

Daniela Brezinova

- Heini: Welcome to the 'I am also in the Tourism Industry' podcast series by Turku Tourism Academy, where we discuss career paths, job descriptions and current phenomena in the tourism industry. Tourism is a cluster industry that covers the diverse field of travel, accommodation, catering, meetings, congresses, recreation, event, food, destination management and facility services. My name is Heini Korvenkangas. I am senior lecturer in tourism and entrepreneurship at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences, which is one of the member organisations of Turku Tourism Academy. Today, as our guest, we have marketing coordinator Daniela Brezinova from Visit Espoo. Daniela graduated as a Bachelor of Hospitality Management in International Tourism Development from Satakunta University of Applied Sciences in 2021.
- Daniela: Thank you for having me today with you.
- Heini: It's nice to have you, Daniela. Now, could you start by telling us how you ended up studying tourism in Pori, Finland, out of all the places?
- Daniela: Yeah, well, that's quite a story. But if I would need to go really to the beginning, it would be to the International Business Week, when I was studying in the Czech Republic in the university, we had this opportunity to go for one week to the foreign country to work on different teams during this International Business Week. And I had the opportunity to go to Pori to work on the crisis management project and yeah, so there it all started. And after that I already knew that I would like to continue for Erasmus programme and go abroad, and I was deciding between the Nordic countries. Because I knew the quality of education is very high in other countries, but I was still not sure will it be Finland or Denmark?
- But after this International Business Week, I knew I already know at least some people here and I had really good experience already then. I remember I was thinking wow, so this is how you do it in here, and how other students were so like - or it felt that they are very more qualified, or they knew where to find this information and how to use it. So, after that I decided that I will go to Finland and well, one semester became two and after that I decided that I want to do my whole degree here and for my luck it was just the time when International Tourism Development degree programme was opening in English, so then I applied there and I was lucky to be one of the first to study this in English programme in SAMK.
- Heini: OK wow, it seems that you truly get to experience Pori before making any like final decisions of your degree programme.

Daniela: Yeah, yeah, I did. I think mostly it was just the education that the way that you study here, was very much different compared to Czech and that felt like something I want to do.

Heini: And I assume that you enjoyed your choice, since you graduated eventually [from this degree programme].

Daniela: Yeah, yeah, definitely. I'm very proud to call of SAMK my alma mater. And I can tell that up today, I have found a lot of the info that I have learned during those years useful, and I still get back to some things that we have been going through during my studies.

Heini: Sounds good. Are there any like significant aspects of your educational background that you would like to share - like some highlights, or something if you would need to mention like few different things that somehow describe the best moments of your studies or your education - what would those be?

Daniela: I think for me it what most important, was that the way of studying here. It was because in the Czchech Republic we often study what something was, or like in the history, or then something from up to date. But then when I came here, we were talking what is now and what may occur in the future. And that was very beneficial for me. And then I think those practical trainings and of course my thesis was the significant parts when I saw that 'Oh, actually I can use all this knowledge that I have now to help those companies', and those companies maybe don't see that they need this kind of things to implement, or develop in order to be more sustainable, profitable, or attract more visitors.

Heini: And what about your thesis? What was the topic?

Daniela: My thesis was on the social media. So, I was doing this project thesis that included also the practical part that was two months, and then the theoretical part as well. And I was doing my thesis for Visit Espoo. And we focus on developing the Instagram channel for destination purposes and attracting more tourism visitors over that.

Heini: I See. Were you working already for Visit Espoo at the time of your thesis?

Daniela: You know, actually that was the time when the COVID-19 occurred, so tourism industry was very much closed everywhere, so it was more challenging at that time. But since during my studies we visited some of the Matka fairs in Helsinki and other events, and I met there Visit Espoo before, and I had the impression that this is a company that I would like to work for in the future. And then knowing more about the destination as well, I see definitely the key points that I believe in. And I think that's very important -when you work in marketing that you need to believe in your product.

Heini: That's very true indeed. If we move on to your professional journey, can you tell us a little bit more about your career path?

