

CASE

# RENT A FINN

“A campaign that had an impact beyond the short term – while branding a whole nation Visit Finland created a commercial triumph.”

2021

Want to be happy?  
Rent a Finnish person to  
teach you how

FAST COMPANY

I rented a Finn to  
find out why people in Finland  
are happiest

INSIDER

Find Your Happiness  
in Finland Through  
'Rent a Finn' Campaign

Forbes

Famously Happy  
Finland Is Revealing Its  
Secrets to the World

ADWEEK

Get happiness lessons  
by renting the happiest  
people in the world

lonely planet



According to the UN, Finland is the happiest country in the world.  
Finns know the lifestyle, but how to teach the world the way?

# Starting point & objectives

Finland is a small, sparsely-populated Nordic nation with big ambitions to become a real contender as a must-see destination in the world of international tourism.

To do this meant challenging the dominance of Scandi tourism giants Norway and Sweden, under whose long shadow Finland's international tourism brand ranking had remained static for many years.

But with a communications budget of just €200K government tourism body Visit Finland needed to find a smarter way to create the biggest possible splash.

## **Commercial objective**

| Increase Finland's tourism revenue.

## **Marketing objective**

| Grow the number of overnight stays in Finland.

## **Communications objectives**

| Increase awareness of, and interest in, Finnish holidays.

| Improve attitudes towards Finland as a tourism brand.

| Create engagement with Visit Finland marketing.

# Rent A Finn in a nutshell

## Background & context

Tourism is an important industry in the Nordics. It makes a large and growing contribution to the economy. In 2017, for example, foreign visitor income accounted for 4.3% of Norway's GDP, an increase of 2.4% on 2016 ①. But for too long Finland has lagged behind, overlooked by overseas travellers. Despite the beauty of its land and lakes and the friendliness of its people, it has been overshadowed and outspent by its neighbours, with Sweden spending twice as much on marketing and Norway four times ②. But Finnish government tourism organisation Visit Finland was on a mission to make a difference.

## Creative challenge

Many tourists think they know what they want from the Nordics. Fjords. Mountains. Midnight sun. Picturesque fishermen's cottages. Northern Lights. Hygge. In fact, all the things Norway and Sweden have been advertising for years. For Visit Finland, the creative challenge was how to appeal to the kinds of tourists who were attracted to all of these things, and yet to say something surprising and different enough about Finland to really stand out - despite being heavily outspent.

## Solution

Nordic people are known for being relaxed and happy. But what most people don't know is that of them all, it's actually the Finns who are officially the happiest. In fact, in the United Nations World Happiness Report, Finland consistently ranks year after year as the happiest nation in the entire world ③. At a time when life is getting busier and noisier and more and more people are desperately searching for some kind of a sense of calm, that's something special. So our solution was to offer the chance to Rent a Finn, to learn the secrets of Finnish Happiness.

## Execution

We launched a nationwide initiative to recruit the kind of Finns that people in the wider world would be pleased to learn happiness from. Then we put them up for hire as what we called Happiness Guides, on our campaign site under VisitFinland.com.

To build awareness and desire, we conducted a worldwide PR campaign that reached 149 countries sharing our Finns' stories and

pictures with the world's media with the aid of internationally known Finnish spokespeople. The campaign reach was boosted with bought advertising in social media covering 10 key countries that had been identified as the main sources for tourism to Finland. As the campaign developed, we used the stories - and the world's reactions to them - to create further content, monitoring earned media developments and reacting along the way.

It was a campaign that exceeded all expectations. It attracted worldwide public attention. It put Finland firmly in the media's 'top places to visit' lists ④. And it increased tourism, with the rate of growth in overnight stay bookings growing sixfold, from 0.83% before the campaign to 5.32% after.

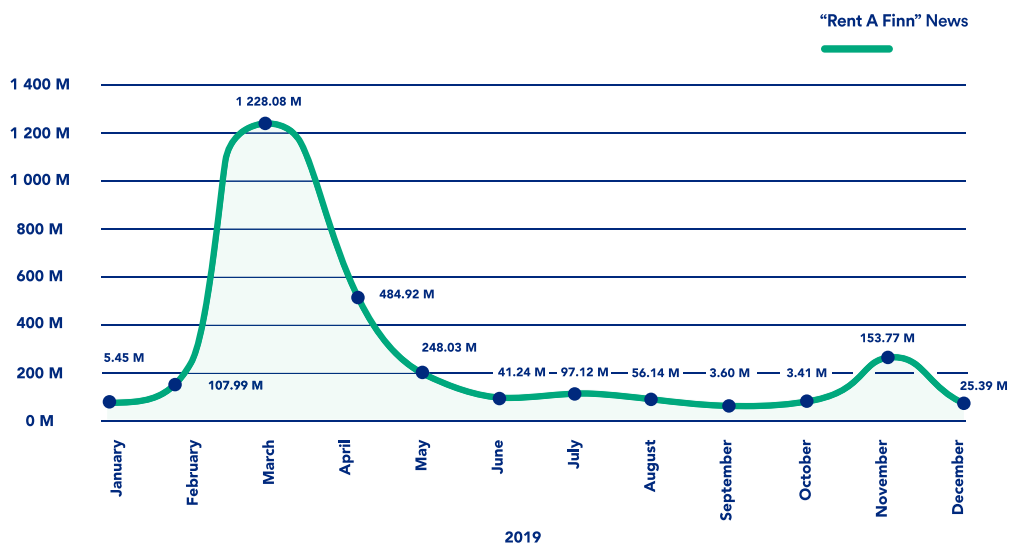
## Sources:

