

In the search of holistic cycling experience - Helsinki-Hanko self-guided cycling product and a promotional blog

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Thesis title In the search of holistic cycling experience - Helsinki-Hanko self-guided cycling product and a promotional blog	Number of pages and appendix pages 32 + 19
<p>Tourism is one of the leading service fields in the world and the market is evolving to include important subcategories of active, nature based tourism niches. The contrary movement back to the nature is a driving force to develop new products in the field of nature tourism and companies are searching for new ways to connect with the rising customer groups in need of individual, personal and self actualizing needs. Finland has a strong potential to be the answer to the demand of carefully built experiences based on nature. The Finnish Tourism Board has invested to develop the field mentioned above. This project-oriented thesis was commissioned by Outdoors Finland and was part of Outdoors Finland South project funded by EU and done in co-operation with the Finnish Tourism Board. During the thesis process the product evolved from creating only a self-guided cycling product from Helsinki to Hanko into a promotional blog for the use of Outdoors Finland, based on the cycling experience done in the summer 2014.</p> <p>The objective of this study is to answer a question: what are the components needed to create a self-guided cycling experience using customer understanding as a base? The methods used in the thesis were literature review in the theory base and gathering information from the cycling trip as committed observing. As an outcome of the thesis, a promotional blog is presented.</p> <p>The theory part introduces different types of tourism, concentrating on cycling tourism. The theories of customer needs are studied as creating customer based experience the understanding on customer needs and expectations is vital for company to succeed. The different experience theories give a framework for making memorable experiences, and from applying these theories and combining the observations from the cycling trip, the components needed to create a cycling experience are found. In order to answer the study question a holistic experience triangle was created, presenting the importance of nature environment, self development and customer understanding inside the experience elements. The triangle can be used as a designing tool when building a self guided cycling experience by taking all the present-ed components into consideration in predict development phase.</p> <p>As a product-oriented thesis, the paper presents the process and planning of the cycling trip and as well as the writing of the promotional blog. The chosen goals for the product, the blog, were three adjectives chosen to describe the blog; inspiring, entertaining and activating, and four themes used in writing the blog entries taken from experience economy theory using the realms; Entertainment, Educational, Esthetic and Escapist. The blog entries captured these adjectives and themes. The final success of the blog can be measured by the amount of engagements when the texts go viral in Outdoors Finland webpage.</p>	
Keywords Experience tourism, nature tourism, rural tourism, adventure tourism, cycling tourism, blog, Outdoors Finland	

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1 Introduction

The modern era of urban lifestyle in cities has brought up a contrary movement back to the nature. According to Adventure Tourism Market Study (2014 quoted as in Finnish Tourism Board, 2014, 8) demand for active vacations is growing globally and the value of the international market is growing yearly 65%. Global trends seen in tourism market demand are reflecting the global trends in all consumption and leisure, and Kinnunen & Manninen, (2014) state that the quality of life and self-development are increasingly important for tourists as well as health, well-being, and activities. These interests in the market has led to growing market of towards transformative experiences in nature, doing sports in nature and the special interest tourism niches, like biking, paddling and hiking in nature. The growth of nature based activities has been noted already in the beginning of century, for example combining elements of learning and enrichment, responsible tourism, health consciousness, unpredictableness, the experience-fullness and customization as well as focus on special interests has been pointed out by Hudson (2008, 59-69). The growth of nature-based tourism market is partly because of the overall growth in tourism market, but according to Adventure Tourism Study 2013 (2014, quote as Finnish Tourism Board 2014, 8), it is also thanks to the growing proportional amount of adventure tourists inside the overall tourism market. Attention towards developing nature/activity tourism sectors has been led by the destination marketing organization of Finland, Visit Finland (VF), which has started projects on raising Finland's profile among nature tourism destinations. The Finnish Tourism Board (2014) published a strategy for developing Finland's summer activity tourism and the biggest focus is in the most potential themes, which they list as biking, hiking, paddling and wildlife watching. The goals for the strategy include among others to create marketing communications tailored especially for the strong target markets, the Modern Humanists (Finnish Tourism Board, 2014).

The commissioner and sponsor of our thesis is Outdoors Finland (OF) South project. Outdoor Finland project is EU funded project to coordinate the development of activity tourism in Finland. The first part of the project was running from 2009 until the end of year 2014. This national project will be spreading to consider the whole country, but the southern Finland part was conducted by Lahti University of Applied Sciences with project leader Pirjo Räsänen. The aim for the project is to map out southern Finland's nature activity routes (trekking, bicycling and canoeing) and use this homogenous material to market and get new business opportunities considering nature tourism and activity tourism. A big focus on the project is to add internationality to the tourism supply system relating to nature tourism, and build visibility in the international markets. OF project has planned Finland nature tourism services into attracting packages, created a multichannel communications model

and helped private companies in internationalization. The southern project works in areas of Etelä-Karjala, Päijät-Häme, Kanta-Häme, Kymenlaakso and Uusimaa. OF project works in cooperation with the tourism organisations and developing offices of the areas, the national tourism board, as well as with the Ministry of Forestry and our national parks. (Finnish Tourism Board, 2014, 5)

As a background for this thesis, the researchers have both professional and personal interest on nature/experience tourism and finding wellness through nature. In Adventure tourism study 2013 the active tourists mentioned the beauty of nature as their number one motivation when choosing destination for their holiday (ATTA, 2014 quoted as Finnish Tourism Board, 8). As the researchers have enjoyed Finnish nature with different activities, the motivation to study the potential of Finnish nature environment with activity tourism was the reason to start working with the OF project.

The project started in May 2014 with a topic of making two self-guided products from cycling and kayaking from Helsinki to Hanko. During the summer the kayaking was discovered to be too demanding for beginners to kayak, therefore the commissioner and the team agreed to drop it out of the project and a 200 kilometres biking trip was decided to serve as the practical part for observing activity tourism and get the customer perspective on the nature tourism product, biking. The project includes gathering material using the method of committed observation during a biking trip and a literature review. In the theory part the most relevant areas of tourism defined and applied to the project. Customer based product creation, customer understanding and different approaches to experience economy theory are examined in theory part, as well as using the observation material to find the answer to study question at the end. The product of this thesis is a marketing blog which has been written using the experiences of the biking trip as well as theory background reviewed in search of the answer to the study question. The blog serves as a marketing output for the Outdoors Finland commissioner and will be part of the OF project webpage.

Using the starting point of the growing market of nature experiences, this project oriented thesis is aiming to answer a question: what are the components needed to create a self-guided bicycling experience using customer understanding as a base? The goal of this thesis is to gather these components in an understandable form. The outcome from the thesis is also to deliver marketing material for the commissioner to use in their digital marketing channels. This is done by using the theory and observative information to build a promotional blog. The aim for the blog is to communicate opportunities to have holistic experience during the biking and that the blog would inspire, activate and entertain the

reader by using four experience elements (Pine & Gilmore, 1999): Entertainment, Educational, Esthetic and Escapist as the theme of the posts.

2 Creating Nature Experiences

The search for finding the answer to the study question starts with theoretical review on customer based product development, customer understanding, experience theories and looking into blogs as marketing communicational tool. After the theories, definitions of tourism concepts are presented including niches such as adventure tourism, rural tourism, nature tourism, and in the end, the nature based tourism niches are reviewed in Finnish tourism environment. The final part of this chapter is concentrating on cycling tourism.

2.1 Customer based development of a product

Creating customer based product means that the base of the development of the product is built on customers' terms. For the customer, the experience of the product is always subjective. The aim is to create additional value for the customer. (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 21.) According to Cook (2011, 36) in customer driven processes, main aim is to match customer's needs not the company's own needs. For example the company's primary goal could be to get profit, the attitude of the service and bad word-of-mouth would make them realise that profit will come as a result of a well running business. (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, 2010, 7).

A tourism company creates the needed prerequisite for the customer to experience the product. The prerequisites includes three components: service concept, service process and service system, and all of these three components must work fluently in order the service/product to function properly. (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 21.) Service concept builds the core of the product, the benefits and values that the product would give to the customer. It is based on customers' primary and secondary desires, in which primary motivation is the reason to travel, secondary consist of how and where to travel. The service process includes the description of the actual product this means making a service blueprint. (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 22.) The last component of the prerequisites to create customer based tourism product is the service function including all the external and internal resources that are needed to create the expected value to the customers. It includes the location, the equipment and the personnel. (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 23.)

The service blueprint portrays a visual map of the service functions, and it is a useful tool in the design stage of a service. The components of a blueprint are customer actions, on stage functions, backstage functions and supporting processes. It shows the processes, points of contact and the evidence from customer point of view (Zeithaml, V. A. Bitner M. J. & Gremler, D. D, 2006, 267). Customer actions are the choices and activities that the

customer performs during the service (Zeithaml & al, 2006, 268). On stage functions are visible interactions in which the customer is directly in contact with. Backstage functions the customer doesn't see but are needed in order the onstage functions to work. Supporting processes are internal services that support delivering the whole service. (Zeithaml & al, 2006, 268; Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 22, 104.)

Customer focus in developing new products must be maintained all the time. To keep focus on the right tract Cook (2011, 38) introduces an action checklist that can help the process. Putting yourself in the customers' shoes is one of the actions and reviewing the service. Understanding customer's expectations and reasons for choosing the service would help keeping the right focus. Knowing the most profitable customers and making the service customised according to the company's main focus. (Cook, 2011, 39)

2.2 Customer understanding

When the customer is the main starting point for a company's activities, they have to understand the customers. What are their needs and expectations? (Borg, P. Kivi, E. & Partti, M, 2002, 126) If customers' expectations are met the customer is satisfied, but the expectations should not be set too high otherwise the customer will leave disappointed. There are many factors that influence the customer behaviour they are; cultural, social, personal and psychological. (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, 2010, 14, 151)

Cultural behaviour is the deepest influencer on personal behaviour and wants. It contains basic values, perception and behaviour that is learned from the society. Social factors are family, friends, roles, status and groups in which the customer belongs or identify him/herself with. Personal factors are also influencing the behaviour such as age, economical situation, lifestyle, personality and self-image. The final psychological factors are motivation, learning, beliefs and attitudes. One of the most commonly known motivation theory is Maslow's theory of need. Most of the human behaviour is learned through stimuli, responses and reinforcement. Beliefs supports the brand image and attitudes consist of evaluation and feeling toward certain matter. Attitudes are very hard to change once they have been established. (Kotler & al, 2010, 151,154,156 & 161-163.)

Understanding customers' needs Maslow's hierarchy of need (1954) illustrates 5 level model (picture 1) what drives the motivation. The levels are from bottom to top; physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation. Physiological needs are for example air, shelter, food, sleep. Safety needs are for example security and stability. Social needs are

for example love, friendship and feeling of belongingness. Esteem needs are for example achievement, mastery and independence. Self-actualisation needs finally are for example self-fulfilment, seeking personal growth and it is the peak of experiences. The lower level needs must be fulfilled in order to climb up the levels. In Maslow's later years he added 3 new levels in the hierarchy. After esteem needs there would be basic cognitive needs which are the learning to know and to understand. Then aesthetic needs which appreciate and looks for balance and beauty. The final addition would be after self-actualisation the transcendence needs, which would be helping others to achieve self-actualisation. (Maslow 1970, 15-26.)

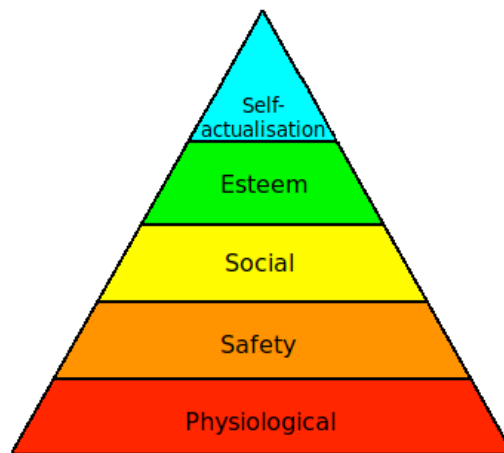


Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of need (Edited from: Motivation and Personality, 1954)

When marketing a product, expectations of the perceived service/product must be set on a level that does not over exceed the true value, otherwise the customer's expectations are not met and customer is dissatisfied. Matching or exceeding the expectation brings satisfied customer. One way to exceed in customer expectation is to under promise the quality but that might take the possibly new customers away. (Zeithaml & al. 2006, 100). Customer's expectations are built from past experiences, opinions from friends and the market information. (Kotler & al. 2010, 14). Then again according to Zeithaml & al. (2006, 81) customer expectations are beliefs of service standards which work as a reference points for future service contacts. It is important to understand the expectations of the customers in order to fulfil them. Different customer standard vary according to their tolerance of service. (Zeithaml & al. 2006, 86)

2.3 Experience

“Tourism is a paradigmatic experience ‘industry’; therefore, it is reasonable that it to be a leader in conceptualizing experience” (Henning, 2012, 25). In the following chapter an overview to the evolutionary steps of experience in tourism is made along with two different theories of experience, objective and subjective (Henning, 2012, 25), are being presented.

The concept of tourist experience theory started to emerge in the 1980’s. During that era the service offer was traditionally defined from the perspective of production and not focusing on the customer needs or tourists point of view. Despite of the overall environment of production focus, in the late 80s there was discussion arising about the importance of interactions inside the tourism supply chains. The defining of a touristic experience had started. During the 1990’s, a wave of relationship marketing came to change the views on tourism services, when the weight of relationship and customer satisfaction was acknowledged inside the tourism business and the tourist was seen in the middle of the tourism supply system. At the same time some implications of tourism product value chain was used to define what makes a tourism product successful. (Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza, 2012, 13-14).

