

Finland

The Lakeland (Chapter)

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Coverage includes: Savonlinna, Around Savonlinna, The Seal Lakes, Sulkava, Mikkeli, Around Mikkeli, Varkaus, Heinävesi & Around, Valamo, Lintula and Jyväskylä.

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The Lakeland

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Why Go?

Most of Finland could be dubbed lakeland, but around here it seems there's more water than land. And what water: sublime, sparkling and clean. Reflecting sky and forests as clearly as a mirror, it leaves an indelible impression.

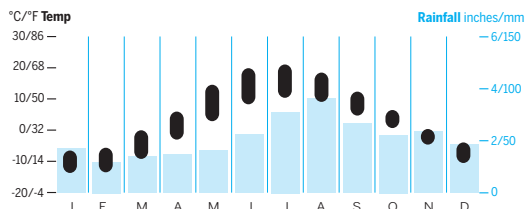
Get outdoors here, whether you rent a cottage and try your hand at kindling the perfect blaze in the sauna stove, grab a canoe and paddle the family-friendly Squirrel Route or go in search of rare inland seals.

Towns, too, have much to offer. Savonlinna hosts opera in the wonderful setting of its island castle. Jyväskylä's lively feel and architectural portfolio have obvious appeal, while Kuopio offers lake trips and a great smoke sauna.

Lakeland's people – the *savolaiset* – are among the most outspoken and friendly of Finns. They are often lampooned due to their distinctive Savo dialect, accent and humour. But they have the last laugh thanks to the unparalleled beauty of their region.

When to Go

THE LAKELAND



Feb Check out the ice sculptures in Savonlinna, and explore Linnansaari National Park on skates.

Jul Great weather for water activities, and the best festivals, including opera in Savonlinna's castle.

Aug See all the highlights in decent weather but without the July crowds.

Savonlinna

015 / POP 27,734

One of Finland's prettiest towns, Savonlinna shimmers on a sunny day as the water ripples around its centre. Set on two islands between Haapavesi and Pihlajavesi lakes, it's a classic Lakeland settlement with a major attraction: perched on a rocky islet, one of Europe's most visually dramatic castles, Olavinlinna, lords it over the picturesque town centre. The castle also plays host to July's world-famous opera festival in a spectacular setting.

Even if you're no ariaholic, the buzz of the festival makes this the most rewarding time to visit, with more restaurants and cafes open and animated post-show debriefs over dinner or bubbly going deep into the darkless night. But Savonlinna rewards a visit any time of year, and has other major drawcards like Kerimäki's church and the Retretti gallery within easy reach.

History

Savonlinna's slow growth began in 1475 with the building of Olavinlinna Castle, and in 1639 it received a municipal charter at the instigation of Count Per Brahe, the founder of many towns across Finland. Despite appearances, the castle didn't prove particularly defensible, and the Russians finally grabbed the town in 1743. It was returned to the Finnish grand duchy in 1812.

Sights

Olavinlinna

CASTLE

(www.olavinlinna.fi; adult/child €6/3, combined ticket with museum €8/3; ☉10am-6pm daily Jun-mid-Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun mid-Aug-May, last tour leaves 1hr before close) Standing haughtily on a rock in the lake, this castle is one of the most spectacular in northern Europe. As well as being an imposing fortification, it is also the spectacular venue for the month-long Savonlinna Opera Festival, comfortably seating 2300 within its sturdy walls.

The castle has been heavily restored after fire damage, but is still seriously impressive, not least in the way it's built directly on the rock in the middle of the lake. To visit the interior, including original towers, bastions and chambers, you must join a guided tour (around 45 minutes). Tours are multilingual and depart on the hour. Guides are good at bringing the castle to life and furnish you with some interesting stories: the soldiers, for instance, were partly paid in beer – five

litres a day and seven on Sundays, which makes the castle's frequent change-of-hands more understandable. During the opera festival, the last tour of each day includes a visit backstage.

