

Un/Sustainable Tourism -Innovation Camp in Tornio

Building Sustainable Tourism Together

From October 7th to 9th 2025, Tornio hosted a three-day Innovation Camp that brought together upper secondary school students, teachers and professionals from Finland and Sweden. The Aurora Entrepreneurialis project served as the foundation for the event, with a focus on sustainable tourism, cross-border collaboration and fostering an entrepreneurial culture in schools. The camp culminated in a principal seminar 'Keeping the Future in North', highlighting the importance of educational leadership in shaping future-ready institutions.

Inspiration and Team Building

The first day began with a warm welcome and lunch at Boutique Hotel Mustaparta. Participants were introduced to the story of Mustaparta and the Grand Hotel, followed by engaging team-building activities. The Innovation Challenge “creating a sustainable tourism experience” was launched, setting the stage for collaborative problem-solving throughout the camp.

According to Oliver Lokka (students, Tornion yhteislyseon lukio), *team building was fun and helped the team members to connect. He agreed with his mates from the 'Petrol A-team' that it was a bit awkward at first to start working on a challenge with complete strangers, but through the exercises, collaboration began to work and on the second day it was easy to express own opinions and thoughts and try to find a joint solution.*

Keynote speakers from the University of Oulu shared insights on cross-border cultural tourism and envisioned the regenerative tourism industry. Photographer Eva Kaján offered a compelling perspective on how photography can be used to highlight sustainable practices in tourism. With these insights in mind, the mixed participant teams began brainstorming ideas for the challenge solutions.

“I enjoyed especially the lecture from Eva Kaján, who spoke about photographing and activism, topics I genuinely relate to”, said Annika Knuuti (Student, Lappia-Tornio). Edith Ek Strand from Strömbäckaskolan (Piteå) mentioned that the lectures gave her new understanding about tourism: “After listening to the keynotes, I understood that also I, and all the other participants at the innovation camp, are actually tourists experiencing new things.”

Company Visits and Reflection

On the second day of the innovation camp, participants visited local businesses in the Torne Valley area that exemplify sustainable tourism. The two travelling routes introduced the participants Snow Castle and Experience365, Old Pine Husky Farm, Sataman Krouwi and Bothnian Bay Jähti, Kukkolaforseen, Luppio and Farm Escape. These visits provided real-world context and inspiration for the innovation challenge that teams started to brainstorm the day before.

"The visits were really interesting," said teachers Merja Lappalainen (Haukiputaan lukio, Oulu) and Inga Matarengi (Gränsälvsgymnasiet, Övertorneå). Merja was especially amazed by the fact that she got to experience totally new things for her, even though the visits took her to areas she originally comes from. Inga on the other hand, was astonished by the Experience 365: "It was a marvelous experience and at the same time confusing, as I had not known that something like this exists in Kemi. I think it is remarkable and even sensational what Experience 365 offers to international tourists. There are many tourist attractions up north that offer experiences with snow and ice, but to combine all of this with the sea – this is unique even to a person living up North too."

In the evening, each team got to present their ideas to another team, which offered constructive feedback. The day concluded with a shared dinner, after which many continued the evening in the elegant Ball Room of Grand Hotel Mustaparta, enjoying relaxed activities such as board games and music in a warm and informal atmosphere.

Experience Creation and Principal Seminar

The final day of the camp focused on polishing and showcasing the teams' innovative solutions. It also included the principal seminar, where upper secondary education leaders delved into themes surrounding tourism and the steel industry. The discussions centered on how schools can help sustain the vitality of northern regions by boosting their appeal and capacity to retain talent.

While the principals explored opportunities for collaboration under the theme "Keeping the Future in North," the innovation camp challenge teams had the chance to experience each other's creations, which were also evaluated by a panel of judges representing a wide range of expertise. The evaluation focused on sustainability, creativity, innovation and the quality of collaboration. The whole camp ended in a final ceremony, where outstanding teams in various categories were recognized and awarded.

"It was truly inspiring to witness how the innovation process and team dynamics evolve. In the beginning, every participant is pushed outside their comfort zone, facing uncertainty, requiring resilience and navigating feelings of confusion or even frustration. But as time passes and teams share experiences and build trust, something remarkable happens, they come together, collaborate and discover creative solutions to challenges that even seasoned

professionals struggle with,” reflected Sini Viinikka (Aurora Entrepreneurialis project specialist).

The Final Innovation Camp of Aurora Entrepreneurialis

The Un/Sustainable Tourism Innovation Camp was a memorable event that empowered participants to explore sustainable entrepreneurship through hands-on experiences, expert insights and cross-border teamwork. It marked the third and final innovation camp organized by the Aurora Entrepreneurialis project. Participants left the camp with fresh perspectives, new connections and ideas to reflect on, especially regarding sustainability in travel and tourism.

Edith Ek Strand and her schoolmate Elin Segerstedt (Strömbackaskolan, Piteå), who were attending their second innovation camp organized by the Aurora Entrepreneurialis project, shared: *“We decided to come to another event since the first one was so nice experience, everything was so well organized, and the food was very good. We also think these events are an amazing opportunity to practice our English. The camp was again super great, and we hope to be able to join also the last event of the project.”*

The Aurora Entrepreneurialis project will conclude with a final event in late November, themed “Un/Sustainable Food.” This event will not only explore critical issues around food sustainability but also serve as the official closing milestone of the project.
