

Destination Finland

Remote, forested, sparsely populated Finland has had a hell of a last hundred years. It's propelled itself from an agricultural backwater of the Russian Empire to one of the world's most prosperous and forward-looking nations, with a great standard of living and education, low crime and corruption, and a booming technology industry. Although socially and economically part of the vanguard of nations, parts of Finland remain gloriously remote. Its trendsetting capital, Helsinki, is counterbalanced by vast forested wildernesses in the north and east.

There's something pure in both the Finnish air and spirit that's incredibly vital and exciting. It's an invitation to get out and active year-round, whether by whooshing across the snow behind a team of huskies or shooting rapids on a frisky Lapland river. A post-sauna dip in an ice-hole under the majestic aurora borealis isn't a typical winter's day just anywhere. Nor is hiking or canoeing under the midnight sun through pine forests populated by wolves and bears your typical tanning-oil summer.

Nordic peace in a lakeside cottage, summer sunshine on a convivial beer terrace, avant-garde Helsinki design, dark melodic music, and cafes warm with baking cinnamon aromas, are just the beginning of Suomi seduction. And the real bonus? The Finns themselves, who tend to do their own thing and are much the better for it. Independent, loyal, warm and welcoming – a memorable people in an inspirational country.

But Finland, like everyone, has issues. The devastating 2007 school shooting was followed within a year by an almost identical college massacre. Peaceful Suomi was horrified. Always keen for a bit of introspection, Finns wondered if it revealed something rotten at their society's core; some hang over from the war years perhaps, or a dramatic manifestation of those seasonal depressive tendencies that seem to boost alcoholism and suicide stats? Or is it just too easy for angry youths to buy a gun? As usual there are no clear answers, but tightening gun laws is a likely first step towards preventing a reoccurrence.

Since the 12th century, Russia has loomed large. Finland's long experience with the Bear has stood it in good stead, and the two countries have a strong relationship, with much exchange of commerce and tourism. Nevertheless, Finns on the street are understandably nervous of what some view as an increasingly nationalistic Moscow. Memories of the bitter fights for freedom are too painful for national service and the army not to be taken seriously here.

However, climate change upstages even Russia on the agenda. Southern Finland has already noticed dramatically changed weather patterns, and the almost unthinkable prospect of a nonwhite Christmas in Helsinki looks ever-likelier. Though Finland will reap corn sown by bigger nations, its people and government are very environmentally conscious. Definitely realistic rather than idealistic, they prefer managed forestry and a nuclear power sector to back-to-basics pipedreams.

Finland has seen a great growth in tourism in recent years and is well placed, with its magnificent wildernesses, healthy tree cover and tradition of cottage culture, to offer a sustainable ecological experience to travellers looking for a new type of low-impact holiday. It's perhaps Europe's finest destination for getting outdoors and revelling in nature's bounty while treading lightly.

FAST FACTS

Capital: Helsinki

Population: 5,300,484

Cups of coffee drunk per day: over 20 million

Size: 338,145 sq km

Percentage of country covered in water: 10%

GDP per capita: €30,978

Unemployment rate: 6.9%

Number of reindeer: 193,000

Number of days of no sun in Nuorgam: 51

Number of days of constant sun in Nuorgam: 72

Getting Started

For somewhere offering such awesome wildernesses and off-the-beaten track opportunities, travel in Finland is gloriously easy. Buses and trains run on time, tourist offices are eager to please and full of at-your-fingertips information, and you can get by easily enough without even dipping into a Finnish dictionary. It's not cheap, but neither are prices as elevated as sometimes imagined, and accommodation in particular can be excellent value, with hotels chopping their prices in summer and plenty of cosy wooden cabins at bargain rates.

WHEN TO GO

The tourist season in southern Finland and the Lakeland is early June to late August. This is when all attractions and summer accommodation options are open, steamboats and ferries ply the lakes and rivers and there's always some event or other in full swing. Attractions, though not towns and cities, are at their busiest during Finnish holidays from late June until the end of July. This is the time of long, light nights, when Finland doesn't seem to sleep and numerous festivals (p21) offer everything from chamber music to wife-carrying.

Northern Finland, including Lapland, is different. Mosquitoes can be unbearably annoying in July – and we do mean unbearable – but they tail off in August, and then September is delightful with its autumn *ruska* colours. October, and February to April are good times to visit Lapland to view the aurora borealis (Northern Lights) and enjoy winter activities such as skiing and dog-sledding. The Christmas holiday period is also prime time up north, and charter flights bring thousands of families eager for snow, reindeer and some Christmas spirit – after all, this is where Santa Claus makes his home...

