

Our Quality Commitment



COMPANY PHILOSOPHY

- ☐ Client orientated: Exceeding Expectations¹.
- ☐ Working towards repeat custom based on satisfaction
- ☐ Dedicated, to and flexible to, needs of clients
- ☐ Fair pricing of quality products
- ☐ Continual monitoring of achievement of goals, vision and values
- ☐ Ecologically-minded approach
- ☐ Continual development of services, partners and client base
- ☐ Commitment to staff training and development
- ☐ Succeeding together with our partners by offering quality add-on services within an open and supportive working environment

Quality

Quality is a fairly ambiguous concept when related to the tourism industry since it has different meanings to different people but it is clearly an important one. We are constantly looking for ways to enhance the quality of our products from our clients' perspectives.

Some ways in which we do this are to:

- ☐ not only comply with, but outperform, all of the existing standards and regulations that are relevant to our industry and instruct customers about them
- ☐ challenge out-dated models of working with sled dogs by driving the development of new industry standards in sled dog welfare
- ☐ strive to be at the forefront of positive change in the industry and new products in the marketplace and thereby also keep up with industry trends
- ☐ constantly evaluate staff training tools and targets to ensure a client focus
- ☐ Continuing to review and update your products; making innovative changes;
- ☐ monitor product delivery through (analysis and response to) client feedback to ensure that we are constantly meeting or, ideally, exceeding their expectations in all areas. This includes following up/debriefing accidents, failures, complaints in order to learn from them and keeping in contact with past customers.
- ☐ Define our changing customer base in terms of geographic, socio-economic and psychographic factors;
- ☐ Maintain a cooperative relationship with other local businesses and tourism operators;
- ☐ Maintain positive relations with your community – a quality experience for our client begins with feeling welcome.
- ☐ continually attempt to figure out solutions to our biggest challenges (eg answering client emails during multiday safari season!).
- ☐ Being punctual – picking people up when communicated and starting trips when promised is actually a challenge with private groups since people tend to arrive up to an hour early and up to an hour late...so we need good systems in place to deal with this.

Our guides work in some of the most extreme conditions on earth so the level of competence that they need to be trained to is exceedingly high and a huge amount of time and effort is invested in this.

We set a great emphasis on driving consistency in performance within products irrespective of the conditions encountered since we want all of the clients to go home having experienced a great value, 'once-in-a-lifetime' (hopefully twice!) product. At the same time, because of the conditions, the guides have to be able to adapt and be flexible to constantly changing client needs, depending on the circumstances.

For us, it is important that those of our clients who participate in an adventurous early-season multi-day safari, for instance, have the same positive outlook at the end of the journey as those of our clients who participate in the more relaxing spring months. Whilst their experience of the arctic might be fundamentally different, their experience of their care in the arctic needs to be at the same high standard, throughout. We, and our guides, do our very best to fulfill this expectation.

It is important to remember that delivering quality is an on-going process. A business never reaches the point where it can simply 'coast' on a good reputation, since quality services will not keep up with new trends and demands in tourism. Similarly different parts of the world have different definitions of quality. Southern destinations, for instance, may stress quality in the infrastructure and equipment used as well as in service, rate systems according to stars (eg 5 star hotels) or show quality through fine bed linens or gourmet meals.

¹ This aligns with Lapland's tourism strategy which states that taking care of high quality of tourism services is especially important. The customer has to be valued and his expectations for a trip to Lapland should always try to be exceeded

Northern tourism operators tend to express quality more through personal service and caring that is provided to guests. The Arctic is a spectacular, exotic destination which provides a quality experience all on its own. People come here not for luxury but for something unique, so we make up quality through service. We provide physical comfort by ensuring that our cabins, albeit rustic, are homely and clean. We make sure that the clothes we provide are new and we never give guests anything that we wouldn't wear, eat or use ourselves. We pamper them by providing sweets on pillowcases, unexpected local snacks (salty licorice, cream in hot chocolates etc) at unexpected moments. Authenticity of the experience is essential. We provide emotional comfort by showing care and concern and by understanding that the environment that we perceive to be within our comfort zone, may feel hostile and dangerous to them. But at the same time we have a sense of humour and attempt to convey a feeling of confidence and competence even when things are not going 100% to plan.

It is all about paying attention to details. Providing a 'quality' as well as a safe experience is an important aspect of any tourism business. When a client seeks out sustainable tourism operators, quality and safety are not simply desirable – they are expected. Given the cost of arctic tourism packages, a certain quality expectation is created for the visitors. And for many, their journey to the arctic is the 'trip of a lifetime'. We are selling a dream so we want our clients to go home with amazing memories. The Arctic is viewed as pristine, unique and having 'mystique' – our products have to reflect this.

In a region in which infrastructure is limited and the costs of doing business are high, quality has to come from the person-to-person interactions of operators, staff and guests. Thoughtfulness and concern for guests' enjoyment, comfort and safety go a long way to providing what visitors view as quality and, in turn, value for money.

We have to ensure good administrative and financial management, to have an easy online booking system with a deposit and refund policy in place, guest reservations and registrations in good order; Management of deposits; deposit and refund policy in place.

COMMITMENT TO CLIENTS

We consider everyone we interact with as clients. The key clients are customers, seasonal staff and full time staff. Client care encompasses all the ways in which we interact with our clients, written or verbal, and also our success in tailoring products to each individual customer.

The elements of our work which come under the client care banner are:

- ☐ Client liaison: written or verbal communication, marketing material
- ☐ Programme/solution design
- ☐ Personal development content (where applicable)
- ☐ Resources

All of our clients are unique, whether that is someone who just pops in briefly for a farm visit, someone who is on a training scheme or even a long-term tourism partner. All deserve the best experience that we can offer so we aim to deliver above and beyond our promises, and to have fun along the way².

In terms of our promises, we endeavour to provide accurate information about each product and ascribe a level of difficulty and potential risk to each³. We use images and videos taken during standard products so as to reflect what the client might expect to encounter and provide access to customer reviews. We use our logo in all of our marketing materials and also include logos from awards, certifications, labels etc.

