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BENCHMARKING FINNISH AND IRISH EQUESTRIAN TOURISM

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<p>The purpose of this thesis was to benchmark Finnish and Irish equestrian tourism. One of the goals was also to examine the current status of equestrian tourism in Finland, as well as the use of the Finnhorse in equestrian tourism services. Improvement suggestions were created based on research about Irish equestrian tourism as well as the Irish Draught Horse and the Irish Sport Horse. There was no commissioner for the thesis. The topic arose from personal interest in equestrian tourism and the growing importance of the Finnhorse as part of the industry.</p> <p>The first part of the thesis comprises the theoretical background. It includes different aspects of equestrian tourism in Finland and in Ireland. The current status of equestrian tourism in Finland and the safety guidelines created by the Finnish Consumer Agency are discussed in detail. The history, current status, and different usages of the Finnhorse are discussed. Also the Irish Draught Horse and the Irish Sport Horse as Irish horse breeds are elaborated.</p> <p>The second part is the empirical part. It gives suggestions for improving equestrian tourism in Finland and increasing the use of the Finnhorse in tourism related services. The suggestions are based on strategies and actions implemented by different organizations in Ireland.</p>	
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**Kajaanin
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<p>Opinnäytetyön tarkoitus oli vertailla suomalaista ja irlantilaista hevosmatkailua. Tavoitteena oli myös tutkia suomalaisen hevosmatkailun nykytilaa ja suomenhevosen käyttöä hevosmatkailutarkoituksiin. Tutkimus Irlannin hevosmatkailusta, Irlannintyöhevosesta (Irish Draught Horse) sekä Irlanninhunterista (Irish Sport Horse) oli pohjana kehitysehdotuksille. Opinnäytetyöllä ei ollut toimeksiantajaa. Aihe nousi esille henkilökohtaisesta kiinnostuksesta hevosmatkailuun ja suomenhevosen kasvavaan merkitykseen osana hevosmatkailua.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön ensimmäinen osa koostuu teoriataustasta. Se sisältää eri näkökohtia suomalaisesta ja irlantilaisesta hevosmatkailusta. Suomalaisen hevosmatkailun nykytila ja Kuluttajaviraston ohjeet ratsastuspalveluiden turvallisuuden edistämiseksi on käsitelty yksityiskohtaisesti. Suomenhevosen historia, nykytila ja eri käyttömuodot on selvitetty. Myös Irlannintyöhevosta ja Irlanninhunteria on käsitelty yksityiskohtaisesti.</p> <p>Empiirinen osa sisältää ehdotuksia suomalaisen hevosmatkailun kehittämiseen sekä suomenhevosen käytön lisäämiseen hevosmatkailutarkoituksiin. Ehdotukset perustuvat Irlannissa toimivien eri organisaatioiden strategioihin ja toimiin.</p>	
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CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
2 EQUESTRIAN TOURISM	3
2.1 Tourism and Equestrian Tourism	3
2.2 Equestrianism in Finland.....	6
2.3 Equestrian Events.....	7
2.4 Safety in Equestrian Activities	8
2.4.1 General Requirements.....	8
2.4.2 Risk Management	9
2.5 Equestrian Tourism Education in Finland	11
2.6 Tourism Product Development	11
2.7 Trail Riding.....	12
2.8 Equestrianism and Equestrian Tourism in Ireland.....	14
2.9 The Irish Draught Horse and the Irish Sport Horse.....	15
3 THE FINNHORSE.....	18
3.1 History.....	19
3.2 Finnhorse Today.....	21
3.3 The Finnhorse as a Harness Racing Horse.....	24
3.4 The Finnhorse as a Competition Riding Horse	26
3.5 Brand, Communications, and Marketing of the Finnhorse.....	27
4 BENCHMARKING.....	29
4.1 Marketing	31
4.2 Websites	35
4.3 Establishments	36
4.4 Education.....	37
4.5 Events.....	38
5 CONCLUSIONS	40
SOURCES.....	42

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the thesis was to examine the current status of equestrian tourism in Finland and benchmark it to that of Ireland. Increasing the use of the Finnhorse in equestrian tourism services and making it more known as a breed has been benchmarked to the Irish Draught Horse and the Irish Sport Horse.

Equestrian tourism comprises all equestrian activities undertaken by tourists outside their normal place of residence. It is still a fairly new sector in the tourism industry, and in Finland many companies have equestrian tourism only as a side income. Equestrian tourism has gained popularity all over the world, mostly due to the growing number of horseback riders. In Finland alone over 150 000 people are engaging themselves in horseback riding, and 15 000 people work in the equine industry full- or part-time. The different forms of equestrian tourism include for example trail riding, horseback holidays, and equestrian events. Customers are often interested in the positive ecological values of equestrian tourism.

In Finland equestrian tourism faces multiple problems such as obscure promotion, lack of professionals as well as horses suitable for the activity, and the current economical situation. There are also numerous possibilities. These include the safety and exoticness of the country, calm nature, and most importantly the Finnhorse. Educating professionals of equestrian tourism is an important factor in the future success of the industry in Finland.

Safety issues are an extremely important part in the equestrian industry. The Finnish Consumer Agency has created safety guidelines for entrepreneurs providing equestrian activities. These safety guidelines are an essential part of the equestrian tourism industry where the service provider is responsible for several people who may not have previous experience of horses.

The Finnhorse is the only original horse breed in Finland. It was formerly a very important part in farming and transportation. The number of Finnhorses has decreased from 400 000 in 1950 to approximately 20 000 today due to the transition from horse drawn to motorized vehicles. Today the Finnhorse is a modern sporthorse used mainly for harness racing but also for other equine sports, such as dressage and jumping. Also many trail horses used in equestrian tourism are Finnhorses.

The Finnhorse possesses many good characteristics to be used in equestrian tourism. It is strong and suitable for riders of all ages and levels of experience. The challenge is in finding enough schooled horses suitable for equestrian tourism use. Like the Finnhorse, also the Irish Draught Horse used to be a farm horse. Nowadays it is a horse that can be used for all disciplines. The Irish Draught has a very good nature and it is easy to handle.

Irish equestrian tourism is much more promoted than that of Finland. Ireland has established a status as a big equestrian tourism country. An international campaign has labeled it as 'the Land of the Horse'. Finland has not yet reached the level where Ireland is today. To get there Finland should take an example of what has been done in Ireland and pick the best solutions from there. This thesis benchmarks Irish equestrian tourism and the Irish Draught Horse to Finnish equestrian tourism and the Finnhorse. The suggestions arisen from the research have been delineated to include marketing, websites, establishments, education, and events, mostly concentrating on the marketing part. Ireland has been chosen as an example due to its success in equestrian tourism, and their appreciation to their only national horse breed, the Irish Draught.

2 EQUESTRIAN TOURISM

Equestrian activities have seen a growing popularity over the last years all over the world. Alone in Europe there is approximately two million trail riders. People engaging in equestrian tourism activities in Finland are commonly women between the ages of 35 and 45, and have some previous experience from horseback riding. Only five percent are international tourists. (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 4.)

Equestrian tourism first appeared in Europe in the 1950s. At that time motorized vehicles were replacing animals as means of transportation. Today equestrian tourism is very important in the development of horseback riding. It has become popular both to riders and general public who are attracted by the values related to equestrian tourism where relationships, leisure time and the environment are respected. Equestrian tourism also creates new jobs for example for companies providing catering, animal feeds or equestrian clothing. (International Federation of Equestrian Tourism 2010.)

2.1 Tourism and Equestrian Tourism

The term tourism can be defined in a variety of ways. One of them is presented in *Successful Tourism Marketing: A Practical Handbook* (1997). The author has defined tourism as ‘the temporary short term movement of people to destinations outside places where they normally live and work, and their activities during their stay at these destinations’. (Briggs 1997, 9.)

In his book *Marketing Communications in Tourism & Hospitality*, the author has used the definition introduced by Wall and Mathieson, referring to tourism ‘as the sum of the relationships arising out of the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes’ (McCabe 2009, 2).

There is usually some kind of motive for traveling. It can be related for example to culture, religion, leisure, or work. Motives are divided into two different categories: primary and secondary motives. The purpose of the trip is a primary motive, whereas destination, means of

transportation, and the duration of the trip are secondary motives. (Liuska & Pallaspuuro 2009, 3.) A tourism product is a service and can be both tangible and intangible. The product that the customer buys is usually a set of several different products. (Hemmi 2005, 531.)

Equestrian tourism being a relatively new branch in the tourism industry does not yet have many published and widely recognized definitions. The commercial offering of trail riding started in the 1970s (Martin-Päivä 2006, 8). In *Hevosmatkailun kehittämisstrategia 2009-2013* (2009), a development strategy for equestrian tourism in Finland from 2009 until 2013, equestrian tourism has been defined as something where horses are used as a part of the tourism product, them thus being an essential part of the whole experience. In the report it is stated that according to the International Federation of Equestrian Tourism (FITE), equestrian tourism can be divided into two different categories, the first one being horseback holidays and the second horse related events and tourism. (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 3.)

FITE has defined equestrian tourism as horse-based activity, practiced for leisure purposes outside one's normal place of residence. Examples of equestrian tourism products are trail riding, sleigh riding, horse shows, horseback holidays, harness races, and other equestrian events. (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 3.) Another definition states that as a commercial service horseback riding is responsible service based on nature all year round. It takes place on an authorized area with suitable gear paying attention to safety issues. Sometimes the customer can also use their own horse if so wishes. (Hemmi 2005, 339.)

