings in the author. All of them were different from each other. They were all from different regions in Finland and they all differed from one another with their style and sizes. The one thing that the hotels had in common was

that they all want to create positive experiences for their stayers. It is an experience to book a night, weekend, or a long stay in these hotels.

Covid-19 part of the work goes in deep on how the virus and pandemic impacted the Finnish tourism industries. Biggest impact that the virus had was localised in Lapland. Lapland relies on international tourists and many hotels in that area had to shut down due to the lack of visitors. The pandemic took a toll on average residents in Finland. Due to limitations and restrictions people weren't able to travel the way that they were used to.

The end of the thesis consists of the research method used and why the author chose that method for collecting data wanted. The aim of the research method used was to find out how the company's operations changed due to corona. What kind of impacts it effected or didn't affect. The analysis of the results and a conclusion of them will be included in the research method part.

The author decided to use a qualitative research method. Qualitative research method is used when analysing and collecting non-numerical data, when researchers want to understand experiences, concepts, and opinions (P. Bhandari 2023). The author executed a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. The semi-structured interview was made in a form of a survey, which was easier for the participants to answer due to timetable issues. The aim of the research method used was to find out how the company's operations changed due to corona. What kind of impacts it effected or didn't affect.

For analysing the data collected the author decided to use phenomenological analysis method. It is a qualitative analysis method formed on straight thinking and observations, in addition of reflecting on the experiences gained from the research work (Koppa 2015).

The work ends with the authors self-reflections and final conclusions of the work.

## 2 Experience

According to Lapland's experience industry competence defines experience as an unforgettable and meaningful experience, which can cause a personal changing experience for its experiencer (LEO 2013). Experiencing the experience is a very personal and individual matter, since the experience is influenced by the person's own personal thoughts and memories in addition to needs and values (Borg, Kivi & Partti 2002, 26). Experience as a concept means an emotional experience that has an uplifting positive effect. (Borg, Kivi & Partti 2002, 25).

Usually, experience is associated with the feeling of surpassing oneself. We do and experience things that we would not normally do in our everyday life (Tarssanen 2007, 4). For example, rafting, safaris on jet skis, hot air balloons and survival games in the woods are activities to which experience is usually associated (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 188-189). Whether it is an event or experience the precondition for the experience is always a deep profound spiritual movement in the client and it is memorable. The experience is always personal, unique, and positive (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 34-35).

The experience is not only about good service, pleasant customer encounters or good service moments. All of those together creates a good start for a positive experience but they are all part of the whole process. The most essential thing about experience is how the service or product is created, so that it wakes the customers emotions (LEO 2013).

### 2.1 Experience triangle

Lapland's experience industry competence has come up with a tool called Experience triangle. This tool can be used to promote the experiential nature of the service or product. The triangle can be studied from two different angles. From the perspective of the customer's experience and from the perspective of the product elements. For the product to be an experience it needs these features to work:

- Story: the elements that connects the overall arc of the service; the customers experience and meaningfulness
- Multisensory: scents, visuals, sensory sensations, and soundscape of the service
- Individuality: the possibility to customize the service according to the customers needs and wishes and the products uniqueness
- Contrast: something that differs from the client's everyday life

- Authenticity: the customer experiences the service real and authentic
- Interaction: the bond between the producer and the customer

Through these elements the customers experience can be reached. The second level of the triangle is formed by the customer's experience perspective (Leo 2013).

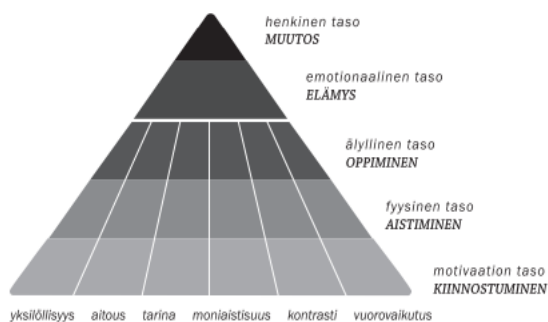


Figure 1. Experience Triangle. Tarssanen 2009, 11

## 2.2 Experiences as part of tourism

Travel is the pursuit of experience. When planning to go on a trip we begin to create mental images, dreams and wishes in our minds on how the trip will feel and will it accede our expectations that we have created in our minds. How the ideal comes reality during the trip is the experience, which is assessed afterwards (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 27). According to WTO tourism is an activity where people travel and spend time outside of their place of residence or circle of life for a maximum of one year in form of free time, business trip or other occasion (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 15).

It is challenging to showcase the differences between tourism service and tourism product. Tourism service as a concept refers to a single or multiple service provided by a tourism company, like activities, accommodation, and meals. A tourism product on the other hand is a service package that contains both immaterial and material elements and is based on some kind of activity (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 15).

Vietnam is known for its beautiful landscapes and tasteful cuisine, which lures tourist from all over the world to travel there, but Vietnam also offers unique activity experiences for tourists. The typical activity when coming to the Bay Mau coconut forest in Hoi An (Quang Nam) for locals and

nowadays for many tourists is to take the basket boat. Many have come across of images of a basket boat ride in the heart of green coconut groves. The basket boat activity resembles to an amusement park device called the teacups. But in this activity the rowing is much more fast passed, and it makes the participant howl. Even though the activity is scary, and it makes the participant and everyone watching it dizzy, there's still many tourists who are willing to try this challenging activity. Many foreign tourists want to try it because it is so unique, extreme, new, and interesting activity (Travel 2023).



Image 1. VietReader. Travel 2023.

### **2.3 Travel and tourism trends 2024**

The year 2023 has not been easy on consumers or on companies either. The inflation has hit hard on normal consumers and companies, the war in Ukraine, security issues but the year 2024 is coming fast. Even if the year 2023 has not been an easy year the travellers are staying optimistic. The tourism and hospitality business are loosening their laces when it comes to year 2024. They want to make the up-coming year interesting and fulfilling (Hotspot 2023).

During Covid-19 the travellers were forced to restrictions concerning to traveling. These restrictions made changes in the travellers needs and desires. They are now looking for meaningful experiences when it comes to travel. There was an increase in road trips and domestic travelling during the Covid-19 years. The amount of mobile booking and searching for accommodation also grew during the pandemic (Eduarda; Possamai 2022).



### **2.3.1 Local Tourism**

Traveling inside your own country is something that will keep on being a trend in the up-coming year. Tourism and travel agencies have reported that solo travellers and families are planning trips in their home states or nearby and by this the trips are shorter. The pandemic changed the mindset of travellers. They are now more open and willing on discovering new places nearby their homes or inside their home country. Domestic and local tourism is a growing trend for the year 2024. Travel agencies should prepare on organizing trips for this specific trend (Hotspot 2023).

Local tourism is also known as staycation. Having a staycation, a mini vacation in your own home city or a city nearby is very popular especially with young adults from 25-35 years old. According to a survey conducted by Lapland's Hotels overnight stayers now want comprehensive wellbeing and easy. The popularity of staycation is rising and around 61% of responders to the survey said that they will book a minivacation in the future (Lapland' Hotels Oy 2023).

### **2.3.2 Bleisure Travel**

Bleisure travel is a mixture of leisure travel and business travel. It is a combination of a business trip work related with a leisure vacation extension after or before the work trip. The bleisure travel concept has grown within a few months due to the fact that more and more people are working remotely (Morgan 2022).