Our website is not only one of the most comprehensive in the dog-sledding industry but it is also the main English-language portal for activities and places to see in our area. Before our website went live, you had to visit multiple different websites to try to piece together information about the area since most only had limited information available in English. Hence, the fact that the information is easily accessible, now, in one place, is a big service to the area as a whole. Clients often contact us in order to reach other service providers in the area since we have one of the most comprehensive information portals in the region and it helps us to put people in touch with other companies, in turn, helping them to remain in the area longer⁴.

Preparation for an Arctic vacation very often begins well in advance of the trip. We put a lot of effort into our pre-trip information – both the information available on our website and the information that is sent out to clients automatically when they book online. Clients are made aware of the need to be prepared for severe and changeable weather in an inhospitable and potentially dangerous environment. They are unlikely to be truly aware of their own capabilities in, and the dangers posed by, this environment but they need to be as armed as possible with knowledge about how to act since we operate without the expectation that a rescue service is available. Operations are planned for self-sufficiency through the use of sound planning, quality arctic equipment and trained personnel.

Pre-trip information includes:

- ☐ The kind of clothing and other supplies clients should bring, what not to bring and what will be supplied;

² ECOT A4 Customer Satisfaction

³ GreenKey 5.6

⁴ ECOT A4 Customer Satisfaction

- ☐ The health services that are available and that medical and trip insurance required;
- ☐ What weather to expect for the time of year;
- ☐ What kinds of foods will be provided;
- ☐ Money and credit card services available locally and what is available for purchase on site.
- ☐ Request for information about medical and dietary issues, allergies and needs and language challenges.
- ☐ A 'What to do in an Emergency' pamphlet detailing what to do in the unlikely event that something happens to their guides⁵.

Transportation Alternatives

We encourage guides and clients to reduce their carbon footprint by opting to use public vs private transportation to and from our base and recommend a carbon-offset program for clients to use within their booking process. Information linked to this could be expanded in the near future⁶.

We provide pre-activity briefings on access issues and procedures that minimise the impact of the activity on the environment for our longer products and provide all participants with an opportunity for evaluation and feedback on the conduct of the activities in respect to impact on the environment⁷.

80% of our snowmobiles (100% of those used frequently for products) were changed from 2-stroke to 4-stroke in 2018 and we are slowly replacing the rest. We have charging stations for recharging batteries used in headtorches and radios by our guides and, whilst we don't have a designated electric car charging station, we have a set-up that has allowed a number of customers to charge their cars here.

In summer, for instance, bicycles (many of which have been restored to use from the local tip) are offered to guides for transport to and from work and in the winter, staff can issue themselves BC or XC skis for the same reason⁸. We also supply one guide car which does one loop each day between the guidehouse and farm since this is needed to ensure the to and from transfer of the dogs that need to stay inside for the night. This also increases the physical wellbeing of the staff – by encouraging an active, mobile lifestyle, and thereby reduces sick leave. Similarly, we encourage post- and during-work activities like kayaking, bikjoring, fatmaxing etc every week in the off-season and skiing in the main season⁹.

Utilising Nature's Bounty

One way in which we look after the well-being of our customers is by providing meals made from local and organic ingredients that are clean and healthy and take care of the well-being of the region by ensuring that the produce that goes into these meals is, as far as possible, foraged or procured locally. Arctic berries are a particularly important natural resource so we include jams and jellies made from cloudbberries, lingonberries, blueberries and rowanberries within our meals as well as offering traditional cuisine including reindeer, white-fish, mushrooms, fireweed, pine-tree buds, spruce-tree buds.

People come to our area from far and wide to collect berries. We too spend c. 3 weeks each year harvesting berries close to our base on marshes that we seldom see others taking the time to access. From those harvests we prepare jams which we serve as part of our client food throughout the winter season. We also harvest mushrooms when there are good mushroom years and dry them, also for the client food. This is all part of our enticing culinary narrative and experience.

The wild foods we use include berries and mushrooms, wild herbs and plants, fish and game. Gathering food from the wild has been part of life in the north for thousands of years, although the name 'wild food' is somewhat new. Finnish people have a unique bond with nature. Picking berries and mushrooms, staying at summer cottages, fishing and spending time in nature are still part of our life and keep new generations in contact with the wild. With increased discussion around the environmental impact of food, the importance of self-sufficiency and the value of local food, wild food has started to be appreciated more. Everyman's Rights¹⁰ are also discussed on our website and we talk about picking berries, mushrooms etc linked to stops in wilderness cabins and when feeding the clients with jams made from self-picked berries.

We're one of the few countries where everyman's rights allow everyone, tourists included, to freely gather food from nature. We train our staff to convey age-old traditions of wild food into credible narratives and experiences. Since wild plants must grow on their own, they have to be sturdier and hardier than their cultivated cousins. They're said to contain more antioxidants, vitamins and minerals than farmed produce. We do not yet offer products in which clients can gather mushrooms with us, but they can already gather berries.

According to Tips for sustainability communications: A travel industry manual for better marketing and communication' (Produced by Visit Finland), Finland not only has the world's largest certified organic wild collection area: a total of 11.6 million hectares, essentially 30% of the entire world's organic collection areas and nearly 38% of Finland's land area, but also the

⁵ ECOT A4 Customer Satisfaction

⁶ Greenkey 2.6 (I) and 3.6 (I)

⁷ Green Key 3.7

⁸ Green Key 2.6 (I)

⁹ Green Key 2.7 (I)

¹⁰ Green Key 5.8 (<https://www.luontoon.fi/retkietiketti>)

cleanest food in the EU. Sami Tallberg is a well-known ambassador for wild food, who inspired restaurants to use wild herbs for flavour in the 2000s. The ELO Foundation, which works to promote Finnish food culture, has set wild food as one of their tenets.

Having said that, we can provide vegan, gluten-free, dairy-free and other foods on request. Anna has herself been vegan and has been vegetarian since she was 15 so whilst it isn't always easy to cook multiple meals in a wilderness setting for a small group, we always make it possible.

We also produce a lot of herbal remedies for dogs and guides using natural products like spruce sap and yarrow and plant flowers that support the bee population. We plant herbs, potatoes and other arctic vegetables each Spring and are part of a food share system with other gardeners. We sell our home picked- and homemade jams and herbal supplements (pine tar, spruce sap, herbal teas etc).

Hunting is also part of our heritage: our distant forefathers lived off game, fish and plants.