COSTS & MONEY

Finland is expensive, but not quite as much as its reputation would suggest. With a bit of planning, you can have a great time here on almost any budget.

Summer is generally the cheapest time to visit. Nearly all the hotels drop their prices – a twin room in a three-star hotel, for example, might drop from €120 to €70 – and student apartments are repurposed as budget accommodation. This is also the time when camp sites, with their cheap wooden cabins, are open.

After accommodation, transport will likely be your biggest expenditure, especially if you move around a lot. Buses and trains are expensive – think €25 to €30 for a ride of a couple of hours – and taxis have an horrendous flag fall. Car hire costs €200 to €350 a week, and petrol is pricier than almost anywhere else in the world.

A couple using public transport, travelling in summer, staying in good midrange hotels and eating out, will spend €130 to €160 per day per person, a little more in pricier Helsinki. If you nab a decent car-hire deal, this figure wouldn't be increased greatly. Solo travellers will pay more, as single hotel rooms are often almost the same price as a double.

Two shoe-stringers, using hostels and cabins and mostly self-catering, could get by comfortably on €60 to €70 each per day, less if not taking too many long trips.

There are numerous ways to reduce the amount you spend in Finland. It's worth being an HI member, as you'll save €2.50 a night in many places.

See Climate Charts (p350) for more information.

HOW MUCH?

Bus ride (200km) €33.40

Sauna free-€20

Bottle of cheap red in a restaurant €30

Day's bike hire €10-20

Simple log cabin for two €30-40

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

You can buy virtually anything you need in Finland, but be sure to carry these:

- Insect repellent (double the strength and double the quantity)
- A sleeping sheet and a pillowcase for cabins and hostels (p347)
- Eye-mask; if daylight at 2am will keep you from sleeping
- Seriously warm clothing for winter or a water- and windproof jacket for summer
- A passport: EU citizens still need it for day trips to Estonia. And a Russian visa if you'll be tempted across that border
- A swimsuit; even if it's winter, there are great water parks and ice-holes for post-sauna dips in the lakes
- A mobile phone; public phones are nonexistent and SIM cards are cheap (see p355)

Group and family accommodation in hotels and cottages is excellent value, and there's a discount on buses for four or more tickets booked together. Camping grounds nearly always have some sort of cabin accommodation sleeping four or more, ranging from simple huts with bunks to luxurious wooden houses: always excellent value.

Many hotels offer weekend discounts similar to their summer ones; similarly, car-hire companies have a good-value weekend rate. It's much cheaper to eat in restaurants at lunchtime, when there are daily specials and often a groaning buffet table – a filling meal can be as little as €7 on weekdays.

Students with valid ID and seniors receive substantial discounts on museum admission prices quoted in this book, as well as on transport.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Finland is a rather environmentally friendly country, and things like recycling and sustainable forestry have been institutionalised for a long time now. The outdoorsy focus of much travel in the country means it's easy to travel responsibly by picking minimal-impact activities like hiking or reindeer-sledding, using public transport and following basic guidelines such as those detailed on www.environment.fi. The website www.outdoors.fi outlines ways to avoid impact when visiting protected areas. See the Greendex (p394), Environment (p63) and Accommodation (p347) sections of this book for more specific details of ecofriendly travel in Finland.

But travelling responsibly doesn't just mean treading lightly in nature. It includes endeavouring to spend your money in a way that will benefit the local community; trying to stay in family-owned places and eat sustainable, locally produced food; making the effort to at least learn how to say 'please' and 'thank you' in Finnish (OK, Finnish doesn't have a word for 'please' but you know what we mean); and respecting local cultures. This is particularly important in Lapland, where Sámi communities are a focus of touristic interest but don't always reap the benefit from it. If you're going to buy a colourful Sámi hat as a memento, for example, buy it in Inari from a local craftsman, not from the souvenir stand at Helsinki airport.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

House of Orphans, by Helen Dunmore, is a gloriously evocative historical novel, with excellent background on early-20th-century Finnish rural life, the class divide, workers' movement and burgeoning nationalism, through the eyes of sympathetic characters.

TOP 10



BOOKS

Finns are among the world's most voracious readers and the local literature scene is an active one, although relatively few novels are translated. See p43 for more on Finnish literature.