- ① Statistics Norway
- ② World Travel & Tourism Council
- ③ United Nations World Happiness Report
- ④ E.g. Business Insider's Number One Country to Travel To in 2019

# Creating engagement & awareness

Figure 3.2. Rent a Finn PR campaign results

## Rent a Finn had a massive global potential reach of 2.46 billion impressions



**Sources:**

Meltwater Global Media Monitoring Report, Rent a Finn campaign report January – December 2019

## The recruitment campaign engaged and excited the Finnish nation

The campaign received significant media coverage within Finland with a campaign potential reach of 34.4 million, i.e. six times the amount of Finns (1). As a result, hundreds of Finns contacted Visit Finland offering to

be rented out to tourists as Happiness Guides, sharing the secrets of the Finnish way of life. This content was widely shared by Finns and Finnish media.

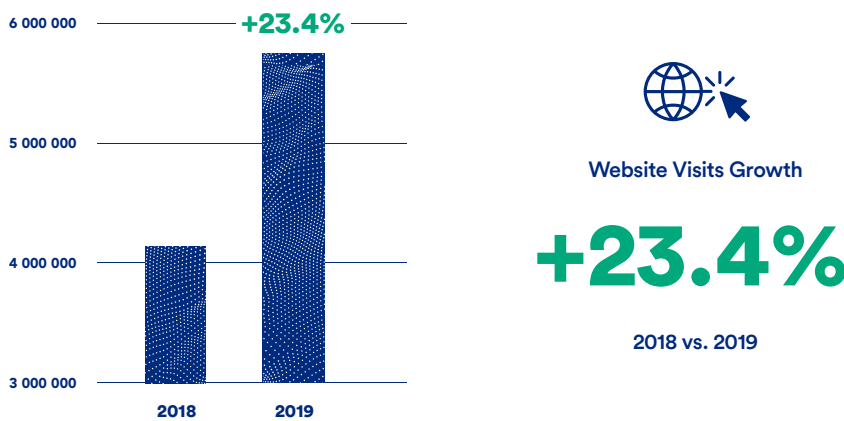
## The chance to rent a Finn drove traffic to visitfinland.com

When we had assembled our band of Finnish Happiness Guides ready to rent out to the world, we fed their stories to the global media, supported by PR activity and by the involvement of some internationally-known Finnish spokespeople. Visibility was further boosted by online and social media advertising targeted at busy workers on their lunch-breaks.

The resulting peak in worldwide coverage sparked both interest and engagement, with an immediate 114% year-on-year increase in monthly traffic to VisitFinland.com @.

Figure 3.3. Visit Finland website visits 2018 and 2019

### The global interest turned into engagement that increased the traffic at our website by 23.4%

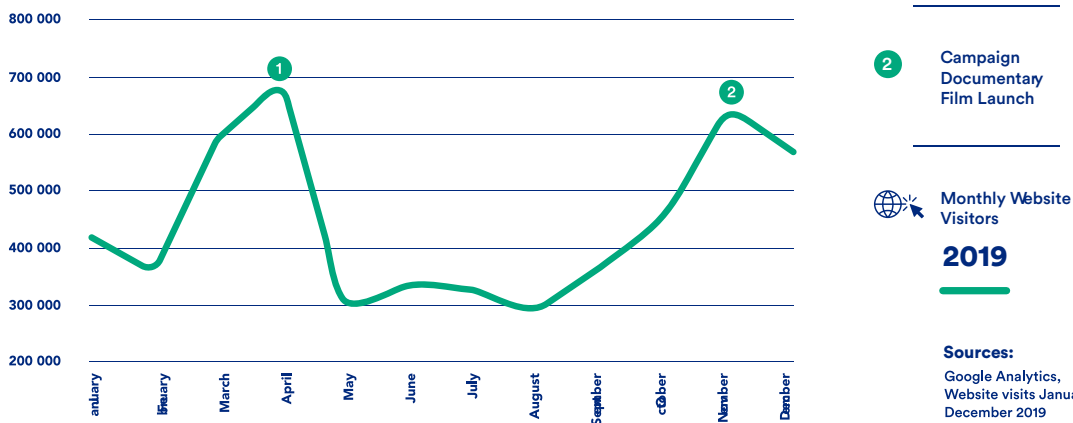


**Sources:**

Google Analytics, Website visits January 2018 – December 2019

Figure 3.4. Visit Finland website monthly visits 2019

### The PR activities created peaks at our website. The monthly visitors were even 114% higher compared to previous year at the same time