Savonlinnan Maakuntamuseo

MUSEUM

(www.savonlinna.fi/museo; Riihisaari; adult/child €5/2, with castle €8/3; ☉10am-5pm Tue-Sun, also Mon-Jun-Aug) The town's provincial museum, in an old Russian warehouse near the castle, tells of local history and the importance of water transport to the area. There are plenty of old photographs and models and a changing art exhibition. Here also is **Nestori**, a national parks visitor and information centre for the Saimaa region.

Moored alongside is a selection of historic **museum ships**, all with exhibitions open from mid-May to mid-September during the same hours as the provincial museum (and accessible by the same ticket). The museum won't take your breath away like the castle, but is worthwhile and several orders of magnitude less touristy.

Activities & Tours

Numerous operators run tours allowing you to explore some of this Lakeland area. Savonlinna Travel runs many of them, from half-day to multiday trips.

The Savonlinna area, with its quiet country lanes and gently sloping hills, is terrific for **bicycle touring**. Bikes can be carried on board lakeboats for a small fee. To rent **canoes** and **rowing boats**, visit Vuohimäki Camping or the operators around the Seal Lakes detailed later in the chapter.

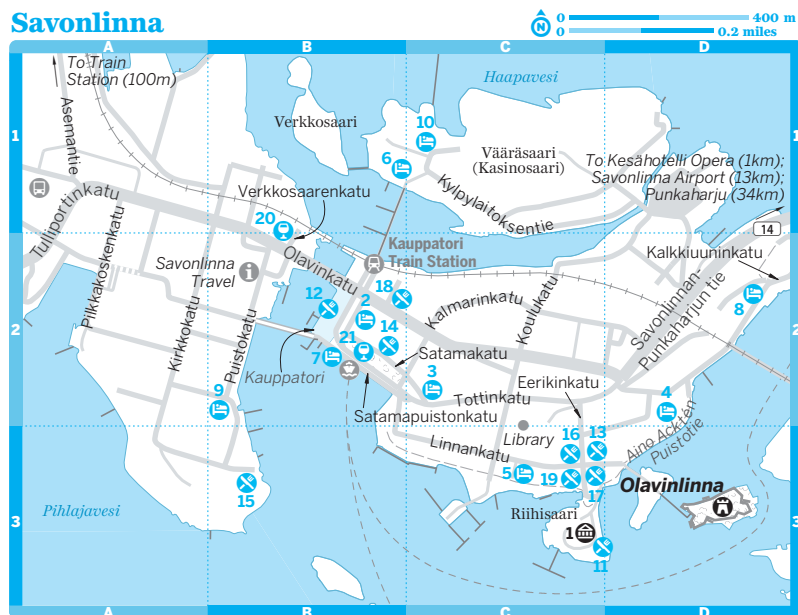
Lake Cruises

From June to August, Savonlinna **passenger harbour** is buzzing with dozens of daily scenic cruises that last about an hour and cost around €15. Boats include the **Ieva** and **Elviira** (www.ieva.fi), the **Lake Star** and **Lake Seal** (www.lakestar.info), and the **Paul Wahl** and **Punkaharju** (www.vipcruise.info). The boats anchor alongside the kauppatori (market square) and you can soon see which is the next departure. There are also many boats available for charter.

The **SS Heinävesi** (www.savonlinnanlaivat.fi) runs daily at 11am to Retretti art gallery in Punkaharju (adult/child one-way €25/10, return €33/15, two hours, July to mid-August), giving you 2½ hours there.

For cruises to Lappeenranta and Kuopio see *Getting There & Away*.

Savonlinna



Savonlinna

Top Sights

- Olavinlinna D3

Sights

- 1 Savonlinnan Maakuntamuseo C3

Sleeping

- 2 Hotel Seurahuone B2
 3 Kesähotelli Tott C2
 Lake Seal (see 7)
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 4 Lossiranta Lodge D2
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 5 Perhehotelli Hospitz C3
 6 Spahotel Casino B1
 7 SS Heinävesi B2
 8 Tavis Inn D2

- 9 Villa Aria B2

- 10 Vuorilinna C1

Eating

- 11 Hilpeä Munkki C3
 12 Liekkilohi B2
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 18 Sinikka B2
 19 Valo C3

Drinking

- 20 Olutravintola Sillansuu B1
 21 Oopperaterassi B2

Festivals & Events

When the opera's done, there's also an important **ballet festival** (www.savonlinnaballet.net), which runs for three to four days in late July or early August. Get tickets from **Lippu.fi** (☎060-090 0900; www.lippu.fi)

Less elegant, but keenly contested most years in late August, is the **Mobile Phone Throwing World Championships** (www.savonlinnafestivals.com).