- 1 *Kalevala*, by Elias Lönnrot, translation by Keith Bosley, is Finland's epic, compiled from the songs of bards. It tells everything from the history of the world to how to make decent homebrew.
- 2 *The Year of the Hare*, by Arto Paasilinna, is an offbeat tale telling how a Finnish journalist revolutionises his life and sees things in a new way while travelling around the countryside with a hare.
- 3 *The Canine Kalevala* is a doggy take on the *Kalevala* by Mauri Kunnas, successful and much-loved children's author and illustrator.
- 4 *Finn Family Moomintroll*, by Tove Jansson, is one of the earliest and best of the loveable Moomin books.
- 5 *Seven Brothers*, by Aleksis Kivi, is one of the Finnish classics, and allegorises the birth of Finnish consciousness with a story about brothers escaping from conventional life by heading to the forest.
- 6 *Tummien Perhosten Koti* (The Home of Dark Butterflies), by Leena Lander, is a successful and challenging novel about a teenager growing up in a strict boys' home.
- 7 *The Egyptian*, by Mika Waltari, was a worldwide blockbuster success for this prolific novelist.
- 8 *Fallen Asleep While Young*, by 1939 Nobel laureate Frans Eemil Sillanpää, is a portrayal of a peasant girl.
- 9 *The Position of the Sun*, by Ranya El Ramly (now Paasonen), is a recently translated first novel that won critical acclaim.
- 10 *Not Before Sundown*, by Johanna Sinisalo, is called *Troll – A Love Story* in the USA, and tells the story of a photographer who rescues a wounded troll.

FILMS

The Kaurismäki brothers Aki and Mika put Finnish cinema on the map, but there are several other promising young directors on the scene these days. See p54 for more on Finnish cinema.

- 1 *Drifting Clouds*, directed by Aki Kaurismäki, is a marvellous film, full of awkward, stilted emotions, about a couple forced to seek new jobs.
- 2 *Man Without a Past* is another excellent work from Aki Kaurismäki.
- 3 *Musta jää* (Black Ice) is a 2007 film that won many plaudits for its portrayal (with little left to the imagination) of a middle-aged love triangle.
- 4 *Tuntematon Sotilas* (Unknown Soldier), directed by Rauni Mollberg, is a good film about the Continuation War, based on the book by Väinö Linna.
- 5 *The Winter War* (Talvisota) is another good film about the fight against the Russians.
- 6 *Tummien Perhosten Koti* (The Home of Dark Butterflies) is a successful film adaptation of Leena Lander's novel.
- 7 *Mannerheim*, due out in late 2009 and directed by Finnish Hollywood director Renny Harlin, is an eagerly awaited biopic about this complex figure who played such a major role in the Finnish Civil War and WWII.
- 8 *Näkkälä* is a documentary film about a Swiss man who goes to live as a reindeer herder in a remote Sámi community.
- 9 *Pahat Pojat* (Bad Boys) is a Finnish gang film, about four infamous brothers who terrorised the nation by robbing petrol pumps and worse.
- 10 *LA Without A Map*, a touching love story, is perhaps Mika Kaurismäki's best solo work.

Travels through Sweden, Finland, and Lapland to the North Cape (Vol II), by Giuseppe Acerbi, has recently been republished. This late-18th-century traveller's account is a gem, full of keen observations on the places visited, and the customs of the Sámi.

Bad Wisdom, by Bill Drummond and Mark Manning, is a visionary and disturbing rock 'n' roll road trip through Finland, taking an icon of Elvis to the North Pole. If it were a film, it'd cop an X-rating for kinky sexual content and substance abuse.

Though set just over the river in Sweden, *Popular Music*, by Mikael Niemi, is an area with much Finnish influence and has plenty to say about contemporary Lapland through the eyes of a boy liberated from the constraints of small-town life by discovering rock music.

Palace of the Snow Queen, by Barbara Sjöholm, is a winter travelogue that spends more time in Norway and Sweden, but is good on Lapland and the Sámi in general. It has much detail on the building of snow hotels, and pays a visit to Inari's film festival.

Let the Northern Lights Erase Your Name, by Vendela Vida, is a woman's voyage to discover her roots and evokes Finnish and Norwegian Lapland through her vulnerable visitor's eyes. The emotional journey is powerful, but the setting's just an exotic backdrop here and let down by inaccuracies.

See p43 for information on Finnish literature.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Almost every town in Finland has a website chock-full of information, nearly always: [www.\(townname\).fi](http://www.(townname).fi). See also Accommodation (p347) for relevant sites.