**Sources:**

Google Analytics, Website visits January – December 2019

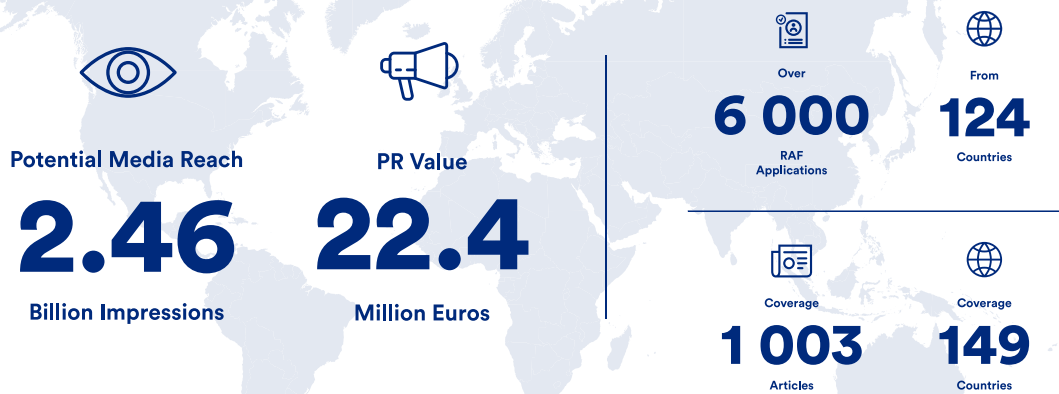
## The campaign gained PR value of €22.4M

The campaign engaged public and media opinion all over the world. Our message raising awareness of Finland reached potential tourists in 149 countries,

with a campaign potential reach of 2.46 billion and a combined PR value of €22.4 million ☺

Figure 3.1. Rent a Finn PR campaign results and number of applications

**The campaign was a success with impressive results: a chance to Rent a Finn created a PR value of 22.4 million euros**



**Sources:**

Meltwater Global Media Monitoring Report, Rent a Finn campaign report January – December 2019  
Google Analytics, Target: Rent a Finn number of Applications 18.3.-21.4.2019

## Thousands of foreigners applied to rent a Finn

In the space of just 4 weeks, we got over 6000 video applications from 124 different countries from people looking to hire a Finnish Happiness Guide ☺.

## As the campaign develops, awareness and engagement continued to rise

As tourists took up the chance to rent their own Finnish Happiness Guide we recorded what happened and used it to create further content. One of those visitors was Charlene from Singapore, who spent a week in Ansahti with her guide. Her story was turned into a cinematic documentary film, launched towards the end of the campaign, which drove a second peak of visitors to the website ☺.

**Sources:**

☺ Meltwater Global Media Monitoring Report, Rent a Finn campaign report January –March 2019 ☺ Google Analytics, Website visits, April 2019 compared to April 2020 ☺ Meltwater Global Media Monitoring Report, Rent a Finn campaign report January – December 2019 ☺ Google Analytics, Target: Rent a Finn number of Applications ☺ Google Analytics, Website visits, November – December 2019

# Motivating behaviour change

## Audience behaviour and insight –Meet the Modern Humanists

We started by interrogating Visit Finland's segmentation study of global tourists ☺. Unsurprisingly, people travel for different reasons. Some seek sun, sea and sangria. Others want fashion and urban chic. But we identified a significant segment who travel to gain a sense of balance in their busy working lives, and who seek to 'live like a local' when they are abroad. They're people who obtain

personal satisfaction, and social status, from mixing with the locals, from trying little-known delicacies and specialities, and from gaining the inside knowledge that marks them out as a 'real' traveller. They are called Modern Humanists. We believed this group would appreciate the unique attractions only Finland has to offer – if only we could find the right way to present it to them.

## Finland social behaviour and insight – identifying and activating a unique relationship with nature

**IDENTIFYING.** We were in an ideal position to uncover the truths behind Finland's world-beating happiness ranking. We analysed Finns' attitudes to life. What came back time and time again was the sense of perspective and ease that has its roots in a deep and culturally-engrained relationship with nature. For Finns, even urban ones, nature isn't something separate from human society – it is all interwoven and interconnected in daily life.

**ACTIVATING.** Understanding what lies beneath Finnish happiness was one thing, but to turn it into a campaign capable of motivating behaviour change in the wider world we needed to turn it into action. We needed to turn our campaign into a social activator to get ordinary Finns all over the county to want to play their part. So the campaign in general – and the first phase in particular – was targeted not only at overseas tourists but at Finns themselves, to make them feel proud and to build a social movement to get them to offer their services.