In February, the castle hosts **Jäällinna** (www.jaalinna.fi), an ice-sculpture contest.

Sleeping

Prices rise sharply during the opera festival, when hotel beds are scarce. Fortunately, the students are out of town and their residences are converted to summer hotels and hostels. It goes without saying that you should book accommodation well in advance if you

plan to visit during July. If you have a vehicle, staying in Punkaharju, Rantasalmi or Kerimäki is an option.



Lossiranta Lodge

BOULIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎511 2323; www.lossiranta.net; Aino Acktén Puistotie; d €160-195; P) To get up close and personal with Olavinlinna Castle, this lakeside spot is the place to be: its impressive form looms just opposite. Offering five snug little nests in an outbuilding, this is one of Finland's most charming hotels. All are very different but decorated with love and style; they come with a small kitchen (yes, that's it in the cupboard) and numerous personal touches. The best has a wood sauna and jacuzzi – a honeymoon special. Breakfast is served on the lawn if weather allows; when the snows fall, an outdoor spa bath will keep the chills out. This is like a rural retreat but in the middle of town; warm personal service seals the experience.

Tavis Inn

BOULIQUE HOTEL €€€

(☎511 2323; www.lossiranta.net; Kalkkiiuninkatu 11; d €160-195; P) Tavis Inn, run by the same people as Lossiranta Lodge and further along the lakeshore, is in a secluded end-of-the-road spot, offering similar comfort minus the castle view. Rooms and suites are larger than at Lossiranta, and summer art exhibitions give it its own discrete ambience. Prices drop off-season. Check-in is at Lossiranta's reception.

Perhehotelli Hospitz

HOTEL €€

(☎515 661; www.hospitz.com; Linnankatu 20; s/d €88/98; P@) This cosy place near the castle is a Savonlinna classic, built in the 1930s and redolent of that period's elegance, with striped wallpaper and ornate public areas. The rooms are also stylish, although beds are narrow and bathrooms small; there are larger rooms available for families. A balcony costs a little extra. The hotel has a pleasant terrace and orchard-garden with access to a small beach. Opera festival atmosphere

is great but rates rise accordingly (single/double €120/145), with midnight buffet laid on. Book eons in advance.

Hotel Seurahuone

HOTEL €€

(☎020-757 1350; www.savonlinnaseurahuone.fi; Kauppatori 4-6; s/d €111/132; P@) Towering over the kauppatori, this friendly hotel offers a bit of everything; its rooms have views, big flatscreen TVs, sofas, sober but recently renovated decor, and decent little bathrooms. The top-floor bar has great views and fries up *muikku* (vendace, or whitefish); however the restaurant has disappointing food. There's also a nightclub onsite. Weekend prices are good but opera prices are substantially higher.

Spahotel Casino

SPA HOTEL €€€

(☎73950; www.spahotelcasino.fi; Kasinosaaari; s/d €95/110, large d €135; P@) Charmingly situated on an island across a footbridge from the kauppatori, this is a good option. Nearly all rooms have a balcony; those that don't, have their own sauna. In the 'small' rooms, the beds are arranged toe-to-toe. The rooms aren't luxurious for the price, but guests have unlimited access to the excellent spa facilities, and the location is fantastic. Non-guests can use the spa for €9. Room prices fall at weekends and during winter and rise substantially during the opera festival, when it's a real favourite.

Vuorilinn

HOTEL, HOSTEL €€

(☎73950; www.spahotelcasino.fi; Kylpylaitoksentie; dm/s/d €30/65/85; ☺Jun-Aug; P) Set in several buildings used by students during term time, this is run by the Spahotel Casino and has an appealing location across a beautiful footbridge from the town centre. Rooms are clean and comfortable; the cheaper ones share bathroom and kitchen (no utensils) between two. Happily, dorm rates get you the same deal, and there's a HI discount. Reception is most helpful, and there are free laundry

DON'T MISS

LAKELAND: GETTING OUT ON THE WATER

With so many lakes, it's no wonder that the main summer activities involve getting out on them. One of the best ways to do so is to take a day-long lake cruise between Kuopio and Savonlinna; other cruises visit the Valamo Orthodox monastery.