Hunter-gatherers valued natural offerings, such as bird eggs, clams and crayfish, very highly. In recent times, we have started a discussion about insects as food, and although it may seem foreign and new to us, it is very likely that insects and larvae were used for nutrition in these parts during the Stone Age. And during war times, wild herbs and vegetables were an important source of vitamins. When times were tough, Finns appreciate purity and origins in their food. In fact, studies show our food to be the cleanest in the EU. Finland's statistics are compiled from 2,193 samples, of which 575 were produced in Finland. None of the Finnish products showed any unwanted traces beyond harmful levels.

Local hunting groups bring us bones from waste products of elk and reindeer hunting for the dogs to keep their teeth clean with and some of these materials are also used in the making of knife-handles which we also sell.

Travellers also value clean, local food. Which is why Finland is starting to gain fame for our delicious, high-quality cuisine. We have many exquisite specialities, such as fireweed shoots, also known as the asparagus of the North. When prepared correctly, its taste is stunningly similar to asparagus! Rowan berry buds resemble bitter almond and can be used to spice springtime dishes, while nettle pesto has become a national staple of the summer for many.

For our guides a great deal of food comes from a local restaurant which has a daily menu. We commit to purchasing whatever component of their daily menu does not sell out, at a reduced price; the restaurant as a result has almost zero waste and our guides (and sometimes clients) eat restaurant-quality food regularly.

We have our own well for the water used by the farm and use rain-water collecting barrels and systems around the farm and at the composting areas to reduce groundwater consumption for basic tasks like cage floor cleaning. We have systems in place to avoid pollution of groundwater by machines that are utilised by, and fuelled at, the farm.

Accessibility for All

We welcome those of any religion, race or sexual orientation and have a proven track-record in running overnight safaris to wilderness cabins for groups of mixed ability adults. As long as we know about special needs ahead of time, we see what we can do to accommodate them and to ensure that we can provide access to our special arctic adventures ¹¹.

Anna and Pasi have a long history of working towards making the outdoors accessible to all¹². Their largest commitment was during the two years of research into the development of kit and clothing technology to enable a (successful) inclusive crossing of the Greenland Icecap in 2006. In other words, they have a lot of experience working with those with physical challenges and some experience working with those with intellectual challenges and they are very open to developing safari products and winter vacations that are accessible to all.

We also have some experience working with those with intellectual challenges and have run overnight safaris for groups of adults and their carers on a number of occasions¹³. We talk about our previous experiences with providing inclusive adventures as part of our standard staff training processes in order to improve consideration for inclusivity in the establishment, both in terms of access, usability and openness to adapting and trying new things. We don't really see this as training to provide equal treatment for all guests because, at the end of the day, those with special needs have far higher needs in terms of our time and efforts – but we do believe that we have a responsibility to go above and beyond in our attempt to allow access to the wilderness for everyone¹⁴.

In terms of taking into consideration sensory disabilities and limitations in designing products and services, we have our farm tour available as an app both in audio and visual format in a number of different languages. We have used that effectively, when interpreting across language and sign-language barriers¹⁵.

¹¹ ECOT A.6.4. Special Needs Access and Greenkey 4.5

¹² ECOT A.6.4. Special Needs Access

¹³ According to the Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, (Kehitysvammaliitto), there are around 25,000 intellectually disabled individuals in Finland, but only 500 of them are currently employed

¹⁴ Greenkey 4.5 and 4.6

¹⁵ Greenkey 4.7

Some local accommodation providers also have accessible facilities, we are in the process of board-walking many of our paths for year-round access and we have also talked with the area's authorities about how to make the ski trails and centres more accessible for all. We do not, however, have complete inclusive access to every part of our property since that would just not be practical at this point. However, in the meantime, we can always transfer people with physical limitations to the farm (which is offset from the main road by c. 200m for the safety of the dogs) by quad in summer (since we haven't concreted our yards and paths) or by kick-sleds or snowmobile or snowmobile sleigh in winter. Since 98% of our husky customers visit in our winter months, it is very easy to enable access to the farm, dogs and even safaris (depending on the needs of the client) for those who aren't so mobile at that time.

Our farm toilet is a simple dry toilet but it has been adapted to facilitate access for the physically challenged and we have a heated building on the farm which provides safety for those with cold-prone injuries in extreme cold.

Obviously, the longer the journey and the colder the weather happens to be, the more demanding it is on client fitness and outdoor skills, and the greater the risks, when things go wrong. Having said that, many people with physical and intellectual needs have already visited us and we have always managed to find a way for them to experience the dogs and the arctic wilderness.

Communicating Values and Leading the Way

We understand that whatever measures we take with social and environmental ethics in mind are limited in performance by how well we communicate our commitment to them, both to our clients and our guides. Hence, a central tenant of any ethical stand has to be communication and engagement re policies, targets and achievements¹⁶.

In terms of staff involvement, we talk about our environmental commitment as part of ongoing training processes. If we do not specifically mention things like the 'reduced flow' button on toilets, circular economies linked to our relationship with Hetta Bikes and Café Peura, the use of reusable vs plastic bags, reducing water waste etc, then we cannot build commitment to these principles. Action Plan. We will build more communication about such actions into a) our training processes, b) our staff manual and c) our reading targets within the next 12 months.

We put a LOT of effort into communication about our ethos and values on our website¹⁷ and we reinforce this extensive baseline with blog posts and social media posts about animal ethics, responsible tourism, behind-the-scenes glimpses into real life on the farm etc. Each and every visitor to our farm receives communication to this end and we point with displayed QR codes to apps that give more information about the region's flora (particularly NTFPs), fauna etc. The longer the tour, the more comprehensive the list and breadth of topics the guides are expected to introduce¹⁸.

We offer open days for locals (but could also do more targeted days w.r.t. environmental communication...eg with the ministry of forestry staff). Even though we live in such a remote area that there is little chance of attracting customers who would pay to visit a farm school, we still produce materials and nature-based activities for children modelled on the kind of materials produced in environmental farms in the UK. At present, the main benefactors are local day-care centres and MLL groups who visit the farm for free but we hope to develop this side of the business in the future and anyway believe that it adds to the richness of the informational material currently displayed. If nothing else, it means that local families will have an extra resource when it comes to entertaining and educating their children during family time. Linked to this, our child, Eliel Ikonen, is being followed by Eränkävijät in the 2022-23 season as we thought that this would be a good way of profiling our way of life in the north.