The first stage of experience economy was established with Pine & Gilmore (1999) stating our economy being in change from a service society towards an experience society. This meant that people need more than just a simple service, they want to be part of a bigger experience. In their article “Experience Economy” (1999) Pine & Gilmore presented the venue of experience as a stage and the service provider as a performer building up layers of added meaning to make the moment of experience meaningful. When the purpose is to create an experience the services are used as the stage, goods are props and the individual is engaged in a way that makes it a memorable event. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) The biggest differences between a service and an experience are tailoring of an experience based on the guest, using drama as a tool, and building more content to the service with a theme. When a customer is buying a service, it is important what the customer gets, as in experience it is important how the guest is taken care of. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)

The latest change, the so called second stage of experience economy, started in the beginning of 21st century, when the customer interaction evolved to lose dependence on tourism supply business and the era of self-guided, self-booked and self-tailored tourism started to challenge the traditional tourism business (Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza, 2012,

18). This has led to stronger role of the customer as the co-creator of the experience. When Pine and Gilmore describe the experience economy to transform the destination into a stage where services are not produced but performed and where added value is achieved through the provision of memorable experiences (Sharpley & Stone, 2012, 2), in the second stage of experience economy, touristic experience is seen as co-creation between the tourist and the producer, and it is not possible to be ready made, because of differentiating perceptions that every individual has. The second stage of experience economy is been presented as the European reaction to the American model of experience, against all commercial, artificial and superficial way to create an experience (Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza 2012, 18).

So what is a good experience? According to Pine and Gilmore (2011, 45-56) it is personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on emotional, physical, intellectual or even spiritual level. Pine & Gilmore (2011, 45-56) presented a model to divide different experiences based on the customer participation and the awareness of the customer. They present experiences in four groups; Entertainment, Educational, Esthetic and Escapist experiences as presented in Figure 2.

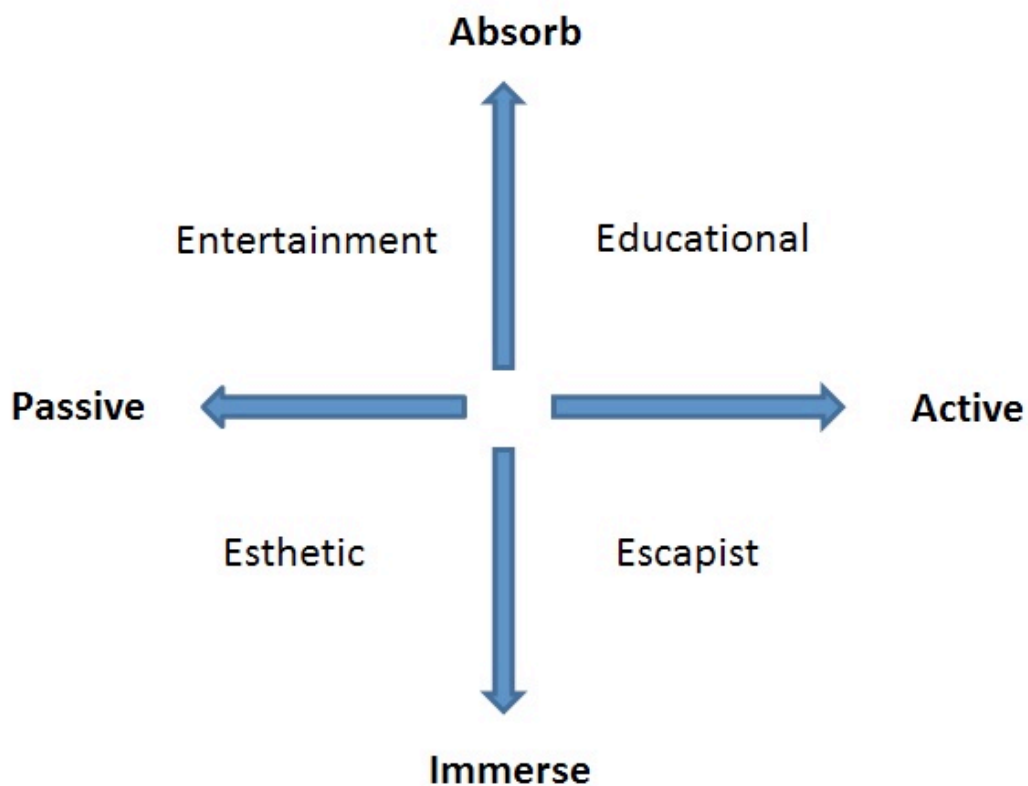


Figure 2. Experience realms (Edited from: the Experience Economy 2011)

If the tourist is following an event, gig or performance but is not being immersed to the experience, Pine & Gilmore are presenting this as an entertainment experience. When the participation of the guest is more active for example physically, but they are not deeply inside the emotional level of the experience, this can be seen as an Educational experience. Escapist experience is in consideration when a person is part of an activity which demands full concentration and immersion to the situation. The guest can also be deeply immersed to a landscape but in this case there is no active participation, and this combination of experience realms can be seen as an Esthetic experience. In a holistic experience there should be elements of all of these parts, and it could be placed in the centre of model, to the sweet spot. (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)

Other academics took the experience production in their agenda after Pine and Gilmore, for example according to Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003) the whole process of creating experiences, can be seen as innovative and different process compared to the production of a standard tourist product. The process of commodification of experience, Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003) argue, involves the continuous production of new experience narratives articulated with the four realms presented by Pine and Gilmore (1999); Entertainment, Educational, Esthetic and Escapist depending on the level of customer participation and the awareness of the customer.

On the other hand Tarssanen & Kylänen (1999) from the University of Lapland, Finland, wrote a guidebook to give companies tools to move themselves towards the experience economy. Based on the experience economy theories, they have built a model, the Experience pyramid to guide the production of experiences (Figure 3). The pyramid presents an ideal experience product with six experience realms that build on deeper connection with the customer. The levels of connection with the customer defines the success of an experience product, starting from the lowest level of the customer being interested coming all the way to life changing experiences, transformation which is related to personal growth and self-actualization. The realms they use to give a service more depth are Individuality, Authenticity, Storytelling, Multisensory perception, Contrast to everyday life and Interaction inside the experience.

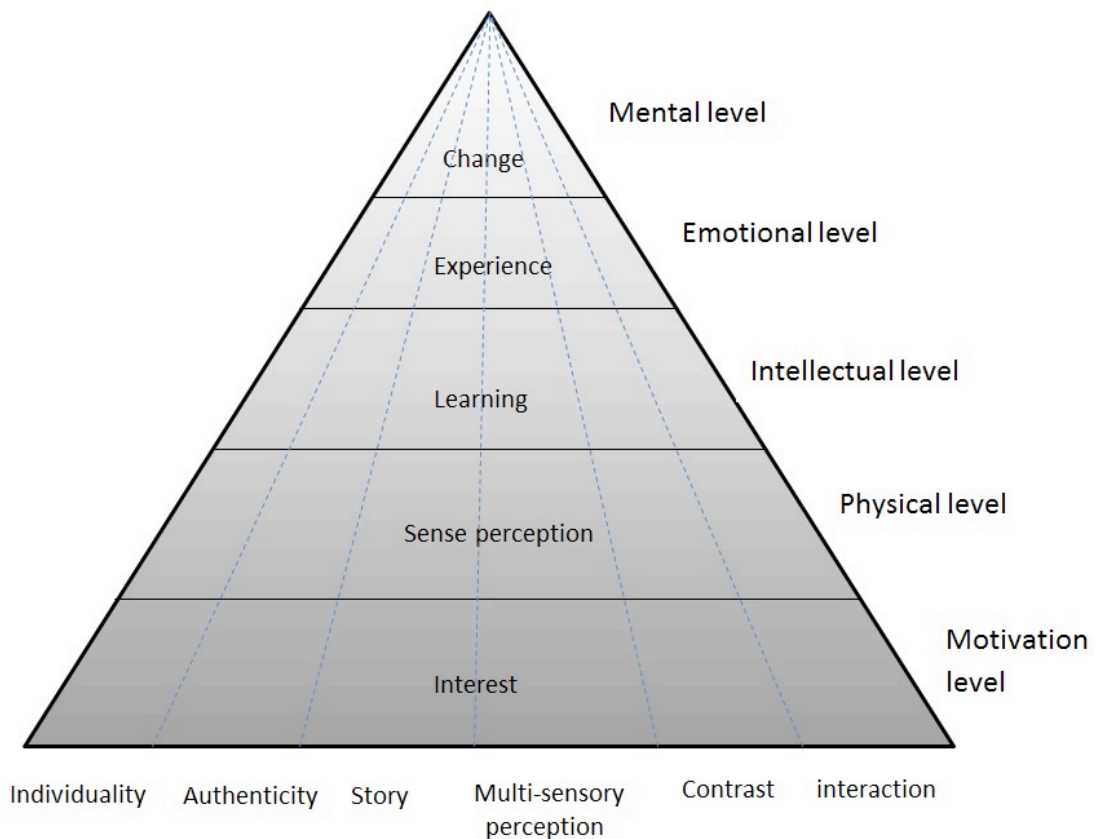


Figure 3. Experience pyramid (Edited from: Elämystuottajan käsikirja 1999)

Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza (2012, 18) present the new, second stage of experience economy as the humanistic experience which takes the prosumer as part of building the tourism offerings. Inside this European model of experience Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza quote Binkhorst (2005, as quoted in Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza 2012, 18) by saying that co-creation

“means no separation between supply and demand, company and customer, tourist and host, tourism spaces and ‘other’ spaces but viewing tourism as a holistic network of stakeholders connected in experience environments in which everyone operates from different spatial contexts”.

In the European model the experience is often divided as 1) travel experience (the process in which the tourist is involved when travelling), and 2) tourist experience (tourists own subjective experience, a meaningful experience relating to individuals own personal values and emotions) (Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza 2012, 18-19), turning the focus towards the transformation and experiencing tourism through setting own goals and exceeding those personal goals. In this market environment the tourism products should only offer a platform for individuals to fulfil their passion and find a way to change, and as Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza (2012, 23) *“tourism businesses and organisations can play a*

meaningful role in helping tourists to find their own way” or “a facilitator who carries out the function of accompaniment”.

2.4 Blog as a marketing Communicational tool

According to Hudson (2008, 253), an effective communication with target customers' needs a variety of methods, which can be referred as marketing communications. Hudson presents tourism and hospitality promotional tools used in the promotional mix includes advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, word of mouth, direct marketing and internet marketing. Advertising is communications published in for example television, internet or brochures. In context of tourism industry, Hudson (2008, 262) says that advertising has important tasks of confirming and reinforcing the buying decisions, creating new patterns of buying or changing attitudes and behaviour. Promoting is one element of the marketing communications, targeted to convince potential customers of the benefits of choosing a certain product/service/experience (Hudson 2008, 253). When using promoting effectively, it creates an identity for the product or the organisation. (Hudson 2008, 253). Internet marketing is advertisement done in the internet. When planning advertisement activities, an objective should be set before deciding the ways to advertise or promote.

Weblogs (blogs) defined as; *“frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence”* (Herring *et al.*, 2005) or *“personal journals on the internet arranged in reversed chronological sequence that facilitate interactive computer mediated communication through text, images, and audio/video objects”* (Huang, C., Shen, Y., Lin, H. & Chang, S., 2007, 472-484) are a platform for communicating, a part of social media and a possibility to create relationships with your customers. In addition to text, image and audio, a blog often has links to other sources of information (Newson, A. Houghton, D. & Patten, J. 2009, 3). An article in a blog added by the author (blogger) are called entries, posts or blog posts (Newson & al. 2009, 4).

There are many benefits for writing a blog, regarding to Newson *et al.* (2009) you will gain better result on search engines, create a personal voice for your organization, give a chance for interaction with your potential customers and on top blogging is known to be inexpensive. The effectiveness of blogging depends on the target market, and the methods they use when searching for information. Blogging is a personal way of communicating, a way to build relationships with readers and potential customers because bloggers can be seen as friends if they tell stories about themselves and the brands that they like (Kretz & de Valck, 2010, as quoted in Tuomi, 2014, 20). Newson & al. (2009)

grounded the usage of blogs as marketing tool as follows; *“If a substantial proportion of your market regularly obtains its information from the internet, blogging is a potentially powerful form of marketing for your business”*.

2.5 Defining tourism and nature-based tourism

According to UNWTO (2015) tourism is a phenomenon entailing social, cultural and economic aspects. The Phenomena includes the movement of people outside their common environment such as work or personal purposes. The people that move are called visitors which could be tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents. The action they do is tourism effecting the economy as well as the natural or built environment, the local population and the tourist themselves. In the year of 2013 over one billion international tourists travelled in the world, promoting jobs, creating more income and increasing development. In 2014 international tourist covered 9% of the global GDP, 30% of exporting services and forming 1 in every 11 jobs. (UNWTO, 2014)

Defining a complex phenomenon such as tourism is challenging and several academics have done their own part for defining the phenomenon in their own words, Hall & al. (2009, 7) gathered some common element from different definitions of tourism; it is temporary, short term action performed by people traveling to and from a destination outside their usual environment; it may affect the destination and the transit path; it may affect the attitudes and behaviour of tourists and the providers of the service; it is voluntary; and mostly for leisure and recreation purposes, business travel being also important part of tourism (Hall & al. 2009, 7). In this thesis the tourism concepts are understood as the UNWTO defines them. UNWTO (2015) defines a visitor as; person going outside his/her normal environment, mainly for business or leisure, for less than a year. If there are no overnight stays the person doing the trip is called excursionist.