Equestrian tourism could be categorized as sport tourism which, in the book called *Sport and Adventure Tourism* by Simon Hudson (2003), is defined as 'travel away from one's primary residence to participate in a sport activity for recreation or competition, travel to observe sport at the grassroots or elite level, and travel to visit a sport attraction'. Another category to put equestrian tourism in is adventure tourism. However, not all equestrian tourism is adventure tourism as it usually involves some sort of physical challenge. The positive side effects that may follow can be for example losing weight, getting a suntan, and reduced stress. (Hudson 2003, 2, 208-209.)

Equestrian tourism is most often connected with rural tourism (Kaskinen 2007, 9). Rural tourism includes 'nature, scenery, culture, and people'. Activities undertaken can be based on for example nature, culture, or holidays on a farm. The companies providing this form of

tourism are most often small and family based. (Pohjois-Karjalan ammattikorkeakoulu 2006, 1.) Rural tourism is often operated on farms as a secondary line of business besides farming. According to the Finnish legislation, rural tourism is a part of the accommodation and restaurant business. Equestrian companies offering riding camps and horseback trails are an example of rural tourism service providers. (Hemmi 2005; 185-186, 225-226.) Rural tourism is one part of nature tourism category. Thus equestrian tourism is associated with nature tourism, the nature being a big part of an equestrian tourism product. (Kaskinen 2007, 9.) Nature tourism contains activities undertaken in the pure nature as well as in built surroundings, without any significant help of technical energy-consuming appliances (Hemmi 2005, 285).

Of approximately 200 equestrian tourism companies in Finland not all list equestrian tourism as their main line of business (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 4). According to a study by Matkailun edistämiskeskus (MEK), only 45,5 % of the respondents mentioned equestrian tourism as their main business. Most common equestrian tourism products that businesses in Finland sell are different camps and courses, which were offered by 55 % of the respondents of the study. The second most common product was trail riding. (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 b; 7, 21.)

Finland has a lot of opportunities in equestrian tourism in the future. It is a safe, exotic, and interesting country with a pure and calm nature, and a terrain suitable for equestrian activities. Due to the climate many companies operating in tourism sector provide seasonal products, for example ski resorts provide skiing holiday packages in the winter and during the summer their product selection is something completely different. The strength of horse-related activities is that no matter the season, the same or similar products can be offered. (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 4-5.)

To be able to use Finland's strengths and develop the equestrian tourism industry, it is important to educate people working in the industry. The expertise and knowledge gained through education could prevent the issues in profitability due to for example miscalculations in pricing the products. Currently the product offerings in Finland are quite good but there is still a lot to be developed to be able to compete in the international markets. (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 5-6.)

According to MEK some challenges in equestrian tourism in Finland are currently the lack of infrastructure in sales and promotion, profitability, finding professional staff and horses suitable for tourism use, the current economical situation, increased competition, new regulations, and changed values and expectations of consumers (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 7).

Hevosmatkailun toimenpidesuunnitelma 2009-2013, a strategy plan for equestrian tourism from 2009 until 2013 has created a list of the most important factors to be developed in equestrian tourism in Finland. These include branding the Finnish equestrian tourism which also includes comprehensively utilizing the Finnhorse, product development, increasing knowledge by degrees and seminars, promotion and networking, and reasserting the status of equestrian tourism in Finland. (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 c, 2-4.)

The equestrian tourism products that different businesses offer vary quite tremendously (Martin-Päivä 2006, 5). They range from horseback riding lessons to trail rides of different length and difficulty level, courses, camps, horseback holidays, farm accommodation, sleigh rides, different types of packages for example for bachelor parties, as well as dining and meeting services. As stated earlier in the text, most businesses do not have equestrian tourism as their main line of business (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 4).

Internationally equestrian tourism is a growing industry. People make more trips close to their home but also to different continents, and there are more different tour operators organizing equestrian tourism packages. The overall increased interest in equine related activities has gone up all over the world. By taking part in equestrian tourism activities it is often possible to support the local culture, make a contribution to the welfare of animals, and influence the employment situation in rural areas. As responsible traveling is a trend today, equestrian tourism is concentrating on working with the nature, not against it. This is a valuable asset when acquiring new customers who are interested in ecological, responsible, and health promoting activities. (Laine, Martin-Päivä, Prepula & Saastamoinen 2008, 9.)

2.2 Equestrianism in Finland

In Finland there are more than 150 000 horseback riders of which over half are adults (Equestrian Federation of Finland 2010). There are altogether about 75 000 horses in Fin-

land (Louhelainen & Pussinen 2010, 2), Finnhorses comprising approximately 20 000 of them. Only a small number of Finnhorses is used for horseback riding and most of the remaining ones are trotting horses. (Equestrian Federation of Finland 2010.) The equine industry employs 15 000 people full- or part-time (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 5). There are altogether approximately 16 000 horse barns in Finland of which 3000-3500 have some kind of business activities (Louhelainen & Pussinen 2010, 2).

There are two main horse-related organizations in Finland. Suomen Hippos ry manages horse breeding issues and trotting horse sports, and the Equestrian Federation of Finland, SRL (Suomen Ratsastajainliitto ry), is concentrated on the development of equestrian sports, as well as on ‘promoting horse welfare and rider safety, providing activities for young people, and working to create safe traffic routes for riders and carriage drivers’. (Equestrian Federation of Finland 2010.)

Currently there are 44 leisure riding stables approved by SRL in Finland, and 193 riding schools (Equestrian Federation of Finland 2010). Riding schools usually have a selection of different breeds but some of them are concentrated only on Finnhorses. According to a research 40 % of riding schools and 43 % of equestrian tourism companies would be interested in acquiring a Finnhorse. The problem is that finding a well schooled Finnhorse suitable for the activities the companies are providing is challenging. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 4.)

The most important uses of horses at the moment are breeding, harness racing, horseback riding activities, and different services, such as rental of stalls and general taking care of horses. In the future services offering different experiences, such as trail riding and other equestrian tourism services, horse therapy, and wellness services will be of greater importance. (Louhelainen & Pussinen 2010, 4.)

2.3 Equestrian Events

There are about 800 equine related events organized in Finland each year. Over 12 000 horses are involved in the events with approximately 870 000 spectators. (Hyypä, Pesonen, Tanhuanpää & Virtanen 2008, 7.) Finnish Equine events that attract a lot of tourists include for example Finnhorse Royals Riding Event (Suomenratsujen Kuninkaalliset), Finnhorse

Trotting Championships (Kuninkuusravit), Helsinki International Horse Show, Bastioni Horse Festival, and different harness race events. (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 4.)

Harness races attract the second largest amount of visitors, approximately 800 000 a year, the first one being ice hockey (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 4). The Finnhorse Trotting Championships is a competition that was first started in 1924 and has now grown to attract 60 000 spectators yearly. Helsinki International Horse Show is the largest indoor riding competition in Finland with 40 000 spectators. The oldest outdoor riding competition in Finland is Finnderby and it has been organized since 1973, currently gathering 10 000 spectators yearly. (Hyypä, Pesonen, Tanhuanpää & Virtanen 2008, 8.)

2.4 Safety in Equestrian Activities

In 2004 the Finnish Consumer Agency published safety guidelines for entrepreneurs who provide equestrian activities. The guidelines are based on the act concerning the safety of consumer goods and services. The purpose of the guidelines is to define the minimum requirements for safety in equestrian activities, enhance safety, intensify the monitoring of safety, and prevent accidents. The guidelines remind that even with careful planning of safety issues there are always risks involved when working with big animals such as horses. (Finnish Consumer Agency 2004, 4.)

Companies approved by SRL are somewhat safer than those without the approval. These companies have agreed to comply with the regulations the federation has set. These include for example the obligatory use of riding hats, professional staff, and safe facilities. According to a research about service providers in Eastern Finland, the biggest risk factors are for example the customer's disregard to instructions given, poor physical condition, entrepreneurs disregard to safety, and 'amateur entrepreneurs'. (Martin-Päivä 2006, 13-14.)

2.4.1 General Requirements

In the guidelines it is stated that the service provider is responsible for safety during the whole activity. The maximum number of clients and the level of their expertise regarding the activity need to be determined beforehand. The limits for the safe operation of the activity

must also be determined in case of for example a radical change in weather conditions. Safety must be taken into consideration already when marketing the product as the consumer needs to be sufficiently informed beforehand about the issues that may have an effect on their personal safety. The promotion material must state to whom the product is targeted, and the activities must be described truthfully. (Finnish Consumer Agency 2004, 6-7.)

There is a list of information that needs to be given to clients taking part in trail riding or in riding camps. For example the duration of the activity, prerequisites, needed gear, and the person responsible for the activity need to be mentioned. It is important to tell the client if the service provider does not provide insurance. (Finnish Consumer Agency 2004, 7.)

2.4.2 Risk Management

The service provider needs to create a thorough safety document including facts such as phone numbers of persons responsible, horse and building details, risk assessment, and instructions in case of emergencies. The employees of the company need to be familiar with the document and they must go through it regularly. The service provider also needs to include risk management as part of the safety document. By determining the possible risky situations it is easier to prevent accidents. It is obligatory to have an up-to-date accident reporting system. With the system it is possible to enhance the safety procedures and risk management, and make sure the details are written down in case they need to be observed by officials. (Finnish Consumer Agency 2004, 8-9.)