Aurora Forecast (www.gedds.alaska.edu/AuroraForecast/) The best predictor of aurora borealis activity. Based in Alaska, but you can change the view to Europe.

Cosy Finland (www.cosyfinland.com) Organisation that sets up dinners and homestays with Finnish host families.

Finnish Tourist Board (www.visitfinland.com) Official site full of excellent information from the practical to the whimsical.

FMI (www.fmi.fi) The Finnish weather forecast.

Forest and Park Service (www.outdoors.fi) Truly excellent resource, with detailed information on all Finland's national parks and protected areas, as well as activities listings.

Helsingin Sanomat (www.hs.fi/english) International edition of Finland's best daily newspaper.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Check recent postings for the very latest recommendations and tips on travelling in Finland.

Virtual Finland (virtual.finland.fi) Maintained by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this is an excellent, informative and entertaining website.

Events Calendar

JANUARY–FEBRUARY

SKÁBMAGOVAT 3rd weekend in Jan
Sámi film festival in Inari with collaboration from international indigenous groups (www.siida.fi).

RUNEBERG DAY 5 Feb
This day commemorates Finland's national poet. Flags are at half mast and people eat 'Runeberg tarts' (p111).

LASKIAINEN 7 weeks before Easter
Coinciding with Carnival in other countries, people ski and toboggan down hills and enjoy other winter sports during this festival.

MARCH–APRIL

TAR SKI RACE early Mar
Long-distance cross-country ski race held in Oulu (www.tervahiihto.fi).

TAMPEREEN ELOKUVAJUHLAT early Mar
Respected international short-film festival in Tampere (www.tamperefilmfestival.fi).

LAHTI SKI GAMES early Mar
Ski-jumping and other winter shenanigans in the southern city of Lahti (www.lahtiskigames.com).

ICE-ANGLING MARATHON late Mar
Forty-eight hours of nonstop ice-fishing (www.oulutourism.fi).

REINDEER RACING FINAL last weekend in Mar or 1st weekend in Apr
The King's Cup in Inari is the highlight of the reindeer-racing season (www.paliskunnat.fi).

PÄÄSIÄINEN EASTER
On Easter Sunday people go to church, paint eggs, and eat *mämmi* (pudding of rye and malt).

APRIL JAZZ ESPOO
Jazz with big-name artists and big crowds, held in Espoo (www.apriljazz.fi, in Finnish).

TAMPERE BIENNALE
Festival featuring new Finnish music, held in even-numbered years only (www.tampere.fi/festival/music).

MAY

VAPPU 1 May
Traditionally a festival of students and workers, this also marks the beginning of summer, and is celebrated with plenty of alcohol and merrymaking.

IJAHSIDJA last weekend in May
The annual Sámi music festival in Inari (www.ijahsidja.fi, in Finnish).

JUNE

PISPALA SCHOTTISCHE early Jun
International folk-dance festival held in Tampere (www.sottiisi.net).

HELSINKI DAY 12 Jun
Celebrations of the city's anniversary (www.helsinki.fi/helsinkipaiva, in Finnish).

KUOPIO TANSSII JA SOI mid-Jun
International dance festival held in Kuopio (www.kuopiodancefestival.fi).

PROVINSSIROCK mid-Jun
Big three-day rock festival held in Seinäjoki (www.provinssirock.fi).

MIDNIGHT SUN FILM FESTIVAL mid-Jun
Sodankylä hosts a big range of Finnish and international screenings (www.msfilmfestival.fi).

MIDSUMMER'S EVE & DAY weekend closest to 22 Jun
Juhannus (Midsummer) is the most important annual event for Finns. Celebrated with bonfires and dancing, and ornate poles are decorated and raised in Åland. People head to summer cottages to celebrate the longest day of the year.

JUTAJAISET late Jun
Celebration of Lapland folklore held in Rovaniemi (www.jutajaiset.fi).

WOODCARVING SYMPOSIUM late Jun or early Jul
Held every odd year in Kemijärvi (www.kemijarven-kuvanveistoviikot.fi).

MIKKELI MUSIC FESTIVAL late Jun or early Jul
A week-long celebration of classical music (www.mikkelimusic.net).

PRAASNIEKKA

These Orthodox celebrations are day-long religious and folk festivals held in North Karelia and other eastern provinces between May and September, most notably at the end of June.

JULY

SAVONLINNA OPERA FESTIVAL

A whole month of fabulous opera in a spectacular castle setting (www.operafestival.fi).