Tourism is often divided into mass tourism and alternative tourism. Mass tourism relies on scale, standardised products keeping the production costs down in replicating and including little cultural immersion (UNWTO, 2014). Alternative tourism seen as an umbrella over smaller sectors of specialised forms of tourism with smaller amounts of travellers. Alternative tourism includes subcategories, niche tourism sectors such as adventure tourism, rural tourism and nature tourism, which are partly overlapping and linked together even though they are separate movements of tourism and born from different starting points. In the following chapters these three concepts are explained briefly.

According to Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) adventure tourism must include at least 2 of the components which are physical activity, natural environment and cultural immersion (UNWTO, 2014). Biking trip through the authentic surroundings of Kings Road can be seen as an adventure tourism experience with cycling (the physical activity) through the natural environment of southern Finland and genuine interaction with local residents of the Uusimaa region traditional villages, participating to cultural events and learning about the area (cultural immersion). Adventure tourism falls into the same category as other traveling, it can be domestic or international, must include overnight stay but does not last more than a year (UNWTO, 2014).

Tourism is considered rural when tourism is located in rural areas and is functionally rural (based on small scale enterprises, traditional social structures and ways of living, agrarian economies and relatively natural settings) (Lane, 1994, quoted as Hall & al. 2009, 114). The Council of Europe (Thibal, 1988, as quoted in Hall et al. 2009, 116) lists cycling as one of the activities related to rural tourism. According to Hall & al. (2009, 110), the market for rural tourism is perceived as growing across Nordic countries and tourism, recreation and related services have been viewed as opportunity for replacing lost employment in traditional rural industries. Tourism is regarded as an effectual source of income and employment for rural communities (Hall & al. 2009, 110). Sharpley and Roberts in the other hand turn their concentration from the supply side to the rural visitors, *“the welfare effects of improved mental and physical well-being that are widely sought (if imagined) effects of assimilating the restorative and curative powers of nature.”*

According to Borg & al. (2002, 65) nature tourism is sustainable form of tourism using what the nature offers to create nature experiences. Hemmi (2005, 333) has a similar definition of nature tourism, according to him it is travelling that happens in a nature environment and its objective is to follow the sustainable principles and for example to keep the biodiversity in the area sustainable. The nature is the resource and the ingredient in nature tourism, and keeping the resource unchanged and inexhaustible makes nature tourism sustainable. (Hemmi, 2005, 333). According to Goodwin (1996, quoted as Hall & al. 2009: 134) nature based tourism uses the natural resources and areas in order to enjoy the natural environment and/or the wildlife. Nature setting provides a good setting for self-development and contemplation (Swarbrooke, beard, Leckie & Pomfret, 2003, 20). Cycling is one of the sustainable ways to move in nature.

2.6 Nature-based forms of tourism in Finland

Adventure tourism, rural tourism and nature tourism are three forms of tourism which rely dependent on natural environment combined with cultural, traditional, active or sustainable elements. These three form of tourism have been in spotlight in Finnish tourism field, for example Vuoristo (2002) stated over ten years ago that Finland's full tourism potential is not fully used because the activities and outdoor recreation have not reach their full demand. He continued that while the urban masses will increase the northern Europe will strengthen as the pressure comes for nature based trips. According to Kinnunen & Manninen (2014) in their research done for the University of Helsinki about nature's product in tourism, the urbanization of societies leads to growing appreciation for nature, peacefulness and quietness, but also services, activities and action is wanted as balancing elements. The pull-factors of nature tourism are clean environment and nature, beautiful sceneries, security and hospitable service. Finland can offer wilderness, quietness, space and peacefulness of the nature. These strengths act as pull-factors and is the base of nature tourism in Finland. (Borg & al. 2002, 65, 73). Nature has to be productized as easy and safe at the same time with environmental values come even more important (Kinnunen & Manninen 2014).

2.7 Cycling tourism

UNWTO (2014) stated in their latest study on Adventure tourism cycling tourism to be on the rise around the world, with road and mountain biking tours gathering an increasing number of adventure tourists. According to a study made by Finnish tourism board (2010) cycling was most popular by 60% among the activities presented at the study, when other activities were hiking, canoeing, fishing and animal and bird watching in nature. The most about 60% of the travellers preferred self-guided trips, either as self-guided ready-made packages or completely self-guided. A self-guided trail is according to Youell (2003: 211-212) is a route used by walkers, cyclists and/or car drivers, who follow a series of signs and/or a route map, to learn about places and people featured on the trail. Self-guided trails are a common type of interpretation, aiming to enhance a person's experience of the place they are visiting, Youell (2003: 211-212) continues. According to Dr. Richard Weston of the University of Central Lancaster, quoted in the UNWTO (2014) report on Adventure tourism

“Cycle tourism is more sustainable environmentally, socially and economically; being less reliant on air travel. Cycle tourism disperses visitors to areas that traditionally do not attract tourism and supports employment in local economies.”

There are different types of cycling presented according to Finnish tourism board (2009).

Excursion cycling is done with a regular bike, a road bike or a mountain bike. It could last one or multiple days and the aim is to get light exercise, getting to know attractions and enjoying the landscape. The trip is self-guided using specialised material including map and/or route description or the trip is guided. Road cycling is done with road bike in groups and the aim is to exercise. Mountain biking is done with mountain bike and it has different types of route options from rocky small paths to sandy downhill. Explore biking uses bike as transportation between attractions. Finnish tourism board (2009). According to Ritchie (1998) cycle tourism has a wide variety of individuals and potential market segments, such as short break or longer break holiday cyclists, who may be either touring a circuit or taking day trips from a main destination. Cycling is done in several parts of the world as way of transportation, but in this paper the term cycling tourist is used to call the leisure bikers or as the Finish tourism board (2009) would categories it as excursion cyclist, with the activity being one of the main interests instead of cycling as a method to move from one place to another. Brent W Ritchie (1998) is presenting cycle tourist based on two separate academic definitions done by Simonsen and Jorgenson (1996) and Bryan (1997) which divides the definition into cycle tourist and recreational tourists. A cycle tourist is according to Ritchie (1998), a person going away from home area for not less than 24 h or a night, the objective is vacation or a holiday, mode of traveling is cycling independently organized or as a part of commercial tour, in may include supporting transportation and any formal or informal accommodation. A recreational cyclist Ritchie (1998) defines as a person who has taken a part in any recreational cycling activity or excursion, which is not longer than 24 hours or one night outside their normal home surroundings and it is seen as a positive use of leisure time.

3 Cycling as customer based nature experience

The following subchapters discusses cycling as an experience from a point of view creating a product based on cycling customers, understanding them and recognising and developing the experience side of a cycling trip.

3.1 Customer based cycling product creation

When applying customer based product creation, the most important part is to start with the expected value of the customers. (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 25.) For a customer the whole travel experience encompasses from starting to plan it until the customer arrives home. It includes all the transactions done during the trip and it creates a service package which ultimately determines the quality of the whole travel experience. (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 12.) The cycling tourists are not a homogenous group with similar motivation factors to take a cycling holiday, which leads to different expectations for the holiday. As Ritchie (1998) suggested (presented in the previous chapter) that cycling tourists could be divided into subgroups based on their tour preferences, and different groups have different expectations.

When talking about customers and their needs, the customer can be seen as an individual with a unique set of characteristics who buys or uses leisure and tourism products and services (Youell, 2003, 63). Customers will have very different needs and will expect high levels of service from leisure and tourism producers. Leisure can help an individual fulfil his or her needs and contribute to sense of wellbeing, and the needs of a person will vary with age and family circumstances, which will affect demand for leisure, travel and tourism product and services (Youell, 2003, 164).

The viewpoint of the tourist is according to Räsänen (2014) built in many layers. It is important to open up the experiences to the customer and give tips where to take photos, breaks on the biking or how often it is good to eat. The possible customer is not only a wilderness expert but can also be a metropolitan from New York without previous experiences on Finnish nature (Räsänen, 2014). There are people with different ideas of wilderness and they all has to be taken in consideration when planning a route and signs. Important is to provide a FLOW experience to the customer so that he/she can be comfortable on his activities in nature but at the same time get experiences and learn. Challenging weather conditions can be a positive experience with the modern survival mentality and most of the modern tourists are demanding their holiday to have some content relating to

health or sports, the active life. (Räsänen, 2014) By using service blueprinting in the developing stages of the biking product in order to minimise simple errors for example making daily plans how long to cycle and where to stay the night.

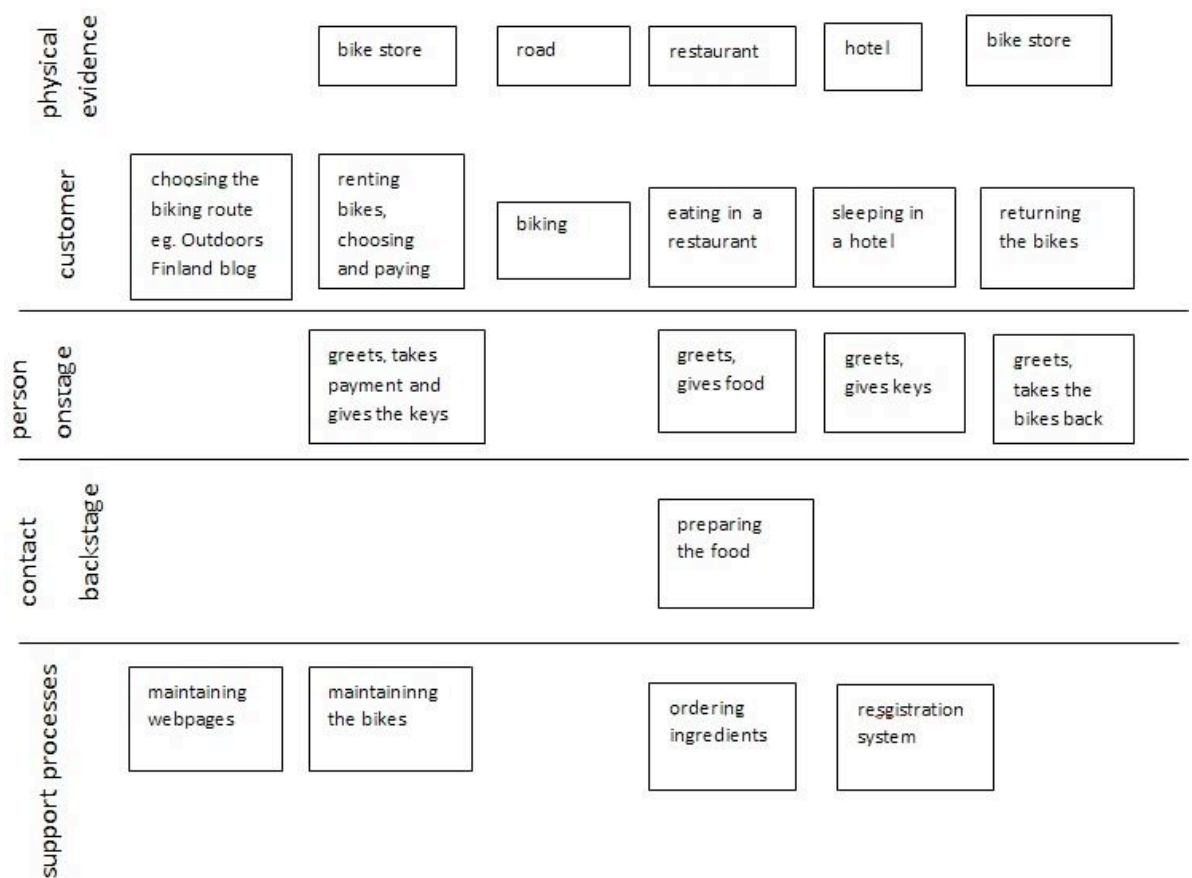


Figure 5. Blueprint, self-guided biking trip

3.2 Understanding cycling customers

Understanding customer's needs and motivations is the base of customer understanding. The basic needs from Maslow's hierarchy must be fulfilled during the trip but it doubly is the reason to travel. Putting oneself to the limits of the basic physiological needs could be an experience for some but complete failure for some. The sociological need give greatly motivation to travel for example feeling of belongingness and looking for company. (Borg et al. 2002, 129). From the marketing speech/route information it is important to give realistic picture of the product, therefore the customer will know what to expect and does not create too high expectations.

Trauer (2006) states that the modern tourists seek for personal experiences full of varying intimacies, intensities and complexities, the immaterial qualities and ambience which is

also seen on the study delivered by Finnish Tourism Board (2010) about nature tourist coming to Finland. Trauer refers towards Varley and Crowther (1998) in her article "Conceptualizing special interest tourism - frameworks for analysis" (2006), they stating that *"successfully providing the creative space for the consumer's aesthetic personal projects to unfold is surely the challenge facing the late-modern entrepreneur"*. So that the customer would not be searching for ready-made packages for themselves to follow, rather a platform to express their own interests for example in sports, culture or culinary field. We can question the term modern, because already in the year 1985 World Tourism Organization stated that the late-modern leisure society has differentiated consumption pattern related to interests and that outdoor activities has increased the importance among ecological problems, educational developments, aesthetic verdict and self/society-improvement (Trauer, 2006) which has the parts of the definition of nature tourism.

3.3 Cycling tourism product as an experience

As Tarssanen and Kylänen (1999) stated, the experience can be seen as six pieces of the pyramid building towards a holistic result. The story behind the cycling route should be present the whole way to strengthen the experience of the cycling tourist, the individuality and personality should be taken care of by making multiple options for different stop points on the way when biking. The stories about the cycling tour should be based on authentic materials, for example local culture. Nature gives a strong background for multi-sensory perception, when the cycling tourist is actually inside the picture, part of the landscape. The contrast of concentrating only on biking instead of following everyday routines is present when in longer biking trips and the interaction can be built with innovative stop points on the way. A cycling tourism product has potential to be a holistic experience.

For Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003) the experience production is based on the interaction between place, theme and tourist. Tourist's expectation moulds the outcome of the experience and the material of the experience has to be realistic to create a positive surrounding for positive experience production. Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003) sees experiences emerging from the interaction between touristic destinations/place of experience production and tourists - but they as well as Pine and Gilmore (1999) present destinations as theaters in which the actors are tourists who has to play their role according to the level of their immersion. Then again if experience is defined according to the European model as a holistic persona-centred concept (Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza, 2012, 11) the attention is focused to tourists' personal growth and self-development through immersion of the tourist experience. The cycling tourism product can be seen as a strong experience when all the levels of emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual experience are

reached (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Completing a challenge chosen by the tourist, the biking experience offers opportunities for personal growth as well.

The idea of succeeding a certain goal, aim for the cycling, gives the tourist an emotional context to the experience. During the biking trip in July, an emotional level was found in the minds of the team during the biking. Team had made a goal to complete 200 kilometres of biking during the project days, and this number was leading the thoughts on the way. When there was more hilly legs, the goal kept the body continuing. Emotional content can be easy to relate to nature experiences, because of strong emotional relationship of human and the wild nature. The physical level of the experience is the actual biking, the journey which is done not by machines, but the individual himself. The cycling tourist is ready to through all in and use the natural source of energy to move. Intellectual content the experience is added by directing the self-guided biking route to variety of educational spots such as cultural attractions, museums. The tourists can also educate themselves by involving to the local culture during their trip. The intellectual content of the experience could also be related to practical matters during the cycling experience. It is possible to learn in practice about sports and nutrition (how often body needs filling up to continue biking all day), bike maintenance (if need for repairing the bike occurs) and when cycling abroad, also language skills can be added to the list of intellectual capacity of biking trips. The spiritual content of nature tourism is relating to the spirit of the nature, be one with the natural environment.

3.4 Profiling the nature tourist

Customer profile is a set of characteristics of the customers who buy a particular product or service, such as age, gender, employment status and income level (Youell, 2003, 63). The following chapter search characteristics defining the nature tourist, looks into the attracting markets for Finland's nature tourism marketing efforts and presents the Finnish Tourism Board prioritized customer groups.

Mehmetoglu (2006) has studied nature tourism attraction visitors in Northern Norway to be able to get characteristics that define nature tourist. In Mehmetoglus (2006:59) study (66%) of the respondents represented the independent nature-based tourists, while (34%) were on package holiday trip. Mehmetoglu found out that in both segments female represented a slight majority of the tourists, and that almost half of the respondents in the independent group were under 50 years old, when in the package segment the vast majority (84%) were over 50 years old. When it comes to income and education, Mehmetoglus (2006, 59) found out the independents to have bigger annual household income, and that

77% of the independent tourists had an university degree when in the package segment 62% had a university degree (2006, 59).

According to a study conducted by Finnish Tourism Board (2012) in search for nature tourism/activity tourism markets in the Netherlands and UK, the most potential nature tourists' customers were families and person travelling alone. Cycling and hiking trips were targeted mostly to singles and couples, who do not have children. The customers were mostly 25-60 years-old. A bit more of the customers participating in activity tourism were men than women. Activity travellers were from all age groups and were middle or upper class people living in big cities. The majority of the growth of active tourists comes from the European market, where the soft adventure market has a growth of 27% in the year 2013 (ATTA, 2014 quoted as Finnish Tourism Board, 2014, 8). According to TTI (1999) study on adventure tourists, the respondents' average age was 40, and they had good monetary resources. Adventure travellers are often well educated, middle-aged, singles or couples which belong to upper class. (Finnish Tourism Board, 2014)

It is nature tourism to make only a couple of hours of hiking and then use the services for relaxing, food and beverages (Räsänen 2014). Räsänen (2014) states that the biking customer or the person wanting to rent a kayak is not necessarily sporty survivor, but can also be valuing comfort and for example buying an additional service for luggage transport to make the journey more pleasant. Räsänen (2014) also presented basic features of tourists; biking tourists are usually biking around 25 kilometres for day and often enjoys culture, sociality and good food. Personality and locality are important factors when a biking tourist chooses the place to stay or eat during their vacation (Räsänen, 2014).

The nature tourist coming to Finland according to a study conducted by Finnish Tourism Board (2010) is a biking, paddling and hiking traveller, who spends several days (2-7) to nature activities on their usually once a year holidays outside their own country. In the study Finland was mentioned also interesting thanks to its cultural possibilities and winter tourism. According to Räsänen (2014), the customers using the nature tourism packages (hiking, biking kayaking) has to be seen as a group of individuals, without making presumptions to be dealing with only wilderness experts with their backpack on. Mehmetoglu (2006:48) states that marketers and managers need to appreciate the diversity of nature-based tourism market, to be able to benefit more effectively from this quickly growing and competitive market.

The most important customer group for Finland's nature tourism is according to Finnish Tourism Board (2014) market segment definition, a group called Modern Humanists in Europe. The group shares values such as openness to different cultures and experiences, as well as concern about the future society and world (Hietasaari, 2012). According to Finnish Tourism Board (2012) the core motive for travelling for Modern Humanists is to be surrounded by a culture- or natural environment different from their own and preferably; get away from everyday life (escapism), learning and understanding the local way of living (education) and interaction through authentic experiences (Hietasaari, 2012). Curiosity to learn more can be offered to the target group by sharing information about the real, authentic Finnish events in their destination area. The natural environment should be exotic, but at the same time peaceful to give contrast to the target groups everyday life in busy cities (Finnish Tourism Board, 2012). The target group has been segmented into 3 sub-categories; Culture fans with special interest to local lifestyle, traditions and history; Active families who are ready to read and find out about the destinations best bits before the trip; and Modern Humanist couples, who are the average travellers inside the group and they expect a balance with nature activities and culture (Finnish Tourism Board, 2014). The active family travellers and couples are the most potential customer groups for nature tourism companies (Finnish Tourism Board, 2014). The big actions are focused to these two groups in Europe, in the following countries Germany, France, UK, Benelux, Austria, Switzerland, Italy and Spain (Finnish Tourism Board, 2014).

3.5 Target group marketing communications preferences

The nature tourists interviewed to the study conducted by Finnish Tourism Board (2010) were often interested on self-guided products; either based on recommendations or purely tailored by the customer herself. Based on the study, internet is the biggest channel where the visitors are searching for information and do the booking. Also recommendations from friends or family or social media are seen as important channels to search for material. (Finnish Tourism Board, 2010) Similar result can be seen from the UNWTO Global report Adventure tourism (2014, 15) which presents that adventure travellers prefer researching online or rely on their family/friends' recommendations when preparing trips. Research conducted by VF (2010) concerning potential visitors interested on nature activities, they found out that the most used channels for the target market when searching information for future trips, were internet, friends and family. ITB World travel trends report (2014) states that different types of social media channels such as review portals, blogs and forums have been used worldwide by travellers especially planning the trips, as well as UNWTO (2014) states that in order to arise awareness of a product online marketing is critical part of it. The organisation need to have the right softwares and platforms to attract

their target. ABTA (2014) continues with stating that through social media and blogs the local communities and environment can get tangible benefits as the customers demand authentic experiences. (ABTA, 2014)

The Outdoors Finland South project is focusing its communications heavily in the internet and mobile applications, making blogging a natural part of this marketing pallet. As the studies show, the targeted market looks for information from social networks and wants information published in a personal way, like asking from family or friends.

4 Execution of the project

The following subchapter will explain the process including both biking and the usage of the gathered material to build a promotional blog. Under the biking process the chapters of product, preparation and documentation will be covered. The description of the biking route from Helsinki to Hanko can be found as an attachment in this paper. Under blog we will present the stages of planning and writing the blog. The blog texts can be found as an attachment of this paper. This chapter begins with presenting the methodology.

4.1 Methodology

The chosen methodology for our project is committed observing, which is a qualitative method to collect information. In observation research the goal is to make a decision to observe and analyse from a certain point of view, in this case looking through the eyes of the customer. Observation is a method to collect information using multiple ways to document the findings, for example making notes, photographing or recording sound or moving picture. Observation is a subjective, personal way to gather material (Alasuutari, 2007, 102) and in this case full objectivity is not possible. The material collected through observation is being used as for creating a promotional tool for the use of the commissioner.

Research starting point cannot be without hypothesis, because of the commissioner has provided material and training on the where to concentrate when doing observation. According to Alasuutari (2007) during the observation, the research environment is examined not with automation or mechanical way, but in this case with special consideration on touristic matters such as signs or safety. In the beginning of the route observation the team already had a hypothesis on the customer group using the route in the end with the customer profiles presented in studies and during the training days. Expectations on results, and experience from tourism field affects the result of the observation as well. Qualitative analysis is according to Alasuutari (1999, 38-43) based on two phases; simplifying the observations and resolving the focused problem. Simplifying the observations were done by writing marketing material considering the route info (found in attachments), and the problem in this case was to find the components needed to build a holistic experience from the cycling tourism product.

4.2 Cycling

The cycling project started in the summer 2014 it with training, continued with preparations for the trip, the cycling trip itself collecting information through observing and the final

collection of the data. The product in focus in this paper is a self-guided biking trip in southern Finland in the area of Uusimaa. The trip is totally 163 kilometres, if the biking is made without detours. The biking team biked in total of 200 kilometres during 4 days. The route can be followed by using OF applications for smartphones (Appendix 1) or uploading a GPS route to portable GPS equipment.

The process for completing the biking tour for OF project started with two day training on planning outdoor activity routes. This course was held in May 2014 by Outdoors Finland project team. During the training we got the basic information about route planning and tried out the gear in practise. In the training the theory part included information about the industry, opportunities for business and how to take in account the companies already operating in the area of the route. During our training we also discussed about the visitors who would use the routes, how to open the beauty of the route to visitors by using the route planning for showing the best of the area, how to take for example the weather conditions in consideration to build a memorable experience for the visitor.

After the training the actual planning for the biking tour started. The planning was made based on the existing biking route in King's Road using the electronic and printed material existing. The electronic material consisted of the OF map/route application (Appendix 1) and another map application with overall roads in the area. The biking route was already analysed by a previous team in the project, so there was material available to plan out preciously. Some specific checkpoints were decided to visit along the route, the question at this point was which the places are worth to see on the way on the customer point of view. The route was transformed to take also accommodation companies as part of the new tour and testing out how a person without the willingness to sleep in a tent would experience the biking. Better use the service providers (accommodation and restaurants) on the way would have an impact on the local economy and the routes would provide better income to the municipalities and local people.

The budget was made and proposed to Outdoors Finland before the actual trip. The route was decided to complete in 4 days, biking distance ending up to be approximately 50 kilometres per day. The time of the trip was decided to be in July and because of the need of good weather for photography. The last call of jumping on the saddle decided to make when the weather forecast was reliable enough. Based on these conditions, the team started to bike from Helsinki the 17th of July 2014, ending up to Hanko the 20th of July 2014 and back to Helsinki with a train on the 21st of July 2014.

To document our findings the team used camera and a notebook. During the trip there was a thousand photos taken. The route was saved with the GPS router and maps and brochures of the area, a road map to Southern Finland, Outdoors Finland mobile application and a general mobile phone map application was used to collect additional information about the route for the customer. The material was collected to a computer and compared to the existing route info found in the internet.

4.3 Using the cycling trip to create a promotional blog

In the following chapter the observations made during the biking trip on July 2014, as well as the photos taken, are refined into a promotional marketing tool, a personally written blog with experience theories used as a base. Goal for Outdoors Finland South blog is done for publishing extra material in the official Outdoors Finland webpage. Writing the blog was done by using blogger.com platform and a blog was established to web address <http://helsinkihankocycling.blogspot.no>.

The blog is additional material to inspire, activate and entertain the potential customers visiting the webpage. The blog is not written by the OF South project group as an organizational blog, but as a personal view of the biking trip. The blog written to present the experience of the biking team in summer 2014 was chosen to aim to be an inspiring, activating and entertaining blog. The blog should be inspiring with strong visual content and it should get to the emotions of the reader. Activating blog is easy to read, rewarding to the reader and it should present the biking trip in a positive way. The blog is aimed to be entertaining, and to reach this goal the text should be written in light, enjoyable way and not write too many words in one post. An overview of available blogs considering cycling and travelling with bikes were done and as a result the following features were noted to use in process of writing the blog; the most popular of the biking blogs were written using strong visual content and photos of the trips were used to inspire the reader. Another notion was the use of emotion and sharing personal feelings of changes during the biking trips. Good example is a blog written in the form of a discussion between the biker and his bike.