## Impact of the campaign on behaviour change

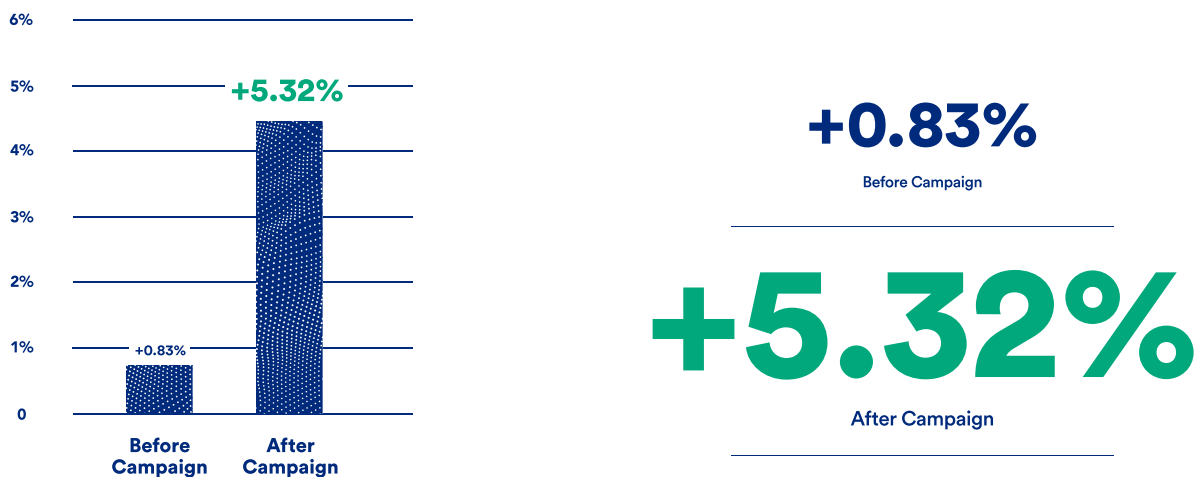
**BEFORE.** Before the campaign, tourists had been 'discovering' the Nordics, encouraged by big-spending advertising campaigns.

The number of overnight stays booked in Norway, Sweden and Denmark was steadily increasing. But Finland was missing out, with an almost-flat growth rate of just +0.83%.

**AFTER.** Rent a Finn got people around the world to sit up and take notice. More than this, it sparked a change in behaviour, with the result that tourists spent nearly 1 million nights more in Finland during the campaign than in the same time previous year ☺.

Figure 4.1. Year to date growth in foreign tourists' amount of monthly overnight stays in Finland before and after the campaign

### Overnight stay growth was 6 times faster after the campaign



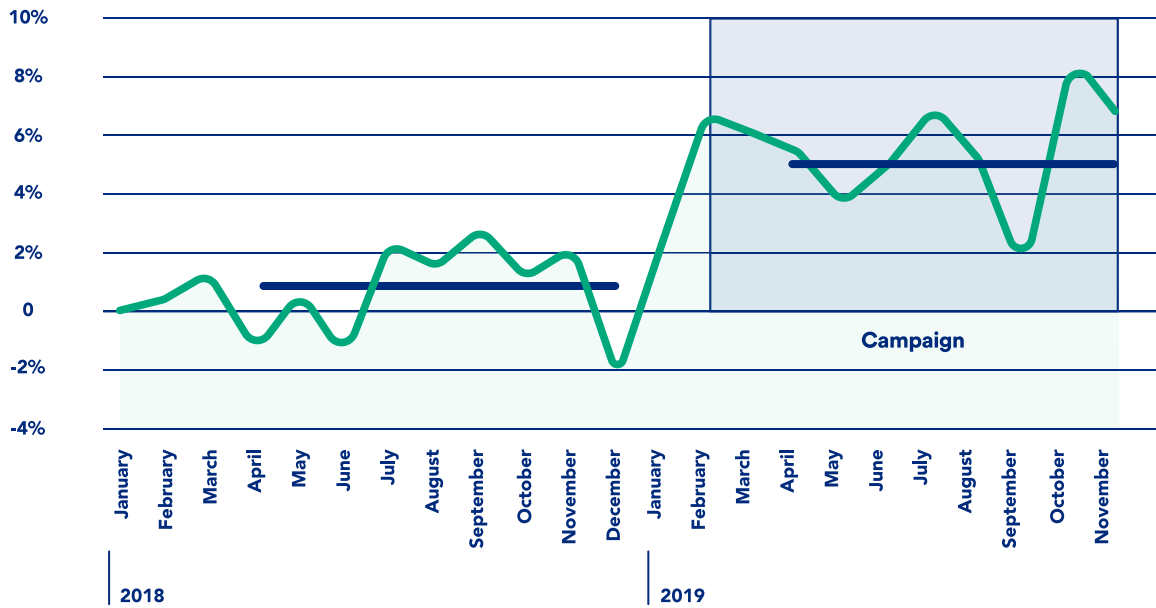
**Sources:**

Foreign visitors' overnight stays in Finland, Visit Finland/Statistics Finland



Figure 4.2. Year to date growth in foreign tourists' amount of monthly overnight stays in Finland 2018-2019.