We joined Tripadvisor at the end of 2015 and were super happy to be awarded Tripadvisor's Certificate of Excellence each year since then. The Certificate of Excellence honors accommodations, restaurants, attractions and vacation rentals that deliver consistently great service.

In 2015 we were thrilled to receive a gold award the Animal Welfare Category of the 2015 World Responsible Tourism Awards, announced at the World Travel Market in London. When we were invited to submit an application for the category of 'Best Animal Welfare Initiative', we looked into the award and decided that going through the process application process would be valuable in itself, irrespective of the outcome.

The World Responsible Tourism Awards look for people and businesses that have identified the economic, social and environmental issues which matter locally, and which are using tourism to make better places for people to both live in and visit. They are looking for inspiring examples of businesses which are demonstrably making a difference, and can show the results of their efforts in taking responsibility. The businesses are assessed within 12 separate categories including, for instance, 'best for wildlife conservation' and 'best accommodation for disability access'.

The award process was a long one. It started over 6 months before the announcement of the awards themselves with an in-depth assessment of our procedures, practices and plans. Sometimes being challenged to put your thoughts and ethos into

¹⁶ Green Key 2.1 (I)

¹⁷ Green Key 3.3

¹⁸ Finland has, for instance, more saunas per capita than any other nation; somewhere between two and three million. Finns have been making saunas for more than 2000 years.

writing in a specific way, brings enhanced clarity and that was definitely true in this case. At the end of the process, they announced the largest ever 'long-list' of finalists: c. 200 companies (including 5 nordic companies) from over 69 countries.

In August, the short list of companies that had been put through to the final judging was announced and we were excited to be amongst them. Just 37 companies from 20 countries had made the final cut and ours was the first Finnish company to make it this far in the competition. Three other Nordic companies made the shortlist.

When the Gold Award category winners were announced at the WTM in November, it gave us confidence that - despite sometimes feeling that we were swimming against the tide in our fairly old-school industry, (when it comes to talking openly about the topic of responsible husky dog care, for instance,) - there is a moral imperative to not only continue to showcase optimal standards of care with our own dogs but also to drive improvements in standards, industry-wide.

Communication about Sustainability and Welfare within Programmes

Sustainable tourism is based on the principle that clients are interested and respectful. When tourists learn about an area's nature, culture, indigenous people, historic traditions, daily life and the environment, (both ahead of arrival and in person) then the tourism business is providing the most benefits for all involved. It maximises their experience and minimizes their impacts. Knowledge about the special vulnerability of the Arctic environment, its special characteristics, its global significance, and the role of the Arctic area in regional and national tourism activities – all combined with a positive experience will enable tourists to act as ambassadors for Arctic environmental protection who will argue for positive objectives in the larger political debates in society¹⁹.



Finland is a land of extremes with a distinctive culture rooted in history and a strong national identity. Its Eastern and Western influences can still be seen in our architecture, gastronomy and art. In the arctic, in particular, the extremes of the summer's midnight sun followed by the never-ending night forces a lifestyle that is unique unto its own'. Finland is known for technological innovations, mobile applications and games, but old traditions are still very much alive, and we strive to live in harmony with nature. Finnish 'grit and determination' (aka 'sisu') has been popular among the international press lately. The Times put the word on the international map in January 2017 although this was years after the The New York Times had discussed it in 1940²⁰.



We respect the people who live and work in the countryside and want to protect the quality of the experience of those who visit. We have both been members of mountain rescue teams in the past and actively encourage people to head into the wilderness safely. Doing that responsibly in the arctic, however, demands a fairly advanced level of self-sufficiency and knowledge of local ways and customs and these are skills and knowledge platforms that we are keen to share.



Whilst it is impossible to share a great deal on the subject of responsible travel and the area's ecology with the majority of clients who visit for a short, focused program with the dogs, our approach and philosophy is hopefully obvious to all who visit the farm through our comprehensive network of signboards and artwork both in our entrance area and on the farm itself²¹. The information displayed is the same as that available on the website, albeit often in a different format. Hence, for those who prefer to spend their time, whilst on the farm, interacting with the dogs, QR codes are available so that they can easily follow up on the information they missed at a later time²².

There are signboards available on a wide range of subjects including the farm itself, our dogs and our business philosophy, the history of dog sledding, famous dogs from history, area maps, possible safaris and other excursions into the nature which can be undertaken locally and some of the training tools and systems we use with staff. We also display some of our staff 'how to' guides which detail processes like building kennels, mapping the farm and creating dog lines.

¹⁹ ECOT A.9 Raise visitors' sensitivity of the host destination

²⁰ Tips for sustainability communications: A travel industry manual for better marketing and communication' Produced by Visit Finland)

²¹ ECOT A.7 Interpretation (Signage, exhibits, labels, brochures, booklets, and digital media are all referred to as 'non-personal interpretation, whereas art is considered personal interpretation).

²² ECOT A.7 Interpretation

There is one signboard dedicated to the area's flora and fauna (ecological biodiversity), one to our environmental philosophy, etc, (this would need to be reworked to display the green key certificate and information about STF Finland, as would the front entrance signboards, the shop displays²³ and the relevant pages on the website)²⁴. I am not sure how we would display the information within our social media channels other than as a post about certification or possibly as a blog post²⁵ but we could update the information on some of our apps. We understand the importance of biodiversity and are committed to protecting and enhancing biodiversity in our area of operation²⁶. Our 100+ birdhouses, insect hotels, attempts to grow local plants which attract bees etc are all some of our practical efforts in this area²⁷.



We can add information about our environmental activities to our farm tour apps in various languages²⁸. We already have a set of worksheets available for visiting school groups but could add more environmentally targeted worksheets to our collection. We could also change the name of one of the environmental signboards to 'Ecopoint'²⁹.

Both our clients and our guides are our target groups for communication and the objective is to increase the knowledge of those visiting both in a practical (names of species) and ethical way and help them to understand how they can buy in to our environmental efforts by participating in actions like recycling, water conservation etc³⁰. Obviously, our staff need to be able to communicate on these subjects too, should questions about them be posed towards them so there needs to be an increasing emphasis on this as part of standard continuation training.