Bleisure travel is also a growing trend in Finland, mixing work and free time has been a growing trend and it will keep on growing in the up-coming years. For example, a business traveller in a city destination can divide the work week. Half of the week you focus on work and the other half can be used in culture like museums, restaurants, and socializing. On the other hand, a business traveller in Lapland can finish the workday going on a husky-safari or snowshoe walking. After a long remote work period and pandemic many companies wants to bring back business travel and face-to-face meetings. Lapland's Hotel which is Finland's biggest private hotel chain have seen that bleisure travel is growing and becoming more popular now that business traveling is back after the pandemic limitations and restrictions (Lapland's Hotel Oy 2023).

### **2.3.3 Experiential Tourism**

A growing and predicted trend is experiential tourism. This a form of tourism where the travellers want to get in the core of the locals' lives. They want more exceptional and once in a lifetime

experiences. They prefer the non-traditional accommodations, so that experimenting and getting to know the locals and their ways is more profound (Push 2023).

They want to engage in with the locals, their history, culture, environment, and cuisine. Experiential tourism includes different forms of tourism in it. Uniqueness is one of the biggest assets when it comes to experience travel. For example, the size of the destination does not matter. A small destination can offer unique once of a kind experience. These experiences can be traveling to a new place that are out of the way can create an experience and connect with the place than just seeing it. Sustainability plays an important role when it comes to experiential travel. Sustainability is important but it might not always be practical to travel sustainable especially in the mainstream tourism destinations. On the other side travellers who are interested in experiential tourism might want to put their travel budget in these popular tourist destinations and by doing so supporting the local architecture and history. Local culture and authenticity are also important. Many travellers who want to dive into the local culture and authentic experience do it by learning the new language, by getting to know the history and learning to cook their cuisine. They also want to interact and spend time with the locals. By doing this tourist can help communities to obtain a positive social and economic outcome (Bambini 2022).

#### **2.3.4 Sustainability**

The definition of tourism can be explained by the sum of the phenomena and relationships which are born from the interaction of the tourists and the host country by hosting and attracting the tourists and other potential visitors (Pineda, Brebbia 2004, 154).

Sustainability is something which is considered more and more when talking about traveling. The popular mass destinations are being shunned by travellers. The popularity by travelling by land has been growing and the interest for smaller destinations are also on the rise. Nature tourism and discovering national parks is growing (Borgenström 2021).

Nowadays people are more interested on knowing where their money spent on holidays is actually going to. Travellers these days are willing to spend more money on responsibility, ethics, and sustainability. Big international hotel chains no longer interest today's travellers instead they rather choose smaller family-owned hotels (Abbassi 2023).

The goal of sustainable tourism has always been about growing the economic wellbeing of the residents of the tourist destination and to foster their cultural identity and their subjective wellbeing.

Sustainable tourism idea is also about maintaining the natural resources but at the same time meet the needs of the tourists (Pineda, Brebbia 2004, 118).

Sustainable tourism is a form of tourism which seeks the principles of sustainable development. Tourism is a small part of sustainable development which enhances all sectors of the economy. Nevertheless, sustainable tourism aims to strengthening the destination's cultural identity, growing the employment of the native people living in the area and by supporting tourism by generating new institutional structures (Pineda, Brebbia 2004, 119-120).

Sustainable tourism is tourism that is maintained and improved in an area in a manner that it remains viable for a longer period of time and does not scatter nor changes the environment in which it exists in a way that it will not prevent the wellbeing and development of other activities (Pineda, Brebbia 2004, 154).

When talking about sustainable tourism ecotourism is very much related to it. Ecotourism offers another form of tourism. It is based on sustainable development principles. Ecotourism is about travelling to the untouched destination areas that are undisturbed with the agenda of enjoying the scenery or studying new plants and animals. It is also a way for the traveller to embed himself or herself closer to nature, which many not be possible in their everyday life and routines. Ecotourism is a more sustainable option to mass tourism.

Ecotourism is being kept within four parameters:

- Ecotourism includes interaction with the natural environment where the traveller is.
- It is managed by businesses which are owned by the local communities.
- Ecotourism mainly has an educational aspect, such as growing the understanding of how the environment works.
- Ecotourism is done by light ecological footprint (Pineda, Brebbia 2004, 162).

### **2.3.5 Winter Tourism**

Many mountainous regions of the world are dependent of the source of income that winter tourism offers. Winter tourism is essential for the future development of those rural areas for their economic wellbeing and socio-cultural wellbeing. Even though winter tourism is important for those communities the mountain areas are delicate and sensitive environments defined by an elevated biodiversity. The development of winter tourism and winter destinations need to find a balance between the conservation of the mountain's ecosystems and traveller's needs. Winter tourism has grown

significantly due to new travel experiences and habits, international ski resorts and innovating pricing systems (Pröbstl-Haider, Richins & Turk 2019, 1).

A traveller chooses destinations for various reasons, but in winter tourism the choice of destination is mainly driven by the want to do winter sport activities. Trends on winter sport activities are cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, and snowmobiling (Pröbstl-Haider, Richins & Turk 2019, 175-177).

Even though winter tourism is growing as a tourism trend it faces challenges. The biggest challenge that it is facing is climate. Many destinations are adjusting to climate change and its effects on product range are currently the biggest challenge that they are facing. Climate change does not just have an impact on the range of products but on many management aspects also. For example, those are short reaction times to changing weather, demand changing, documentations obligations when it comes to artificial snow and cost efficiency (Pröbstl-Haider, Richins & Turk 2019, 2).

### 3 Information about the companies

There are over 204 companies in Finland that go by the name experience (Finder).

For the survey the author wanted to take six different companies that are all related to experience industries. The author chose two companies that organise adventure tours. The companies chosen are Kon-Tiki Tours and Elämys Group. The last four companies are all hotels that have a reputation in Finland of being hotels that offers experiences to each guest. It is an experience itself to accommodate oneself in these hotels. The hotels are Elämys Ämmi, Elämshotelli Järvisydän, Arctic TreeHouse hotel and Herrankukkaro. Even though these hotels are all in the same category of being experience hotels they are still all very different from each other. That is the reason of why the author chose these hotels. They are all also in the top list of hotels to visit in Finland.

In Finland the consumer can find the most special and unique accommodation options for stayers that are looking for experiences. (Iltalehti 2023).

#### 3.1 Elämys Group

Elämys Group “we make experiences” is a domestic travel company founded in 1993 in Helsinki. It is a reliable and full of experts in the field as a domestic travel agency. The company has other auxiliary nouns, Elamysmatkat.com, Elämys Group, Elämys Travel events and Suomen Elämys- ja seikkailumatkat. Today the company goes by the name Elämys Group. The company is a tourism group whose core is to offer its clients best service by Finland’s best experts while using the latest technical solutions (Elämys Group 2023). For clients this is shown as expert service, affordable prices, industry’s wide range of products and easy smooth booking.

Elämys Group serves consumers in all areas of tourism, from business trips to active and experience trips and from group trips to organizing events (Elämys Group 2023). Elämys Group consists of many trusted and known brands and many travel industry specialist companies. Each year they organise business and leisure trips for customers from all over the world as well as for customers from Finland. For example, the Finnish Olympic team, Susijengi and Huuhkajat and many other sports team trust the expertise from Elämys Group and have been their loyal customer for many years.