The person responsible for instructing and supervising horseback riding must either possess a degree from the field or have extensive experience. When doing trail riding the person needs to have sufficient skills to be able to act correctly in emergencies also when in remote locations. There also needs to be enough staff to take care of the clients. The Finnish Consumer Agency recommends that on trail rides each guide would have a maximum of seven clients to be responsible for but every case needs to be assessed individually. If there are foreign clients there must be guides that have sufficient linguistic skills to be able to give safety instructions. The staff working with clients needs to have first-aid skills, and must know how to act in emergencies. (Finnish Consumer Agency 2004, 9-10.)

Clients doing horseback riding need to wear riding helmets and shoes appropriate for the activity. The service provider must provide protective gear if the client does not have their own, and make sure he wears them correctly at all times. Information on how to act in different situations with horses needs to be given, and the risks of horseback riding must be told to the client. It must be made clear to the client that no alcohol is to be used in horse-related activities. (Finnish Consumer Agency 2004, 11-12.)



Picture 1. Safe riding gear (Suomen Hippos ry 2010)

In trail riding the route in which the ride is to be taken must be planned carefully. The surroundings must be safe and provide enough visibility to prevent surprises that may scare the horses. It is recommended to avoid public roads or at least stay in a safe distance from them. In many cases it is impossible not to use private land, and in those situations permission from the landowner needs to be requested beforehand. (Finnish Consumer Agency 2004, 16.)

2.5 Equestrian Tourism Education in Finland

Education leading to a degree in equestrian tourism is still new in Finland. Studies related to equestrian tourism are offered in many institutes, and it has become easier for an entrepreneur to take part in education that is often offered in different forms, such as an apprenticeship. (Martin-Päivä 2006, 16.) Some institutes are important Finnhorse breeders, and many of them actively organize events and courses related to the breed (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 18).

In Finland the leading equestrian education provider is the Ypäjä Equine College which offers programs to for example riding instructors and farriers, and also frequently organizes courses to the public (Equestrian Federation of Finland 2010). In Ypäjä there is a degree in equestrian studies with a specialization on the use of the horse in tourism (Hemmi 2005, 340-341).

Another well known equestrian education provider, Harjun Oppimiskeskus, is located in Virolahti in Southern Finland. In Harju one can study to become a groom. After basic studies it is possible to choose an additional course about the use of the horse in tourism. The studies include for example dressage and jumping. Also pedagogy is included, as besides riding the student also needs to know how to teach and guide other riders. The students are also familiarized with Finnish equestrian tourism, as well as with the principles of operating a riding stable. Also carriage driving, taking care of tack, shoeing, and horse first-aid are included in the studies. (Hemmi 2005, 566.)

Haapavesi vocational institute educates students to become tourism activities organizers with a specialization on trail riding tourism. The institute also offers the vocational qualification in a multiform course for those who are working simultaneously. (Haapaveden ammat- tiopisto 2010.)

2.6 Tourism Product Development

A tourism product is a service that consists of the core product, supporting products, and facilitating products. Physical environment, interactions, accessibility of the product, and customer participation are also significant factors that have an influence in the success of the

product. A company cannot create a tourism product but it can create the circumstances that the product requires. This includes the product idea, the procedures that are needed to be able to put the product into practice, and resources. (Järviluoma & Saarinen 2002, 48-50.)

Many companies have the capacity to create good tourism products but often they do not put enough effort on product development. By having products with a clear content and price it is easier to sell and promote them. Finalizing the product is important because it gives the client a better picture of the product, and minimizes the chance of misunderstandings. Usually short tours or trips sell better than long ones. (Maa- ja kotitalousnaisten keskus 1998, 68-70.) To stay competitive, tourism service providers must put effort on product development. New ideas and products are needed in order to get new customers and keep the old ones coming back. (Liuska & Pallaspuuro 2009, 11-12.)

Product development is creating a completely new product or improving the already existing one. The aim is to create a product that is competitive and easy to sell. The starting of a product development process is usually customer driven. The process includes finding a product idea, as well as research about future prospects, potential markets, and other information essential in starting product development. Also detailed planning of the product takes place during the process. (Liuska & Pallaspuuro 2009, 11-12.)

2.7 Trail Riding

Trail riding is horseback riding in the nature. It is a guided activity where safety issues have been taken into consideration, and which can be undertaken by participants of all skill levels in horseback riding. (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 3.) Depending on the activity, the duration can be from some hours to several days, and may include coffee breaks or meals (Martin-Päivä 2006, 4). The recommended distance of horseback riding for one day is 20-25 kilometers with breaks every one and a half hours (Hemmi 2005, 339).

Usually trail riding refers to riding in the nature for a longer period than normally, and it can be done both in the summer and in the winter (Hemmi 2005, 339). As trail riding has become more popular, the land use has to be considered carefully. Everyman's rights of horses and riders have been emphasized by SRL. (Ticklén 2006, 12.)

The creation of a new trail riding product starts with profound planning. Besides making sure the routes that are to be used are suitable for horseback riding, one must get permission from the landowners concerned. As trail riding is not only about horseback riding itself the possible interesting points and sights should be listed, and also accommodation facilities and resting spots need to be located. (Hemmi 2005, 339.)

The horses used for trail riding in Finland are mainly either Icelandic horses or Finnhorses due to them being calm and strong breeds (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 3). Other breeds that are also used include for example Norwegian fjord horses and Estonian Native horses (Trail Riding Union of Finland 2010). Also for example Hanoverians are used. What is common with the mentioned breeds is that they all are usually kind, calm, heavily built, and durable horses. A good trail horse is preferably a little bit lazy rather than too 'hot' to avoid dangerous situations. (Hemmi 2005, 339.) In their character the horses must be kind, calm, and co-operative, and they need to be well trained and easy to handle, as for example in the forest they act in a completely different manner than in the riding arena (Liuska & Pallaspuuro 2009, 10).

Trail riding that lasts for several days is always physically challenging for both the horse and the rider, so being fit for the ride is essential. The rider should not be overweight as it extensively increases the load that the horse needs to carry. (Hemmi 2005, 339.)

Today especially adult riders have found trail riding as a nice and a relaxing way to spend time with the horse in the nature. It provides memorable experiences without rushing, meeting people with similar interests, and familiarizing oneself with the nature and sights of different areas. What distinguishes companies concentrated on trail riding from riding schools is the variety of other simultaneously offered services such as accommodation or meals. (Trail Riding Union of Finland 2010.)

As in all guided activities, also on trail rides the guide plays a huge role in the success of the trip. A good guide is an experienced leader who is skilled in horseback riding as well as in handling horses. It is also important to be familiar with first-aid procedures, and possess excellent customer service skills. The guide is responsible for the safety of both clients and horses, and the instructions given by him or her need to be obeyed. (Liuska & Pallaspuuro 2009, 10.) Most importantly the guide must be good in entertaining clients and organizing, rather than only sharing information (Viherkoski 1998, 5).

Trail riding started to become popular in Finland in the 1990s. Most of the businesses used Finnhorses, and some used Icelandic horses. There are several trail riding stables all over the country, the oldest one of them being the Finnhorse Farm in Northern Finland which uses Oulanka National park on its trails. (Ticklén 2006, 26.) Finnhorse Tours is a trademark owned by Forssan Seudun Kehittämiskeskus Oy. It has been designed to be used as a marketing and quality label for companies operating in the trail riding industry as well as for accommodation and food service providers. To be able to qualify for the use of the label the company must meet the required criteria. (Martin-Päivä 2006, 13.)

For Finland to be able to be competitive in the equestrian tourism field in the future it is important to improve the quality and diversity of the products offered, as well as to have professional, educated staff (Martin-Päivä 2006, 17). This can be enabled by business partners and networking. Trail Riding Union of Finland (Suomen Vaellustalliien Liitto ry), Suo-Va, aims to aid the trail riding entrepreneurs for example by providing training, consulting and help in marketing. (Trail Riding Union of Finland 2010.)

2.8 Equestrianism and Equestrian Tourism in Ireland

In 2005 there were an estimated 110 000 sport horses in Ireland. In proportion to the population this number 'makes Ireland the most densely sport horse populated country in Europe'. Sport horses are all riding horses and ponies used for recreational and competitive purposes but not for racing. The sport horse industry of Ireland is active, and involves over 50 000 people regularly. (Irish Horse Board 2007, iii.) Approximately 20 000 people work in the industry full- or part-time (Horse Sport Ireland 2010 b, 2). The strategies for development and promotion for the industry to be internationally competitive are handled by Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) (Horse Sport Ireland 2010 a, 3).

Ireland has for centuries been known for its horses, and the skills the people possess in horsemanship, breeding, and training. Equestrian tourism in the country has developed due to this tradition. In 2005 over 50 000 foreign visitors engaged themselves in some type of equestrian activity. 43 % of the visitors were from the United Kingdom, 34 % from Europe, and 18 % from the United States. (Fáilte Ireland 2010.) In 2008 visitors from overseas who engaged themselves in equestrian activities spent altogether 53.9 million euros (Horse Sport Ireland 2010 a, 10). Besides short treks, trail riding, cross country jumping, show jumping,

and dressage it is also possible to do hunting and polo on horseback in Ireland (Equestrian Holidays Ireland 2010).

Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority of Ireland who 'provides strategic and practical support to develop and sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourist destination'. The Authority, together with the Association of Irish Riding Establishments (AIRE) and Equestrian Holidays Ireland (EHI), promotes the Irish horse riding sector domestically and internationally. Racing is also important from the tourism point of view. According to a research completed in 2009 by Fáilte Ireland and Horse Racing Ireland approximately 68 000 foreigners attended a race meeting in the country yearly. Of these visitors 17 000 traveled to Ireland only for this purpose. (Fáilte Ireland 2010.)

One of the biggest events organized in Ireland attracting tens of thousands of people every summer worldwide is the Dublin Horse Show. It was first held in 1864 and today entertains also people who are not interested in equestrian sports. (Dublin Horse Show 2010.) In the recent years Ireland launched a marketing strategy for international markets promoting Ireland as the 'Land of the Horse'. One of the aims was to establish a tourism categorization system for equestrian centers. The system benefits tourists by showing what destinations correspond to their needs. The goal of the strategy is to account to 250 000 equestrian tourism visitors in 2015. (Irish Hotels Federation 2007.)

2.9 The Irish Draught Horse and the Irish Sport Horse

The Irish Draught Horses are working, riding, and sporting horses. They were created by farmers from the need of lighter and more adaptable horses that could be worked, driven, and ridden. The idea was to breed strong and gentle horses that would have good gaits and the ability to jump. Today the Irish Draught Horse is used in various disciplines, such as show jumping, dressage, driving, and endurance riding. It is a strong, versatile horse that learns quickly, and is easy to work with. Due to its reliability it is suitable also for amateur riders. The Irish Sport Horse is a combination of Irish Draught Horses and Thoroughbreds. It is used as a competition horse, and it has been very successful on the international jumping circuit. (Irish Horse Board 2008, 2-5.)



Picture 2. Irish Draught Horse (Irish Draught Horse Society of Canada 2010)

The Irish Draught Horse is the only native horse breed in Ireland. Besides agriculture it has been an essential help in forestry, military, leisure, social, and sport use. (Irish Draught Horse Society 2010.) It has an important role in the Irish breeding but today it is categorized as a rare breed due to the diminished number of registered mares (Equine Sub Group of the Rural Stakeholder Forum & BDO Stoy Hayward 2007, 33).

The Irish Draught Horse Society, founded in 1975, aims ‘to encourage and assist breeders and those interested in the preservation, promotion and improvement of the breed’. It is also, together with the Irish Shows Association, responsible for All Ireland Irish Draught Mare and Young Horse Championships resulting to finals at the National Show. The National Show is a breed show attracting visitors from all over the world. It is held in a different location each year. The Irish Draught National Sale is a yearly held auction for Irish Draught breeders. The sale attracts buyers from Europe, North America and New Zealand. (Irish Horse Board 2008, 6-8.)

The Irish Horse Board (IHB) has allocated resources to the breeding, promotion, and marketing of the sport horse of Ireland. It has exhibited in various international shows promoting the Irish Sport Horse as well as the Irish Draught Horse. The board also sponsors television coverage important when promoting the characteristics and achievements of Irish

horses. (Irish Horse Board 2010.) Horse Sport Ireland (HSI) maintains the Irish Horse Register containing the Irish Draught Horse Studbook, and the Irish Sport Horse Studbook (Horse Sport Ireland 2010 a, 6).

3 THE FINNHORSE

In Finland there are almost 20 000 Finnhorses which is one third of all horses. They are ‘all-rounders’ and suitable for both children and adults. The Finnhorse is the only original Finnish horse breed. From its character it is co-operative, aspirant, and it tries as hard as it can. The Finnhorse is mid-sized, well-postured, and quite heavily built, and it is suitable for several different tasks regardless of its conformation. (Suomenratsut ry 2010.)

Nowadays riding horses are supposed to be humble, have three clear gaits, and have a naturally good posture. In the old days the Finnhorse was mostly used in carriages and for farm work, and thus different characteristics were valued, such as speed, toughness, and durability. (Suomenratsut ry 2010.) In Hevosmatkailun kehittämissstrategia 2009-2013 one of the goals is to make the Finnhorse an internationally recognized horse breed whose role in equestrian tourism has been emphasized (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 5).



Picture 3. Finnhorse (Suomen Hippos ry 2010)

3.1 History

The history of the Finnhorse states back to 1907 when the Finnhorse studbook was founded. The aim of the studbook was to ‘develop a native horse breed that is suitable for the local environment and agricultural purposes by abiding by purebreeding principles’. The information that was gathered in the studbook of a single horse was its name and number, year of birth, height, color, pedigree, and owner. Originally operated by the state, in 1970 the task of keeping the studbook was given to Suomen Hippos ry, the National Horsebreeding and Trotting Association. The studbook was divided into consisting of 4 different categories: riding horse, trotter, work horse, and small pony-sized horse. (Ticklén 2006, 10.) Nowadays in order to be approved in the studbook the horse must be at least four years old and have existing performances, characteristics, movements, conformation, and health appropriate for breeding purposes. Besides these there are separate requirements in each category the horse is to be approved in. (Suomen Hippos ry 2004, 7.)

There has been Finnhorses in Finland for centuries but no record was kept of them. In 1910 there were over 200 000 Finnhorses, and in 1950 the amount had doubled to 400 000 which is 20 times more than today 60 years later. Only a few years earlier over one third of the 60 000 Finnhorses that were sent to Winter War and Continuation War between 1939 and 1945 were lost in battles. The next decades after the wars were difficult for the Finnhorse. People started moving to cities, and machines overtook the place of the horse in farm work. By 1970 these dramatic changes had eventually led to an alarming number of 15 000 Finnhorses left in Finland. (Ticklén 2006, 3.)

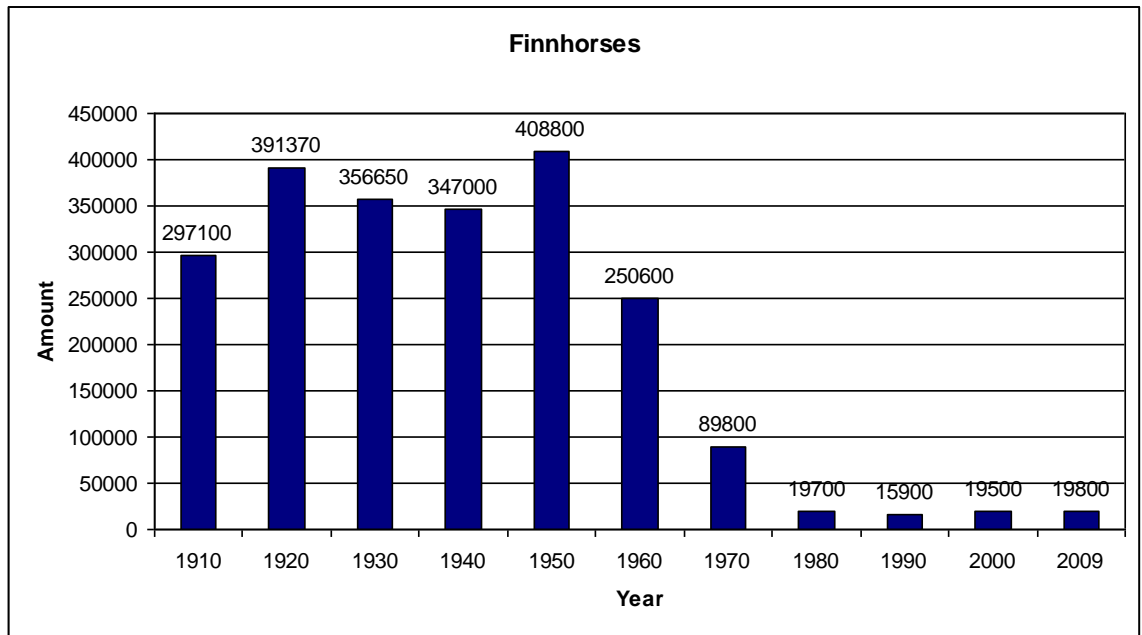


Figure 1. The Amount of Finnhorses 1910-2009 (Suomen Hippos ry 2010)

Finland joined the European Union (EU) in 1995, and on the same year the status of the Finnhorse as a native breed was recognized. In 2007 hundred years had passed from the foundation of the Finnhorse studbook, and the breed was celebrated in different ways, for example in the form of a televised documentary. (Ticklén 2006, 3.)

The Finnhorse was used for tourism purposes in Finland already centuries ago. In the 1300s people travelling by themselves needed, besides a place to stay for the night, horse transportation. The inns were located about 10-20 km away from each other, and all of them had horses that could be used for transportation for up to 160 km a day. In 1650 an inn organization was formed and it existed until 1950. (Ticklén 2006, 6.)

Besides using Finnhorses for transportation, they were also used in the fields and in logging sites, the latter employing 40 000-50 000 horses each winter until the 1960s. In addition to working in agriculture, the horses were also used in the growing cities in maintenance work. The cities needed Finnhorses for other purposes as well. They were used in fire fighting, as police horses, and in horse-cabs which were called 'vossikka's. Its most important task having been working and helping people in their everyday lives, the Finnhorse is nowadays used mainly for recreational purposes. (Ticklén 2006; 7, 14.)