The signboard which we try to draw the most attention to is the one detailing some of the systems used to record the dog health and welfare. The information on our signboards, website etc, includes information as to how to care for the environment and cultural heritage and the importance of conservation for the area as well as about the natural and cultural value of the destination. >70% of our signboard information discusses responsible husky farm ownership, baseline environmental practices and accountability, talks about the area's fauna and flora, optimization of basic dog care etc. Such material is also a central theme on our website and in our social media channels³¹.

Whilst it is impossible to share an awful lot on the subject of responsible travel with those who are with us for a short time, our approach and philosophy is hopefully obvious to all of those who visit the farm. We have a nature trail activity for those who prefer to amble around, (rather than be pulled around) and an agility course.

The various types of wilderness areas to be found in our region, along with their protection levels / acceptable behaviours, are outlined on the website. Our website and information boards not only highlight our destination's natural, cultural, social and political conditions but are probably the only information source to do so in a comprehensive manner, in English. Since we are surrounded by wilderness areas, watershed areas, national parks and other nature-protection areas, we always have to consider the type of protection of each area and the respective activities allowed to take place within each, whenever we travel away from our base.



Our signboards are updated annually, and new signs are replaced whenever waterlogged or looking tacky. Website information is updated whenever there is a key change. Information about the nature of the area and carbon offsetting is sent out automatically to all multiday clients within their standard pre-safari briefing packs. Signs dotted around the staff areas encourage staff to save resources (eg turn off lights, turn off taps, save paper, etc.), reduce / recycle waste, and use machinery and equipment in an eco-efficient way (eg washing machines and dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, etc.), or other aspects of responsibility³².

In our cabins and kota, where clients and guides sometimes stay, the literature is a mixture of dog-related subjects, books that consider the area's ecology (and some basic good quick reads). We stay on top of research about the ecology of the area,

²³ Green Key 3.1 and 3.2 (I)

²⁴ Green Key 3.3 (I)

²⁵ Green Key 3.3

²⁶ Green Key 5.9

²⁷ Green Key 5.9

²⁸ Green Key 3.4 (I)

²⁹ Green Key 3.1, 3.2 and 3.9 (I)

³⁰ Green Key 3.4 and 3.5

³¹ Green Key 2.4 (I)

³² Green Key 2.1, 2.3 and 2.4 (I)

tourism in the area, sustainable practices in the arctic etc and all of this is held in an accessible folder for the longer-term guides to access should that be their area of interest.

We also have a large interpretive mural about dog sledding displayed in the farmhouse area, wooden dogs as decoration and three peekaboos which incorporate dogs, our farm, and the arctic landscape. Inside our farmhouse we have a number of works of art from previous guides on display.

Some of our products incorporate the teaching of basic wilderness and survival skills and even clients on standard multi-day safaris are encouraged to learn and utilise basic skills including traditional fire-making techniques since the wilderness cabins we use have no electricity or running water³³. We follow all rules and regulations related to making fires in compliance with Everyman's Rights and Forest Fire Warnings in order to always strive to prevent forest fire. Pasi is the person who communicates forest fire warnings to the team and, in turn, to any clients participating in self-guided trips. The two key hazards linked to fire-making in our programs is the use of gas cylinders and the emptying of ash within cabins. We never make fires on the trail because of the potential danger to other trail users.

Subjects like environmental restrictions and challenges when operating in the remote Arctic, as well as subjects like how challenges when operating in the remote Arctic, as well as subjects like how people continue to live, in part, from the land, are all designed to come up as 'natural' conversations during these multi-day products.

We hope that through the in-house training provided and the information available the visitor's personal experience of nature is enhanced without being heavily restricted. Anna is one of the few guides who manages groups larger than 20 pax because she has more experience in this. Most guides are dealing with groups up to 15 pax and multiday groups are generally 6 pax max.

Credible Knowledge Sources

Anna is a professional in the field of environmental management and nature protection. Pasi is a professional in the field of tourism and we look a lot at social science work including the potential learning impact of being on wilderness journeys for both guides and clients. We attend courses, locally, by experts and bring in their expertise – eg when developing new salves for the dogs or clients or guides - and read as much as we can about the history and culture of the area.

In 2007, for instance, there was an EU-funded project on sustainable arctic tourism to develop best practices and codes which businesses could sign up to. Unfortunately, the project was maybe ahead of its time and the impetus died with the end of the funding. Hence, although we incorporated its codes and principals when defining our own, (supporting the local economy, operating in an environmentally friendly way, supporting the conservation of local nature, respecting and involving the local community, ensuring quality and safety in business operations and educating visitors about local nature and culture), we decided to align, rather, with the international Leave No Trace alliance since none of the other options (Green Tourism, UK, Nature's best from Sweden, the UIAA Environmental Label etc, seemed directly applicable.

The [Leave No Trace](#) philosophy is an outdoor lifestyle philosophy that we have been following in our own travels and explorations for many years, honed down into seven clearly defined principles: 1) Plan ahead and prepare, 2) Travel and camp on durable surfaces, 3) Dispose of waste properly, 4) Leave what you find, 5) Minimise campfire impact, 6) Respect wildlife, 7) Be considerate of other users.

As a programme, Leave No Trace is designed to promote and inspire responsible outdoor recreation through education, research, and partnerships. It depends more on attitude, awareness and ethics (a commitment to doing what you know to be the right thing regardless of who is there to witness you doing it), than on rules and regulations. The Leave No Trace premise is that partner companies should lead by example and have a commitment to environmental education of those they work with.

We have also applied to become a partner business once our National Park gains Charter Status. Partner businesses around the park are committed to attend regular training activities about the park and the region and to provide accurate information to their customers.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism is a practical management tool which helps protected areas to continuously improve the sustainable development and the management of tourism taking account of the needs of the environment, the local population and the local tourism businesses. The Charter is not a typical quality or eco-label but a process-oriented methodology that can be used and applied by all kinds of protected areas. The Charter's focus is on initiating and assisting a process of sustainable tourism planning which will lead to sustainable development step by step. The Charter assists this process by providing a 'strategy development kit' which contains principles, a methodology and check-lists for the protected areas to work with.