The need and desire to see and experience new things and travel keeps connecting people all over the world even if the pandemic revolutionised the travel industry. Elämys Group has grown and evolved quickly so that it can continue to fulfil the needs and dreams of its customers. Elämys

Group wants to be a pioneer in the Finnish travel agency field and the best employer for its current and future employees (Elämys Group 2023).

### 3.2 Kon-Tiki Tours

Kon-Tiki Tours is a travel agency founded in 1995. Kon-Tiki Tours offers experience travels for group travellers. It is a private, solvent group travel agency and 100% domestic. Kon-Tiki offers customised trips for different sized groups from special trips like theme trips to culture and nature trips all around the world. The theme trips are always customised to the group's preferences. It can be a trip built around a favourite author, historic figure, religion or even an animal. Their customer base is very wide. They have customers from friend's groups to associations, clubs, and different sized companies. The travel agency offers individually planned travel programmes according to the theme chosen to travel destinations all over the world (Kon-Tiki Tours 2023).

Unlike other travel agencies Kon-Tiki and its subsidiary company Kon-Tiki Sport Travel managed to navigate through the Covid-19 pandemic. Both companies managed to stay among the strongest companies in Finland.



Image 2. Suomen Vahvimmat. Asiakastieto 2022.

Kon-Tiki Tours serves its customers through different brands, for example they organise different theme trips, culture, nature, hiking, and bird watching trips. Kon-Tiki Tours is a dream maker

agency, their mission is to create experiences for their customers. For 2025 their vision is to be the internationally benchmarked travel agency in the world. The travel agency offers customised trips for groups with the principles of sustainable responsibility and development. Kon-Tiki's values are entrepreneurial mood and touch, sustainability and loyalty, personal service for every customer and collaboration and team spirit with colleagues and other operations. The customised trips are organised to exotic destination across the world or to trips inside Europe (Kon-Tiki Tours 2023).

### **3.3 Elämys Ämmi**

Elämys Ämmi is an experience accommodation company that was founded in 2017. The company is in Sauvo in the Southwest Finland region. Elämys Ämmi offers local food, accommodation services and experiences. Elämys Ämmi is a pioneer in sustainable tourism and it is one of the first tourism companies to have combined sustainable values to good business. As proof they have received the EU environmental certificate and the STF mark as the second company in the Nordic countries (Elämys Ämmi 2023).

Elämys Ämmi offers and creates experiences in a unique setting, with clean environment where they nourish traditions with a modern twist. The clients are able to choose the accommodation from different options. They can reserve accommodation from the main building where the owners also live, or they can stay in the fairy-tale houses or sleep in a tree in a floating tent. The fairy-tale houses have different names. Overnight stayers can choose to stay in Notko, Keno, Vino or Naakanpesä (Elämys Ämmi 2023).

Elämys Ämmi is a unique accommodation experience, it gives the stayers a vibe of grandma's place with fairy-tale villas in the middle of the forest. A fourth cottage is being completed for the upcoming summer. There the customers will be able to sleep on the hay like birds in their nest (Iltalehti 2023).



Image 3. Elämys Ämmi 2023.



Image 4. Elämys Ämmi 2023

### 3.4 Elämshotelli Järvisydän

Nature hotel & Spa resort Järvisydän is in Rantasalmi in the Southern Savonia region in Finland. The hotel and spa were founded in 2012 (Finder). Järvisydän offers to its client's experience holidays all year long with accommodations, saunas, meals, and nature programmes. The customer can choose whether they want to stay in the experience hotel or they can stay in the upscale villas, Houseboats, Landscape suites, Panorama suites and Forest suites and then relax in Järvikylpylä which is the spa section.

Järvisydän also offers basic standard rooms, and they have a recent addition for accommodation option Kuru Resort villas. Kuru Resort villas includes two beautiful villas 800 meters away from Järvisydän. In the luxurious villas, nature wraps around the stayer. The landscape opens from the glass wall to the pine forest and brings the nature into the villa (Nature hotel & Spa resort Järvisydän 2023).

In addition to different accommodation options the hotel offers its customers a range of activities according to every season. The customers can choose activities from yoga and relaxation to more active activities such as lake and forest excursions. Yoga and wellness classes are organised in Kuru Resort Lazy Space. At Safari house the stayer can find rental equipment for the season activities and there they can book excursions (Nature hotel & Spa resort Järvisydän 2023).

Järvisydän spa offers a unique spa experience in Saimaa. In the lake spa the customer can experience a new way of Finnish lake wellbeing experience, since all the building materials are close to



nature. Over 500 years old sunken logs, natural stone, and Saimaa Lake water. The spa is heated by solar power and ground/lake heat (Nature hotel & Spa resort Järvisydän 2023). The spa contains five pools, a circulation pool, jacuzzi, children's pool and outdoor pools. The water temperature for the indoor pools is +31 degrees Celsius, the restrained temperature for the water is a major part for the ecological side of Järvisydän spa (Nature hotel & Spa resort Järvisydän 2023).



Image 6. Hotelli Järvisydän 2020.



Image 7. Spa Hotel Järvisydän 2020.

### 3.5 Arctic TreeHouse Hotel

Arctic TreeHouse Hotel is in Rovaniemi in Northern region of Finland. The hotel offers a one-of-a-kind mixture of luxury comfort in the heart of arctic nature, modern Scandinavian design and local Lappish traditions, and an unforgettable accommodation experience. In contrast to carefully planned accommodations and nest-like cosiness the panoramic views from the windows offer impressive views of the arctic sky and forest (Arctic TreeHouse Hotel 2023). You can admire the Midnight Sun and Northern Lights from your bed. The hotel restaurant caters culinary meals which are prepared using arctic ingredients (Arctic TreeHouse Hotel 2023).

The visitors can choose from three different accommodation options. Arctic scene executive suites, Arctic treehouse suite or Arctic glasshouse suite. The Arctic scene executive and glasshouse suites include saunas and a small kitchen. The arctic treehouse suite is more standard, and the rooms can be connected to get a bigger family room (Arctic TreeHouse Hotel 2023). The hotel serves phenomenal and unforgettable activities for its guests. The visitors can choose activities from intimate and relaxed private dining's to more active activities such as a wilderness sledge ride, arctic floating, wool sock nature walk or scenic snowshoeing. The hotels offer to its visitor a

chance to explore the arctic nature when it fits their schedules the best, they have activities for every season (Arctic TreeHouse Hotel 2023).



Image 6. Arctic TreeHouse Hotel 2023.

### 3.6 Herrankukkaro

Herrankukkaro is a distinctive recreation and meeting place that is built on an old fishing farm located in the Turku archipelago in Rymmättylä. It is open to customers like different sized companies, groups, or individuals all year long. At Herrankukkaro they cherish their long history, nostalgic design, and peace and quiet and everything that makes their visitors feel good. The traditional buildings of different sizes of the old fisherman's farm and the hotel ship Arkipelagus in Herrankukkaro have accommodations for over a hundred visitors. Mummon, Vaarinmökki and Mamma offer nice atmospheric moments for its stayers. There are no single or double people hotel rooms in Herrankukkaro. The cottages offer good qualities for guests with bathrooms and showers.

