A presentation of the Degree Programme in Tourism Management at Sydväst Polytechnic, Finland

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The most important tourist attraction in Finland is the beautiful and untouched natural environment. In order to preserve this valuable asset the development and planning of tourism should be sustainable. The tourism industry in Finland is seasonal and largely based on entrepreneurship.

Sydväst Polytechnic is situated in South-western Finland in the archipelago. The tourism development in this region is characterised by both seasonality where summer is the high season and tourism activities made up of small and medium sized enterprises. Thus knowledgeable experts are needed in this growing industry. The Degree Programme of Tourism Management provides instruction for expert functions within the sector of Tourism, Catering and Institutional Management. The extent of the programme is 210 ECTS credits which corresponds to three and a half years of full-time study. The degree awarded is bachelor of tourism management.

The aim of the programme is to educate versatile, service-minded and professional tourism specialists who are fluent in several languages. The students learn to independently and expertly plan, manage, develop and analyse tourist activities. They also learn to work with customer service and marketing within the tourism industry both nationally and internationally. Graduates can function as managers and employees or run their own business. Coordinating and analysing financial, cultural and ecological aspects of tourist activities and tourism enterprises are also emphasised in the programme.

The studies consist of basic and professional studies, profile studies, electives and finally a degree project. In the basic studies students learn the fundamentals of the tourism industry both in Finland and abroad. The studies also include communication and language studies. The professional studies go deeper into areas like travel agencies and traffic companies, accommodation services, sports and recreation as well as the tourist industry from a global perspective. The profile studies and electives provide options for students and they may choose from courses provided within the tourism programme or combine studies from other fields of interest in order to create their own multi-disciplinary profile.

The polytechnic degree is designed to meet the changing requirements and development needs of working life with a pronounced occupational emphasis that qualifies graduates for various expert duties. Consequently, the programme emphasises close contacts with business, industry and services, especially at the regional level. Different projects are carried out in close co-operation with the tourist industry.

The compulsory on-the-job training period at Sydväst is equivalent to a minimum of 30 ECTS credits. Apart from acquainting students with their profession and future job, it enables many students to combine their degree project with hands-on job experience and an opportunity to work independently and apply their theoretical knowledge in practice. Students may choose to work as receptionists in hotels or with customer service in restaurants. They may also work in tourist information offices or for traffic companies.

An increasing number of students both at Sydväst and at the Programme of Tourism Management choose to complement their studies with a study period abroad. The EU-funded Socrates/Erasmus programme has enabled excellent opportunities for this. The tourism programme at Sydväst has developed contacts with universities and other institutions of higher education both in Scandinavia and the rest of Europe. The co-operation with University of Aveiro and the Department of Management started in 1999 with a Socrates teacher exchange. This exchange has been extended and now also includes a student exchange of three months.
Polytechnics in general undertake some R&D with a distinctly applied and practical emphasis. The development interests of the tourism department at Sydvåst coincide with the general development of tourism in Finland. Sustainable development is emphasised in the programme and serves both the teaching and the development of the sector. The management and development of small and medium sized enterprises is of importance for a stimulation of the regional economy. Cultural tourism is being promoted in the region and strategies for developing this in the programme are at the moment being looked into.