Sleddog welfare

The subject of sleddog welfare was almost non-existent when we started the dialogue in the north, 10 years ago. Now it is an openly discussed topic across a number of related industries. In-house, we have always had the policy of deliberately engaging with our clients on this subject both in person and through our social media channels. We estimate that we have had direct conversations covering topics like animal welfare and regional sustainability with over 100,000 (primarily European) visitors, vets and owners of other farms to date.

We obviously have more time to chat with clients on longer day tours and multiday journeys than we do with clients simply visiting the farm or participating in short day tours. However, we have a script for each and every visitor and topics under the 'responsibility' heading have to be discussed to a different degree in each product.

On the longer tours, for instance, we have more time to 'tick off' subjects that the guides are supposed to cover that may include, for example, local food purchasing policies (Arctic char, reindeer with hand-picked and made lingonberry jam and Lappish squeaky cheese with hand-picked and made cloudberry jam) etc.

We also cover subjects like environmental restrictions and challenges when operating in the remote arctic, as well as subjects like how people continue to live, in part, from the land and how to minimise impact on the ecology as we journey through the region. We like it if the customers leave us not only understanding more about the world of the dogs but also more about the world, lifestyle and culture which they help to preserve by spending time in the region in which we operate in the high European Arctic.

We want clients to leave understanding what they should hope to see, as examples of good practices, in any other similar establishment, (in other words, we aim to celebrate the good rather than to negatively highlight the bad), and we want them to also understand a little bit about the nature and cultural politics of this region.

As a result of our increasing level of social engagement, we have seen a steady growth in the number of clients sponsoring and adopting dogs, year on year. We have even had a few clients ask to join our private social media groups that look at topics like 'best practice' and 'sleddog welfare'.

Of course, all of these practices are limited, in performance, by how well we communicate our commitment to them to our guides (and their ability, in turn, to communicate about those subjects, to our clients). Hence, a central tenant of any ethical stand has to be in-house communication and engagement w.r.t. policies, targets and achievements so that all actions are taken by staff with social and environmental ethics in mind. Whilst our ethos is apparent and encapsulated within all of our standard processes, staff still need specific training on environmental best practices and relevant codes of conduct (and how to communicate these to guests) in order to maximise benefits to the environment and to minimize negative impacts³⁴.

We need to take action to include more specific points about our environmental policies within our established training processes so as to introduce the lexicon of circular economies, responsibility w.r.t. biodiversity etc since training can be used to define and implement suitable and usable solutions. The training should focus on practical actions by which personnel can influence the site's environmental impact and responsibility work through their own everyday practices. The training includes issues of environmental management (water, energy, waste, hazardous chemicals, cleaning, food and beverage, air quality, environmentally friendly use of appliances, the circular economy principles: reduce, reuse, recycle, etc.), awareness of guests, staff, suppliers and the surrounding community, as well as other sustainability issues, addressing climate change, local biodiversity, social, cultural, economic, quality, human rights, health, risk, and crisis management issues. Training should also include knowledge about Green Activities and could also be extended to add knowledge around the establishment (e.g., protection of biodiversity)³⁵.

We will aim to add, as an action plan, an additional environmental training /test to our google assessment sheets within the next year and we will add additional environmental and inclusiveness aspects to our farm tour apps. We will also re-evaluate the way in which the staff can provide feedback evaluating the environmental and/or social performance of the establishment and ideas for improvement³⁶.

To that end, we emphasise an understanding of local customs and beliefs within our staff team and we make a definite point of attending all local cultural events with our guides (reindeer gatherings, craft shows, community events, the local dog walking club, etc). We have a code of conduct about sensitive topics that should be avoided when talking with locals, what to do when reindeer are encountered etc. This applies to both staff and clients. Staff are very aware that we do not hire based on gender or colour.

We also contribute manpower or finance to pretty much any project that the community asks for help with (building bridges, deconstructing buildings etc). Such actions contribute towards the continued vibrancy of the community and encourage a sense of shared responsibility, localised action and open communication. We tried to join the local search and rescue but language gets in the way...our child is part of the voluntary fire brigade's youth section. We (Anna) would love to do more work with the

³⁴ Green Key 2.3 (I)

³⁵ Green Key 2.3 (I)

³⁶ Green Key 2.2 (I) and 2.5 (I)

local school but language gets in our (Anna's) way and Pasi just doesn't have the time or specific interest to work with children given all of the other community things he is involved with. We do, however, provide access to work experience and internships.

Feedback

In order to achieve long-term positive relationships with all our clients we must be open to feedback (both positive and negative) at all times, and respond by improving performance. Feedback is always welcome, at any level, since it not only provides our quality assurance and helps us to improve but also drives our business development.

We work hard to have our responsible travel philosophy apparent in everything that we do, for instance. However, any client with suggestions as to how this or any other aspect of our business can be improved upon, has a means of making suggestions through, and engage with us frontline employees (client-liaison people on safari), tour leaders, customer feedback questionnaires, travel forums, facebook pages, email and whatsapp. These are reviewed regularly and trends are identified.

Following their visits, we also encourage all clients to engage with us through our social media platforms and to provide evaluation and feedback on the conduct of the activities in respect to their impact on the environment³⁷.

Feedback not only provides our quality assurance and helps us to improve but also drives our business development. Feedback from experienced staff members is particularly valued and we constantly ask staff for observational feedback about customer's behaviour and satisfaction in addition to the written feedback the clients themselves provide. In that way, we can sometimes address perceived issues before they escalate and explain the reason behind why something is being done in a particular way. We teach staff that feedback is a positive and not scary thing, without which it would be much harder to innovate.

We also monitor published articles, blogs, client facebook posts etc, to see if there are any issues which we can address. We do this at least once mid-season and at a more in-depth level at one point in the summer season³⁸. This is important because a large part of our husky clients come to us through other agencies, and they do not always pass their feedback back to us. When we have a particular topic that we wish for feedback upon, (essentially a focus group on a particular topic like, for instance, the cost/benefit value of the use of supporting snowmobiles on the environment relative to the safety that it brings to a tour) we have a number of different forums that we can ask for that feedback from, from previous clients.

Serious complaints are always dealt with by management although lead guides are normally sufficiently trained to deal with the majority of standard small issues that might arise (for instance someone using GPS who 'measures' the route without really understanding that the GPS measures the route between straight line dots and complains that the tours are not the length they claim). c. every second year we do a deeper dive into the analysis of feedback and prepare reports with pictorial diagrams so as to be able to discuss trends more easily.