For the guests that are not afraid of new experiences Herrankukkaro offers special accommodations like luxury birdhouse or sleeping in the glow of a campfire at Ryssänlaavu (Herrankukkaro 2023). The smoke sauna in Herrankukkaro is said to be the biggest of its kind in the world (Iltalehti 2023). The hotel, recreation, and meeting place offer visitors some experience activities from sports to culture. Go on an archipelago adventure or on a hike in the archipelago nature or boating in the islands. Adventure tracks in the trees offers excitement for the extreme ones and for some relaxing activity the guests can try rescue suit floating.



Image 5. Linnunpönttö. Herrankukkaro 2023.

## 4 Covid-19

### 4.1 Coronavirus

In December 2019, in Wuhan China started an epidemic caused by a coronavirus which was a completely new virus for humans, the virus causes respiratory infections. The disease it causes is officially called Covid-19. The pathogen virus was named SARS-CoV-2-virus, it comes from the words Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2. Both the virus and disease are mutually called simply by the name of corona (Terveyskirjasto 2022).

Coronavirus spreads primarily as droplets when a person who is infected sneezes or coughs. In some cases, the virus can be transmitted via contact when in close contact with an infected person and especially if the infected person coughs in his/her hands and then touches others. The virus can be spread through air in the form of tiny aerosols. When a person sneezes, sings, shouts, speaks, or coughs those small specks called aerosols are expelled in addition to more larger droplets. They stay in the air and move along with the moving air, sometimes quite long distances. The virus can also be transmitted and caught through surfaces which have been contaminated quite recently from an infected person with respiratory tract secretions. Nonetheless the structure of the virus is the way that it doesn't stay on surfaces for longer period of times (THL 2023).

The incubation period of the disease is about 1-14 days. Usually, the symptoms of the Omicron variant appear in 1-3 days. According to current knowledge a person affected by coronavirus is more contagious in the beginning of the disease 1-2 days before the symptoms appear. The contagiousness lowers drastically after the first symptomatic days. It is important to remember that a person who doesn't have symptoms but is still infected with corona can also spread the disease (THL 2023).

The usual symptoms of the coronavirus are cough, muscle pain, headache, shortness of breath and loss of smell and taste. The coronavirus affects a sudden respiratory infection. The disease can vary from no symptoms at all to a very critical condition which most likely will need hospice care. In cases where a person gets sick with a severe corona, they can get an acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) or pneumonia. The condition of the person fallen sick can deteriorate quickly. The deterioration usually happens when the symptoms have lasted a week, in the most serious cases the coronavirus can lead to death. Many people who have had the severe case of corona have had some already existing illnesses for example, diabetes, cancer, heart problems or asthma. They are the so-called risk group, which also includes older aged people (THL 2023).

When Covid-19 started spreading in the world, many countries especially America has been in the belief that the virus had originally escaped from an Army Biological Weapon Centre located in Wuhan China. Researchers from an American biomedical research laboratory has refuted that claim and state that the origin of the coronavirus is natural. They base their statement after analysing structure and genome of the virus. The virus is not intentionally manipulated or constructed in a laboratory.

The researchers have found no evidence that the virus would've been made by humans, since the virus do not have the typical characteristics that a manipulated virus would have. An even stronger thing that points that the virus is natural is the virus molecular structure the chemical backbone. The researchers have two scenarios which explains the coronavirus epidemic. The first one resembles to two previous coronavirus pandemics SARS and MERS. In those cases, the virus passed from animals to humans. The second scenario is that the virus evolved into its current form after being spread to the human population. This means that the virus would have spread undetected in the human population for a while before the outbreak started. Currently it is impossible to say which scenario is the likeliest (Tekniikan Maailma 2020).

On January 30, 2020, the WHO expert committee confirmed corona as an international health threat. At the time there were over 9,600 infections and about 200 deaths all located in Wuhan. According to WHO the biggest threat and concern with the virus was on those countries with limited health care system that they would not have the proper resources to treat the virus. WHO was in the belief that the spread of the virus could be stopped if every country would take strong measures to try to catch the disease early on by isolating and treating cases, detecting, promoting risk appropriate social actions, and investigating contacts (Onnettomuustutkintakeskus 2020).

## **4.2 Coronavirus in Finland**

The first case of Covid-19 discovered in Finland was 29 of January 2020. In the beginning of the year 2020 nobody could have imagined what the new virus could do, and the first case of corona was considered as an exception in Finland. The peak of the disease was in April when the Uusimaa area was isolated from the rest of the country. On Friday 24 of January Iltalehti got an alarming news, a suspicion that in Ivalo among the tourists there are two persons carrying the coronavirus. The information about the new virus had mainly come from Wuhan China. There were tourists from China, so the threat of the virus was taken seriously. At that time, it was suspected that there were only hundreds of cases in the world due to corona, 26 people had died of the disease worldwide (Iltalehti 2020).

In 16 of March 2020, the government and the president of the Republic mutually decided to declare that Finland is in exceptional circumstances due to Covid-19. The purpose of those measures is to protect the population in Finland and to secure the functioning of the economic life and society. The measures are valid till April 13, 2020. The government and authorities put the recommendations and decisions effecting according with the Infectious Act, Preparedness Act, and other legislations.

The universities as well as universities of applied sciences, schools, day-cares, and other educational work will be closed, and the teaching will happen remotely using different digital platforms and by self-studying. Public gatherings are limited to a maximum of ten people and to avoid unnecessary presence in public. Museums, theatres, libraries, swimming halls and hobby centres will also be closed. Visits to elderly homes and other elderly housing service units are prohibited and avoid contact with people who belong in the risk group (Valtioneuvosto 2020).

The restrictions on physical contacts probably slowed down the epidemic in Finland according to THL. The intensive care peak in Finland was the highest on April 6-12 on week 15 2020. After the mid-April the number of intensive care with Covid-19 steadily decreased so the intensive care units were reduced. The recommendation of using facemasks in public places and transportation came from the head director of THL on 14 of April 2020 (Onnettomuustutkintakeskus 2020).

During the entire Covid-19 epidemic there has been a total of 1,448,656 cases of the disease identified in Finland. The total number of deaths due to corona in Finland is 7091. From the Finnish population 81% have had the first dose of corona vaccination and 78% of the population have had the second dose of corona vaccination, 55% have had the third-round vaccination dose and about 22% of the total population have had the fourth dose of corona vaccination (Koronatilastot 2023).

Today, although the corona disease is still among us it is no longer a risk of serious risk according to Otto Helve the head of the health security department (THL). The risk of having a serious illness from the corona virus is lower today than what it was a while back. According to Helve we have come a long way in the treatment of the pandemic and the vaccinations has done their job. Corona is no longer a special case on disease, but it is a case on infectious disease among others (HS 2022).

### **4.3 Covid-19 effects on Finnish tourism industries**

Due to the spread of Covid-19 the over-night stays by international tourist dropped by 68% in 2020 in Finland. The tourist coming from important inbound tourism countries dropped dramatically in

March 20 when Finland closed its borders for international tourists (Statista 2023). Because of corona the majority of Finnish citizen said that they will cancel their travel plans due to Covid-19 according to a survey made by Statista. About 17% of the respondents said that they changed their plans of international travel to domestic travelling (Statista 2023). Finnish companies in the tourism and accommodation business were heavily impacted because of corona, 96% of tourism industries in Finland said that they received cancellations from clients due the Covid-19 during February and March 2020 (Statista 2023).