The more active choice is to hire a canoe, whether for a short paddle or a longer trek. The Savonlinna area presents several choices, with two national parks, Linnansaari and Kolovesi, offering great rowing, canoeing and kayaking; there's also the popular two- or three-day 'Squirrel Route' from Juva to Sulkava.

SAVONLINNINA OPERA FESTIVAL

The **Savonlinna Opera Festival** (www.operafestival.fi; Olavinkatu 27) is Finland's most famous festival, with an enviably dramatic setting: the covered courtyard of Olavinlinna Castle. It offers four weeks of top-class opera performances in July. The atmosphere in town during the festival is reason enough to come; it's buzzing, with restaurants serving post-show midnight feasts, and animated discussions and impromptu arias on all sides.

The first festival was held at Olavinlinna way back in 1912, the brainchild of Finnish soprano Aino Ackté. After a break of 39 years it was resurrected in 1967 and has grown in stature with each passing year. The festival's excellent website details the program: there are rotating performances of four or five operas by the Savonlinna company, as well as an international guest company performing, and concerts on the Sundays.

The performances themselves are magical: the muscular castle walls are a magnificent backdrop to the set and add great atmosphere. There are tickets in various price bands. The top grades (€110 plus) are fine, but the penultimate grade (€80 to €101) puts you in untiered seats, so it helps to be tall. The few cheap seats (€40) have a severely restricted view. Buy tickets up to a year in advance from **Lippupalvelu** (☎060-010 800; www.lippupalvelu.fi) or from Savonlinna Travel.

facilities. The spa hotel also runs Malakias, another summer lodging 2km west of town, with similar rooms and prices (open July only).

Kesähotelli Tott

HOTEL €€

(☎020-757 1356; www.savonlinnaseuraahuone.fi; Satamakatu 1; s/d/f €88/106/110; ☉Jun-Aug; [P]) Run by the same people as the Seuraahuone and not far from the kauppatori, this is another university residence that'll have you envying the Finnish student. Spacious rooms feature couches, comfortable beds, minibar, and some have great views. Apartment-style rooms are larger, a little more downmarket (lino floors) but have a fully equipped kitchen. Rates rise during July.

Villa Aria

HOTEL €€

(☎515 555; www.savocenter.fi; Puistokatu 15; s/d €108/158; ☉early Jun-mid-Aug; [P]) By the water in a quiet but central part of town, this stylish wooden former hospital has spacious high-ceilinged rooms, and runs as a summer hotel. The students who normally reside in it run reception in a haphazard manner, but it's still a fine, if expensive base. It's a bargain in June and in the week after the opera festival (singles/doubles €62/78).

Kesähotelli Opera

HOTEL €€

(☎521 116; www.savocenter.fi; Kyrönniemenkuja 9; d/q €102/176; ☉early Jun-mid-Aug; [P]) Operating as a summer hotel, this student residence is across the bridge from the main part of town, about 1.5km east of the centre. Some of the clean, spacious rooms share a bathroom and kitchen, while others have their own facilities. A double's only €55 outside July.

Vuohimäki Camping

CAMPGROUND €

(☎537 353; www.suncamping.fi; Vuohimäentie 60; tent sites €14, 4-person r €75-80, cottages €65-90; ☉early Jun-late Aug; [P]) Located 7km southwest of town, this camp ground has good facilities but fills up quickly during July. You can hire canoes, bikes and rowing boats here. Prices for rooms and cabins are cheaper in June and August.

SS Heinävesi

BOAT €

(☎050-065 3774; www.savonlinnanlaivat.fi; cabins upper/lower deck d €68/58; ☉Jul-early Aug) After the last cruise every afternoon/evening during high summer, this steamer offers cramped but cute two-bunk cabins. There's a good chance of getting a bed here, even during the opera festival, and it's moored right in the centre of things.