Daniela: Yes. Well, basically since I came to Finland, I was mainly studying, but during the... After first year - after I had already some experience from Czhech

University and of course the Erasmus studies were also included, I was already a little bit advanced, since you can very much individualise your programme. Then I already started my practical training as a receptionist in the in the Scandic hotels. And that was, I think, a very good point for my Finnish skills as well, as I was forced to really speak there, and that helped me to develop a lot in that sense as well. Yeah. And after? After my internship there I was offered a part time job that I could study during my studies as well, or I could work during my studies as well. And then I continued basically till my graduation. And after that with my thesis, I was offered to stay with Visit Espoo for a few months. But of course, it was very difficult times during COVID-19, and there was not very many positions or even like those companies were not able to provide any longer term. So, I just needed to believe that things will get better and continue. But I believe that if there are some points in my career that were very important, it was one of those practical trainings. And then of course, there's the thesis.

Heini: Now I must say that I am very impressed by the fact that you managed to secure a practical training place in a Finnish hotel, not being a native Finnish speaker, so congrats on that.

Daniela: Thank you.

Heini: Are there any other special moments that have somehow made you realise that you really enjoy working in tourism, and this is what you would actually like to do for your living?

Daniela: I think it's mostly like seeing how much there is to develop in this industry, especially comparing my home country and Finland, where the tourism industry is in totally different levels.

And also, then when I got more into this field - that when you start to meet and see those passionate [people] in companies and their owners - like everybody in tourism is very passionate about what they are doing. And it doesn't matter whether you are a receptionist, you are a business owner, or you are a guide on the tour. You can really feel it, well, although it's very small industry here in Finland. But the environment is great and of course it's not only like holidays, what maybe some people think, when you talk about tourism industry - it's also a lot of work. But luckily, we are lucky to enjoy - to enjoy the way of working here as well, because tourism is just a great industry to be in.

Heini: That is very true, and I believe that passion truly is the one word that describes the sort of enthusiasm that people have, who work in this industry.

Shifting gears a bit, you currently work as a marketing coordinator for Visit Espoo. Can you shortly tell us what is Visit Espoo and what your role entails?

Daniela: Yes, so Visit Espoo is part of Enter Espoo, which is a marketing company, and we are 100% owned by the City of Espoo. And our main duties are in tourism marketing and tourism development. And myself then - my responsibilities are in international tourism marketing. So, I work a lot with our websites, social media and different campaigns and then of course coordinating our event calendar, and

also working with tourism information - not in the way that I would be like present on [tourist] spots. Sometimes I do also that, but also in cooperation, for example with City of Helsinki and then tourism information, or then other corporations that we have. So, it's more like a bigger picture of those tasks. And then I also work with our trainees, that are always very good addition to our team, and it's really nice to see their motivation and this like drive for the industry. I think that's very much needed, and I hope there will be more of students and trainees in the future as well.

Heini: I believe, and I should surely hope so as well. It sounds that you have very much on your plate, so different tasks. I'm quite sure that there is one current trend that we could discuss, and that would be social media, which I believe it's fair to say that has become an indispensable part of daily life. Can you tell us a little bit more about social media from the destinations point of view?

Daniela: Yeah, well, social media are very important for destinations, because nowadays the younger generations tend to more search for destinations over social media. And then, for example, Google search or other platforms. So, it's definitely important part, but there is also challenges that comes with that, because everything is developing so fast. And if we talk about tourism, it sometimes feels in even in double pace, than other industries. But for us, it's mainly about the destination awareness and that's the way social media can help us, in achieving that.

So, I would say that we focus mainly on that and then of course showcasing the key selling points of the destinations together with our partner companies. That makes it interesting for visitors to consider visiting in Espoo.

Heini: OK. And is there something, if we think like for example, the user generated content, or [that] this information is served by travellers - how do you cope with that, or how do you work with this kind of behaviour of tourists, when you are also marketing the destination? In social media.

