

Lake Saimaa Association founded after the Saimaa Agreement to make the area one of Finland's most important tourist destinations

In late 2019, the regional councils of South Savo and South Karelia and the cities of Lappeenranta, Mikkeli, Savonlinna, Imatra and Varkaus signed the Saimaa Agreement. The agreement stated that target-oriented development and marketing efforts will be continued to promote tourism in the Saimaa area between 2020 and 2025. The goal is to make the Saimaa area one of the top three Finnish tourist destinations alongside Lapland and the Helsinki Metropolitan Area.

The Lake Saimaa Association was founded to implement the cooperation agreement. The association is responsible for defining strategic guidelines for the implementation of the Saimaa Agreement as well as for developing the activities and monitoring the results. In 2020, **Anu Talka**, Development Manager of the Regional Council of South Karelia, is acting as the chairperson of the Lake Saimaa Association, while **Maisa Häkkinen**, Director of Tourism of Mikkeli, acts as the vice chairperson of the association.

According to Talka, the Lake Saimaa cooperation will result in the introduction of joint digital services, such as a digital platform which will eventually replace VisitSaimaa.fi and GoSaimaa.fi, the current online platforms of South Karelia and South Savo.

- In spite of the coronavirus pandemic, we look to the future and see that the potential of tourism will remain high. We believe that domestic tourism will increase first, and after the situation has gone back to normal, international tourism will pick up as well. Our services and digital marketing and sales must be geared up for it by then.

In addition to building joint digital service platforms, the Lake Saimaa Association will continue doing regional marketing work using the Lake Saimaa Purest Finland brand, which was launched in 2017. Our goal is to strengthen the development work, for example in terms of service productisation and packaging, says **Mirka Rahman**, board member of the Lake Saimaa Association and Director of Tourism of the City of Lappeenranta.

- The results of cooperation can already be seen in the ongoing national campaign called 100 Reasons to Travel in Finland, in the Saimaa Phenomenon 2026 project, and in the Lakeland Experiences sales channel, which offers experiences in both South Savo and South Karelia regions.

The area's unique lake nature and short distances to the Helsinki metropolitan area and St. Petersburg are among Saimaa's strengths. The shared characteristics of the two regions are highlighted in Lake Saimaa projects and other regional cooperation efforts. Rahman believes that the pure and real nature of Saimaa is something that both domestic and international tourists want to experience.

- Although the cooperation between the Saimaa area's organisations already has strong roots, it is now time to enhance it. Together we can do more.

The Saimaa area's strengths, common goals and cooperative approach are mentioned as key elements in the Saimaa Phenomenon 2026 bid book, with which the cities of Eastern Finland aim for the status of the 2026 European Capital of Culture. Involved in the Saimaa Phenomenon 2026 project are the regions surrounding Lake Saimaa and their central cities – Joensuu, Kuopio, Lappeenranta and Mikkeli.

According to the rules of the Lake Saimaa Association, legal entities which have signed the Saimaa

Agreement and are committed to the basic principles and objectives of the association and the agreement can become members of the association.

The association's member organisations are:

Regional Council of South Karelia, Regional Council of South Savo, goSaimaa Ltd, the City of Imatra, Imatra Region Development Company Ltd, Imatra Base Camp Ltd, the City of Lappeenranta, the City of Mikkeli, tourist service association Mikkelin Seudun Matkailupalvelu ry, Mikkeli Development Miksei Ltd, the City of Savonlinna, Savonlinna Travel Ltd, the City of Varkaus, Navitas Development Ltd.

Read more at: <http://lakesaimaa.fi/>

Read more about the Saimaa Phenomenon 2026 project at: <https://www.saimaailmio2026.fi/>

Further information:

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