

Finnish town Kuhmo selected as Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture 2023

On 27 January, an international five-member jury selected Kuhmo, a town in Finland's Kainuu County and a UNESCO Creative City of Literature, as the next Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture. This marks the first time that the Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture will be located in Finland. Kuhmo expects the title to boost cultural tourism in the region and to support the preservation and revitalization of languages and cultural heritage across the wider Finno-Ugric world.

Key objectives of Kuhmo's 2023 programme include awareness-raising of Finno-Ugric languages and cultures in Finland and worldwide, to support the revitalization of indigenous Finno-Ugric languages and to promote the rich music heritage of Finno-Ugric peoples.

Kuhmo is planning to hold over 100 activities as part of the Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture 2023 programme, with the Ethno Music festival Sommelo as the flagship event of the year (26 June – 3 July). Other high-profile events include Kuhmo Culture Celebrates Winter festival, a conference on indigenous Finno-Ugric languages, "On The Trails of the Big Bear", an event exploring the role and meanings of bear in Finno-Ugric cultures, the internationally acclaimed Kuhmo Chamber Music festival and a conference on Finno-Ugric singing cultures.

Key organisations behind Kuhmo's winning bid were Runosong Academy as the main applicant, as well as Juminkeko and the Town of Kuhmo.

In the words of the chair of the five-member jury **Käbi Laan** (Youth Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples), Kuhmo's bid stood out over its competitor – Estonian town of Iisaku - by a versatile programme of traditional festivals and other events that will be successfully integrated with the Finno-Ugric theme. Jury member **Rune Bjerkli** (Kven Finnish Association) highlighted the key role of runosong and traditional music in Kuhmo's bid: "In 2023, Kuhmo will serve as the true musical epicentre of the Finno-Ugric world". According to jury member **Niko Partanen** (Sukukansojen Ystävät ry (Finland)), "It is historic to get the Finno-Ugric capital of culture to Finland, and Kuhmo demonstrated that it was well prepared for this challenge. This is also a great opportunity for all of us working with Finno-Ugric cultures in Finland."

Kuhmo's mayor **Tytti Määttä** expects the Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture title to boost cultural tourism in Kuhmo and the surrounding region, "The theme of Finno-Ugric culture suits us perfectly, because we already have many elements in Kuhmo devoted to this direction. We expect to grow our tourism revenues, and at the same time, strengthen our cultural operators." And according to **Pekka Huttu-Hiltunen** (Runosong Academy), Kuhmo can offer much to the wider Finno-Ugric world, "For instance Juminkeko has been operation successfully for more than 30 years in revitalising Karelian culture and preserving the heritage, both in Finland and Karelian republic. Also Runsong Academy and other cultural organisations can add their contacts and contribution to the Finno-Ugric world. This means support for preserving the languages and cultural heritage by organising research opportunities, artistic events and communication between activists."

ABOUT KUHMO

Kuhmo, a town of some 8 000 inhabitants, lies by a beautiful waterway, in the Eastern part of Oulu region in Finland. Kuhmo is a pioneer both in using renewable energy and timber construction development. The strengths of Kuhmo lie in timber, the boreal wilderness, and culture.

The oldest unaltered state border line in Europe lies in Kuhmo, between Finland and Russia. Despite the past periods of conflicts and tumult, the connection between the people of Finland and Viena Karelia has not been broken. Elias Lönnrot's folklore collecting expeditions to the Karelian grounds are the most well-known example of this connection. Lönnrot elaborated the yield of his expeditions, the epic folklore materials, into the national epic Kalevala in Kuhmo, and even today trips are organised to those "runosong villages" of Viena Karelia. Juminkeko is an information centre for the Kalevala epic.

The nature and cultural heritage of Kuhmo have played a key role in the development and entrenchment of the Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival and the Ethno Music Festival Sommelo here. The Kuhmo Arts Centre offers excellent facilities for these events.

ABOUT FINNO-UGRIC CAPITALS OF CULTURE

Established in 2013, the programme of Finno-Ugric Capitals of Culture is a flagship initiative of Youth Association of Finno-Ugric Peoples (MAFUN) and URALIC Centre that aims to raise awareness of Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic peoples as well as Uralic languages, to strengthen collective Finno-Ugric identity and to stimulate sustainable local development in different corners of the Finno-Ugric world.

To date, the title of Finno-Ugric Capital of Culture has been awarded to nine villages or cities: Udmurtian village **Bygy** (2014), Seto village **Obinitsa** (2015), Hungarian village **Iszkaszentgyörgy** and City of **Veszprém** (2016), Karelian village Vuokkiniemi (**2017**), Mari village Shorunzha (**2019**), Mari-speaking village Mishkan in Bashkortostan (**2020**), town of **Abja-Paluoja** in Estonia (2021) and **Bayterek** village in Udmurtia 2022).

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Photographs: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/126p3roW4GyOpluvsQ60t-zV84iFxyYGQ?usp=sharing>

Also photographs: <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqizAb8Q>

Also: <https://www.facebook.com/FinnoUgricCapitalsOfCulture>

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