3.2 Finnhorse Today

There are four associations in Finland dedicated to the Finnhorse. Suomenratsut ry (Finnish riding horse association), SuoRa, promotes the Finnhorse's use in horseback riding, the FinnHorse Association 'aims to promote the esteem and versatility of the breed and to preserve current family trees and breeding lines', the Finnish Work Horse Association wants to reactivate 'the breeding, training and work use of the work horse', and the Pony-sized Finnish Horse Association aims to preserve and promote the mentioned type of the Finnhorse. (Ticklén 2006, 34.)

A recent project undertaken by Suomen Hippos ry in co-operation with several different equine related organizations aims to clarify the role of equine businesses in the development work of the Finnhorse both domestically and internationally. Concrete actions that have been set as targets include for example regional activity, updating suomenhevonen.info website, creating a brochure of the Finnhorse, and organizing regional development days for equine business entrepreneurs, and info days for people interested in owning a Finnhorse. The project started in March 2009 and ended at the end of February in 2010. (Suomenhevonen 100 vuotta 2010.)

In horseback riding the Finnhorse is used both for competing and recreational purposes. Due to its versatility it can be used in all different equine sports for example in dressage, jumping, cross country, carriage driving, western riding, trail riding, harness racing, and as a therapy horse. The yearly organized three-day Finnhorse Royals Riding Event has been in its part one factor increasing the interest in Finnhorse breeding. The event was first held in 2002 and it has grown to 350 Finnhorses taking part in it in 2008. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 8.)

Today there are about 500 Finnhorse work horses. The use of the breed in different purposes is important in the conservation of the versatile bloodlines that would otherwise disappear. Work horse use also keeps up the traditional horsemanship. Nowadays work horses are used when taking care of for example parks and nature reserves. For the owners it is more of a hobby rather than a profession. Work horse shows are popular in different events, and thus create many possibilities in the development of equestrian tourism. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 9.)

Suomen Hippos ry (2008 b) has listed some strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that are related to the Finnhorse. As its strengths it mentions the importance of the Finnhorse as a Finnish national symbol that has always been a very important part of the nation during all eras. In the future of international equestrian tourism the meaning of original breeds of each country are emphasized. The Finnhorse Trotting Championships is also one of the strengths as it has a great meaning to the marketing of the Finnhorse, harness racing, and the equine industry. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 11.)

The versatile use, a status in harness racing, and breeding protected by different legislations are strengths for the Finnhorse. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland has listed Finnhorse as an endangered breed. The Finnhorse is best suited for adults due to its size and conformation, and today there is a lot of demand for well schooled Finnhorses. It has been bred for Finland's natural conditions which gives it an advantage compared to other breeds. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 12.)

One of the weaknesses involved in Finnhorses is the incapability of producing enough individuals of high quality to correspond to the increased demand. Also the misleading image about the high 'starting' age of Finnhorses often delays the schooling and training of trotting horses. The marketing of Finnhorses is currently not up to date, and the breed is still known mostly for its use during the war, and as a work horse. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 13.)

Finnhorses are mostly used for recreational purposes, and this has lead to the activities being seen as somewhat unprofessional. Other weaknesses include the decreased amount of Finnhorses in harness races, and the high age of Finnhorse breeders which poses a threat to the continuation of Finnhorse breeding. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 13-14.)

There are also opportunities for the Finnhorse. The increased interested in horses can, in the future, lead to new entrepreneurs who in their business are focused on Finnhorses. International markets have not yet been profoundly researched but they offer new opportunities and demand for the breed. If phenomenon related to patriotism become trendy so can happen to the Finnhorse. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 14.) Finnhorse is also able to help people in receiving what they look for during their free time: green values, time spent in the nature, and tranquility (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 5).

Threats posing the Finnhorse include the possible negative changes in the equine industry, and the importation of foreign breeds. For example Icelandic horses are widely used in trail

riding in Finland when Finnhorses could be used for the same purpose. The concern about losing interest in history and national symbols in the future can decrease the appreciation of the Finnhorse. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b; 15, 32.)

In the future the challenges facing the Finnhorse are multiple. Breeding should be developed to create individuals of good quality, and false images and prejudice concerning the Finnhorse must be eliminated. It is important to school Finnhorses to correspond to possible international demand. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 19.)

Finnhorse breeders are an aging group and they are spread all over the countryside in Finland. Most of them only have one horse that they use for breeding, and often they only have one or two foals for sale per year. The selling of the foals is often postponed as many buyers want to buy an older, schooled horse. From the economical point of view it is a negative issue, and can decrease the breeder's motivation. The Finnhorse breeders usually make their living out of something else than the breeding itself. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 19-20.)

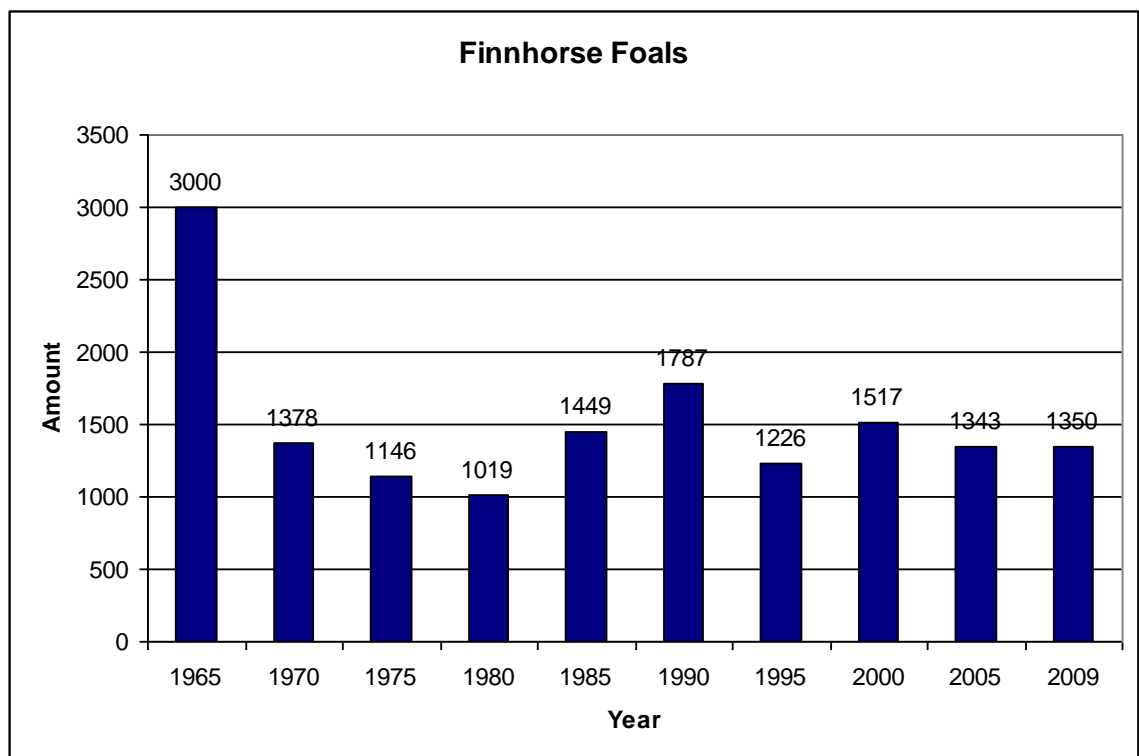


Figure 2. The Number of Finnhorse Foals 1965- 2009 (Suomen Hippos ry 2010)

Even today the Finnhorse is still an unknown breed in other countries. There has not yet been a systematic approach on making the Finnhorse internationally known. To some extent

Finnhorses have been sold abroad but to be able to do it on a larger scale more foals need to be bred. Equestrian tourism targeted for foreigners is an important factor in the internationalization process although there is still unused potential in the domestic market. (Laine, Martin-Päivä, Prepula & Saastamoinen 2008, 1-2.)

As can be seen in figure 3, the Finnhorse is mostly used in harness racing. The amount of riding horses is about only a half of the amount of trotting horses.

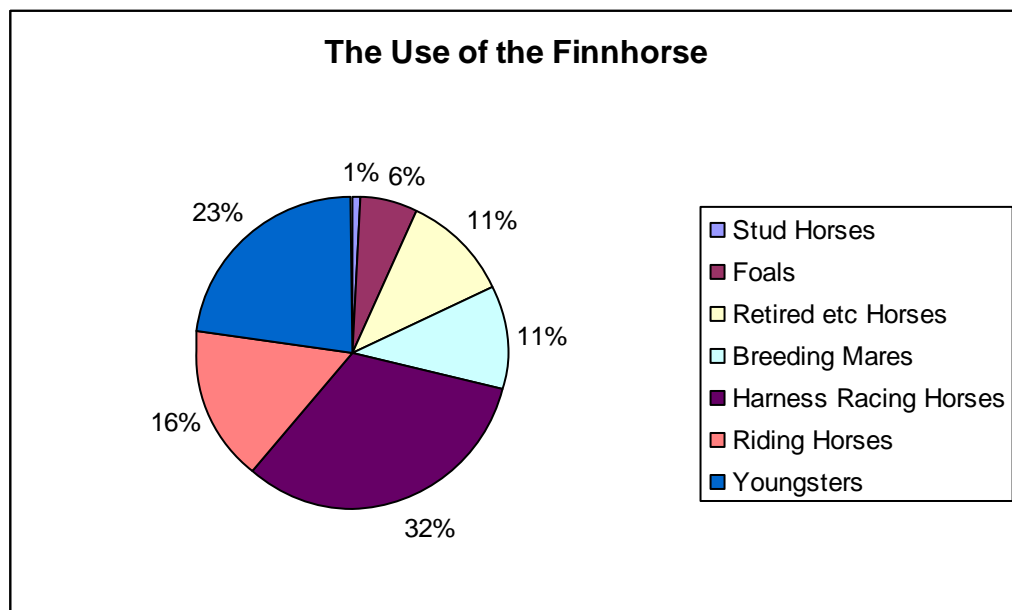


Figure 3. The Use of the Finnhorse (Karoma 2007, 5)

3.3 The Finnhorse as a Harness Racing Horse

In Finland about 50 000 people are engaging themselves in harness racing (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 4). The first harness races were held on ice in Turku in 1817. In 1864 the first races on road were held in Elimäki. Nowadays harness races are organized every day of the year excluding Christmas Eve. (Suutari 2007, 6-7.)