IMATRA BIG BAND FESTIVAL early Jul
Imatra, near the Russian border, draws international big bands for this festival (www.ibbf.fi).

RUISROCK early Jul
Finland's oldest and arguably its best rock festival, held in Turku (www.ruisrock.fi).

KIHAUS FOLK early Jul
Rääkkylä's widely acclaimed festival of modern and experimental Finnish folk music and dancing (www.kihaus.fi).

TANGOMARKKINAT early Jul
Finland's older generations converge on Seinäjoki in this massive celebration of the tango (www.tangomarkkinat.com).

WIFE-CARRYING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

early Jul
An unusual husband-and-wife team competition in Sonkajarvi, with international participants and beer prizes (www.sonkajarvi.fi).

SULKAVAN SUURSOUDUT 2nd Sun in Jul
Massive rowing festival and even bigger party held in Sulkava (www.suursoudut.net).

JYVÄSKYLÄN KESÄ mid-July
Jyväskylä's multifaceted arts festival (www.jyvasskylankesa.fi).

PORI JAZZ FESTIVAL mid-Jul
The port town of Pori springs to life with one of Finland's most notable festivals (www.porijazz.fi).

ALANDIA JAZZ FESTIVAL mid-Jul
Jazz greats play at waterside venues in Mariehamn (www.alandiajazz.aland.fi).

TAMMERFEST mid-Jul
Four days of rock concerts in various venues around Tampere (www.tammerfest.fi).

GARLIC FESTIVAL mid-Jul
Oulu's most pungent celebration, with everything from garlic beer to garlic ice cream on offer (www.oulunliikekeskus.fi).

RAUMA LACE WEEK mid-Jul
Rauma hosts lace-making demonstrations and a carnival (www.rauma.fi).

KAUSTINEN FOLK MUSIC FESTIVAL 3rd week of Jul
A massive folk music and dance extravaganza in Kaustinen (www.kaustinen.fi).

KOTKA MARITIME FESTIVAL late Jul
Kotka's festival features music, sailing races and cruises (www.meripaivat.com).

KUHMO CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL late Jul
An excellent fortnight of concerts featuring a fistful of young and talented performers from around Europe (www.kuhmofestival.fi).

SLEEPYHEAD DAY 27 Jul
After a vote by the townspeople, Naantali's laziest person is rudely awakened by being dragged from bed and thrown into the sea.

DOWN BY THE LAITURI late Jul
Rock music festival held in Turku (www.dbtl.fi, in Finnish).

AUGUST

HAMINA TATTOO early Aug
Hamina's parade of military music, held in even years only (www.haminatattoo.com).

NESTE RALLY FINLAND most years early Aug
The Finnish leg of the World Rally Championship, in Jyväskylä (www.nesteoirallyfinland.fi).

LAPPEENRANTA MUSIC FESTIVAL early Aug
Festival of international music, held in both Lappeenranta and Lemi (www.lemi.fi).

GOLDPANNERS' FESTIVAL early Aug
Tankavaara hosts its Goldpanning championships and more (www.tankavaara.fi).

RAUMAN FESTIVO RAUMA early Aug
Rauma hosts a chamber music festival (www.raumanfestivo.fi, in Finnish).

ANKKAROCK VANTAA early Aug
Big rock festival held in Vantaa (www.ankka.fi).

SAVONLINNA BALLET FESTIVAL early Aug
Four days of ballet in the Savonlinna castle (www.savonlinnaballet.net, in Finnish).

MOBILE PHONE THROWING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS late Aug
Savonlinna's quirkiest festival allows participants to indulge in a spot of Nokia-hurling (www.savonlinnafestivals.com).

AIR GUITAR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS late Aug
Oulu hosts this festival as part of a music video festival (www.airguitarworldchampionships.com).

HELSINKI FESTIVAL late Aug–early Sep
Head to the capital for this all-arts festival (www.helsinginjuhlaviikot.fi).

SEPTEMBER

RUSKA SWING early Sep
Kemijärvi's festival of swing music and dancing (www.ruskaswing.fi, in Finnish).

SIBELIUS FESTIVAL mid-Sep
Performances by the famous Lahti Symphony Orchestra, honouring composer Jean Sibelius (www.sinfonialahti.fi).

OCTOBER, NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

BALTIC HERRING MARKET 1st week of Oct
Traditional outdoor herring market, held in Helsinki (www.portofhelsinki.fi).

