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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Ähtäri gets ready for the pandas with an evening party**

Ähtäri is getting ready for the arrival of the panda couple. The locals will welcome Lumi and Pyy with a panda carnival on the evening of Thursday, 18 January 2018. The panda convoy will drive through the town centre, and while waiting for the convoy, the public can enjoy the programme and food and drink on offer in the market area.

The whole town of Ähtäri is delighted to welcome the arrival of the pandas after lengthy preparations, and an event like this deserves a party. All local people are welcome to participate in the panda carnival and spend a delightful evening together.

Visiting the pandas at the zoo is not yet possible, and the panda convoy will drive straight through the town centre to the zoo without stopping, where the pandas will start a month in quarantine. All arrangements are done with the animals' wellbeing as a priority. Winter in Ähtäri has also given its best, as there is a lot of snow, which the pandas love, so in February we will be sure to see them playing in the snow.

After the welcoming ceremonies in Helsinki, the panda convoy will start its journey towards Ähtäri. The estimated arrival time of the pandas in Ähtäri town centre is around 5 pm, but delays are possible because of flight time, for example.

The panda carnival starts at 4 pm, and from 4.30 pm onwards the first 750 attendees will receive free coffee and juice with donuts at the Vanha Nalle building on the market square. At the same time, the first 300 children coming to the event will receive free panda ear headbands.

The snow sculptors of Ähtäri will build a snow sculpture depicting bears, with a small slide for children. Visitors will also get a taste of the Finnish Winter Swimming Championships, which take place in Ähtäri in February. In the market square, local ice swimmers will give a demonstration of taking a sauna and bathing.

At 5 pm, the Otsonkoulu school choir will sing. Scenes from the fairy-tale dance performance *Little Mermaid* will be presented in the Vanha Nalle building at 5.30 pm.

Of course, there will also be animal characters circulating among the crowds, giving out sweets and playing with the children. On the market square, visitors may encounter a lynx, a bear, a fox, a snow leopard, or the star of the day, a panda.

For snacks, there will be grilled sausages and crepes on sale.

The local Ähtäri business community will participate in the event, with the shops on Ostolantie open for longer, among others.

Jamo Niemi will be the master of ceremonies.

The carnival is organized by the town of Ähtäri, which hopes that as many locals as possible will participate this historical moment and welcome the giant pandas Lumi and Pyry to Ähtäri.

The matter is even more significant because the pandas are a gift from the People's Republic of China to Finland on the occasion of 100 years of independence.

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