## Each campaign month growth in overnight stays exceeded the growth of the same month in previous year



**Sources:**

Foreign visitors' overnight stays in Finland, Visit Finland/Statistics Finland

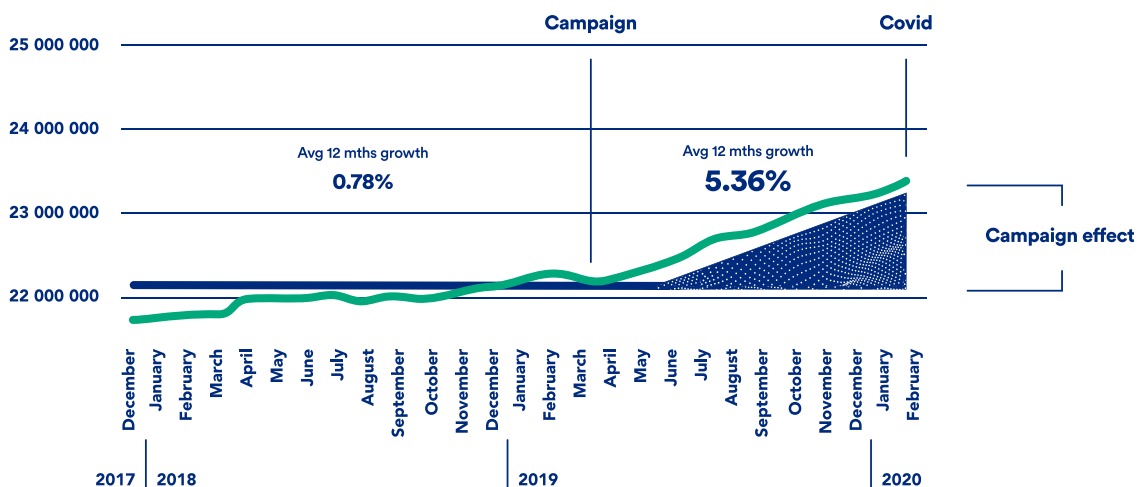


The growth of foreign tourists' overnight stays



Figure 4.3. 12 month moving average of foreign tourists overnight stays in Finland 2017-2019

## After the stagnation in overnight stays, the campaign accelerated growth in stays



**Sources:**

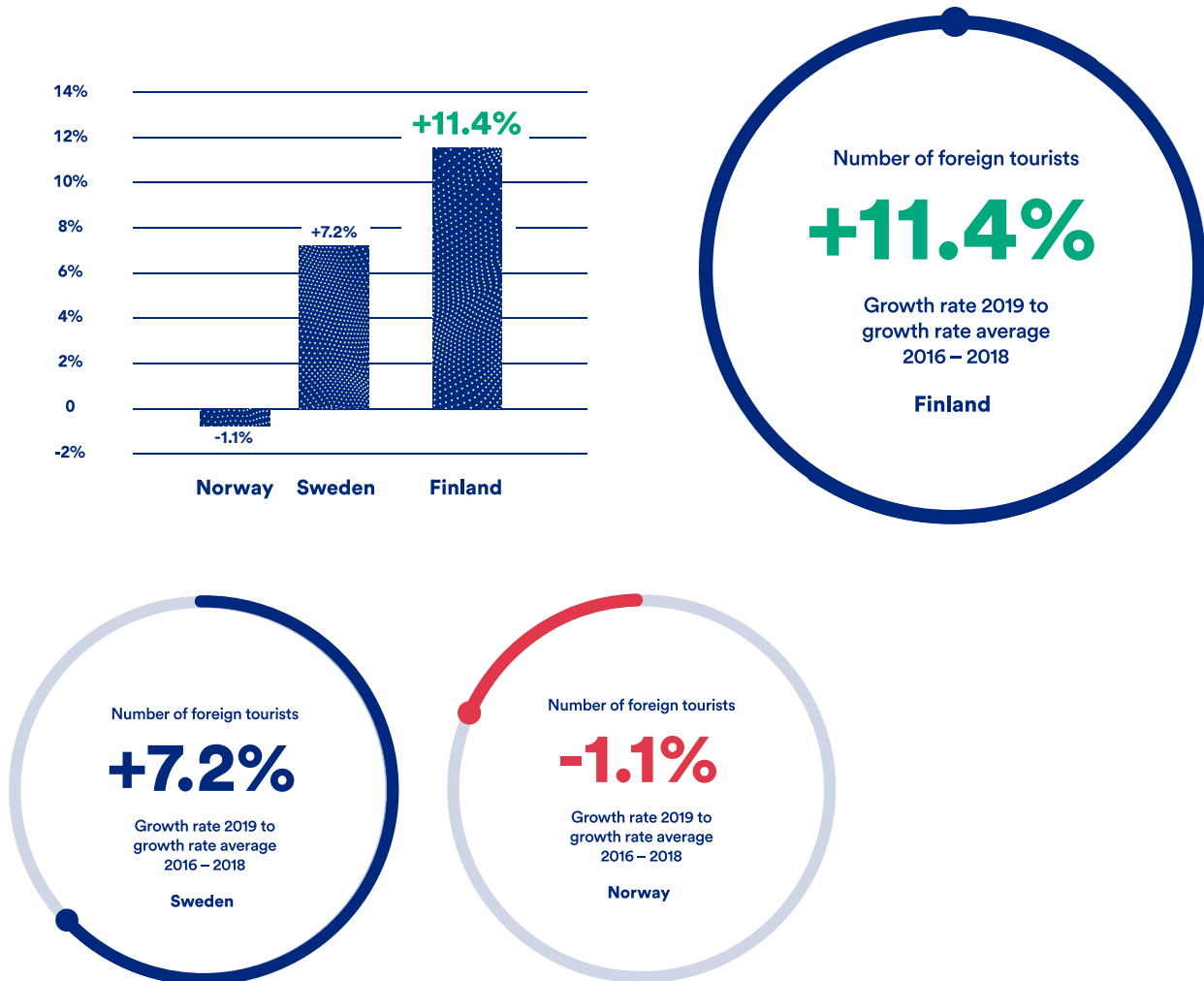
Foreign visitors' overnight stays in Finland, Visit Finland/Statistics Finland

