



Karelia

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Why Go?

The forests in Karelia are...*deeper* somehow. Visit Karelia and you'll experience the truth of this wistful statement. If you're looking for wilderness, powerful history and perhaps even the Finnish soul, your search starts here.

Koli National Park is close to every Finnish heart, but the whole region is a blessing for nature lovers. Hiking routes thread through the area, Ruunaa is renowned for rafting, lovely Lake Pielinen is a kayaker's dream, and there's great winter skiing. Bears, wolverines and even wolves roam freely across the Russian frontier and animal hides allow visitors a close encounter.

Karelia is a region of contradictions, with its culture, language, religion, cuisine and music all heavily influenced by its eastern neighbour. The fierce battles of WWII are raw and close; you can feel the weight of history in Lappeenranta, pining for its sister cities lost to Russia, while battle-scarred Joensuu has reinvented itself as a lively young university town.

Best Places to Eat

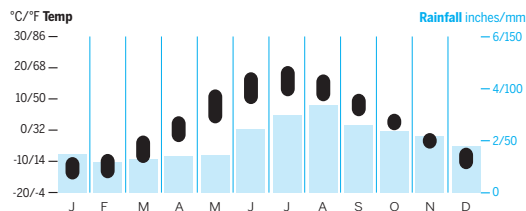
- » Bomban Talo (p215)
- » Café Wolkoff (p195)
- » Buttenhoff (p200)

Best Places to Stay

- » Imatran Valtionhotelli (p199)
- » Sokos Hotel Vaakuna (p202)
- » Sokos Hotel Bomba (p215)

When to Go

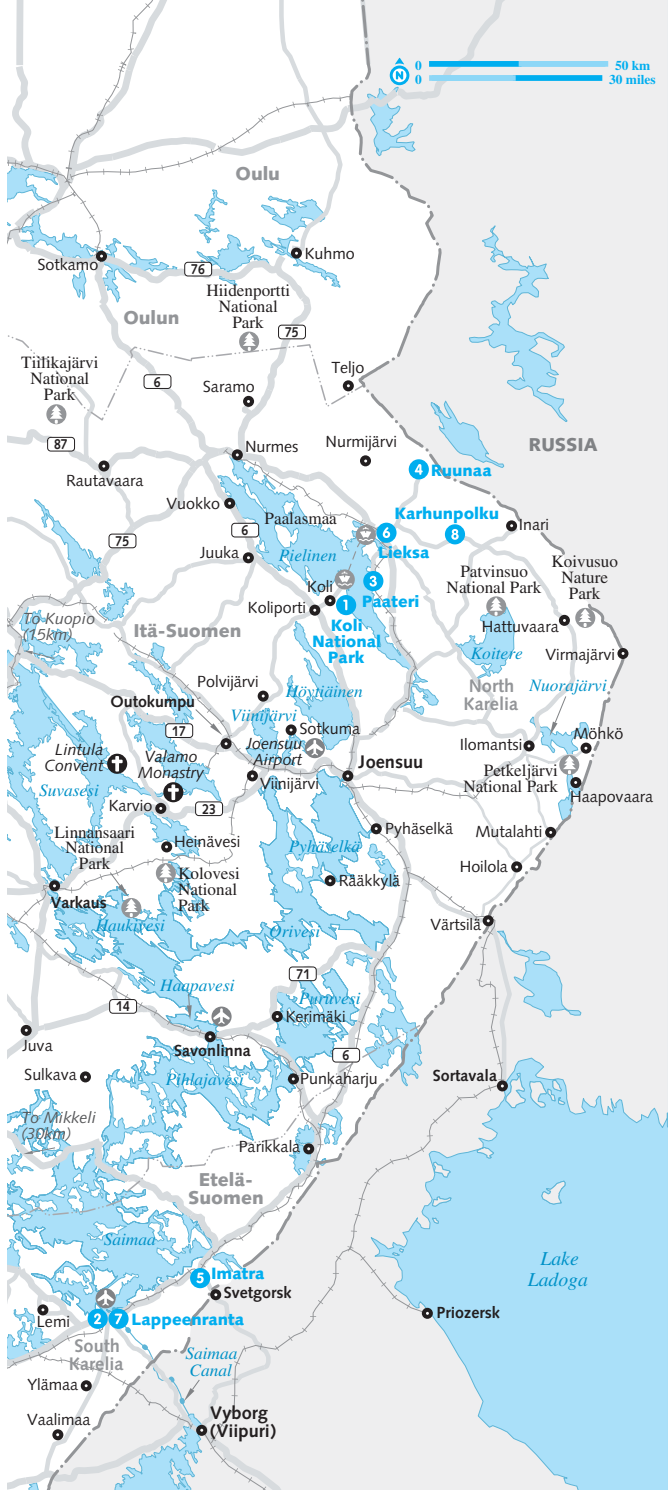
KARELIA



Mid-Apr The bear-watching season begins, when brown bears wake from their winter sleep.

Jul Folk in Joensuu have a blast at the international Illosaari Rock Festival.

Dec Finland's most accessible ski resort at Koli National Park opens for business.



Karelia Highlights

- 1** Be inspired by the views at **Koli National Park** (p213) before skiing down the country's highest slope
- 2** Visit the lost Karelian town of Vyborg on a **cruise to Russia** (p197)
- 3** Fall in love with the woodland chapel at **Paateri** (p212), carved by a single artist
- 4** Shoot **Ruunaa's rapids** (p209) on a rubber raft
- 5** Dangle upside-down over torrents of water at the **Imatra Rapids Show** (p198)
- 6** Spend the night in an animal hide near Lieksa, awaiting **wolverines and bears** (p207)
- 7** See how the pros build a sandcastle at Lappeenranta's immense **Hiekkalinna** (p193)
- 8** Hike the peaceful walking trail **Karhunpolku** (p210), scattered with WWII remains