At a management level we collect reviews regarding our business's performance from other tourism professionals and stakeholders including local and regional authorities, local stakeholders³⁹ and put considerable effort into teaching our guides about how to be professional and courteous, even when they are saying no. In the arctic, the customer is not always 'right' in what he or she wants to do since they often do not have the experience to know whether or not what they are asking to do (or what they are doing) is safe. For that reason, we sometimes have to say no or be firm for their safety. Professionalism can be demonstrated in, for instance, handling special needs clients and emergencies with confidence, skill and sensitivity; going the extra mile to be helpful; establishing the tour leader's authority from the beginning; advising visitors about what conditions might be encountered (a pre-trip talk).

Happy return customers validate our ethos whilst at the same time enhancing the value of our product and the region as a whole to the tour operators who bring their customers here. When we have long-term relationships based on trust, openness and honesty with our clients, this enables us to really understand their needs, systems and approach⁴⁰.

Our aims are to:

- ☐ Gather, reply and acknowledge all feedback
- ☐ Discuss the feedback's impact at the present time, for future journeys and for individuals
- ☐ Evolve a mutually agreeable solution to any concerns
- ☐ Give feedback on our actions to all involved
- ☐ Record all feedback outcomes and actions
- ☐ Improve business unit and company-wide systems and policy from the feedback gathered

We ask as part of our feedback forms for clients, to what degree the guides were able to raise discussion about environmental matters and answer questions knowledgeably. In this way, we can monitor how effective our in-house training is. Obviously training about sustainability isn't as important to us at first as teaching the new guides the dogs' names - since without knowing the names of the dogs, they cannot feed them or care for them in any real sense so it isn't the first priority - but it is part of their knowledge development pathway.

³⁷ Green Key 3.7 (I)

³⁸ ECOT A4 Customer Satisfaction

³⁹ ECOT A4 Customer satisfaction

⁴⁰ ECOT A4 Customer Satisfaction

We have learned that the majority of the customers who come through other agencies do not, yet, use quality or animal welfare as determining factors in their destination or program choice. Even those who book with us direct arrive believing that most companies like ours in Scandinavia have similar operating principles and it is only when they are with us that they perceive that there are huge differences in animal welfare and quality between such companies. Knowing that they are visiting a company which is leading the way in this area clearly enhances their customer satisfaction post arrival, but it is unlikely to help us to attract clients until we have helped to establish an industry-wide certification system or code of conduct which will highlight transparently the ethical differences between the companies⁴¹.

Staff Recruitment, Training and Development⁴²

Our work environment is supportive and team-oriented. The staff know that their input, drive, creativity and innovation is valued as much as a strong work ethic, commitment to each other and a positive 'can try' attitude.

Before staff are even able to apply to work with us, they are sent a comprehensive manual detailing both the kind of tasks which they will need to master at different times of year if they are to work here and the kind of conduct we expect. When we select staff and trainee guides, we focus on what motivates them and what they are passionate about, as well as on current ability. We have a talented team, motivated to excel and go 'above and beyond' as part of our commitment to achieving results. We believe in supporting their chosen lifestyle, in developing their potential and in rewarding hard work⁴³.

When we select staff we aim for a balance of skills, personality types and language abilities since we have to be able to wide range of tasks within a relatively small team. Race and gender do not, therefore, come into this apart from for positive selection around key language skills. Language skills are a fundamental starting point (and since the majority of our customers speak French, this makes it harder for us to employ many locals since we have yet to find a local who speaks French. Since French has been the dominant travel group staying in Hetta and in the region at large during the whole time in which we have operated, we have tried to get the local school to consider teaching French to its students but because of staffing restraints, this is still not offered in a meaningful way. (Swedish, English, Saami, German and Norwegian are the main languages offered).

We prefer to offer permanent contracts but will offer seasonal contracts when necessary⁴⁴, since many of those interested in the husky world are relatively young and haven't yet finished studying completely or committed to a career path. Combining seasonal work and social responsibility can be challenging. The travel industry employs an estimated 140,000 people in Finland at the moment, of which 30% are young adults. By 2025, the industry is estimated to create another 40,000 jobs. Tourism is a significant employer, especially in remote regions. As tourism grows, more and more seasonal workers are needed. This is especially evident during high season in Lapland. Kitchen and waiting staff are in short supply, even though statistics say there should be enough trained candidates. Other vacancies are also chronically unfilled although we do not discriminate against candidates on the grounds of age, race, gender, disability, socio-economic status, etc and are opposed to commercial, sexual or any other form of exploitation or harassment, particularly of children⁴⁵, adolescents, women, minorities, and other vulnerable groups and committed to equal treatment and rights for all people⁴⁶.

For any employees under the age of 18, national regulations as well as the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and ILO (International Labour Organization) Conventions 138/182 are followed⁴⁷. We keep a copy of all pay slips and a record of number of working hours and overtime ⁴⁸ and have no subcontractors that have employees working on-site, so we do not need to pay attention to compliance of other parties⁴⁹.

Advancement within the team happens naturally over time if the staff members are meeting their skill acquisition and personal development targets. We have staff feedback loops in place⁵⁰, incentives for retainment, and all of our staff are constantly challenged to develop their personal life skills and work-based skills. We offer first aid courses, cold safety courses, navigation training and travel safety passports in-house⁵¹. Staff who stay with us for a longer period are offered wilderness aid courses, access to professional conferences etc⁵². Rather than have a specific folder against each guide listing their training and/or working experience, we have worksheets linked to first aid training, power tool training, reading lists etc, which monitor staff training progress⁵³. We tend to either update these eg two to four times a year – basically whenever there is a big influx of new seasonal staff - or at the completion of a specific training course. We see no real advantage to guides having a wilderness guide qualification since the kind of training they receive in that kind of training course is very basic. The only skills of value might be plant and wildlife identification, but these are of marginal – if any – importance in the majority of our products⁵⁴. Of course, the other skills that they may acquire through that course – skiing, navigation, reversing a trailer etc – are things that we would

⁴¹ ECOT A4 Customer Satisfaction

⁴² Green Activities 1.2 (I)

⁴³ ECOT A3 Employee Training

⁴⁴ ECOT B.8. Employee Protection

⁴⁵ Green Activities 1.2 (I)

⁴⁶ Green Activities 4.1 (I) and 4.8

⁴⁷ GreenKey 4.1 (I)

⁴⁸ Green Activities 4.1 (I)

⁴⁹ Green Activities 4.4 (I)

⁵⁰ ECOT B.8. Employee Protection

⁵¹ Green Activities 5.7 and 5.29

⁵² ECOT B.8. Employee Protection

⁵³ Green Activities 5.7

⁵⁴ Green Activities 5.30

hope that the guides would anyway have. We would see some value in longterm guides becoming registered national park guides but that would primarily be about raising their area knowledge and so far, neither Pasi nor Anna's training has been utilized in any way⁵⁵.