By way of comparison, the number of foreign tourists visiting Finland in 2019 grew +11.4% compared with the country's 2016-18 average. Using the same measure, Sweden achieved only 7.24% and high-spending Norway actually declined.

The result was that Finland overtook its rivals in the World Tourism Organisation's growth rankings to become the TOP Nordic tourist destination ☺.

Figure 4.4. The growth of foreign tourists in Nordic countries 2019 compared to 2016-2018 average

## With Rent a Finn Finland triumphed the neighbouring giants in the number of foreign tourists



### Sources:

☺ Visit Finland Segmentation Study, NEPA ☺ Visit Finland/Statistics Finland ☺ Number of foreign tourists, UNWTO World Tourism Organization

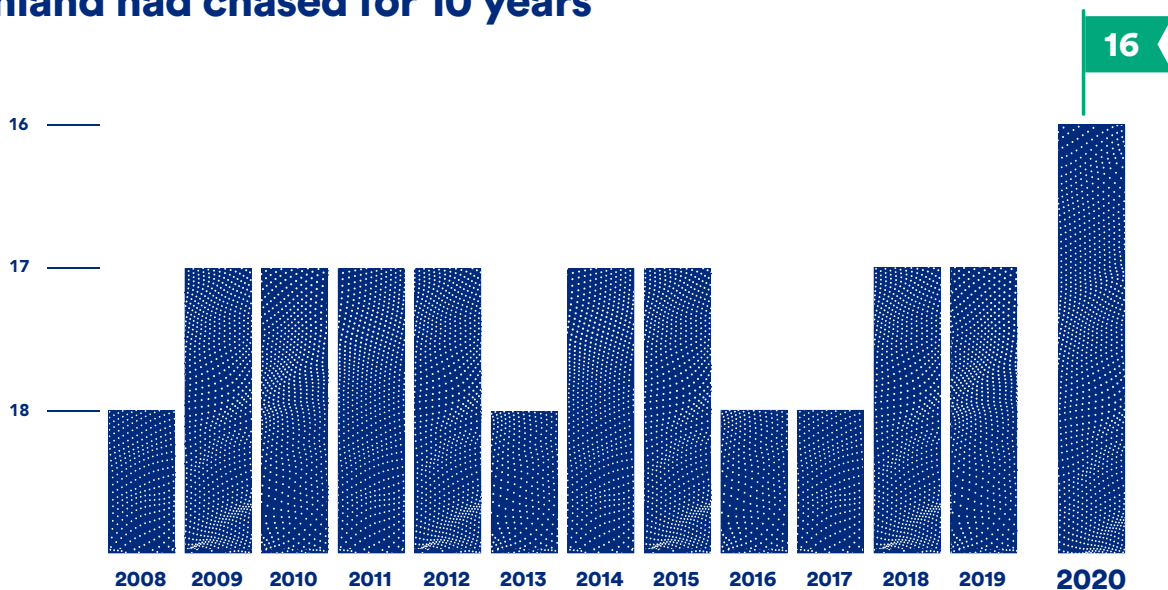
# Rent A Finn measurably improved Finland's brand image

Each year, Anholt Ipsos publish the Nation Brands Index (NBI). It is a global survey of the brand images of nations around the world. The NBI examines the images of around 50 nations each year, by conducting online interviews with 20,000 adults aged 18 and over, in 20 core panel countries. For ten years Finland had languished at number 17, sometimes even slipping to number 18. But in 2020, following the Rent a Finn campaign, Finland's ranking in The National Brand Image finally moved up to reach number 16, an all-time high 📈.

The NBI covers brand image on six dimensions, Exports, Governance, Culture, People, Immigration, Investment and Tourism. Finland's image increased across all of these dimensions, with the highest increase of all on the tourism dimension.