As discussed earlier, the persona-centered definition of experience focuses on delivering a setting for the visitor, guest or experiencer to find room for own self development. Blog is a personal way to communicate, the blog written for OF project was chose to write in the words of one experiencer doing this biking route. Following this idea the blog gives the reader a possibility to relate on growth and observations of another individual still not giving right or wrong answers how to do the biking. The texts gives an insight to the options

what an individual can see and feel during cycling. The biking trip from Helsinki to Hanko has been considered as a nature tourism product and objective experience economy theories were used as the guideline when planning the blog posts, so the trip was reflected from four viewpoints;

- Introduction which gives information about the writers and the available material on the route
- Post 1 considering biking trip and the possible entertainment elements on the way
- Post 2 considering education element, seen as history and local culture on the route from Helsinki to Hanko
- Post 3 considering esthetic element of the biking route, the beautiful nature and the views on the way
- Post 4 considering the escapist element of the biking, the concept of exceeding your physical and mental potential when taking a longer biking trip with an exact goal and losing yourself on the way

The overall blog was to be an inspiring source of information with strong visual content and emotional content to the reader. The photos and the style of writing the blog met the conditions set. Another goal was to write an activating blog, meaning it to be easy to read, rewarding to the reader and it should present the biking trip in a positive way. Even if the text gives some straight forward information of the ups and downs during the biking, the overall tone of the blog is positive. The blog texts are written with short chapters and consultation from a native speaker of English has been used to get the text enjoyable to read. The last goal for the blog was to make it entertaining, and to reach this goal the text should be written in light, enjoyable way and not write too many words in one post. The criteria chose to be as the aim for the blog is not countable, so in the future the success of the blog could be measured in a countable way, for example number of visits or engagements to the texts.

Introduction page was written to give basic info about the writers and the project as well as links to the information portals. For post 1, a goal was set to present biking trip and the possible entertainment elements on the way. In the text, different summer festivals were presented as well as the names of the summer theatre organizations. As the route is in Uusimaa region, several summer festivals are organized during summer months and information of these festivals were easy to find from the internet and add to the blog. Most of the culture events are still in progress so deeper description of the shows of the summer theatres was impossible to do. The goal for post 2 was to present an educational element, information about history and local culture on the biking route in the text. The focus

was decided to keep on the medieval history, with the theme of cycling to medieval times. Information about historical use of the Kings Road was used as a theme on this blog text. A recommendation to use fairy-tales, such as Sleeping Beauty was made to attract also younger cyclists. The theme for post 3 was to present the esthetic element of the biking route, the beautiful nature and the views on the way. This was decided to be done with different places to have a break, and the exact location recommendations of beautiful places were given. The text was supported by the chosen photos of beautiful places on the way. Post 4, considering the escapist element of the biking, was written in the most personal tone and the goal of this text was to raise emotions of exceeding physical and mental potential when taking a longer biking trip. The personal journey of losing yourself on the way and finding yourself again as a different person was the theme of this entry.

5 Discussion

The thesis process was long and full of setbacks and challenges which the team overcame with perseverance and patience. The project was started already in the summer of 2014, and continuing until the spring of 2015. The original goal of the thesis changed, but the main core elements stayed the same; the paper was in search of the core component of a nature experience.

5.1 Own evaluation

The practical part of the thesis, the biking trip during July 2014, followed the original time frame and plan. The outcome of the practical part was a big amount of photos and written material, which came to use in the end for the creating of the blog. The observations made during the cycling trip cannot be seen as a pure, subjective view of the existing product, because the focus was concentrated to find an answer to our question. The observation material was affected by the commissioners wishes on the project, as well as the background on tourism from the biking team. Theoretical background was collected from both English and Finnish literature, and internet sources for latest articles. Research team was not short on resources, as there were the materials of two Universities and internet at use. The problematic part was to choose the right combination of sources for the study question. The writing process started right after the practical part, but challenges relating to change of focus in the thesis were met, and communication had to be planned well as researchers were living in different countries. During the writing process, online internet meetings were held at regular intervals from November to March.

During the process the research team took timeouts and had to rethink about the plan and goals for the work. This process taught perseverance, systematic planning and how to adjust plans during the process due to changes in the overall goals of the project. Despite of challenges relating to the project objectives, during the 10 months process inspiration and enthusiasm to the subjects kept the researchers in progress towards the goal. In future the researchers will have a strong knowledge regarding nature tourism with its implications, customer based product development, customer understanding, and experience theory discussions gathered during the project. As the created outcome of the project was a promotional blog, skills on digital marketing were also strengthened.

5.2 Conclusion

In search of the components of building a holistic nature based experience of biking trip, multiple sources and viewpoints were reviewed. During the theoretical research the same keywords started to appear from the theories of nature tourism, experience, customer based product development and customer understanding theories. The trends of learning and enrichment travel, responsible tourism, health consciousness, and unpredictableness in tourism experiences (Hudson 2008) as the starting point, the orientation towards adventure tourism, rural tourism and nature tourism for restorative and curative powers of nature (Sharpley & Roberts) is an important development direction in tourism. The wilderness, quietness, space and peacefulness of the nature in Finland provides a good setting for self-development and contemplation (Swarbrooke, &al. 2003, 20), which is according to the European experience model (Goytia & De La Rica Aspiunza, 2012) the platform that modern tourists seek when looking for transformative experiences. Also according to Trauer (2006), the tourist seeks for improvement of self, as well as Tarssanen (1999) presenting the experience triangle for creating holistic experiences that leads to transformative experiences. The knowledge of the tourist individual needs and understanding the motives of the customers stay still as part of creating the platform for the customer to find the transformative experience.

When looking for objective list about the components of a holistic experience, Pine and Gilmore (1999) divide between the realms of experience as; entertainment experience, educational experience, escapist experience and esthetic experience still stay as the core components in building experiences, but the aim for life changing experiences and tourists' personal growth and self-development has to be reached through immersion of the tourist experience. Tarssanen (1999) present the experience creating triangle with the following building blocks to create a holistic transformative experience; Authenticity, Story, Interaction, Multi-sensory perception, Individuality, and Contrast.

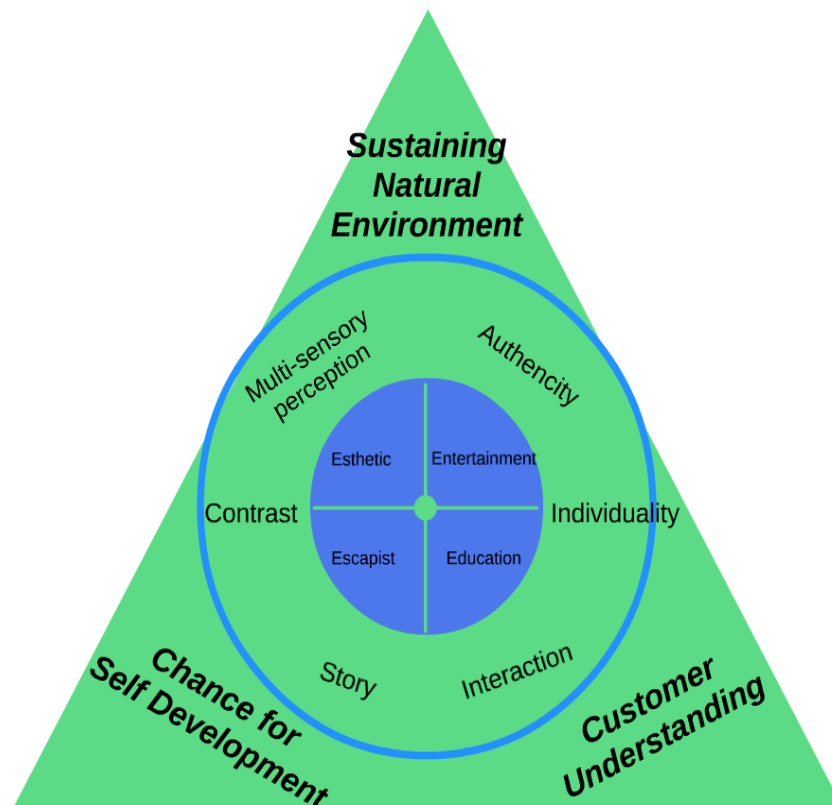


Figure 4, Holistic nature experience triangle

According to the findings, a model is created (figure 4) to present the components needed for nature tourism experience being a holistic experience. In the center of the model, there can be found the four basic elements of experience economy by Pine and Gilmore, the circle in the middle includes the building blocks of experience by Tarssanen and the outer side of the triangle there are the three elements demanded as the base for the experience; nature environment, customer understanding and the chance of self-development. The holistic natural experience is found when all these components are brought to the nature experience creation process, placing the created holistic experience in the middle of the model.

The promotional material created for Outdoors Finland was conducted in the form of experience blog with the aim to communicate in inspiring, activating and entertaining ways. The blog texts followed the four themes from the experience model by Pine and Gilmore (1999), and the aims to build an inspiring, activating and entertaining blog were met. In the future the blog should be evaluated according to engagements or visit to the page.

Future research could take goal of inspecting into the mind of the customer wanting transformative experiences; what kind of goals do the customer want for self-development? Also the overall market of experience customers could be studied to find out how big amount of them are still seeing the experiences from the traditional point of view and how big is the group of people seeking for transformative experiences. In the future also further research could be done using the components presented above, with test groups and test products in able to get more academical background for this compilation of theories.

According to UNWTO (2014) tourism is one of the industries growing on fast pace and specially nature based adventure tourism is one of the most rapidly growing categories inside tourism. Countries in different stage of economic development are considering nature based tourism fields; adventure tourism, rural tourism and nature tourism, as prioritized fields of industry because of their value through ecological, cultural and economic viewpoints (UNWTO 2014). Adding experience theory, customer understanding focus, and the possibility to fulfil the needs of individual customers self-development to the service design and at the same time taking care of the environment sustainability, the nature experience provider in Finland will continue to attract futures demanding customers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Pictures from the Outdoors Finland smartphone application and webpage

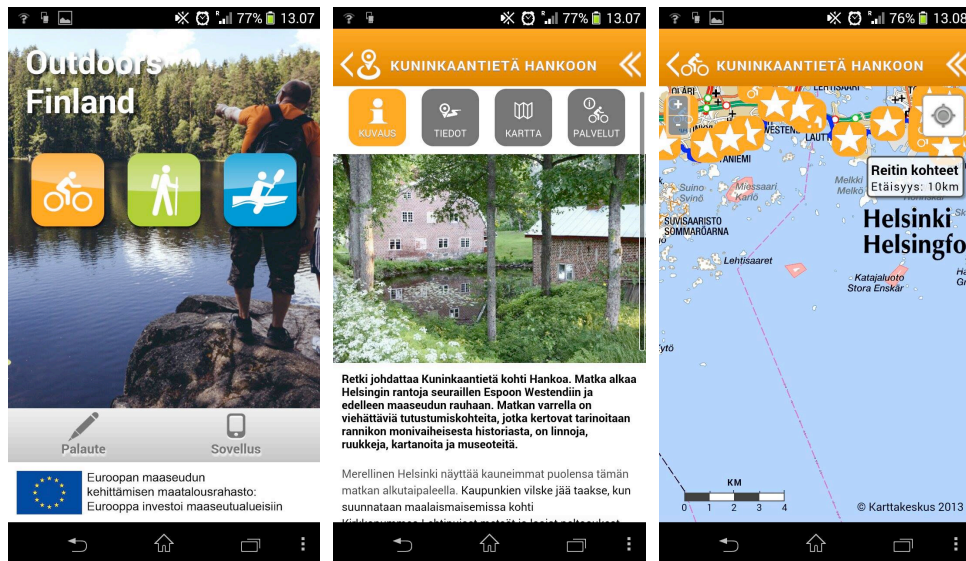
Appendix 2. Description of the route

Appendix 3. Marketing material written based on the observation

Appendix 4. Presenting” Our 200 kilometers” blog

- Introduction
- Post 1
- Post 2
- Post 3
- Post 4

Appendix 1. OF smartphone application and webpage



[Publications](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Contact](#) |

— Welcome to Southern Finland's outdoor portal

Outdoors Finland – Outdoor activities in Southern Finland

Outdoors Finland
 Tykkää Sinä tykkäät tästä

#outdoorsfinland

[Home](#) | [Cycling](#) | [Hiking](#) | [Canoeing](#) | [Maps and guides](#) | [Social Media](#)

KING'S ROAD TO HANKO, 163 KM

[SEE ROUTE MAP](#)

163 km

Easy

Sights

- Fagervik Iron Works area
- Raaseborg Castle ruins
- Charming Tammisaari town by the sea
- Hanko, a summer paradise by the sea

Maps & guides

- [Outdoors Finland mobile app \(in Finnish only\)](#)
- [Outdoor GT map of Southern Finland](#)
- [Bicycle tour guide – west from Helsinki](#)

Accommodation

- [Kirkkonummi](#)
- [Majvik](#)
- [Siikaranta](#)
- [Hvitvort](#)
- [Inkoo/Degerby](#)
- [www.hrtigris.fi](#)
- [Kupariniemi](#)
- [Vastankvarn gård](#)
- [Westerby gård](#)
- [Mangs farm](#)

Links

- [Visit Raaseborg](#)
- [Hanko](#)

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

The seaside of Helsinki shows its best in the beginning of the tour. Route follows the seashore through Kaivopuisto park and Lauttasaari island towards Espoo's finest residential areas, where beautiful houses and yards follow one after another. Lively cities are left behind when continuing towards Kirkkonummi in countryside landscape. Forests and vast fields follow each other on this hilly section. There are also rock

Appendix 2. Description of the route

The first day of the biking started early from Helsinki center and continued until the team reached the first accommodation in Nuuksio nature park. During the first day the team faced some issues with technical equipment and the gps trace was partly missing in the end of the day. Day two started from Nuuksio's hilly landscapes and it took several hours to get back to the official route in Kirkkonummi. During the second day the team experienced one lesson about weather conditions; sunny weather is not the best for biking long distance routes. The day was tough because of the heat. In the end the team had to stop several times for swimming. The day ended in Inkoo.

The third day's leg was to bike from Inkoo to Ekenäs, passing beautiful sights such as Raseborg castle and enjoying the historical mansions and nature along the Kings Road. In the Tammisaari centrum we spend the night in a hotel. The last biking day took the team from Tammisaari to Hanko with weather changing from sunny to unstable weather and the team had to run away from a thunderstorm. This day had some aspects of survival instinct raising because of the threatening change on the weather. The feeling of lightning hitting next to you and surrounded by only forest and fields got our adrenaline flowing and the last 20 kilometres passed in full speed. During the day in Hanko the team did bike sight-seeing and celebrated the accomplishment. The next day the team took a train back to the capital area.

