



Herder Holiday as an Agroforestry Voluntourism Model

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Old farm in Koli National park (Photo: Tanja Kähkönen)



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A herder holiday is an agroforestry voluntourism model practiced in Finland. The idea of herder holidays as voluntourism model was developed by Metsähallitus, Parks and Wildlife Finland in 2008. The aim was to develop a product to combine both use of rental cottages and landscape management in Koli National Park in Eastern Finland. As a result, the herder holiday voluntourism model was created as a new product offered by Metsähallitus. During the first few years, herder holidays were offered only in one rental cottage in Koli National Park.

In 2024, Metsähallitus offered 169 herder holiday weeks in 15 different locations, traditional rural habitats at old farms or grazing areas, across Finland from May to September. About 15000 applications for herder holidays are received annually. As herder holidays are very popular, the participants are drawn by lot. The cost of one week herder holiday was 400-630 € in 2024, excluding one location where the cost of one week herder holiday for the participant was 0 € due to other volunteer duties. The amount paid by the participants includes accommodation for several persons, and wood-heated sauna in almost all locations.

As voluntourism, participants can support taking care of grazing animals – usually sheep, sometimes cows or horses – with the responsibility for care, however, resting with the farmer. The main aim of herder holidays is maintenance of traditional rural habitats. Income received from the participants is used for this purpose and also for nature management. Farmers rent grazing areas from Finnish national parks and practice grazing as a business activity. Besides the grazing, the farmer also needs to maintain fences and carry out additional pasture management measures.

Besides herder holidays offered as voluntourism by Metsähallitus, private entrepreneurs also offer herder holidays in farm settings in Finland for paying customers.

References

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