The breaks in transport connections between China and the rest of the world due to Covid-19 affects the Finnish business also. The main industries that are facing heavy hits are tourism and accommodation businesses. Those companies are facing direct income losses (Business Finland 2020).

The Covid-19 crisis hit heavily on accommodation and tourism business in Finland right when the pandemic started spreading and when the restrictions came into effect in late March and the beginning of April 2020. The number of visitors dropped by 47% in total. The number of international tourists dropped by 53% and number of domestic tourists by 44% compared to the previous year. During March the international over-night tourists was around 1 million when the previous year number was around 2 million (Tilastopalvelu Rudolf 2020).

In 2020 sales from February to March dropped from 116 million to 60 million. In March 2019 the overall sales were 118.6 million. Compared to figures from a year ago slightly less than 60 million euros remained unreceived due to Covid-19 pandemic. In April the total of tourists staying in Finland fell by a total of 88% (Tilastopalvelu Rudolf 2020).

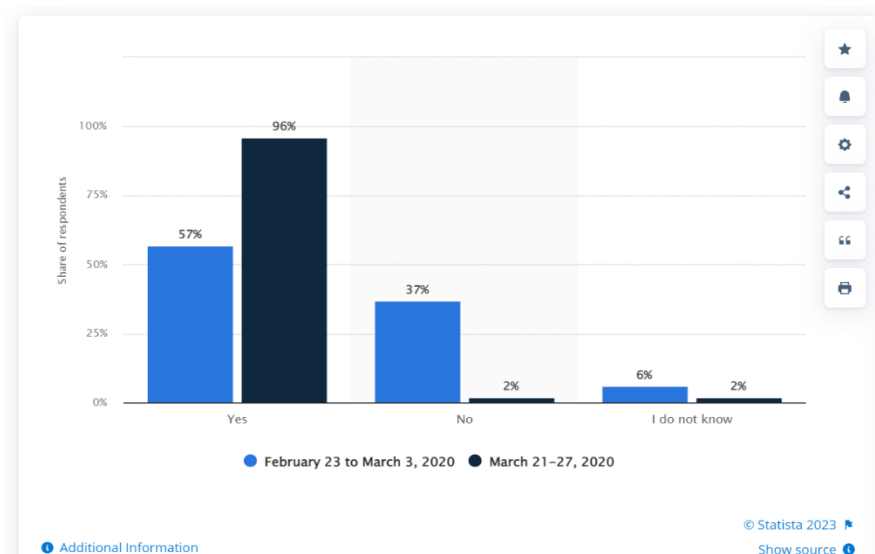


Figure 2. Booking cancellations due to Covid-19. Statista 2023.

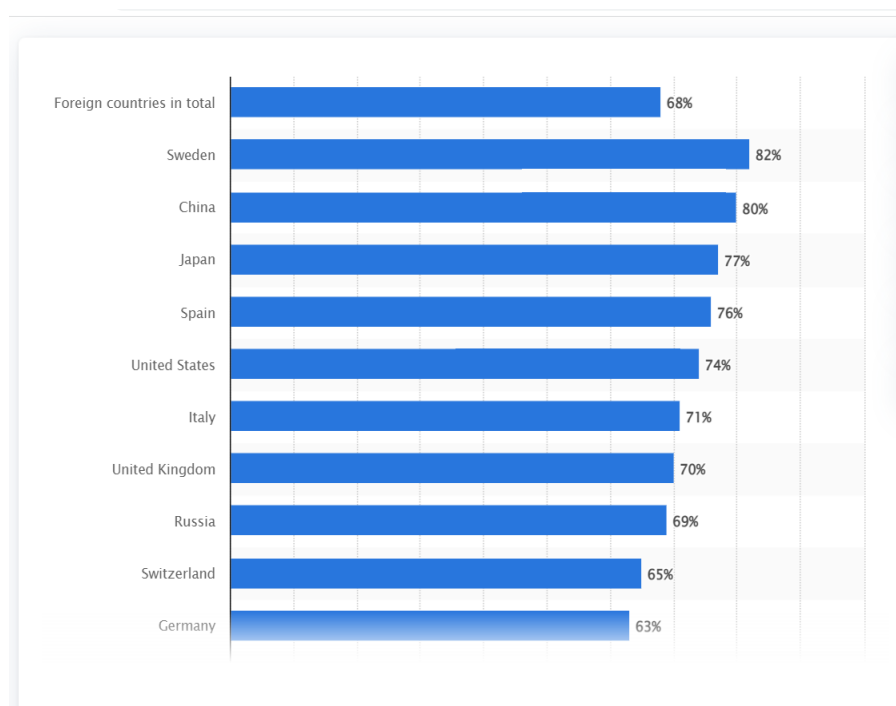


Figure 3. Decrease in overnight stays of international tourists. Statista 2023.

During the pandemic in Finland there has been a lot of talk about restaurants that had had to close their doors and farms that need foreign seasonal workers and of sole entrepreneurship that has lost their jobs. The situation in tourism and accommodation field is difficult as well. Due to the restriction's planes don't fly, tourists are not coming to Finland so there is no need for hotels. According to Mara's data 80% of Finland hotels are closed. Those hotels that are open the occupancy rate is between two and five percent. If the hotel has hotel has hundred rooms, an average of two to five rooms are being used. Lapland hotels closed all its hotels when the pandemic hit hardest, at the same time the ski centres in Lapland were closed (Räisänen 2020).

#### 4.4 How Covid-19 is changing traveling in Finland

The Covid-19 pandemic has had positive effects on destinations affected by mass tourism, the water in the canals in Venice has turned clear as tourists flocked from the city. Sustainability is more important for travellers than ever before (Timonen 2021). The pandemic has increased the interest in domestic travelling in Finland, even travellers who usually do not travel in their own country have



toured Finland. Especially small towns and Natural sites have been winners. In the past tourism in Finland has mostly been family related, events, hobbies, or business trips.

The lack of experiences by traveling abroad has been fixed by traveling domestically in search of new experiences and places. In Finland the interest in premium-level accommodations is rising, from holiday accommodations the traveller expects something better than what you have at home. The biggest trend in domestic tourist is local. Accommodation breakfast tables have local products and local art in the hotel premises. Chain hotels fade the chain likeness and increase individuality. A lake spa located in Savonlinna region has utilized the lake in creating the spa experience around it. (Kelola 2021.)

## 5 Research method

Processes used to collect certain data are called research methods. This information can be used to analyse current procedures or methods and to find more information on the subject. Research methods are used by professionals when they study human behaviour, medicine, and other scholarly topics. Quantitative research method and qualitative research method are the two main categories of research methods (Indeed 2023).

Researchers use many different types of methods when they want to achieve results. Researchers and analysts use both qualitative and quantitative research methods by executing surveys, interviews and focus groups to interpret data to improve the understanding of that specific data. Choosing the best and fitting research method and using it can help the person conducting the research achieving useful results in their studies (Indeed 2023).