Lake Star

BOAT €

(☎040-020 0117; www.lakestar.info; d €40) The Lake Star offers cabins during the festival.

Panimoravintola Huvila

B&B €€

(☎555 0555; www.panimoravintolahuvila.fi; Puistokatu 4; tw €75; [P]) Above this brewery restaurant are two cosy, compact attic rooms (€120 during opera festival).

SKO

HOSTEL €

(☎572 910; www.sko.fi; Opistokatu 1; s/d basic €42/65, superior €65/80; [P]@) Six kilometres southwest of town, in the same direction as the camp site, this Christian college offers hostel rooms in a variety of buildings in a peaceful location near a lake. Excellent facilities on offer. Get close on bus number 3. Follow signs for Kristillinen Opisto. HI discount.

Eating & Drinking

The lively lakeside **kauppatori** is the place for casual snacking. A *lörtsy* (turnover) is typical and comes savoury with meat (*lihälörtsy*) or sweet with apple (*omenälörtsy*) or cloudberry (*lakkaälörtsy*). Savonlinna is also famous for fried *muikku*; try these at Kalastajan Koju on the kauppatori, or the Muikkubaari on the top floor of the Seurahuone hotel. The opera festival peps up Savonlinna's nightlife, with restaurants open late and pubs thronged with post-performance merriment.

Panimoravintola Huvila

FINNISH, BREWERY €€

(☎555 0555; www.panimoravintolahuvila.fi; Puistokatu 4; mains €15-26; ☼lunch & dinner Jul, dinner Mon-Fri May & Sep, dinner Mon-Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun Jun & Aug) This noble wooden building was formerly a fever hospital then a mental asylum, but these days writes happier stories as an excellent microbrewery and restaurant just across the harbour from the town centre. The food focuses on fresh local ingredients and might feature unusual fare like goose or wild boar, all expertly prepared and served in generous quantities. The staff will recommend a beer match, whether it be fresh, hoppy Joutsen, traditional sweet *sahvi* (ale flavoured with juniper berries), or the deliciously rich dessert stout. The terrace is a wonderful place on a sunny afternoon, with live music some weekends.

Majakka

FINNISH €€

(☎206 2825; www.ravintolamajakka.fi; Satamakatu 11; mains €12-20) This restaurant has a deck-like terrace, fitting the nautical theme (the name means 'lighthouse'). Local meat and fish specialities are tasty, generously sized and fairly priced, and the select-your-own appetiser plate is a nice touch. It's child-friendly too, and opens late during the opera festival, when it buzzes with good cheer.

Hilpeä Munkki

THEME €€

(☎515 330; Riihisaari; dishes €15-30; ☼2pm-1am Jul) Alongside the museum in a delightfully ramshackle wooden building, this terraced restaurant gets back to basics in medieval style. Waiters dressed as monks bring out beer in tankards and meat on skewers. Views of the castle are superb.

Liekkilohi

SEAFOOD €€

(www.liekkilohi.fi; Kauppatori; fish buffet per kilo €39; ☼Jun-mid-Aug) This bright-red pontoon,

anchored just off the kauppatori, specialises in 'flamed' salmon, a delicious plate that forms part of an excellent pay-by-weight fish buffet.

Valo

FINNISH €

(☎514 425; www.savocenter.fi; Linnankatu 12; burgers €11-14, mains €10-22; ☼noon-late Jun-Aug) A great terrace near the water makes this an opera favourite. They do a nice line in gourmet burgers (think reindeer, smoked salmon), and the main menu features several Finnish favourites.

Olutravintola Sillansuu

PUB

(Verkkosaarenkatu 1; ☼2pm-late) Savonlinna's best pub by some distance is compact and cosy, offering an excellent variety of international bottled beers, a decent whisky selection and friendly service. There's a downstairs area with a pool table; during the festival amateur arias are sometimes sung as the beer kegs empty.

Sinikka

CAFE €

(www.cafesinikka.fi; Olavinkatu 35; salads €6; ☼7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat, also 9am-3pm Sun Jul) Run with a motherly air, this local cafe does quiches and salad lunches as well as decent coffee and excellent cakes.

