



Helsinki Excursion

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Why Go?

It's fitting that harbour-side Helsinki, capital of a country with such a watery geography, melds so graciously into the Baltic. Half the city is liquid, and the writhing of the complex coastline includes any number of bays, inlets and a speckling of islands.

Though Helsinki can seem like a younger sibling to other Scandinavian capitals, it's the one that went to art school, scorns pop music, works in a cutting-edge design studio and wears black and plenty of piercings.

On the other hand, much of what is lovable in Helsinki is older. Its understated yet glorious art nouveau buildings; the spacious elegance of its centenarian cafes; the careful preservation of Finnish heritage in its dozens of museums; restaurants that have changed neither menu nor furnishings since the 1930s: all are part of the city's quirky charm. It makes a great trip across the Baltic for a couple of days or more.

When to Go?

Helsinki has year-round appeal; there's always something going on. The summer kicks off in June, when terraces sprout outside every cafe and bar, and the nights seem never to end. There's a bit of a lull in July when Finns head off to their summer cottages, but in August the capital is repopulated and plenty of activities are on offer. If you feel like seeing the wintry side of town, go in December, when you can ice-skate and absorb the Christmassy atmosphere before temperatures get too extreme.



Helsinki Highlights

1 Descend into the weekend maelstrom of Helsinki's **pubs and bars** (p178)

2 Grab a picnic and explore the fortress island of **Suomenlinna** (p173), which guarded Helsinki harbour

3 Browse the huge range of exciting design shops in **Punavuori** (p179)

4 Selecting from the city's huge range of museums and galleries; **Kiasma** (p173) is first stop for great contemporary art

5 Hire a **bike** (p182) and take advantage of the great network of cycle paths to explore on two wheels

6 Sweat out your cares in the traditional, atmospheric **Kotiharjun Sauna** (p174)

7 **Dine** (p177) on traditional Finnish comfort food such as meatballs or liver and mash, or experiment with the latest avant-garde new-Suomi cuisine at Olo or Juuri