When analysing and collecting non-numeral data that is called qualitative research method. This method is used to understand experiences, opinions, and concepts. While using this method researchers can gather deep insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research. Qualitative research is generally used in the social and humanities sciences for example, health sciences, history, sociology, anthropology, and education. Qualitative research method is the opposite of quantitative method. Qualitative research is used to understand how people experience the world. Qualitative research is mostly flexible and focus more on retaining rich meaning when reading the data. Qualitative data is usually in the form of videos, audios, text, and photos. This means that the researcher might work with interview transcripts, recordings, fieldnotes or survey responses. Qualitative research aims to preserve the participants opinions and voice and it can be adjusted if new questions arise. The research is good for natural settings, flexibility, generation of new ideas and meaningful insights (Bhandari 2020).

Qualitative research is especially relevant when prior views of the phenomenon under review are modest which refers that qualitative research usually is more flexible because of unstructured problems. Qualitative research can enable hypothesis testing the main emphasis is mainly on gaining insights and constructing theories and explanations. Qualitative research tends to be more unstructured and investigative where the pressure is on understanding (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2005, 202).

Qualitative methods can't answer questions like "How many?", "What are the causes?" However, it can deliver an understanding of how figures are built through social processes. Qualitative research can visualise and demolish the mechanisms which links variables, by looking at the

explanations or narratives given by the parties involved. By using qualitative methods it's possible to study how different concepts are understood by people. Qualitative research is especially suitable when studying concepts. Illogical behaviours are understood well with the help of qualitative methods (Barbour 2008, 11-13).

There exist many different types of research that are used by professionals to conduct research (Indeed 2023). For collecting qualitative data interviews are the most used methods. Qualitative interviews have been categorized in different kind of ways. Many contemporary texts freely separated qualitative interviews as semi-structured, structured, and unstructured (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree 2006).

Interviews done by the interviewee and the interviewed are the most commonly used interview forms in the qualitative method. Qualitative researchers prefer to use the semi-structured interviews because it allows the responders to be freer with their answers and the order of the questions is not so precise. The characteristic of interviewing in qualitative research is using open questions. This lets the responders to concentrate more on the issues on what is important to them rather than focus on the researcher's interests (Barbour 2008, 17).

Semi-structured interviews are mostly the only source of data in qualitative research projects. They are usually scheduled in advance with the participants at a specific time and the location is often outside of everyday events. Semi-structured interviews are usually done around a set of open-ended questions. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are largely used form of interview for qualitative research, and it can be used for an individual or in groups. Mostly this kind of interview is used on a sole person or in a group and it approximately takes between 30 minutes to several hours to complete (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree 2006).

## **5.1 Analysis Method**

For the analysis the author decided to take advantage of the phenomenological analysis method. It is an analysis method that is commonly used in qualitative research methods. It is based on making straight thinking, reflecting and observations on the experience gained from the research object. The objective is to approach the research subject without any assumptions made beforehand. Phenomenological analysis method is mainly about studying about the experiences and feelings of the research subject in hand, but it can also be used on examining the researcher itself and about his-self or herself understanding and experiences during the process (Koppa 2015).

## 5.2 Execution of the survey

The author decided to execute the survey in Google Forms. It is an application developed by Google, that allows to create customized online surveys and questionnaires. The survey answers are automatically saved in Google Forms, this helps the creator of the forms to see in real time the answers of the people who have answered the survey (Google). The author felt that this platform was the best tool because the author had priorly used this platform to execute questionnaires. The author felt that Google Forms was also easy to use to prior experience and the survey was easily sent to the participants via email.

It was intended to use both secondary data (data used in other materials and studies by others) and primary materials (self-collected observational data) in this survey.

The goal of the survey was to get information from six different companies in the experience tourism field, and to think how Covid-19 pandemic affected the operations of those chosen companies. What kind of changes has the companies gone through and if those changes are permanent. The author chose only a limited number of companies for the survey because the purpose of the survey was not to make a comprehensive analysis or statistical analysis of the company's measures, but to find out the immediate effects caused by the coronavirus pandemic in the chosen companies. The intention of the survey was to find out how the Covid-19 situation affected the companies in spring 2020. The intention was also to get comments from the companies what thoughts they had due to the coronavirus situation in spring.

The data was collected by using a qualitative method, which in this case was a semi-structured survey. The author originally wanted to do a proper interview with the participants from the chosen companies but due to lack of time and schedules that couldn't be fit and agreed to, the author decided to compromise and instead do a semi-structured survey.

Research material can be collected by using different methods. Methods used in qualitative methods are usually surveys, interviews, observation, or a form combining different methods (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006). The author used open questions in the semi-structured survey. This form gave the responders more room with the answers, and it also ensured that the responders were not led in a certain direction.

The author wanted to bring out the company's perspectives and their opinions in the answers. The author felt that this form of method was best for the work for getting the result intended. The semi-structured interview was chosen because the author felt that this would be easier for the companies. The contact persons from each company are all very busy in their work so this kind of survey was relatively easy and quite fast to answer. The survey contained 5 opened questions.

The survey / questionnaire sent to the companies can be found in appendix 1.

### **5.3 Survey findings**

For the semi-structured interviews, the author decided to choose the six companies mentioned before. The respondents for the survey were chosen according to their positions and titles at the company. This decision was made because they work in sales and marketing, so they have seen most immediately the effects that the pandemic and restrictions had on travel and bookings. Most of the responders worked in marketing and sales. There was one responder who oversaw the whole operations in the company.

The responders of the survey knew that their answers would be public and therefore they all wished to stay anonymous. The results and answers will be handled anonymously and will be referred to responders 1-3.

The author wanted to have each six companies representatives answer the survey but due to busy schedules the three companies from six answered the survey. The other three backed down from answering due to the fact that spring is very busy time for hotels and travel agencies.

Responders 1 and responder 3 work at the travel agencies which offers experiences to their customers. The agencies were Elämys Group and Kon-Tiki-Tours. The responder 2 works at Elämys Ämmi.

The survey was sent on late April for the representatives of each company. The survey was sent on the beginning of week 16 on April. The responders took almost over two weeks to answer the survey. The author had to send many emails for the responders to answer the survey since the weeks were running fast, so that the author would have time to analyse the results.

## Have you noticed changes in the purchasing behavior of the customers during Covid-19?

Responder 1:

Of course, outgoing stopped and domestic self-travelling increased.

Responder 2:

Päätökset tehdään hyvin lyhyellä jännteellä. Monesti aamulla näytti, ettei ole yhtään majoitusvarausta, mutta iltaisin oli aina täyttä. Suomalaiset alkoivat käydä meillä, kun ennen suurin osa matkailijoista oli ulkomailla. Rahaa käytettiin rohkeammin kuin ennen.

Responder 3:

Yes, people want better change and cancelling conditions, even quite expensive trips are booked closer to the departure date.

The changes in customers purchasing behavior did change due to the pandemic. Outgoing travelling stopped due to the restrictions and domestic and self-travelling did increase. People were more aware of the changes happening with restrictions and limitations that they wanted better change and cancelling conditions, and they were willing to book more expensive trips closer to the departure date.

Responders 2 and 3 both said that customers were more willing to put more money when booking trips and when making reservations to the hotel. The decisions were made more on shorter notice than before the pandemic. The willingness of making the reservations on shorter notice shows some carefulness in the customers, since the pandemic showed and taught us that anything can happen. New limitations can come the next day, or the hotel is forced to lay off employees or in the worst scenario they need to shut down their whole operation.