Oopperaterassi

BAR

(www.savonmafia.fi; Satamapuisto; ☼from 2pm Mon-Fri, noon Sat & Sun May-Sep) Near the kauppatori, this flat wooden deck is one of Savonlinna's most popular spots for a summertime drink.

Near the castle, several handsome Linnankatu cafe-bars compete for the pre- and post-opera crowd with mini bottles of fizz and traditional, if pricey, Finnish plates.

Sarastro

CAFE, ITALIAN €€

(www.savocenter.fi; Linnankatu 10; mains €13-23; ☼noon-1am late Jun-early Aug) Lovely back garden. Salads, tapas and pasta.

Linnakrouvi

FINNISH €€

(www.linnakrouvi.fi; Linnankatu 7; mains €15-28; ☼Jun-Aug) Tiered outdoor seating and a short menu of tasty stuff like smoked salmon, *muikku* and filet mignon.

Saima

CAFE €

(www.kahvilasaima.net; Linnankatu 11; meals €7-17; ☼10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun Aug-May, 10am-6pm daily Jun, 10am-1am Jul) Friendly owner, cosy interior, licensed and open year-round.

i Information

Public library (Tottinkatu 6; ☎11am-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-4pm Fri) Free internet. Also opens Saturday mornings outside summer.

Savonlinna Travel (☎060-030 007; www.savonlinna.travel; Puistokatu 1; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri Aug-Jun, 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun Jul) Tourist information including accommodation reservations, cottage booking, farmstays, festival tickets and tours. Free internet.

i Getting There & Away

Air

FlyBe fly daily between Helsinki and Savonlinna in summer, and more seldom in winter. They also connect Savonlinna with Seinäjoki and several other Finnish cities, as well as Gdansk in Poland. During the opera festival, a concert greets arriving passengers and night flights return punters to the capital after the show.

Boat

From mid-June to mid-August, century-old **MS Puijo** (☎250 250; www.mspsuijo.fi) travels to Kuopio on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at 9am (one-way €88, 10½ hours), returning on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The boat passes through scenic waterways, canals and locks, and stops en route at Oravi, Heinävesi, Karvio canal and Palokki, among others. Meals are available onboard. You can book a return from Savonlinna with overnight cabin accommodation for €175. Look for the downloadable English pdf file on the Finnish-language website.

MS Brahe (☎055-410 140; www.saimaatravel.fi) heads to/from Lappeenranta (€75-85, 8½ hours) twice weekly from early June to mid-August; the fare includes lunch and return bus transfer to Savonlinna.

The *Brahe* also sails from Helsinki to Lappeenranta, so you could combine all these routes into a Helsinki-Kotka-Lappeenranta-Savonlinna-Kuopio extravaganza.

Bus

Savonlinna is not on major bus routes, but there are several express buses a day from **Helsinki** (€49.90, 5 to 5½ hours), and buses run regularly from **Mikkeli** (€22.40, 1½ hours). There are also services to **Joensuu** (€24.50, 2¾ hours), **Kuopio** (€30.60, three hours) and **Jyväskylä** (€41, 3½ hours).

Train

Trains from **Helsinki** (€57, 4½ hours) and **Joensuu** (€29.60, 2¾ hours) both require a change in Parikkala.

For Kuopio, Jyväskylä and Tampere, railbuses (stop at both the main train station and the bus station) run the two hours to Pieksämäki and

connect with trains there. The main train station, (buy tickets at an R-kiosk or onboard) is a walk from the centre of Savonlinna; board and alight at the Kauppatori station instead.

i Getting Around

Savonlinna airport is 13km northeast of town. A **taxi shuttle** (☎044-025 2471; €14) meets arriving flights in July and August; it picks up at hotels on demand and leaves from the taxi rank by the bus station one hour before the flight departs. A regular cab costs around €30.