Our culture is about working hard and playing hard. Whenever valued staff members have a wilderness journey that they want to complete then we always find extra time off for them to do it in, as well as ensuring that they have the basic skills necessary to complete it safely prior to setting off.

When new staff members arrive, the first of the standard reading targets they are assigned is our code of conduct⁵⁶ which includes sections on responsible living and thinking ecologically and includes information about the written procedure for raising concerns or complaints. At present, we have identified 85 basic tasks associated with everyday farm life which guides have to master during their first few weeks, as well as 165 linked training documents. Some of these (particularly client-oriented) training documents are available in French, German and Finnish but our working language is English, as are most of the materials in our training program. To facilitate the absorption of our many processes and systems, we have designed a comprehensive practical and theoretical training process which is initially directed by a mentor who works side by side with the newcomer during their first two weeks.

The first week is spent at our home base learning the dogs and processes here. The second week is spent repeating the same processes but at the wilderness farm where there are a different set of dogs. The third week is spent repeating the processes back at base with the expectation that they can, by then, complete the basics without much help. At that point they also start to write their self-driven continuation training plan which is a tool which ameliorates differences in training skills and learning abilities between mentors and trainees. During this, they identify gaps in their knowledge from the first two weeks of training and combine those with standard learning targets for the next 2 to 6 months.

By the end of the first week, the majority of guides are able to carry out basic farm tasks without supervision and by the end of their first month, they are ready to take on secondary / more complicated roles (dog checks, dog medication, team organisation, project management of daily tasks and mentoring newcomers on basic tasks). In reality, it takes c. 6 months before the majority of guides contribute more to the good of the whole than they take in terms of training time needs.

There are clear learning targets set out against standard learning timelines so that new staff members can assess for themselves their own learning progress. These include both hard skills (safari, climate, computer and dog-related) and soft skills (people and project management related). The longer that people are with us, the more responsibility (within their own abilities) they are expected to shoulder and at some point they also take their turn in mentoring a new staff member since, by doing so, they invariably take their own understanding of the processes to a higher level. Those who stay for longer benefit from a greater access to training budgets, staff training trips and cultural outings through the seasons. This is all part of our on-going commitment to life-long learning and their personal growth⁵⁷. Training includes the provision of information about the activity area as well as about the roles and responsibilities of local stakeholders but this is a step-by-step process. We don't expect new guides to learn everything about the area all at once. Anna still struggles with the names of local villages after 10 years. The language is hard and makes learning the names of lakes, villages, rivers etc very challenging. And, of course, it is more important that the guides know the names and personalities of the c.200 dogs first or there isn't much point in being there! Hence, coming to an understanding about the area's stakeholders, whilst important, is not the initial target but obviously has to be a long-term one⁵⁸.

After the first six months, training becomes a little less formal although mentors periodically follow up to see if there are specific learning targets the trainee wishes to pursue and here are standard learning goals for the whole first year. At that point, staff are normally a functional part of the team with their own personal projects and goals which they are expected to manage independently.

In addition to this, all staff members gather together at the transition between seasons to go through new safety and training needs (ie including changing risk assessments) for the coming season since the work with the dogs varies a great deal through the year⁵⁹. In the client season, for instance, staff have to learn all of the safari routes and jobs associated with both single-day and multi-day clients.

All of our staff are constantly challenged to develop their personal life skills and work-based skills and are encouraged to both work hard and play hard. Whenever valued staff members have a wilderness journey that they want to complete then we always find extra time off for them to do it in as well as ensuring that they have the basic skills necessary to complete it safely prior to setting off⁶⁰.

We continually challenge people to adopt lean working styles and systems since a lot of the daily processes are repetitive and need to be carried out consistently and effectively for the sake of the animals. To this end, everyday tasks are very process-driven with clearly defined tasks and timelines. We also culture flexibility since in the client season in particular, change is a

⁵⁵ Green Activities 5.31

⁵⁶ GreenKey 4.1 (I)

⁵⁷ ECOT A3 Employee Training

⁵⁸ GreenKey 5.5

⁵⁹ Green Activities 1.2 (I)

⁶⁰ ECOT A3 Employee Training

constant companion and staff need to be comfortable with this as a positive process. Through these tried and tested processes we cultivate a safe and secure working environment⁶¹.

Although we grow roles as our and our staff's capabilities grow, and although the responsibility and ownership that people are given in their work tends to prolong their time with us, we endeavour to work with staff when they grow beyond our business and need to find their next great life challenge. Through our strong industry contacts, we have helped staff move on to expeditionary leadership, guiding and outdoor retail roles across Europe as well as to other husky farms in North America.

When staff members move on, they generally do so as rounder, more confident individuals, more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, having had their limits tested. Most appreciate how much we actively work on building upon their strengths and challenging their weaknesses. It is maybe because of this that many take time out from serious careers to return, time and again, for the challenge of the hardest part of our winter season.

We try to set the ethical 'tone' of the company through our own attitudes, principles and actions. Important values should be implicit and understood throughout. Local residents are employed on construction and maintenance projects for the farm and each Autumn local school children come to us on work practice placements as much to learn how to work with the dogs as to experience an international working culture (and to practise their English!). Many return to help us out at key parts of the season or simply come back from time to time to feed or play with the dogs or to have fun with family and friends. We also sometimes employ local youngsters through the subsidised summer 'introduction to work' schemes⁶².

⁶¹ Green Activities 4.1 (I)

⁶² ECOT B2 Local Employment