Daniela: Of course, this is very important trend, and you can definitely see if some destination works with user generated content, and how they use their social media. And for me - we work quite a lot in this, with user generated content as well as influencer marketing. Also, with the communication in the way of customer service. So, we use social media to provide tourist information. It feels like a new platform that should be considered for tourist information as well. But there is also a lot of challenges with this, because it of course requires to have lot of budget, in way of human resources, in way of ideas, time-consuming... And a lot of goes to the video. So, there is definitely a lot of time you need to consider for creating videos, editing, and cooperating. Also, if you have user generated content, if you work with different content creators it requires a lot of time. Which, well, I don't know if I should mention this, but you need to really think that if you work in tourism, you don't have only one position, you are more like one person doing six positions at the same time, and that's just the reality which is now, and maybe that will develop in the future. But yeah, the challenge is that everything is developing so fast. But then on the other hand, there is also

companies that invest in those user generated content, influence, and marketing, and have really good marketing strategies that include both like the tourism part that you need to consider, and also the marketing part. And if you have both those skills, you can really get really great results with that. I know companies that generate 30% of their bookings just over social media, and that's quite high number to consider.

Heini: Wow, that's indeed, very, very high. If I would have like one wish for you, or I could grant you one wish regarding social media marketing and destinations, what would it be?

Daniela: I think if you want results, you really need skilled tourism and marketing professionals, because with we have seen, a lot of marketing trends or destinations that just boom, but there is not, for example, infrastructures ready in those destinations or the services are not ready. And then on the other hand, if you think that couple years ago was just COVID-19, and then we have other things that everything impacts on the tourism. You can use this social media as a tool to regenerate the destination and I think for me it was very good like "aha moment". When I was graduating, during this Corona times, but I knew that hey, it's not only that I will just sit and pray, but I have these skills and this knowledge that I can use to help this destination to regenerate much faster. So, if I could say in some ways then it's that being in Finland, recognise that marketing is important thing and that we cannot have one person doing sales, marketing... and then marketing has many different fields. There is social media, there is websites - that is different content and so on. So, yeah, find those skilled people. There are a lot of students that are really trying to do these things and learn, and they can bring a lot to the table.

Heini: Yes, and definitely regeneration is one other current trend at the moment.

Daniela, before we finish for today, I'd like to ask you about some hints and tips for those considering education or a career in the industry. Why is it worthwhile to enter the tourism industry? Like even one good tip will do.

Daniela: Well, I would say that if you have a passion or you really want to enjoy the working life, because in tourism we have lot of opportunities to also enjoy the services and what the destination has to offer. So, I would say then you need to have some passion for this, but if you have, then I would suggest tourism for you. And if we talk about the studying, I will definitely tell you to use the internships and thesis to evolve, not just for convenient, just really find companies that you really want to work for, and then think about how you can... or I will say it again - that how can you help them in developing what they really need, what they don't see. Because we really - in working life - we don't really have time. So, whether you come with a skill that you can bring to the table, you can make things done - that's very important skill to have. That's... that will take you far. And then of course, learn some Finnish, if you want to stay in Finland. That is important as well. And maybe one more tip is, because myself knowing that it's really hard sometimes to find the position that you are looking for in Finnish tourism

industry, that if you don't find the opportunity, you can always create it. And there is a huge space for that.

Heini: Those are some very good tips indeed.

To conclude this interview, I would also like to use this opportunity and hear your recommendation for a domestic travel destination in Finland, that is. What would you suggest, something that should not be missed?

Daniela: I may be biased, but I of course need to tell visit Espoo. Especially if you are an international person living in Finland. Myself, I believe in Espoo as a destination, especially for this international market. We have a lot to offer, a lot from Finnish bucket list that you want to see when you go to Finland. And everything is made about unique experiences, I would say. And if I should pick something, then it would be some of those. Whether it's like arctic kayaking or snowstorm experience or seeing the artificial northern lights, or visiting the southernmost reindeer park or going for a tour to see some moose around the way, or just enjoying day in the seaside or national park.

Heini: Perfect. Thank you for that wonderful recommendation. I will have to try that myself as well. And thank you, Daniela, and thank you listeners. I invite you all to listen to other episodes in the series 'I am also in the tourism industry'.

Daniela: Thank you.