Three car rental agencies have central offices: **Sixt** (☎020-112 2557; www.sixt.fi; Olavinkatu 15), **Europcar** (☎040-306 2855; www.europcar.fi; Puistokatu 1) in the tourist office, and **Hertz** (☎020-555 2750; www.hertz.fi; Rantakatu 2). Hertz, Sixt and **Avis** (☎013-122076; www.avis.com) share a desk at the airport. Rates are expensive and cars should be booked well ahead.

Several places in town rent bikes in summer, including Café Seepira in front of the tourist office, and **InterSport** (☎517 680; Olavinkatu 52; ☎Mon-Sat).

Around Savonlinna

KERIMÄKI

☎015

Kerimäki is a small farming community, yet it's dominated by the world's largest wooden church (see p170), which towers over the village. It's a memorable sight, and close to Savonlinna.

The nearby protected island of **Hytermä** celebrates one of the weirdest human achievements: it has a grandiose stone staircase and monument to Romu-Heikki (Junk Heikki), a man who built large structures with millstones. The island is also quite beautiful, and is easily visited by hiring a rowing boat at the tourist office.

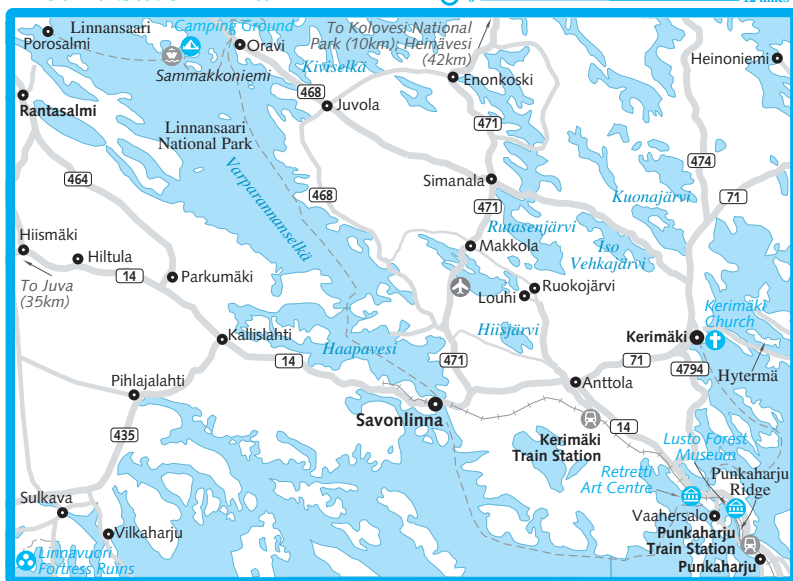
Sleeping & Eating

Herttua

HOTEL 

(☎769 900; www.herttua.fi; Veneenniementie 64; s/d €79/89; ) A kilometre and a half east of Kerimäki centre, this relaxing lakeside place is a good base for activities and has a spa complex. The neat little rooms, with varying colour schemes, all have relaxing perspectives: grab an odd-numbered one for lake views. There are numerous facilities, and also a weapon and artillery exhibition – this was once a frontline in the Winter War. Prices rise to €99/137 in July.

Around Savonlinna



Gasthaus Kerihovi

GUESTHOUSE €€

(☎541 225; www.kerihovi.com; Puruvedentie 28; s/d/q €40/75/116; P) An attractive old wooden house not far from the church, this friendly guesthouse has simple, colourful rooms with creaky floors and washbasins above a pub/restaurant. Breakfast and sauna included, and there are good rooms for families/groups.

Information

Tourist office (☎044-417 5002; www.kerimaki.fi; Puruvedentie 59; ☎10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat Aug-late Jun, daily late Jun-Jul) Across from the church in a craft shop.

Getting There & Away

Hourly buses run Monday to Friday between Savonlinna and Kerimäki (€5.70, 30 minutes). Don't catch a train: Kerimäki station is miles away from the village.

PUNKAHARJU

015

Punkaharju, the famous pine-covered sand esker (sand or gravel ridge) east of Savonlinna, is a popular summer destination and touted as 'Finland's national landscape'. The region was first declared a protected area by Tsar Alexander way back in 1803 and became a favoured summering spot for the tsars and St Petersburg gentry. The area is

very picturesque and great for walking or cycling; there's also an innovative gallery and a forestry museum. It's an easy day trip from Savonlinna on the train but also an appealing place to stay.