TAMPERE JAZZ HAPPENING late Oct or early Nov
Finnish and international jazz musicians flock to Tampere (www.tampere.fi).

ITSENÄISYSPÄIVÄ 6 Dec
Finland celebrates its independence with torch-light processions, fireworks and concerts.

LUCIA PARADE 13 Dec
Helsinki hosts a big parade for St Lucia's feast day.

JOULU
Pikkujoulu (little Christmas) parties, with plenty of *glögi* (hot punch) consumed, dot the lead-up to the main event, which features a family meal on Christmas Eve.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

ESSENTIAL SUOMI

Two to Three Weeks / Helsinki to Rovaniemi

Kick off in **Helsinki** (p77), prowling its buzzing design district. See the harbour – hit **Suomenlinna** (p87) or eat at an island restaurant – before hitting historic **Porvoo's** (p108) enchanting wooden buildings.

Next head towards **Lappeenranta** (p162) on the shores of Finland's largest lake, and home to an enormous sandcastle.

Gorgeous **Savonlinna** (p133) comes next. Its stunning castle hosts a magical opera festival and even if your trip doesn't coincide, it's a memorable town with plenty to do in the area: take your time.

You're in Lakeland, so why not continue by boat? A leisurely day's cruising gets you to **Kuopio** (p154), famous for *kalakukko* (rye loaf filled with tasty lakefish), and its convivial smoke sauna.

The high latitudes are in evidence once you get to **Oulu** (p281) – depending on the season, the sun barely sets or barely rises. It's one of Finland's liveliest towns, with a great summer marketplace.

From Oulu, head to **Kemi** (p315) to see the winter snow castle. Finally, to **Rovaniemi** (p308), base for any number of activities. Then off to explore Lapland or get the sleeper train back to Helsinki.

This highlights trip takes in the capital and a wide selection of Finnish landscapes and towns, from the pretty southern lakelands right up to Lapland's Arctic climes. This journey is about 1200km.



LAPP GOLD

One to Two Weeks / Rovaniemi Loop

In Rovaniemi, capital of Lapland, visit the excellent **Arktikum museum** (p308) to learn about these northern latitudes. Further south in Ranua, you can see some of the region's fauna at its **zoo** (p314).

Cut eastwards to **Ruka** (p298), a lively winter ski resort, and a trailhead of the **Karhunkierros** (p299), one of Finland's best trekking routes.

From here, go via **Kemijärvi** (p329) to **Sodankylä** (p330). Don't miss the wonderful old wooden church.

Heading north, you'll reach **Urho K Kekkonen (UKK) National Park** (p336), where you can try gold panning before striking out on a trek across the spectacular fells in this vast wilderness. Nearby **Saariselkä** (p334) is a good base for summer and winter activities.

One of the most intriguing towns in this region is **Inari** (p340), the capital of Finland's Sámi. It's a handicrafts centre and home to the memorable **Siida museum** (p340).

Next, head to **Lemmenjoki National Park** (p343), where treks and river trips call. Continue the loop towards northwest Finland, ending up at **Hetta** (p324), another Sámi town, with plenty of local walks. From here, if you have time, take a detour up the 'arm' of Finland to remote **Kilpisjärvi** (p328), in the shadow of fearsome Norwegian mountains and the smaller bulk of Saana Fell, a rewarding climb with some memorable views over three nations.

Then, onwards to **Muonio** (p323). In winter you can go husky-sledding, but even in summer it's worth meeting the loveable dogs. From here, return to Rovaniemi, perhaps stopping to ski or rent a summer cottage at busy **Levi** (p321) or peaceful **Pyhä** (p332).



A thorough exploration of the wonders of Lapland and its landscapes, with plenty of opportunity for trekking, skiing or sledding as well as learning about Sámi culture and the Arctic environment. This journey totals around 1600km.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

THE WEST COAST

One to Two Weeks / Helsinki to Oulu

Popular with locals, Finland's west coast doesn't attract many foreign visitors, who tend to prefer the charms of the lakes and reindeer.

After Helsinki, stop at **Lohja** (p115) for its church and mining museum. The industrial theme continues with the pretty ironworks at **Fagervik** (p116) and **Fiskars** (p119), which are both near the family-friendly seaside town of **Ekenäs** (p215). Then head southwest to the noble wooden villas of **Hanko** (p121), where St Petersburg society once summered.

Turku (p215) has many drawcards, as does the surrounding **archipelago** (p229) and picturesque **Naantali** (p224).