Rather than making reservations and bookings on a longer time period they were more willing to pay more to do the reservations closer to the departure date. Responders 1 and 2 also had similarities in their responses. Because of the limitations international customers vanished and people living in Finland started to do more reservations and bookings domestically.

Responder 2 said that in the mornings the booking calendar usually looked quite empty but by evening it was fully booked. This also shows some drastic behavior change in people. Before the pandemic hotel reservations were made weeks or even months before just to make sure that the customers would get the room that they want at a more affordable price.

This behavioral purchasing change does show that to get the room that the customers want they pay an even higher price for it. But they wait till the last minute to do the bookings so just to make sure that nothing drastic will happen.

## Have you noticed changes in the purchasing behavior of the customers after Covid-19?

Responder 1:

Yes, people have an ingrained need to travel and book their tours in very short notice. There are also older people who still likes to be extremely carefully, but not all of them.

Responder 2:

Osa kotimaan matkailijoista on onneksi jäänyt uskolliseksi kotimaan matkailulle löydettyään hienoja kohteita Suomesta. Lähimatkailu on tullut suosituksi: majoittujia tulee omasta tai naapurikunnasta myös runsaasti.

Responder 3:

Same answer as to the previous question

The changes in the customers purchasing behavior after Covid-19 has also changed. People are more eager to book their travels on very short notice and some age groups are more careful while booking trips than others. Responder 1 said that in their operation they have seen that elderly people are more cautions when doing bookings.

This is a clear sign that the pandemic did leave a mark in traveling in the elderly group. From the very beginning older people were put in the risk category which explains why they are more careful with their bookings. Some groups have not shown bigger changes in their purchasing behavior after Covid-19.

Responder 2 said that domestic travelling has become a very popular trend even if we are past Covid-19. People would be able to travel abroad again but more and more domestic people are travelling inside their home country. Some Finnish residents have stayed loyal to domestic travel even though there are no longer limitations on travelling internationally. While travelling domestically people have found new places and experiences and they keep on exploring inside Finland.



## How did Covid-19 affect your operations?

Responder 1:

Operations crashed to the wall after MAR2020, and personnel were laid off. We did have some project still going on, so just couple got 50% employed during 2020-2021. On 2022 all got their jobs back for 100 %.

Responder 2:

Muutin toimintatapoja, yksinkertaistin ja hioin liiketoimintaa ja kasvatin silla lailla liikevaihto.

Responder 3:

we are forced to furlough our personnel etc but we also bought some other agencies and did some re-structure actions in our company

How did the Covid-19 affect their operations. Responder 1 said that their operation took a big hit after March 2020 and due to that crash, they were forced to lay of people from their company. During 2020-2021 they continued their operations but with less projects and with only a 50% employment. In 2022 all the employees who were laid off due to the lowness of projects got their jobs back and their company worked at 100% work force.

Responder 2 said that they had to do some big changes so that their operation could go on. The responder was forced to change the methods of operation. They simplified and refined the business and by doing these changes they were able to grow their sales and turnover.

Responder 3 said that their company also needed to lay off people. Their company is big, so they combined some of their subsidiary companies and did some re-structured actions inside their company to keep business going on.

All the answers show that all of the companies needed to do some drastic and un-wanted decisions to keep business going on and with no need to shut down the whole operation. When analyzing on their actions and decisions during the pandemic it can be seen that the decisions made did guarantee their survival in the field during Covid-19. The changes that responder 2 had to make did have some positive outcomes. They were able to grow their turnover and business just by changing their methods.

## What have you learned from the coronavirus?

Responder 1:

Generally, or in the travelling business? Well, we did have experiences of SARS and China lock downs before, year 2003. The lock downs are the worst for the whole travel industry chains globally, comparable to martial law and state of wars. So many hotels, busses, airlines, restaurants, travel agencies, guides, etc. were unemployed. Billion losses in every travelling sector and no one seems to think about further. But luckily, we all are very flexible people, we managed after all.

Responder 2:

Sopeutumassa tilanteisiin ja oppimalla niistä, on mahdollista pärjätä

Responder 3:

everything can happen! you need to have good crisis management plan, readiness to do actions right away when needed.

What have the companies learned from the coronavirus. Lockdowns, restrictions, and any kind of limitations are the worst thing that can happen in travel business. The same outlook on every responder's answer was the ability to act quick and adapting to situations is the key to survival.

By learning to adjust into quickly changing situations and each time from learning from every situation it is possible to survive. As responder 3 stated everything can happen. It is very important that companies have a crisis management plan ready to any kind of situation occurring. To be ready to act on a quick notice when needed is also very important.

The consistency in each answer shows that the companies struggle with the same things. They all needed to adjust and learn new ways to keep business running. They needed to act fast since the limitations and restrictions kept changing on a short notice. The companies needed to be awake and well aware of the changing situations and act on them. Responder 1 said that luckily in their company they were all flexible people so quick changes didn't undermine them. They all learned new skills that they utilize even after the pandemic is over and keep on utilizing.

## Has the customer based changed due to corona?

Responder 1:

A pit, but not much. New customers come all the time, which is very good!

Responder 2:

Asiakaspalvelu on haastavampaa. Erityisesti suomalaiset haluavat vastaukset heti ja kaikkien kanavien kautta. Varataan ja peruutetaan ja muutetaan. Ulkomaalaisten kanssa työntekeo on paljon helpompaa

Responder 3:

Not that much but maybe also younger people are now booking more via travel agencies vs independently.

So how much did the customer base change due to the coronavirus or did it. Responders 1 and 3 said that their customer base didn't change that much. New customers come all the time. Responder 3 said that one group of customers did surface due to Covid-19. The group was young adults also called the millennials. This is interesting since during the pandemic millennials were the group who are more willing to pay more for experiences and have discovered their home country and what new places it has to offer and experience them.

Responder 2 has not seen any big changes in the customer base but does point out that customer service is even more challenging. Working with Finnish travelers is more demanding than compared to foreign customers. Finnish customers are more demanding in a way that they need to have answers right away, and they need every little detail, and they might change their reservations constantly. For example, making a reservation then cancelling it but then wanting to keep the reservation made before.

The responder's answers to each question from the survey showed a lot of similarities, especially the answers from the two travel agencies. Covid-19 impacted on all the companies, but they all still managed to survive by adjusting, quick reactions to situations and by changing their methods of operations.

The changes they made in the author's opinion has had positive outcomes. They have learned new skills to manage and operate. If something similar would ever happen again they will be able to keep their businesses running. They all said that being flexible, knowing that anything can happen and by having a crisis management plan they can survive.

The customer base didn't change that much. But as stated in the work previously young adults were a group that grew. Today they use more the help of travel agencies when booking trips rather than doing it themselves. The survey also answered the main aim of the work. Domestic travel has increased due to the pandemic. It is a trend than came during the pandemic years but even after the pandemic it is growing steadily, and it is very popular.

## 6 Conclusions and self-reflection

The aim of the thesis was to find out how Covid-19 impacted on experience travel in Finland. The pandemic hit hard on everything and everyone in the world but also in Finland. It hit hardest on the travel industry and all the sectors in it. The author conducted a semi-structured interview in a form of survey which was sent to six companies working in the tourism and travel field. The responders of the survey all worked in the companies.