Figure 5.1. Finland's ranking in Nation Brand Study 2008-2020

## Rent a Finn broke the barrier that Finland had chased for 10 years



**Sources:**

Anholt-Ipsos: Nation Brand Study

This ranking sets Finland's brand image above well-known and much-loved holiday destinations like Singapore, United Arab Emirates, India and Argentina, all of which have far higher tourism budgets than Finland.

Table 5.1. Rankings in Nation Brand Study 2020

## Finland outweighs even the destinations with double or triple advertising investments

		Ranking
<b>Finland</b>		<b>▲ 16</b>
<b>Approximately same government advertising spend than Finland</b>		
Czech Republic	27	
Hungary	30	
Egypt	36	
<b>2-3 times bigger government advertising spend compared to Finland</b>		
Belgium	19	
Singapore	24	
Poland	25	
Argentiina	28	
India	34	
United Arab Emirates	42	

**Sources:**

Anholt-Ipsos:  
Nation Brand Study 2020

World Travel & Tourism Council:  
Government Spending On Travel  
And Tourism Service

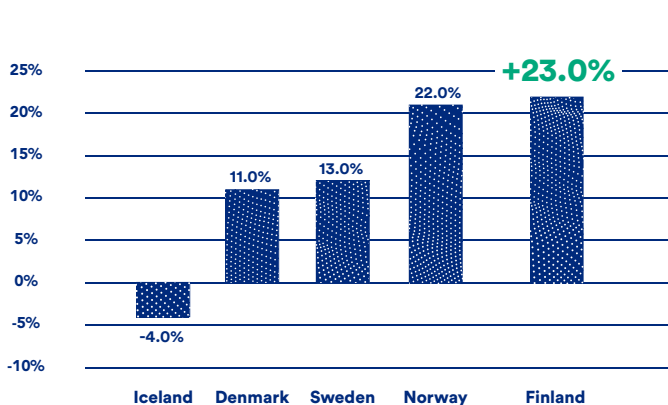
## Affinity translated into active interest and demand

Finland's strengthened brand image translated into increased international interest and demand. One sign of this was the fact that between 2018 and 2019, the year-

on-year number of in online searches for Finland grew +23% from 4,1 to 5.1 million. This growth in appeal was significantly faster than for other Nordic countries. ☺

Figure 5.2. Touristic Online Searches 2019 vs. 2018

## Finland's growth in digital demand was faster compared to other Nordic countries



Digital demand growth  
**+23.0%**  
Finland

## And Finland's happiness continued...

In 2020 Finland was again ranked by the UN as the happiest country in the world ☺.

**Sources:**

☺ Brand Nation Study, Anholt-Ipsos. ☺ Digital Demand, D2 Analytics ☺ The World Happiness Report, United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network

# Creating a commercial triumph

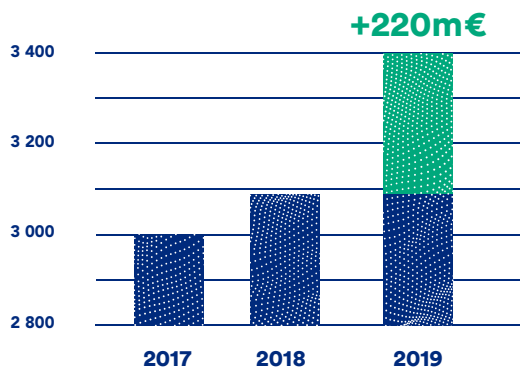
Rent a Finn increased Finland's tourism's revenue by €220 million, Figure 6.1. This money came from a 5% year-on-year increase in hotel overnight stays, 9.9% increase in cottage rental nights and the extra visitors'

additional spending in restaurants, shops and leisure venues. Rent a Finn achieved this revenue growth on a media budget of just €200K.

Figure 6.1. Foreign tourism expenditure

The foreign tourist revenue grew by 220M euros after the campaign

## Meaning of tourism for Finnish economy strengthened after the campaign



# +220

Million Euros



**Sources:**

Foreign tourism expenditure, Statistics Finland

The return on investment of Rent a Finn was truly exceptional. The campaign generated €1099 for every 1€ spent. The incremental revenue from the campaign was estimated to be €219.8M and the total campaign

costs were €200K. This ROI beats the benchmark set by other award winning tourism campaigns, the table 6.1. shows the difference between campaigns.