Uusikaupunki (p231) has a museum that deserves a prize for ironic humour, while **Rauma's Old Town** (p234) features charming wooden buildings. Moving north, busy **Pori** (p237) hosts a pumping jazz festival.

The next bit of coast is known as 'Parallel Sweden': **Kristinestad** (p269) is one of several places in Finland with a Swedish-speaking majority. **Kaskinen** (p270) or **Närpes** (p271) are other tranquil stops. **Vaasa** (p263) has an excellent museum, and is popular for its spa complex and adventure park.

Nykarleby (p276), famous for its waffles and painted church, is a good stop on the way to **Jakobstad** (p274), whose old town rivals Rauma's for beauty. Reaching **Kokkola** (p277), with its boat bar and fascinating mineral museum, you'll definitely feel back in Finnish Finland. Beyond here, a stretch of beautiful coastline runs north to **Oulu** (p281), with **Kalajoki** (p278), one of the world's most northerly beach resorts, on the way.

This 1100km coastal trip is an excellent way to appreciate the differences between the Swedish- and Finnish-speaking communities, not to mention the chance to see picture-perfect wooden towns, sparkling blue water and several more-than-decent beaches.



BORDERLANDS

One to Two Weeks / Helsinki to Kuusamo

Russia's presence looms large in Finnish history and consciousness. This trip takes in areas that have been affected by this relationship.

From Helsinki, head to little **Ruotsinpyhtää** (p126), an attractive village whose river once marked the boundary between the Swedish empire and Russia. Then **Kotka** (p126), a busy port near one of the tsar's favourite fishing spots. Heading towards the modern-day border, the fortress at **Hamina** (p129) was erected by the Swedes to halt the Russian advance in the early 18th century. The plan ultimately failed.

Lappeenranta (p162) suffered a similar fate, with the Russians adding the finishing touches to a fortress originally designed to keep them out. This is the beginning of Karelia, an area where a lot of the most bitter fighting of the 1939 Winter War took place; you'll see numerous memorials on this route.

Heading north, you'll pass through cities largely destroyed during the Winter and Continuation Wars. At **Imatra** (p168), you can see Russia from the Valtionhotelli's top floor, while at **Joensuu** (p171), visit the Carelicum museum to learn more about the area.

From **Ilomantsi** (p174), in deepest Karelia, head out to **Hattuvaara** (p177), a very Orthodox area. You can access the border zone here – Finland's easternmost point. Further north, **Kuhmo** (p291) was where artists and writers set out from, seeking inspiration in the deep forest wilderness further east, which is now part of Russia and much mourned by the Finns. North of here, more deadly Winter War battles took place on the Raate Rd around **Suomussalmi** (p296) where there's an exhibition and moving memorial to the fallen. Then to **Kuusamo** (p295), from which you can fly back to Helsinki.



A 1000km exploration of Finland's eastern zone, shadowing the border with Russia, whose influence has always been very important. This heads through the heartland of divided Karelia, a symbol of Finnish independence, wilderness and loss.

TAILORED TRIPS

OUT & ABOUT

Finland's wonderful portfolio of protected wilderness areas makes for perfect exploration, and its comprehensive network of camping grounds, complete with tent pitches, simple cabins, and full-service cottages with sauna, means that heading out of town is the wallet-friendly way to go too.

While many of the great treks, canoeing routes and national parks are in the north, you can start with a taste of things to come while you are still in Helsinki. In Espoo, a short trip from the capital, is the **Nuukio National**

Park (p112), a haven for several rare bird species and a great place to go for a stroll in the woods. While you're in the south, you could also investigate one of the four maritime parks, such as the **Southwestern Archipelago National Park** (p229). You can visit the archipelago on regular boat trips from Turku or Hanko, but to really explore it you should charter a boat.

In the central belt of Finland, the sheer quantity of lakes invites watery exploration. Grab a canoe for a couple of hours, or go the whole hog and take a week out to explore the **Kolovesi** (p143) and **Linnansaari National Parks** (p142). If you are lucky, you may even glimpse the rare Saimaa ringed seal, which adapted to a freshwater environment after being cut off from the sea by the rising land.

East of here, head to Karelia: the **Patvinsuo National Park** (p180) for excellent trekking, or hit the **Nurmes** (p184) area for a wide choice of activities including excellent rafting.