Appendix 3 Marketing material written based on the observation

The route is possible to start from the beautiful maritimal Helsinki, where well maintained bike lanes follow the sealine. During the beginning of the trip, the route passes some of the sights of Helsinki area, such as Suomenlinna Sea Fortress and Kaivopuisto Park. The trip continues through pittoresque districts and passes small harbour when the route weaves along the coastline in Helsinki and Espoo. In the metropolitan area there are several places for having a break; cafés, harbour restaurants and small beaches for swimming. After passing the Espoo bay (Espoonlahti) it is possible to continue the route towards Nuuksio nature park or straight to the idyllic countryside surroundings of Kirkkonummi.

From Kirkkonummi onwards the route follows the historic Kings Road through fields and groves. The road has lovely hilly profile and biking along this road you get to enjoy its peaceful curves through diverse landscapes. In the area of Kirkkonummi the road passes attractive places for picnic, for example the Kings Road museum bridge with calm river view.

When getting closer to the Inkoo area, the route approaches the sealine. The charming Inkoo center offers interesting places to see, like second hand/vintage shops, handicraft shops and a harbour café next to the sea.

There are cosy villages in the municipality of Raseborg, for example Snappertuna with the noble castle of Raseborg. Biking in this area flows nicely thanks to pleasantful road and there is time for stop and enjoy the landscapes with forest and fields.

Ekenäs is a suitable sized, easy-going city to explore with a bike. The beaches of Ekenäs are popular among boaters and outdoor people, and the city offers also possibilities for eating out or shopping. In Ekenäs, it is possible to spend the night in a local hotel or using the services in the popular camping area next to the city center.

The distance between Ekenäs and city of Hanko is approximately 35 kilometres and the last part of the trip runs in plain terrain following the old highway. When the route approaches Hanko, the route is well marked and the biking road is in good condition. The city of Hanko has invested on biking and there is a sightseeing route of 19 kilometres that circles around the city beaches. The route takes you to see the long sandy beaches

in the eastern part of Hanko as well as the fine wooden villas along the beach boulevards. In the western side of the Hanko cape you will pass the camping area of and the beaches for kitesurfers. During the summer 2014 the city of Hanko opened a new area for public in the southern part of Hanko peninsula. This cultural nature route reaches out to the most southern point of the Finnish continent where the bedrock of Finland rushes to Baltic sea.

Appendix 4. The texts from "Our 200 kilometers" blog

(<http://helsinkihankocycling.blogspot.no>)

Introduction page

Our 200 kilometers Helsinki - Hanko Cycling

Classic Flipcard Magazine Mosaic Sidebar Snapshot Timeslide

Welcome to our blog!

See and Feel - Events in ...

Pedaling our way to medi...

"It is good to have an en...

Is it time to have a break?

Welcome to our blog!

What you can see, feel, taste and learn during 4 days of pedaling in southern Finland? What happens on the road, which events are worth visiting? What kind of thoughts does the slow method of travel, cycling bring to you when the nature is ruling the pace?

The blog gives some of our thoughts on cycling and travelling based on Helsinki - Hanko biking trip in the summer 2014. The trip is in total of 163 kilometers but for us it took 200 kilometers with all the detours we chose to do on the way. The biking was done by using the Outdoors Finland route application available from App Store. The route info can be found also from OutdoorsFinland website; [Kings Road to Hanko - Route description](#)

We as the writers of this blog are two

Outdoors Finland

Palaute Sovellus

Euroopan maaseudun kehittämisen maatalousrahasto:

What you can see, feel, taste and learn during 4 days of pedaling in southern Finland? What happens on the road, which events are worth visiting? What kind of thoughts does the slow method of travel, cycling bring to you when the nature is ruling the pace?

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We hope you enjoy the ride!

Post 1 considering biking trip and the possible entertainment elements on the way

Our 200 kilometers Helsinki - Hanko Cycling

Classic Flipcard Magazine Mosaic **Sidebar** Snapshot Timeslide


Welcome to our blog!

See and Feel - Events in ...

Pedaling our way to medi...

"It is good to have an en...

Is it time to have a break?



The Finnish society works of two seasons; enjoying the warm summer months and the rest of the year waiting for the summer to come.

Festivals are great because you get to just walk around the corner and see a new band that

Our 200 kilometers Helsinki - Hanko Cycling

Classic Flipcard Magazine Mosaic **Sidebar** Snapshot Timeslide


Welcome to our blog!

See and Feel - Events in ...

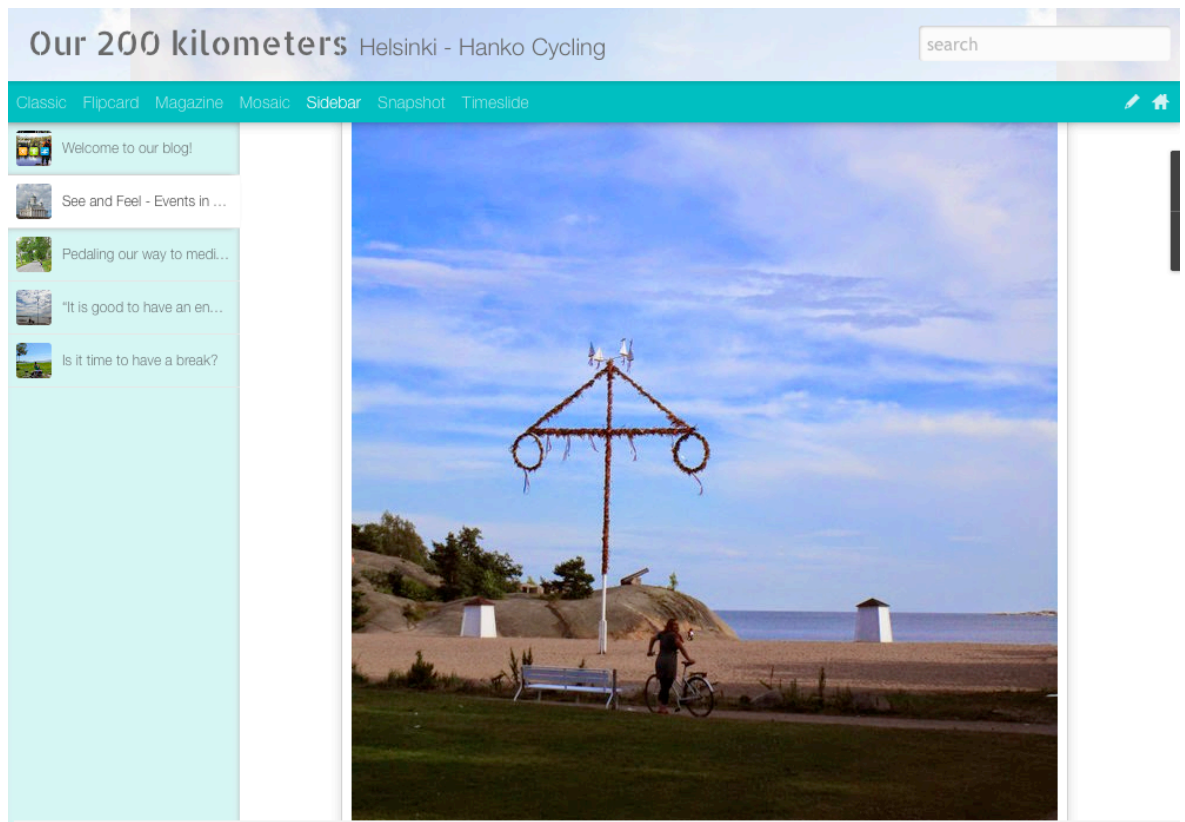
Pedaling our way to medi...

"It is good to have an en...

Is it time to have a break?



Dynamic Views template. Powered by [Blogger](#).



The Finnish society works of two seasons; enjoying the warm summer months and the rest of the year waiting for the summer to come.

Festivals are great because you get to just walk around the corner and see a new band that you've heard but not had the chance to check out.

- Johnny Marr

The southern Finland blossoms during the summer months and the best thing about Finnish summer is the various summer festivals organized around the country. Here are some recommendations for summer festivals to be combined with the biking trip. April Jazz (April 21st - 26th) in Espoo is the biggest jazz festival in the metropolitan area. During April Jazz you can meet the biggest domestic and international names of rhythm, and get to know the rising stars. Festivals more focusing on rock and metal artists are Kivenlahti Rock (June 5th - 6th) in Espoo and Tuska Open Air Metal Festival held June 26th - 28th in Helsinki. There are smaller events in the municipalities along the biking route, like Sammon taontamusic evening taking its name from the mythological epic book of Kalevala held July 4th in Sammatti village in Lohja.

The summer city of Hanko wakes up with spring and acts as a venue of events during the busy summer months. The biggest sailing event organized in Hanko is the traditional Hanko Regatta (July 3rd - 5th), Sea Kayaks gather up to Hanko in August 21st - 23rd and in the end of August there is a full weekend of events during the Hanko days from the 28th to 30th of August.

For more popular and electronic music lovers, there are options for live festivals in the metropolitan area. Summer Sound Festival from July 24th to 26th or Weekend Festival August 7th - 8th organized in Helsinki. Another interesting Flow Festival (August 14th - 16th in Helsinki) brings a selection of latest international stars with edge or true international classics. This summer they have published that their program will include at least Grammy winner Beck (USA), electronic guru Major Lazer (USA) and pop sensation Florence + The Machine (GBR).

If your taste of entertainment is more towards culture or theatre, you can build a cultural biking experience by participating on art and theatre festival Le petit Festival goes Hanko organized from August 28th to 30th in Hanko or visiting summertime shows around the area:

Espoo / Finns Sommartheater

Espoo / Teatteri Hyökyvuori

Hanko / Hangon Teatteri

Hanko / Hangon Teatteritreffit

Helsinki / Helsingin Teatteri

Helsinki / Kumpulan Metsäteatteri

Helsinki / Metropolitan Kesäteatteri

Helsinki / Ryhmäteatteri

Helsinki / Teatteri Tuli

Helsinki / Ylioppilasteatteri

Kirkkonummi / Masalan Nuorisoteatteri

Kirkkonummi / Veikkolan Kartanoteatteri

Raasepori / Raaseborgs Sommartheater

Siuntio / Siuntion Teatteriyhdistys

Welcome to See and Feel the summer in Southern Finland!

Post 2 considering education element, seen as history and local culture on the route from Helsinki to Hanko.

Our 200 kilometers Helsinki - Hanko Cycling

Classic Flipcard Magazine Mosaic **Sidebar** Snapshot Timeslide

Welcome to our blog!

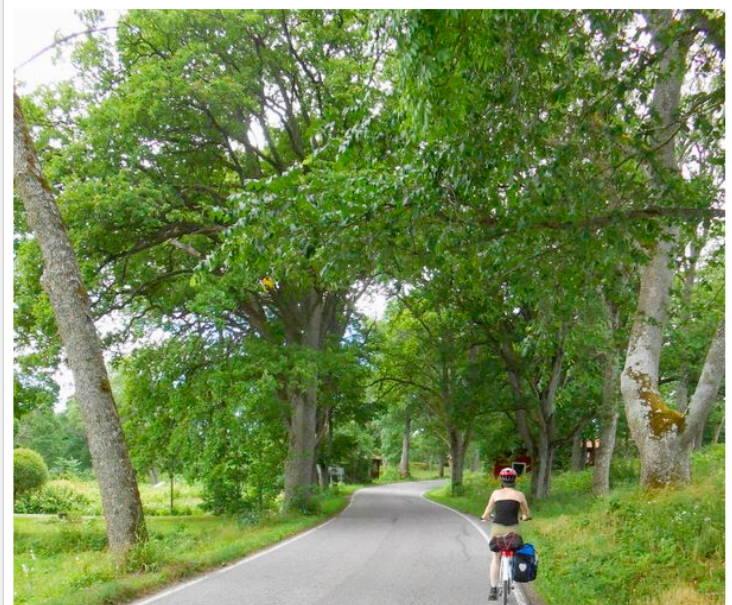
See and Feel - Events in ...

Pedaling our way to medi...

"It is good to have an en...

Is it time to have a break?