Table 6.1. ROI in nordic competitors' most awarded tourism campaigns in effectiveness categories



The campaign generated a ROMI that was significantly higher than other award winning tourism papers

## The return on investment of Rent a Finn was truly exceptional

Campaign 📣	Award 🏆	ROMI 📊	Media Investment 📄
<b>Rent A Finn</b>	<b>Cannes Effectiveness Lions Submission 2021</b>	<b>1:1109</b>	<b>200 000 €</b>
Inspired by Iceland	Euro Effies Grand Prix 2011	1:63	2 625 000 €
Do It For Denmark	IPA Bronze Winner 2016	1:16	670 000 €
The Swedish Number	Cannes Effectiveness Lions Gold Winner 2017	1:13	46 000 €

**Sources:**

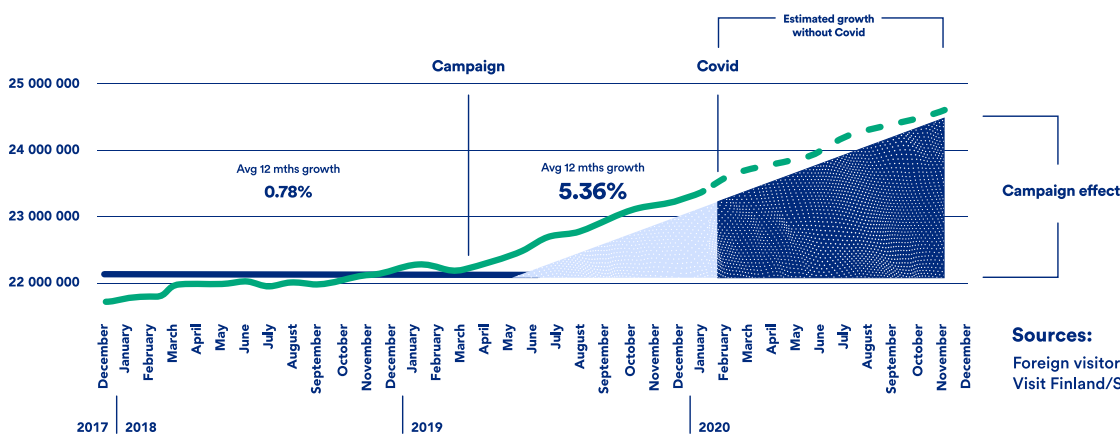
Rent a Finn: Sales growth: Finland's Gross Domestic Product, Ministry of Finance/Statistics Finland, Investments: Visit Finland

Inspired by Iceland: IPA/warc.com  
Do it For Denmark: Euro Effies /warc.com  
Swedish Tourism Association: Cannes Lions/warc.com

It is clear that this campaign exceeded all expectations, not only igniting growth in tourism but also in bringing to life the notion of the Happy Finn and inviting the world to Finland to experience them firsthand.

Figure 6.2. 12 month moving average of foreign tourists overnight stays in Finland 2017-2019 and estimation without Covid

### The campaign potential with same amount of additional investment in 2020 and no effect of Covid: Total long term growth in overnight stays over 2 million nights



**Sources:**

Foreign visitors' overnight stays in Finland, Visit Finland/Statistics Finland

We have no doubt that if Covid had not intervened and stopped the world dead in its tracks, we would have seen a continuation of the success of Rent a Finn into 2020. Figure 6.2. shows the projected 2 million increase

in room nights in Finland for 2020, assuming the same rate of growth achieved in 2019 and further media investment.

**Sources:**

① Statistics Finland ② Visit Finland/Statistics Finland ③ Visit Finland/Statistics Finland

# Rent A Finn became Visit Finland's most successful campaign ever

We offered the people of the world the chance to Rent a Finn, to learn the secrets of Finnish happiness. It was a message that resonated globally, spreading across 149 countries with a potential reach of 2.46 billion. It also changed people's travel plans. As a result, Finland's tourism revenue grew an astonishing €220m year-on-year, despite a media budget of just €200k.

Rent a Finn successfully changed Finland's communication strategy from push to pull. With such a timely and appealing message of happiness and calm in a hectic world, the global media and travel industry willingly picked up and spread Finland's story. Going forward, Visit Finland can now build on this foundation to communicate even more relevant and targeted USPs to potential travellers.

At its heart, Rent a Finn was always intended to offer much more than just tourism. Through its Happiness Guides it created encounters that were both meaningful and enriching. As Charlene from Singapore put it, "This has been a life-changing experience." This is something you don't get from most holidays.

Rent a Finn has now become the brand platform for all of Visit Finland's future actions. Until 2020, when

international travel plans were put on hold by Covid, Visit Finland was preparing to take the Happiness Guide principle to the next level with the launch of a "Happiness School" where greater numbers of travellers could learn from local Finns. Undaunted by the pandemic, we launched Virtual Rent a Finn, an online version. Our campaign reached over 300 million all over the world and, again, received wide-scale media coverage.

Even with much of the world still in lockdown, the momentum created by our campaign continues. At the time of writing, Visit Finland's marketing calendar includes a whole range of Happiness activities, including a major BBC interview on the subject and virtual sales events with the Happiness Guides in a Forest Pavilion for the Tokyo Olympics.

Finland has long been a happy country, but few people outside the country knew. Now, as a result of Rent a Finn, the world finally understands – and this has opened doors to new visitors, new investment, and a healthy and sustainable future for Finnish tourism.

**"This has been a life changing experience."**

Charlene from Singapore after renting Hanna