

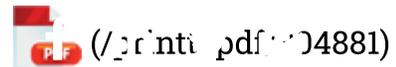
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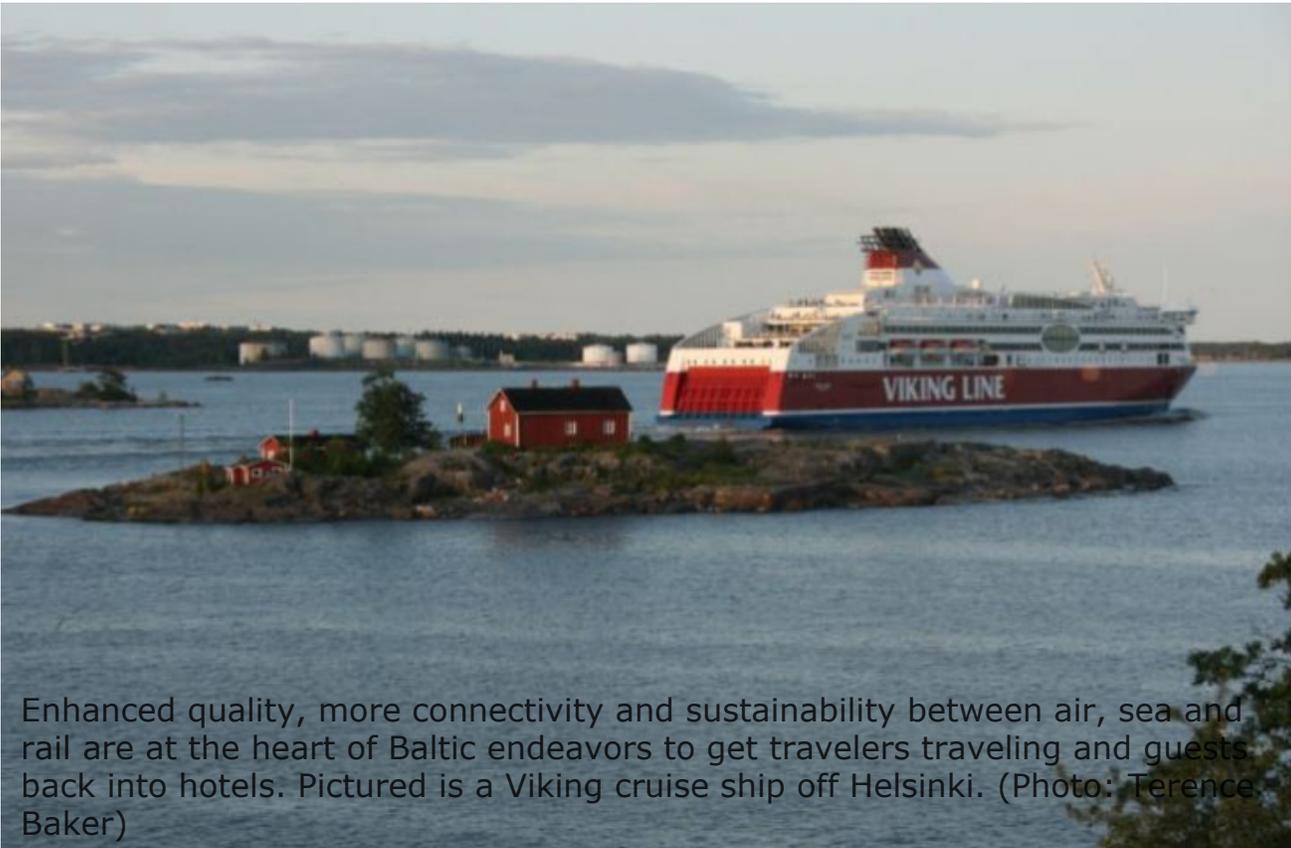


# Transportation health vital to hotel health

19 OCTOBER 2020 7:50 AM

Executives responsible for keeping planes in the air, ships on the seas and trains on the rails in one small part of Europe share how they are planning collectively to ensure the journey to check-in will be seamless when travel demand fully returns.





Enhanced quality, more connectivity and sustainability between air, sea and rail are at the heart of Baltic endeavors to get travelers traveling and guests back into hotels. Pictured is a Viking cruise ship off Helsinki. (Photo: Terence Baker)

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TALLINN, Estonia—Hotels need not bother opening their front doors if guests cannot reach them, a notion that those charged with operating airlines, shipping channels and rail networks are aware of.

That challenge, likely to increase when demand returns after the pandemic, is shared by all destinations and markets, and the Baltics region's example will have many similarities to other regions.

At a panel titled "Land, sea and air" at the recent New Baltic Hospitality Forum, executives partly responsible for the transportation infrastructure of Helsinki, Finland; Riga, Latvia; Tallinn, Estonia; and Vilnius, Lithuania, said the region has advantages due to its numerous deep-water ports and many neighboring countries, but that is only a plus if responsibilities are shared.

Maarika Honkonen, panel host and CEO of the Estonian Hotel & Restaurant Association, said cooperation between all the regional players is key, noting if only one part of the chain slips, the whole network is compromised.

The long-term transport strategy in the region has not changed, but passengers will travel differently, said Arūnas Skuja, GM, Baltics and Eastern Europe, at airline Finnair.

"Travel and air-travel flows, which previously have proven that we've been doubling the flows every 20 years, will continue once this is over," Skuja said.

He said airline carriers in the Baltics region are in "survival mode" and are "putting the cost in the right place to reflect the current demand," although he did not spell out if that would mean significant hikes in flight prices.

He said both airline bosses and customers regard security—terrorism and health—as the major focus and that the International Air Transport Association has pushed back its recovery forecast from 2023 to 2024.

"We are among the first globally to create a travel bubble (<https://www.hotelnewsnow.com/Articles/303131/Travel-corridors-offer-path-to-Europes-rebound>) within the Baltic countries, with a little bit of extended reach, but (normal service) will still take a little longer time," he added.

Aivar Jaeski, country manager for Estonia and Finland at Rail Baltica, said, "I strongly believe as a logistical engineer that the bloodstream of economies are logistical infrastructures."

Rail Baltica plans to complete an integration of the Baltics train network with the rest of the European rail system by 2026, bringing in more travelers to the three capitals and countries.

Jaeski said transportation initiatives, including the first night trains, will enhance quality for guests and travelers.

"Those travelers know what they want. (When) they are arriving at a (transport) destination, they are not hanging around. They are traveling from point A to point B, and when they arrive they really know where they are going. ... They are going to visit this certain hotel," he said. "The demand for quality will certainly rise, and this is what (hotels) need to emphasize."

Valdo Kalm, CEO at Port of Tallinn, said Tallinn's new cruise terminal will debut next spring with the latest hygiene standards, further emphasizing quality.

Skuja said for airlines to get guests to hotels, carriers must "recover and start gaining profits" to reinvest in IT and digitalization.

Transport passengers now know how to travel responsibly, he said, and that benefits hotel operations.

Finnair is one of the major air carriers transporting passengers and cargo between Europe and Asia, and Skuja said Finnair is committed to that strategy.

Kalm said adding to the guest mix are approximately 11 million passengers annually who go through Tallinn's port, where the expansion will provide additional space to be able to test passengers for COVID-19.

He said he expects overall passenger levels to improve markedly by the end of this year, as they have domestically, notably routes between the Estonian mainland and the country's two largest islands, Saaremaa and Hiiumaa, both tourism destinations.

"August was a record month (for the two destinations), which means recovery internally, inside Estonia, was very quick to return," he said, noting August is the height of summer.





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