Pedaling our way to medieval times



Our 200 kilometers Helsinki - Hanko Cycling

Classic Flipcard Magazine Mosaic **Sidebar** Snapshot Timeslide

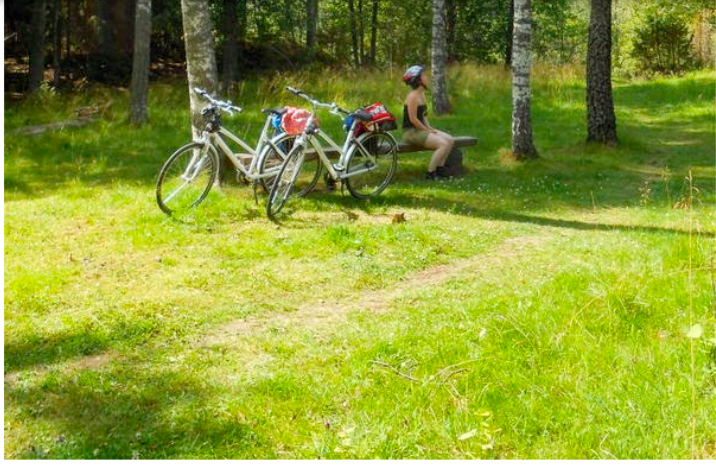
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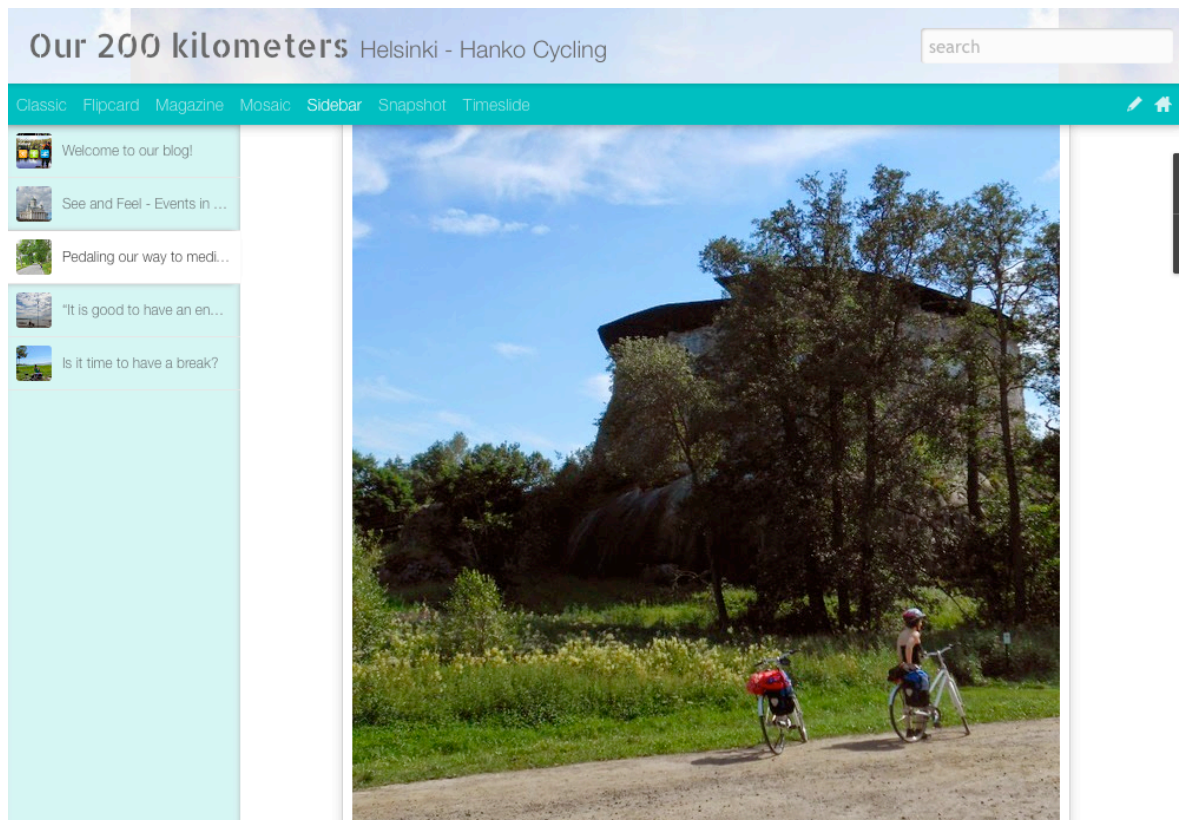
"It is good to have an en...

Is it time to have a break?



At this point you can think of me as a person with a lot of imagination and having a tendency get lost in my own thoughts. And you might be right. But even if you would not usually spend your time daydreaming, when the road turns down to [Raasepori castle](#), you can not help the feeling like walking into the world of the brave and noble. It is easy to deepen the experience of time traveling by spending a break next to some medieval locations and read more information about the life 700 years ago. You can also remind

Dynamic Views template. Powered by [Blogger](#).



The Kings Road is an old post route starting from Bergen, passing Oslo, Stockholm, Marienhamn and Turku to Southern Finland and all the way to Saint Petersburg. The route was already being used during in the 1300's, but the most important period of traffic in this road was in the 1700's, when the road connected Finland's most important administrative centers, Turku and Viipuri. The road visits all the most important villages and castles of the period, places with long history and tradition. The significance of the Kings Road decreased when inventions like steamships, telegraph and railway became a faster and cheaper method to deliver letters and goods.

Finnish museum authority has published historical road rules from the Swedish era, the time when the road was mostly used by horsemen and carriage. At this time Finland had left-side traffic, which could be a significant rule for safety, as the sword was carried on the right hand side. Today Finland is making use of right-side traffic, so I wouldn't recommend to follow this medieval advice present day. Some of the rules, on the other hand, are still applicable when travelling with a bike in present time. So here are the rules of the Kings Road:

- 1. Do not ride with a tired horse, change the horse in the next inn - Horse or cyclist, plan day distances according to your endurance*
- 2. Do not ride or drive drunk - Safety first!*

3. *Too little boy can not act as a driver - Kids can participate on biking trips but make sure they are old enough*
4. *Do not scream, swear or make noise on the road - Be a respectful cyclist and bare in mind that you are not the only one using the road*

When we were pedaling under the green leaves of the noble lindens and oaks with sun shining and the route following the curves of the medieval Kings Road, my thoughts escaped to the times when there were knights and maidens traveling along this road. What did they think of this tranquil vale and this gently splashing stream running under a bridge built with granite boulders? At this point you can think of me as a person with a lot of imagination and having a tendency get lost in my own thoughts. And you might be right. But even if you would not usually spend your time daydreaming, when the road turns down to Raasepori castle, you can not help the feeling like walking into the world of the brave and noble. It is easy to deepen the experience of time traveling by spending a break next to some medieval locations and read more information about the life 700 years ago. You can also remind yourself about childhood stories written in the medieval times, like Sleeping Beauty in the Woods.

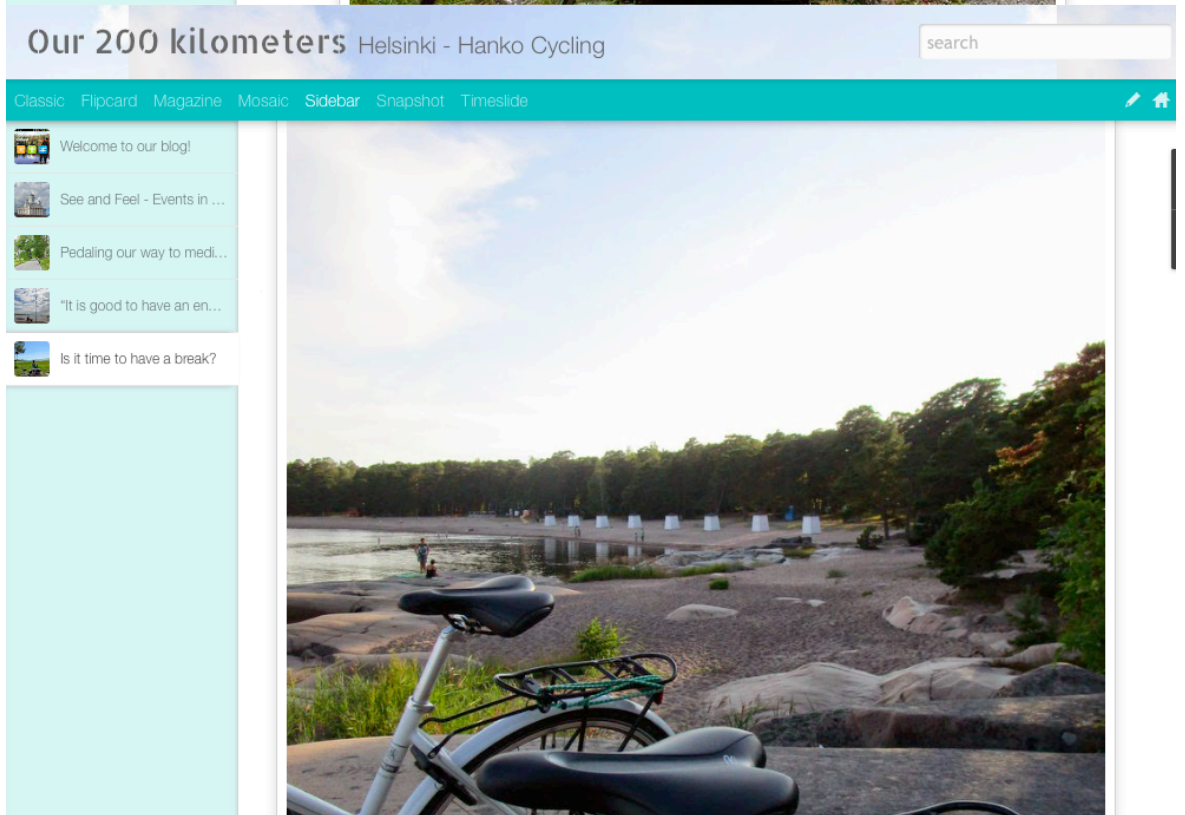
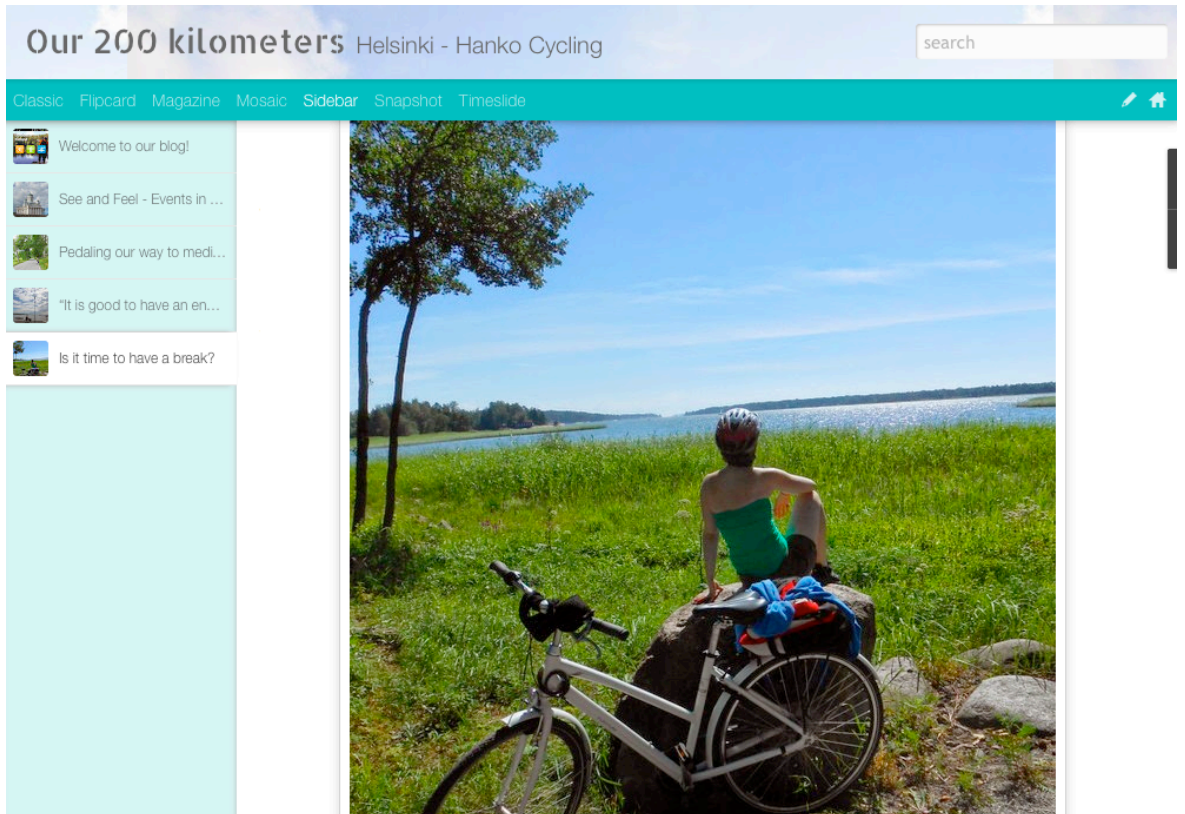
Oh, you darlings! This is the happiest day of my life! Everything's so wonderful!

-Princess Aurora

After enjoying the tales of the past, we jumped on our humble steeds (running with two rubber wheels) and continued the journey.