Today the event from which the Finnhorse is the best known from is the annually organized Finnhorse Trotting Championships where the Trotting King and Queen are selected (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 a, 4). The two-day-event is held in a different location each year. Only horses approved in the Finnhorse studbook can be crowned into Trotting Kings

and Queens. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 8.) About 3000 Finnhorses compete in altogether 600 harness racing competitions held each year in Finland, all year round. In Europe Finland is among the five biggest harness racing countries. (Suomenhevonen 100 vuotta 2010.)

Harness racing is the second most popular sport when measuring in the number of spectators. It is yearly viewed by 800 000 and outside the racing tracks and over the Internet by 900 000 spectators. The Finnhorse was the only breed used for harness racing until the end of the 1950s when the importation of warmblood horses to Finland was allowed. The growing interest in harness racing has been a vital precondition in keeping the Finnhorse viable. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 4.)



Picture 4. A successful harness racing horse, Saran Salama (Suomen Hippos ry 2010)

The Finnhorse is one of the fastest cold blood horses in the world, and in Finland almost 90 % of all Finnhorses are bred for harness racing (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 7). The most famous, and a very successful Finnhorse trotter is a stallion called Viesker (Suomenhevonen 100 vuotta 2010). It was crowned as a Trotting King five times, as were also stallions Vieteri and Vekseli. The most successful mares crowned as Trotting Queens both several times were Suhina and Valomerkki. (Suutari 2007, 9.) The amount of Finnhorses taking part in harness races was bigger than that of warmblood horses until the beginning of 1980s, whereas in 2007 the share of Finnhorses was only 29 % (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 7).

The Finnhorse has been bred to suit Finnish conditions. It is healthy, and can have a long career as a competition horse. In average there are better chances in earning money with a Finnhorse trotter than with a warmblood one. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 7.) Demand for good Finnhorse trotters is evident, and the price level has gone up in recent years. Despite this the overall prices are going down due to oversupply of trotting horse foals. There is more demand for older and schooled foals but the prices do not often correspond to the resources used for schooling. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 b, 20.)

As the Finnhorse is a breed that can be used for several purposes it is possible to school ex-trotters into riding horses. The Finnhorse has not been bred as a trotter as long as the warmbloods, and this is why it is usually easy to teach a Finnhorse to canter. The horse needs to be co-operative and willing to learn new things, as the differences between a trotter and a riding horse are quite big, and different things are required from the horse. For example a trotter has always been told to trot fast and not canter, whereas a riding horse needs to trot slowly, and has to know how to canter. (Karoma 2007, 9.)

3.4 The Finnhorse as a Competition Riding Horse

Compared to harness racing the development of horseback riding has been slow. Until 1965 galloping competitions for Finnhorses took place. They were organized at the same time with harness races. The fastest official result was made by Polle in the 1930s, galloping one kilometer in time 1.20,4. (Karoma 2007, 3.)

Today Finnhorses are allowed to compete in their own categories as well as in those in which everyone can take part in, the open categories. The competition levels range from club to national level. The number of horses competing on national level has risen tremendously in the past decades. In 2005 the number was over 200 whereas in the beginning of the 1980 it was only less than 30. Most of the Finnhorses competing on national level are dressage horses, most famous of them being Jaime and Pilven Poika. In show jumping the maximum that Finnhorses jump in competitions is the 130 cm-level, although most of them compete in 100-120 cm. Examples of successful show jumpers are Finnhorses called Samuli and Pellervo. (Karoma 2007, 5-6.)

The Finnhorse Royals is a yearly held competition with riding and carriage driving categories. During the event also quality evaluations for young horses are held. Other competitions meant for Finnhorses include for example Prix de Suomen Hippos and Suomenhevosten mestaruuskilpailut, competitions with jumping, dressage, and cross country. Prix de Suomen Hippos has categories also for carriage driving. (Karoma 2007, 6.)

3.5 Brand, Communications, and Marketing of the Finnhorse

The image that people have of the Finnhorse is outdated. The history of the breed is known among the people but having Finnhorse as a part of modern equine sports, and as a source of living is not seen as a possibility. The brand of the Finnhorse should be updated to be able to reach new clientele. This should be done in co-operation with different organizations working in the equine industry, and with people whose work is related to Finnhorses. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 2.)

A brand is the image that is given to people about for example a product or a label. It is something that the customer is ready to pay extra for even though there was the same or similar product on the market offered on a cheaper price but which is not branded. The new brand for the Finnhorse could be based on three different slogans: unique, athletic, and Finnish, the people's horse. The Finnhorse is a unique and strong tempered horse suitable for different activities. It is an athletic breed that can be used for various equine sports. It is a genuine and honest people's horse that represents Finnish history. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a; 8-9.)

The aim of making the Finnhorse better known and developing its brand is to alter the images that people have of the breed. The communications have to be based on facts about the Finnhorse although selling is done by creating new images and feelings to the customer. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 7.)

To make the new brand credible the overall public appearance of the Finnhorse should be made to correspond with the brand. It should be visible for example on the internet, brochures, and events. Footage that is suitable for the new brand of the Finnhorse is needed for the media and event organizers. The photos should show the strong emotional connection

between Finns and the Finnhorses, the athletic side of the horse, as well as the Finnish character. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 10.)

The Finnhorse is a national breed that belongs to nobody, and thus it is everybody's responsibility to take care of communications (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 2). This has been problematic, as Finnhorse marketing has been done individually by for example breeders, organizations, and ministries, with the lack of common objectives. The future goal is to make the Finnhorse a wanted and an attractive breed, remembering its valuable history and background as a unique, athletic, and the people's Finnish horse breed. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a; 2, 6.)

The aim in the equine industry is to make owning a Finnhorse desirable. It should be a wanted breed for harness racing, horseback riding, and as a part of business operations. Attracting the attention of media other than that related to the equine industry is also one of the objectives. Media should convey an image of the Finnhorse that is suitable for the new brand. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 12.)

The target group for the launching of the new brand includes Finnhorse breeders, owners, entrepreneurs, trainers, harness race tracks, and organizations. The role of breeders and entrepreneurs is to give a good image of the Finnhorse by taking good care of the horses and the premises they live in. Finnhorse owners and those using them for recreational purposes should give a positive image of the breed by conveying truthful and modern information about the breed to those outside the industry. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 12-13.)

Harness race tracks can have an influence in the public appearance of the Finnhorse by for example on their websites, brochures, and publications. Event organizers can influence the images that the public gets through their marketing. Different organizations can support the positive image of the Finnhorse by their actions and information distribution. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 13-14.)

More articles about the Finnhorse should be published, both in and outside the equine industry. For those working with the breed there should be more informational articles that would bring forth the positive sides of the breed for example in harness racing. For the public outside equine industry local Finnhorse articles will be of interest. (Suomen Hippos ry 2008 a, 16-17.)

4 BENCHMARKING

The Finnish and the Irish equine industries share similar problems. The selling prices of horses are lower than desired due to poor quality or unsuitability for the purpose. In Finland it is hard to find horses suitable for equestrian tourism, and Finnhorses are too often not schooled enough. Also lack of education brings difficulties although the situation has improved over the past years. Both Finnhorses and Irish Draught Horses need branding and international recognition. One difference is that marketing in Ireland's equine industry is concentrated in the selling of Irish horses internationally, as well as in promoting the country as a tourist destination, whereas Finnhorse marketing is still new and undeveloped. This among other factors is something Finland should concentrate on in order to gain success in both domestic and international markets.

Benchmarking includes comparison and interest in how things are done by some other organization or company (Karjalainen 2002, 1). It 'is a systematic comparison of organizational processes and performance to create new standards or to improve processes'. The purpose of benchmarking is to compare the performance of one's business unit, division, organization or corporation with other similar organizations. The outcome of the benchmarking process is often helpful in for example solving budget related issues, improving communication, or professionalizing an organization or a process. (Value Based Management.net 2010.)

Four different types of benchmarking exist: internal, competitive, functional, and generic. Internal means benchmarking within the same corporation whereas competitive compares for example performance to that of competitors. Functional benchmarking compares 'similar processes within an industry'. Generic benchmarking is concentrated on the comparison of 'operations between unrelated industries'. Benchmarking most often involves defining the scope; choosing the benchmark partner; determining the measurement methods, units, indicators, and data collection method; collecting data; analyzing the differences; presenting results; discussing improvement goals; making improvement plans; and monitoring progress. Rather than just a project benchmarking should be an ongoing process. (Value Based Management.net 2010.)

