

## **Spirit of Inari International Tourism Seminar, 1 November 2019, welcome speech by Toni K. Laine, Mayor of Inari Municipality**

Welcome to Spirit of Inari, the international gathering of tourism business for people who are working, investing or influencing tourism development.

During the last decade we have seen a steep rise in interest considering the opportunities of travel business in the North and Arctic area. Although the history of travelling and tourism is long in this area, the last years of development have finally made us able to achieve an international breakthrough in the international market. The economy of the Inari municipality, is firmly tied with the service industry. As we talk about the economy, in many places tourism is an addition to livelihoods but in Inari, economically it's the core. Tourism's role as a core is a complex issue. We are dependent on tourism and its sustainable growth but at the same time we must remember that the originality, pure nature and unique culture are the the key factors behind successful tourism business. It is about people's expectations, the flow of time tied with seasons and places tied with stories. The experience must be authentic as the Arctic and the people living there are themselves.

However, the Arctic and the nature of the Arctic is fragile. In addition to promoting tourism we need to focus on environmental and cultural sustainability. No one wants to see the Arctic as an artificial travel destination that has lost its soul, the wilderness and the local culture. Instead of promoting mass tourism, the focus must be in developing top-tier services and experiences for travellers that wish to experience something different compared to many other destinations around the world.

In Inari we see the co-operation between Finland, Norway and Russia is extremely important. Our strategy is to make Ivalo as a tourism hub and gateway to Arctic area and the nearby areas of Norway and Russia.

As people arrive from a great distance, we need to develop many kinds of products and environments to satisfy the needs of travellers that want to experience many kinds of environments and activities. There are always some things that you can't offer yourself, for instance, in Inari we don't have the sea and sea related activities. That is where you need the international partners to co-operate for mutual benefit.

From our experience, key factors are firstly the co-operation between the entrepreneurs and local government, secondly the logistics, roads and flight connections and third the efforts to make travelling easier and less bureaucratic between our countries.

In Finland municipalities are strong and the decision making on land planning and building is solely municipalities duty. The democratic process is controlling every step of tourism development related to building and environment. From our point of view, we see that sustainable growth and development needs the support of the locals. This is best achieved by open discussion, aiming for common solutions and active participation of stakeholder groups and people.

In Inari, we are building an arctic example of success. Our population is growing again, municipal economy is strong and we are able to provide very wide scale of services for our people and visitors. We do not have mines, windmills or large factories. Instead, we have the tourism, world leading testing of vehicles and tires and traditional sources of livelihood like reindeer herding and fishing. Living in the north means that you can't have the same economical activities or large scale of businesses as you might have in more southern locations near the large cities. You have to try to be best in where you can on a global scale, keep your mind open and head up for opportunities.

Welcome to Inari and I hope you enjoy the seminar, catch some new ideas and make plenty of new connections and friends!