Experience as a concept means an emotional experience that has an uplifting positive effect. (Borg, Kivi & Partti 2002, 25). Usually, experience is associated with the feeling of surpassing oneself. We do and experience things that we would not normally do in our everyday life (Tarssanen 2007, 4). Experience travel and tourism is a relatively new concept which really shaped into the form that it is now during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The literature review of the study included three main topics. Experience, information about the chosen companies for the research and Covid-19. The experience section included the explanation of experience, how it is explained even though it is a subject which is still hard to explain so that everyone would understand it. Experience triangle was a main content in the chapter since it explains through a figure each element on how experiences can be created to make them memorable. The experience triangle shows how a product or service can be made a meaningful experience with six experience elements: interaction, authenticity, storytelling, multisensory, individuality and contrast. Another main subjects in the experience chapter were experiences as part of tourism and tourism and travel trends for the upcoming year 2024.

Travel is the pursuit of experience. When planning to go on a trip we begin to create mental images, dreams and wishes in our minds on how the trip will feel and will it accede our expectations that we have created in our minds. How the ideal comes reality during the trip is the experience, which is assessed afterwards (Verhelä & Lackman 2003, 27). The main reason for people to travel is to gain new experiences. What the pandemic has shown is that memorable experiences can be experienced locally, it doesn't always mean that one must travel to the most exotic place to have an uplifting positive experience. The travel trends predicted for year 2024 are very much concentrated to local travel and sustainable tourism. Traveling locally and inside of Finland grew during the pandemic and travellers were more willing to pay even more for the experiences in their home country.

The second part of the literature review concentrated on the six companies chosen for the work. The companies were carefully chosen. The two travel agencies which were chosen are both domestic but still they operate worldwide, and their goal is to create experiences for each client. The

hotels were chosen by using the same methodology. They are domestic but popular among international and domestic tourists, and their goal is also to make the stayers feel like it is an experience to accommodate in their hotel.

The last part of the literature review ends with Covid-19, explaining what kind of virus it is and how people got the infection. How the pandemic showed in Finland and what measures the country took trying to contain the spreading of the virus. The chapter goes through how Covid-19 affected the tourism industries in Finland and how the pandemic changed traveling in Finland.

The end of the work consists of a research method used for collecting the data wanted. The aim of the research was to find out how the pandemic changed the operations of the companies or didn't change. The research method used was a qualitative research method. When analysing and collecting non-numeral data that is called qualitative research method. This method is used to understand experiences, opinions, and concepts (Bhandari 2020). By using qualitative methods it's possible to study how different concepts are understood by people. Qualitative research is especially suitable when studying concepts. Illogical behaviours are understood well with the help of qualitative methods (Barbour 2008, 11-13). The author decided to perform a semi-structured interview in a form of a survey with open ended questions. The survey was done by using google forms which was a tool that the author had used in previous projects.

For analysing the data collected the author decided to use phenomenological analysis method. It is a qualitative analysis method formed on straight thinking and observations, in addition of reflecting on the experiences gained from the research work (Koppa 2015).

From analysing the results of the survey showed that domestic traveling did grow during the pandemic years. The number of international travellers lowered from the previous years. The Finnish travellers were more eager to spend more money and people belonging to the elder group were more careful when booking trips. The younger generation also grew as a group making reservations. Coronavirus taught use to adjust into changing situations, changing our methods and actions. Anything can happen so having a crisis management plan and being ready to act on short notice companies have survived the pandemic.

### **6.1.1 Self-reflection**

The thesis project started in fall 2022, when the thesis topic was sent to the thesis supervisor. The actual writing process started in November 21 in 2022. The idea of the topic was created during the summer before. I got interested on experience tourism especially during the pandemic years because travelling and tourism almost stopped completely. I really wanted to learn more on how from a product or service can be created to be made a memorable experience. During the summer

when I realized on what I want to write my thesis about I took some courses which were about experience tourism. My thesis topic did change a little from the original topic that I sent for my supervisor, since I realized that the topic originally thought would be too broad, so I needed to reduce it. I always thought that you can only have memorable and soul changing experiences when you travel as far as possible and do things that you wouldn't normally do. As I searched and read more about experience tourism I realized that experiences can be created domestically and even by going to the province near your home you can have a meaningful and positive experience.

I am very pleased that I stuck with this topic idea for my thesis because I didn't have difficulties on carrying out the project. I didn't have a commissioner for my work, so I feel that it gave me some freedom when choosing the content and with my writing schedule.

The process and outlining the content started well since I had finished my other courses and I was able to give my whole focus to this project. The first three months worked well I found all the information needed and by then I had a clear vision on which companies I want to include in my work. Then in February I got an opportunity to start in a company in a position that I had dreamed of since I started my journey in Haaga-Helia. The thesis project stopped for a while because the job and family with two children took all my time. In March I got into the writing mode again and I feel that the process continued smoothly but slowly.

I feel that the work progressed well even though I had some personal time schedule problems. Something that I would do differently would be to take more time with the survey. Getting in touch with the companies and then getting the answers was much harder and slower than I had anticipated and took time to it. It would have been better to have a few back up companies for the future if I ever do something similar since 3/6 companies only answered the survey. The last 3 companies that didn't answer had valid points on why they backed down at the last minute. Spring is a very busy time for travel agencies and hotels since everyone are making reservations for the summer and early fall. I am very disappointed that I didn't have those back up companies thought in advance.

Things that I learned during this project is how important the schedule is and taking the time for the work. The time that I had seemed like forever, and I felt that I have all the time in the world to do this. I quickly realized that time is running out. The weeks and days went by so quickly that I started feeling stresses that will I manage to finish my work. Like said before I wish that I had took a longer time when sending the survey to the people I had contacted. I didn't quite realize that even though the survey was quite short they still needed to take some time to answer it and take time for their answers because they all needed to think back on the pandemic years.

I feel that I have learned to become better at writing an academic paper. Referencing correctly has always been my weakness but I feel that during this process I have become slightly better at it. Academic writing is also not my strongest suit because I always want to say my own opinion on everything. This has been a learning process for me on becoming a person who can write academic papers and look for knowledge on academic papers like journals or papers.

Learning to search academic references and information is also something that I haven't been so good at. But during this project I have learned where and how to do academic research and not to trust everything that I find and be more critical. I know how to examine some information or blogs, news etc to a more critical eye.

I enjoyed this thesis project because I was able to do it at my own past even though I felt like I was running out of time. I did learn a valuable lesson on how important time management skills are and always have a backup plan because like during the pandemic anything can happen. I learned to reference better and to search academic knowledge base better, but I still can grow on becoming even better at it.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1.

Survey questions:

## Survey for my bachelor thesis: **Covid-19 Impact on Experience Tourism in Finland**

The answers will be handled confidentially and will only be used for my thesis

Have you noticed changes in the purchasing behavior of the customers during Covid-19? \*

Pitkä vastaukset

Have you noticed changes in the purchasing behavior of the customers after Covid-19? \*

Pitkä vastaukset

How did Covid-19 affect your operations? \*

Pitkä vastausteksti

What have you learned from the coronavirus? \*

Pitkä vastausteksti

Has the customer based changed due to corona?



☰ Kappale



Pitkä vastausteksti