In this thesis competitive benchmarking is used. Ireland is looked at as a competitor of Finland in the equestrian tourism industry. The purpose is to benchmark Ireland's equestrian

tourism marketing, websites, establishments, education, and events, mostly concentrating on the marketing part from both domestic and international point of view. However, international marketing is given more attention. The Irish Draught Horse has been used as an example and inspiration for increasing the use of the Finnhorse for equestrian tourism purposes. The scope of the research was delineated to the above mentioned issues, emphasizing the marketing part. Ireland was chosen as a benchmarked country due to its success in the equestrian tourism industry. The data was collected from several different organizations' websites in order to obtain trustworthy information. The results of the benchmarking are seen in the beginning of each chapter with improvement suggestions for Finland. The chart below illustrates the benchmarked objects of Irish equestrian tourism.

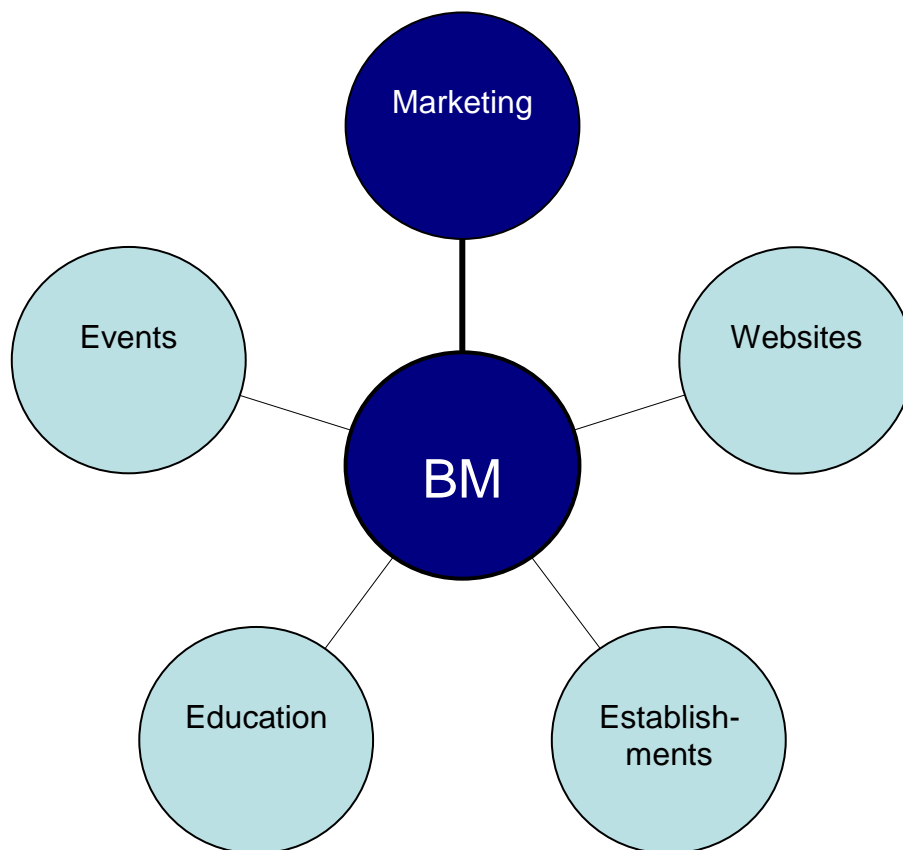


Figure 4. Benchmarking objects

4.1 Marketing

	Ireland strategies and implementations	Suggestions for Finland
Marketing	Ireland- Land of the Horse: Environment, People, and Horses	Strategy using the 4 C's: Credible, Contrasting, Creative, and Cool for international marketing
	Tourism categorization system for equestrian centers	Equestrian tourism quality control system
	Praising the beautiful scenery of Ireland, using the nature as an incentive for equestrian tourists	Exoticness and calmness of Finland must be used in tourism promotion, and new attractive photos of the varying Finnish nature added in
	Attending trade fairs and events in key target markets	Defining target markets and promoting among them
	Different organizations promoting and preserving the Irish Draught Horse in co-operation	Co-operation among organizations, and a joint marketing strategy benefiting all the parties involved
	Irish Draught Horse promoted as world class competition horse	Promoting Finnhorse using its best characteristics

Table 1. Sum of Marketing Strategies

The purpose of tourism marketing is to satisfy the needs of travelers, influence in the decision to travel as well as in the choosing of the destination, increase the market share and profitability of the company, enhance customer loyalty on destinations, as well as clarify and improve the image of a destination or a company. Profound market research must be done to find out for example customers' expectations. When marketing a tourism product it is important to highlight the strengths of the product or service. Means that can be used in

tourism marketing are for example brochures, fairs, selling over the telephone or in the field, or personal selling. (Hemmi 2005, 540-542.)

In the recent years Ireland has launched a marketing strategy for international markets promoting Ireland as the 'Land of the Horse'. One of the aims has been to establish a tourism categorization system for equestrian centers. The system benefits tourists by showing what destinations correspond to their needs. The goal of the strategy is to account to 250 000 equestrian tourism visitors in 2015. (Irish Hotels Federation 2007.)

Ireland as the 'Land of the Horse' strategy consists of Environment, People, and Horses (Fáilte Ireland 2007, 6). Finland has used the 4 C's; Credible, Contrasting, Creative, and Cool; in branding the country. Finnish Equestrian tourism and the Finnhorse could be linked to these themes the same way as Ireland has linked its equestrian tourism to the above mentioned concepts that the 'Land of the Horse' presents.

Out of the 4 C's Credible would illustrate Finland as a safe destination for an equestrian tourism holiday. It would be seen as a country where equestrian tourism providers are trustworthy and take care of safety issues. The Finnhorse as a reliable partner and safe companion would also be emphasized. Contrasting could be related to many different things but for equestrian tourism purposes the nature is the most appropriate. The nature and scenery of Finland must be shown as full of contrasts: four seasons, warm summer days, cold winter nights, flat grounds of Ostrobothnia, hilly views of Lapland, midnight sun, polar nights etc. This will show that Finland is a versatile country, and equestrian tourists can pick the time of the year and the part of the country they wish to experience the most. For the Finnhorse Contrasting could mean that the horse is something completely different from other breeds. It is not yet well known in the world, and there are not many places abroad where one can see or ride a Finnhorse. Although this situation is most often seen as negative it can be used as a positive marketing strategy. If the tourist realizes Finland is practically the only place with this unique breed, he or she is more likely to see it as an attracting point rather than a negative issue.

Creative is not very easy to connect to equestrian tourism and the Finnhorse. Then again, if an equestrian tourist comes to Finland he or she will most likely want to experience something else besides the equestrian tourism part and the Finnhorse. Creative could simply show

that besides equestrian tourism there are many other things that come from Finland. These could be for example art, music, technology, and architecture.

Cool would first be linked to the climate: most of the year Finland is quite cold or cool, depending on what one is used to. This part can overlap with Contrasting a little bit. Attending an equestrian tourism holiday in a place with a cooler climate is completely different than in the south where the temperature never gets below zero. Riding in a colder climate may attract people who want to experience something different from everybody else. In this way Cool can be associated, besides the cool climate, with the equestrian tourist doing something cool and different from other tourists by going on a equestrian tourism holiday somewhere that can, to some people, seem as an extreme destination. In today's world where authenticity and distinctiveness are valued, the Finnhorse can be seen as a cool breed due to its uniqueness and the fact that it has stayed as a pure breed, and is not being modified to compete among world's top competition horses.

The 4 C's strategy is appropriate for international marketing, whereas other types of marketing strategies would be better suitable for domestic marketing. What comes to the Finnhorse, domestic marketing could include for example what Suomen Hippos ry has already suggested: presenting the Finnhorse as unique, athletic, and Finnish, the people's horse.

The pure nature of Ireland has been one of the corner stones of Irish equestrian tourism marketing. The amazing views are expected to bring customers who want to experience equestrian activities in breathtaking surroundings. The exoticness and calmness of the Finnish nature has been recognized in several reports but so far it has not shown in the equestrian tourism marketing that is still lacking in Finland. The nature and different types of surroundings, ranging from the rough terrain of Lapland to views filled with lakes and hills in Central Finland, should be a part of the promotion. Pictures reflecting the positive sides of the Finnish nature and supporting the before mentioned 4 C's are needed. If there is a horse in these pictures it should be a Finnhorse. These pictures are needed in international marketing, whereas for domestic marketing more detailed descriptions of the location and the company are more valuable than pictures of sceneries that are already familiar to the Finnish people.

In 2005 Fáilte Ireland invested 300 000 euros for equestrian tourism marketing. The money was used mainly 'on attending major trade fairs and events in key target markets in Europe

and the USA'. (Fáilte Ireland 2007, 8.) Before Finland can consider doing the same profound marketing research must be done to find out what the best target markets are. Attending fairs and events among these markets will bring the best value to the marketing of equestrian tourism, and will introduce Finnish equestrian tourism as well as the Finnhorse to the people who are most likely to choose Finland as their future destination. Currently the main markets in equestrian tourism are Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Russia (Matkailun edistämiskeskus 2009 d, 40).