References: Museovirasto Tiehallinto Raaseporin kunnat sivut

Post 3 considering esthetic element of the biking route, the beautiful nature and the views on the way

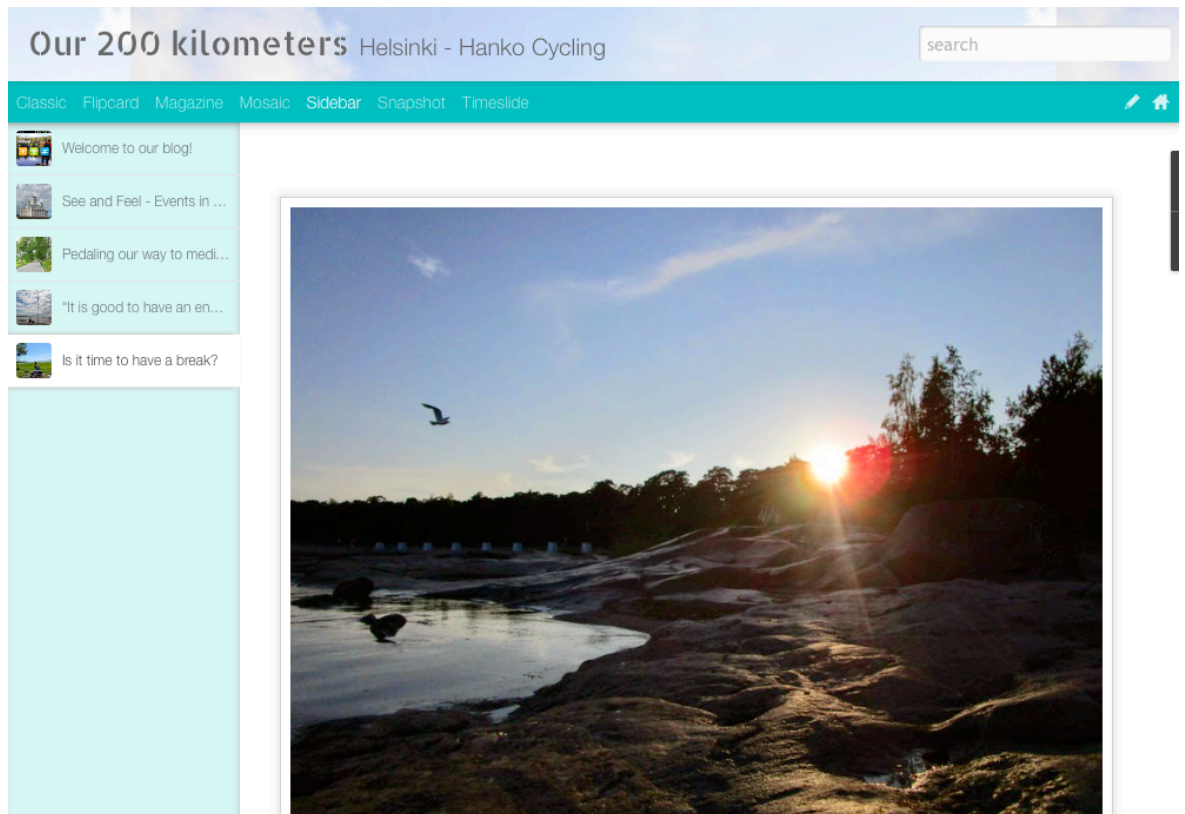


- Welcome to our blog!
- See and Feel - Events in ...
- Pedaling our way to medi...
- "It is good to have an en...
- Is it time to have a break?



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What are the most important reasons for a person to start a long biking trip? Well there can be many reasons, like challenging your physics, being alone with nature, meeting other cyclists, choosing ecological transportation on your holiday or choosing not to be dependable on timetables. These are all valid arguments. Why should we take a bike and see how long it takes before your behind starts to cry for a break? It's because of the break! Ice cream break, photographing break, swimming break, break for drinking, break for eating, break because the views are so splendid and break because the moment is so magical that you just have to stop and breath. What would biking be without having breaks?

"Sometimes it's worth lingering on the journey for a while before getting to the destination."

— Richelle Mead, The Indigo Spell

During our 200 kilometers, we enjoyed some good breaks and now we want to reveal some of our top notch break locations on the way.

There are several small beaches and viewpoints on the way, especially in the coastline of Espoo; Svinö beach, Mellsten beach to name a few. The small beaches offer surroundings for swimming- and/or picnicking- breaks with beautiful landscapes to the sea. During a hot day it is easy to have your swimming suit under your biking shorts and take stop whenever you locate a nice beach that is open for everyone.

Nice lake views can be found by stopping for picnic on a bridge, close to the village of Broända in Siuntio or stopping for a swim in the municipality of Inkoo, on a rocky beach called Svarträsket.

Our favourite small beach was found after city of Tammisaari, a peaceful beach next to Dagmars Spring. The place is a little hidden gem, the path to the beach goes through a forest, but in the end, the view is well worth walking.

In Fagervik, we found a wonderful landscape over a big lake and enjoyed an afternoon snack while the calm water was glistening in the sun light. The area was surrounded by traditional wooden houses from past decades. Special views also follows some kilometers after Fagervik, when you can choose the detour to castle of Raasepori.

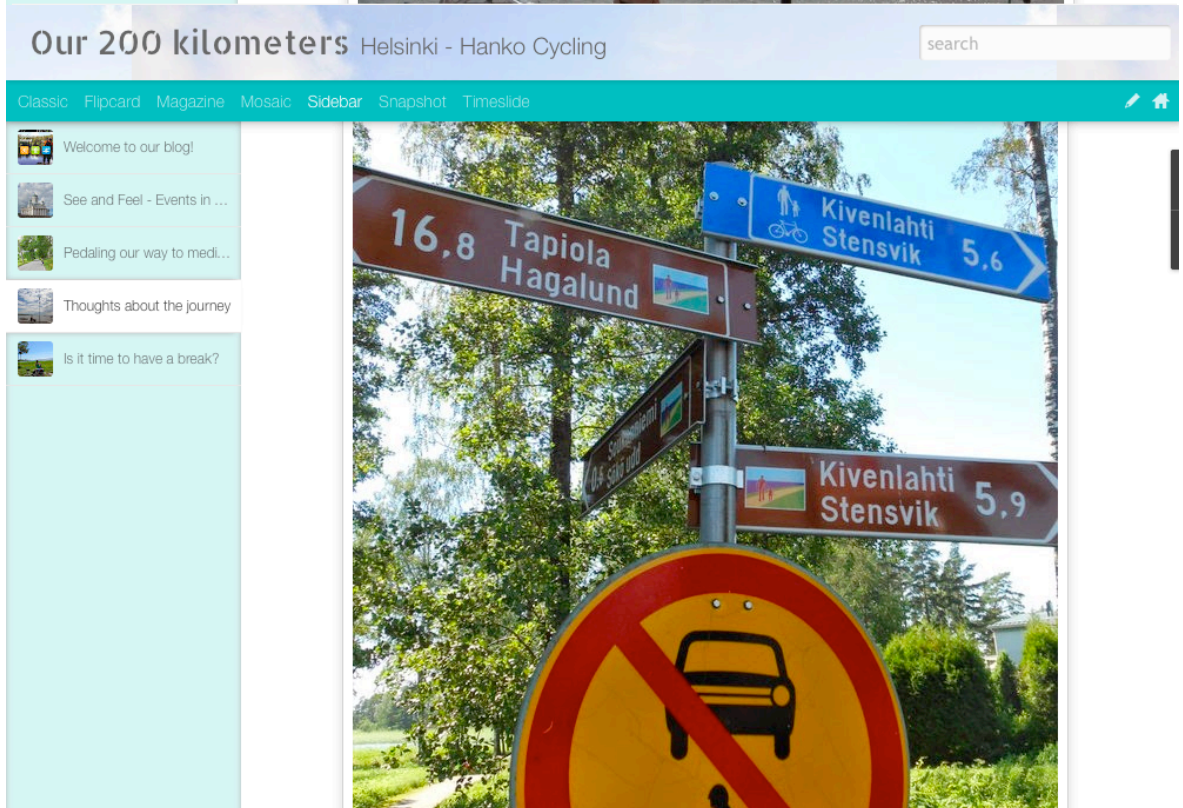
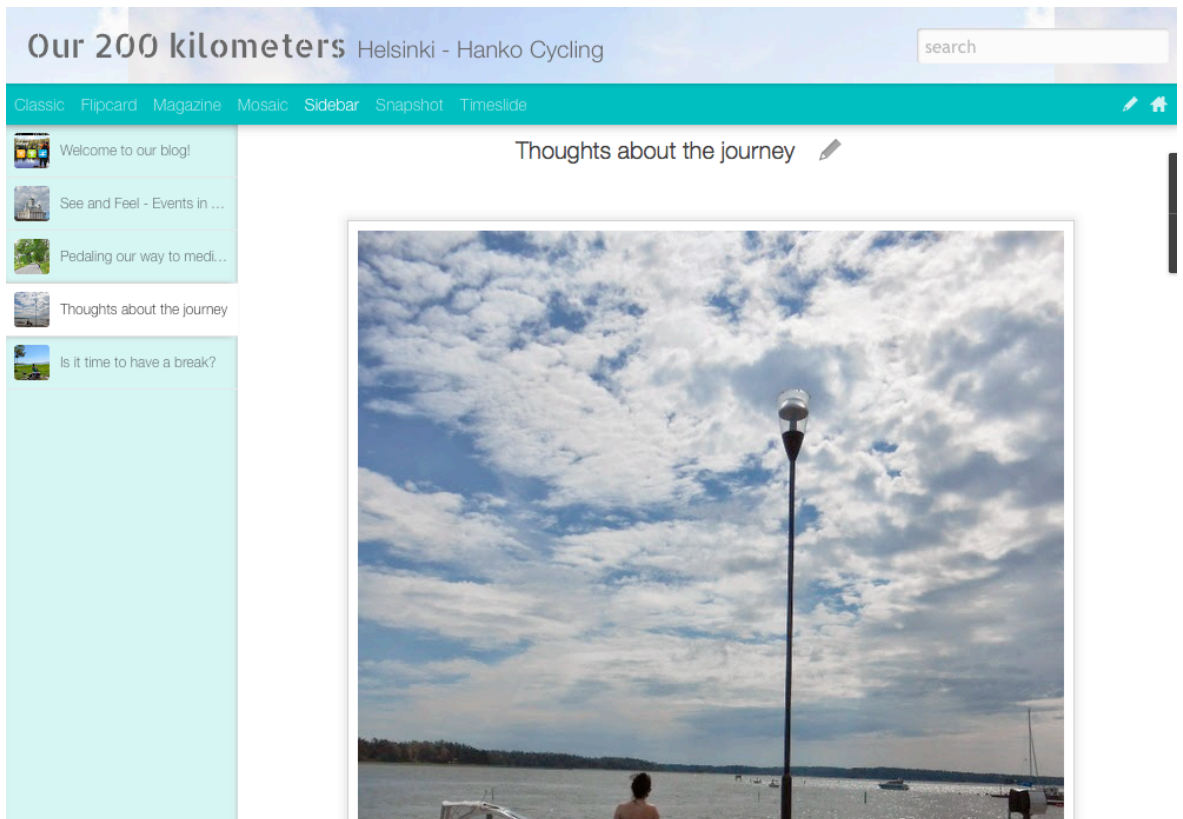
The city of Tammisaari is a picturesque easy-going maritime city and this is where our next recommendation for having a break with amazing view can be found. The beaches and harbors of Tammisaari are popular among boaters and outdoor people and the city also offers possibilities for eating out or shopping. On the harbor area you will find detailed wooden architecture from past centuries. The colors of the villas are often pastel shades and when you see the sun going down on the harbor, you no longer wonder where the inspiration for the colors of the houses came from.

The last day of our biking trip we started to get closer to Hanko. My behind felt like we should take a break soon, but we decided to continue. Finland's southernmost city was showing off with its majestic granite rocks, sandy beaches and islands along the coast. The closer we got to the city, the more beautiful the houses were and the beach on our right side stretched towards our goal. We were so close to the moment that the trip would come to end that I could feel my legs pedaling faster. We made it.

And just like nature would know that we had a special moment, it gave out soft sunlight to decorate the beaches with soft light and the sea was calm. We parked our bikes and sat down for a break. We didn't talk that much, I felt like I was part of the picture. That was my best break.

What would be your perfect break? Try it out this summer.


Post 4 considering the escapist element of the biking, the concept of exceeding your physical and mental potential when taking a longer biking trip with an exact goal and losing yourself on the way.



Our 200 kilometers Helsinki - Hanko Cycling

Classic Flipcard Magazine Mosaic Sidebar Snapshot Timeslide


- Welcome to our blog!
- See and Feel - Events in ...
- Pedaling our way to medi...
- Thoughts about the journey
- Is it time to have a break?



Our 200 kilometers Helsinki - Hanko Cycling

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“It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.”

— Ernest Hemingway

200 kilometres of biking in 4 days? No way, I can not do it! I'm not fit enough, my aerobic condition is bad and my behind will not like sitting on a bike bench with those distances. I'm not going to survive this!

In summer 2014, this is what I found myself thinking just days before our first long biking trip from Helsinki to Hanko. We had planned the trip already in the beginning of summer and the following week the weather forecasts promised tailwind for our trip. Or journey, let's call it journey because these four days really changed the way I see myself and what I'm capable of doing with my body and mind. Oxford Dictionaries definition to journey (noun) in English

1) An act of traveling from one place to another

2) A long and often difficult process of personal change and development

I have to admit; I don't challenge my body daily or even weekly. My everyday life has different kinds of challenges related to school and work, social responsibilities and the pressure to use time wisely every day. Even if I'm originally from a small city, I have found myself in a situation where my calendar and watch are important for the daily routines and that I have to be reachable at any time of the day.

Nature doesn't have a timetable that you could affect. Seasons and weather conditions, as well as darkness and light, changes with or without me sweating on the saddle between Helsinki and Hanko. Nature does not ask for permission, does not wait for suitable time, does not bend to human will, or change direction when desired. Nature just happens, and the small human being pedaling, struggling and enjoying on the way from Helsinki to Hanko has to adjust. This fact makes it necessary for the small human to let go of the desire to organize and decide what happens during the journey. This moment is when the definition of journey as in act of traveling is transformed into something bigger. I felt myself changing. The feeling of letting go and concentrating on the road ahead, gives the mind a chance to escape from the routines and reach a relaxation when the only thought in your head is to continue pedaling.

"No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river and he's not the same man."

— Heraclitus

I found during the 200 kilometers that if I focus my strength, I can.

I can continue biking even though my legs say no.

I can get up big hills even if I feel like it's too much.

I can let go of checking my watch but using nature's expression of time.

I can give my all during the day and the next morning, I can get on the bike and continue.

During our journey I found a way to exceed the expectations that I had for my own body and enjoyed every moment of it.

Next summer I will continue to challenge myself, and start to look for more strength inside me. How would you like to find your strength this summer?