The Kainuu and Koillismaa areas of northeastern Finland are made for the active. The ski resort of **Ruka** (p298) is one of Finland's major ski resorts but has huge scope for outdoor activity year-round. It's the finishing point for Finland's most popular single trek, the Karhunkierros (Bear's Ring). While to do it in its entirety will take you up to five days, you can easily shorten it to three days, or just try the Little Bear's Ring day walk. The **Oulankajoki** (p302) and **Kitkajoki** (p302) also draw canoeists and kayakers to the area, with routes ranging from gentle to hairy. Bear-watching excursions depart from nearby **Kuusamo** (p295) to the forests near the Russian border.

Lapland's wide expanses are the location of Finland's park heavyweights; superb destinations for multiday treks, with regularly spaced wilderness huts and camping grounds if you wish to stay overnight.

One of the most important and popular areas is the **Urho K Kekkonen (UKK) National Park** (p336), a place of classic Lappish fells – a magnet for trekkers of all abilities. Although the well-known routes get busy in summer, there's some awesome wilderness here where few people venture.

In the northwest is the lovely **Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park** (p325), with comparatively easy trekking southwards from the Sámi town of Hetta. You have to be taken by boat to the starting point, so it feels like you're kissing civilisation goodbye for good, but the trek ends happily at a very hospitable hotel.

Finland's northernmost park is **Lemmenjoki** (p343). This has an excellent network of trails, some decent places to stay, and the chance to make your fortune (or at least dirty your clothes) by panning for gold. Not far away, the **Kevo Reserve** (p344) offers a spectacular gorge walk where you are free to carry a tent on your back.



FINLAND FOR KIDS

In **Helsinki** (p82) options are many, with boat trips on the harbour to see Suomenlinna's submarine, a day at Linnanmäki amusement park, or a short bus ride to the great Serena waterpark at **Espoo** (p111).

Other attractions and theme parks designed specifically with the young in mind include Wasalandia and Tropiclandia in **Vaasa** (p263), Särkänniemi in **Tampere** (p203) and Rauhalahti estate in **Kuopio** (p154). And that's not to mention the Moomins, who have their World at **Naantali** (p224) as well as a museum in Tampere, where kids will also enjoy the Spy Museum. **Oulu** (p281) has the enticing Tietomaa science museum, while the magnificent castle at **Savonlinna** (p133) should appeal to the young 'uns. If it gets the thumbs-down, there's always the world's biggest sandcastle down the road in **Lappeenranta** (p162).

Getting active, the **Oravareitti** (p144), or 'Squirrel Route', is a great two-day canoeing trip, one of many river and lake routes across the country suitable for juvenile paddlers.

Lapland is winter wonderland for the young, with the snow castle in **Kemi** (p315), and sled trips, tobogganing, plenty of material for snowball fights and children's runs at ski resorts like **Levi** (p321). In summer, pan for gold in **Lemmenjoki** (p343) or **Tankavaara** (p336), or meet **reindeer** (p330) and **huskies** (p323) at many places across the region. And the most famous resident of **Napapiiri** (p314), Santa, is in his grotto year-round.



WRITERS & ARTISTS

In the exciting decades leading up to independence writers, painters and composers explored the meaning of Finland, many travelling to the wilderness for inspiration.

Start in Helsinki, where the **Ateneum** (p83) will acquaint you with some of these fascinating characters' work. Grab a copy of the *Kalevala* while in town, and have a drink at the **Hotel Kämp** (p96), where artists thrashed out the nature of Finnishness during epic piss-ups.

Porvoo (p108), home to many artists, and Espoo's **Gallen-Kallela Museum** (p111) are musts, as is the journey to **Sibelius' home** (p106) near Järvenpää. Not far away is **Lohja**, close to the rustic cottage (p116) where Lönnrot, creator of the *Kalevala*, was born.

Sibelius' birthplace in Hämeenlinna (p196) is now a museum, and some memorable interpretations of his music can be heard at **Lahti** (p190).

Definitely investigate **Visavuori** (p199) and **Kalela** (p211), studios of sculptor Emil Wickström and painter Akseli Gallen-Kallela respectively, as well as the wonderful art gallery at **Mänttä** (p212).

Then on to Karelia, from which these women and men drew inspiration. From **Nurmes** (p184) you can plan expeditions of your own, exploring the wilderness by foot, canoe or husky-drawn sled. Nearby **Koli** (p183) enchanted Sibelius, while further north, **Kuhmo** (p291) is the place to learn more about the *Kalevala* and its massive impact on Finnish history, and catch the great chamber music festival.



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