In Ireland several different organizations aim to promote and conserve the Irish Draught Horse. Their co-operation is something Finland must learn from. It is not sufficient to have a few organizations who separately promote the Finnhorse in small scale. If they worked together they would be able to make a consistent marketing strategy that would benefit all the parties involved. In 2007 the Finnhorse celebrated its 100 years in the studbook. During that year the breed was promoted in different forms such as articles, events, and a televised documentary. Although the year was a success it is not enough to keep the Finnhorse in people's mind for too long. The promotion must be constant, and have clear aims and targets. Reaching international markets is essential and should be emphasized.

The Irish Draught Horse and the Irish Sport Horse are different from the Finnhorse in their capabilities. The Irish horses are promoted as world class competition horses. The Finnhorse can hardly reach the level of international top horses but in marketing it should not be underestimated. Like the Irish Draught and the Irish Sport Horse, the Finnhorse should be marketed using its best characteristics. Selling Finnhorses domestically and internationally is important, as it increases breeding and makes the breed more known. When there is a larger selection of horses, it is easier to find and school the individuals suitable for equestrian tourism purposes without the costs being too high.

4.2 Websites

	Ireland	Suggestions for Finland
Websites	Websites listing equestrian tourism providers and other equestrian settlements, e.g. DiscoverIreland.ie/Equestrian and Equestrian Holidays Ireland	Creating a similar website containing Finnish equestrian tourism providers and other equestrian settlements. Available also in foreign languages. Promotion on other websites. Link to it on the Visit Finland website.

Table 2. Websites

In Ireland there are numerous websites listing equestrian tourism providers and other equestrian settlements. A couple of renowned ones are DiscoverIreland.ie/Equestrian and Equestrian Holidays Ireland (EHI). They offer lists of equestrian facilities located all over the country providing different equestrian services. There is a description of all the providers with contact information, making it easy for the tourist to compare different options. In Finland this type of a website does not exist. This is negative for the companies as they will have to rely on their own websites and promotion when acquiring clients.

A website containing all equestrian tourism providers in Finland is needed. Also other equestrian settlements should be listed as they may offer for example trail riding on demand but do not advertise themselves as equestrian tourism companies. Clear product and company descriptions ensure that clients find also the smaller service providers who may not have their own websites. The clients are also able to compare different options when looking for the destination most suitable for their needs. Besides Finnish the websites should be available also in other languages, especially in English. The other languages should be those of the main target market countries. The website will create a portal abroad, especially if it is promoted on another popular site, such as Facebook or Google. There should also be a link to it on the Visit Finland website.

4.3 Establishments

	Ireland	Suggestions for Finland
Establishments	Horse museums e.g. the Irish Horse Museum and Dartfield Horse Museum	A new horse museum with regular hours in destination with a lot of tourism. Easy for the tourist to find. Exhibitions all year round.
	The Irish National Stud with museum and gardens. Also round tours around the stud.	Harnessing an equestrian centre also for tourism use. Round tours and presentation of the activities including horseback riding or carriage driving. Meeting services, refreshment days, Sunday lunches.

Table 3. Establishments

In Ireland there are museums dedicated to horses. These include for example the Irish Horse Museum at the National Stud and Dartfield Horse Museum (DiscoverIreland.ie/Equestrian 2010). In Finland there is at least one horse museum. The museum is located in Ypäjä Equine College but it is open only during large events organized at the Equine College (Ypäjä Equine College 2010). This type of a museum reaches mainly only Finnish customers who attend certain equestrian events. To make equestrianism and the Finnhorse more known to domestic and international tourists traveling in Finland, a horse museum that is open regularly is needed. It should be located in a destination with plenty of tourism flow, and it should be easily found by the tourist. Different exhibitions should be organized year round to keep the museum vibrant and profitable.

The Irish National Stud, established in 1946, is one of Ireland's major tourist attractions. Besides the Irish Horse Museum there are round tours at the stud, Japanese gardens, and Saint Fiachra's Garden. (Irish National Stud 2010.) These types of activities bring extra profit to the company. In Finland the establishments that could be considered for this type of service are quite small. Yet, depending on their location and resources, they could offer extra

services during the busiest tourism seasons. An example of an extra service for a normal equestrian centre could be a tour consisting of the presentation of the facilities, business activities, horses and other animals, and perhaps some horseback riding or carriage driving. The market niche for this is not too big but when other services, such as meeting services, refreshment days, or Sunday lunches are added, the market grows bigger.

4.4 Education

	Ireland	Suggestions for Finland
Education	Strategy to improve equine education: promote equine industry careers	Promoting equine industry careers, emphasizing the importance of education, launching a marketing campaign for equestrian tourism education, adding Finnhorse in a degree as a specialization

Table 4. Education

The Strategy for the Equine Industry in Northern Ireland (2007) has listed strategies useful in improving equine education. One of the strategies that the report suggests is a marketing campaign to promote careers in the equine industry for example on open days and trade fairs. This would be useful also in Finland, as there are still a lot of uneducated entrepreneurs and employees working in the equine industry.

The importance of education must be emphasized to young people who are interested in working in the equine industry. Equestrian tourism education needs a marketing campaign to encourage people already working in the industry to seek for professional education. This would increase the quality of equestrian tourism products in the market, and enable the creation of a quality control system. The use of the Finnhorse should be linked to the equestrian tourism education as a specialization. Issues that should be handled could include for example Finnhorse breeding, trail horse schooling, and studies that will teach the participants to use the strengths of the breed in their marketing and products.

4.5 Events

	Ireland	Suggestions for Finland
Events	Horse races for the whole family	Developing events to meet visitors' needs: improving competition program and information availability, more additional activities
	Dublin Horse Show	Helsinki International Horse show: developing the event, improving promotion, adding additional activities to attract domestic tourists. Creating 'all-inclusive' packages for international tourists.

Table 5. Events

In Ireland horse races are popular also among people who are not interested in horses. There are many racing events that serve the needs of the whole family offering a lot of other activities besides watching the race itself. Dublin Horse Show is one of the largest events of the country and attracts thousands of both domestic and international visitors.

Finnish equestrian competitions have potential in attracting more visitors, even from abroad. In order to do this the events must be developed to meet the needs of both domestic and international visitors by for example improving the competition program and information availability, and increasing the amount of additional activities linked to the event. Helsinki International Horse Show (HIHS) is a world class event with competitors from all over the world. In the recent years it has faced tremendous financial problems. The event is not attracting enough spectators to stay profitable. The organizing board has set a campaign called 'Golden Bracelet' that sells bracelets entitling its carrier to enter the show every day and receive some other benefits none before seen to the normal visitor of the event. HIHS needs more promotion to attract domestic tourists. Currently it is a show that attracts mostly people who are interested in horses and horseback riding. More additional activities are

needed for the show to appeal to the whole family that is ready to travel there, even from the other side of the country. International visitors can be attracted by offering affordable 'all-inclusive' packages including transportation, accommodation, and tickets.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The number of horseback riders in Finland is increasing all the time creating more business opportunities and new jobs. Equestrian tourism is a growing industry but so far Finland is far behind compared to Ireland. There is a lot of potential in the exotic and calm countryside of Finland as well as in the Finnhorse. Also the reputation of Finland as a safe country brings its own value to equestrian tourism.

Some of the current problems preventing the development of the equestrian tourism industry include for example lack of schooled horses suitable for tourism use, poor equestrian tourism promotion, and profitability issues. Product development, promotion, networking, and education play a huge role in the future success of Finnish equestrian tourism. Ireland has internationally been promoted as the 'Land of the Horse' whereas Finland still lacks purposeful equestrian tourism promotion.

Trail riding is probably the best known form of equestrian tourism in Finland. The Finnhorse is often used for this purpose due to its characteristics and versatility. The Finnhorse as the only native breed in Finland possesses valuable assets that can be useful in equestrian tourism. It is calm, strong, trustworthy, and suitable for riders of all ages and levels in horseback riding. These are common factors between the Finnhorse and the Irish Draught Horse. Information on how the Irish Draught has been used for tourism purposes was not available but it is a common horse in Ireland that has also earned its respect as a hard working farm horse in the past.

When benchmarking Finnish and Irish equestrian tourism, the issues that arose were marketing, websites, establishments, education, and events. Currently the biggest problem is equestrian tourism marketing, and it affects all the above mentioned issues. The 4 C's; Credible, Contrasting, Creative, and Cool that Finland has used in branding the country, should be used also in equestrian tourism promotion. Defining target markets, creating an equestrian tourism quality control system, co-operation, and the promotion of Finland as an exotic tourist destination and the Finnhorse as a versatile breed are key issues in the equestrian tourism marketing.

New websites for potential customers must be created. A museum with regular hours presenting horses of Finland is needed as a tourist attraction in a destination where it is most

profitable. Improving education and increasing the amount of training for entrepreneurs is important in the development of the equestrian tourism industry. Event development and promotion must be taken care of in order to keep the big events viable.

Comparing Finnish equestrian tourism to that of Ireland was quite simple. Equestrian tourism in Ireland is much more developed and successful, and thus provides a good example for Finland to follow. In Europe there are also other countries famous for their equestrian tourism, such as Hungary and Spain but Ireland as an English speaking country provides much more information of its actions on the internet and thus is easier to research.

The research was successful. The current status of Finnish equestrian tourism was defined in detail and different possibilities for the Finnhorse were stated. In the benchmarking process Ireland was a good country to take example from. The suggestions are useful and realistic. There would be many more issues to include in the benchmarking but the topic was delineated only to include five main issues to prevent the thesis from expanding too much.

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