Punkaharju village has services including a guesthouse and a large supermarket.

Sights & Activities

Punkaharju

OUTDOORS

During the Ice Age, formations similar to this 7km-long sand ridge were created all over the country. Because it crosses a large lake, it's always been an important travel route. Short sections of the original unsealed road along the ridge top remain – once part of a route to Russia connecting the Olavinlinna and Vyborg (Viipuri) castles. To stroll on the ridge, get off at the Retretti train station and walk east towards Punkaharju village, either shadowing the main road, or along the quieter and equally spectacular by-road signposted Harjuaue. It is a spectacular walk, particularly on a sunny day, with water on both sides. Other labelled trails explore the forested areas from the Arboretum car park, which is located between Lusto and Retretti.

Boat cruises exploring the area leave from Retretti train station at 2pm in summer (adult/child €18/7).

**Retretti**

GALLERY

(www.retretti.fi; adult/child €16/5, with Lusto €24/9; ☉10am-6pm Jun-Aug) This is one of the world's most unusual galleries. An innovative annual exhibition of contemporary art is displayed inside an enormous subterranean cavern complex, artificial but authentic in atmosphere. The intriguing combination of craggy walls, watery pools and semi-darkness allows for startling, elaborate installations. There's also a vast subterranean auditorium. More conventional exhibition spaces have high-profile annual exhibitions of more mainstream art; upstairs is a workshop, gallery for kids and a good cafe-restaurant. Entrance is steep, but it's unique, and the descent into the arty underworld is memorable. It's wheelchair accessible throughout.

Lusto

MUSEUM

(www.lusto.fi; adult/child €10/5, with Retretti €24/9; ☉10am-7pm Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm May & Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) The Finnish Forest Museum is dedicated to Finnish forests and forestry and is a good visit, with plenty of information in English. Displays cover hunting, cottage culture, and world global forest resources; a new section has a kid-pleasing range of machinery and chainsaws. More peaceable is the lakescape room from the Expo 2000 pavilion – a spot to relax for five minutes. The building itself is an interesting timber structure with the main display hall designed to represent the trunk of a tree, while the attractive cafe does a summer lunch buffet. There's a free internet terminal.

Kesämaa

AMUSEMENT PARK

(www.kesamaa.fi; admission €16; ☉mid-Jun-mid-Aug) Most reasonable children will allow you the Retretti gallery in exchange for this waterpark, very close at hand and featuring waterslides, bouncy castles and pirate ships. It's cheaper after 4pm.

 Sleeping & Eating

The best places to eat are the Valtionhotelli and the cafes at Retretti and Lusto, which all have a good lunch buffet.

Mannila

HOTEL, FARMSTAY €€

(☎644 265; www.maatilamatkailumannila.com; Koskelonniementie 127, Vaahersalo; d main/outbuilding €110/90, tent €6 plus per person €3, farm d €60-80; ☉May-Sep plus winter if prebooked; ) This farm complex is in one of Punkaharju's most picturesque areas. The wonderful lakeside is the highlight: here you'll find a camp site and the welcoming Rantakatti hotel. The main building has attractive rooms, some with an enormous balcony. Rooms in the secondary building are smaller but share a large common area. There are cheaper but cosy rooms in converted farm buildings, separate family apartments, bikes, saunas, pony rides and a restaurant. It's remote enough to be a great Finnish retreat but handy enough to make a top Lakeland base.

Punkaharjun Valtionhotelli

HOTEL €€

(☎020-752 9100; www.punkaharjunvaltionhotelli.fi; Tuunaansaarentie 4; s/d €90/120, tw without bathroom €60, superior r €150; ☉Jun-Aug;  ) Right on the old walled ridge-road to Russia between Lusto and Retretti, this romantic

KERIMÄKI CHURCH

Finland has many notable churches, but few impose like Kerimäki's – the largest **wood-en church** (www.kerimaenseurakunta.fi; admission free; ☉10am-6pm Jun & early Aug, 10am-7pm Jul, 10am-4pm late Aug) in the world. Built in 1847, it was designed to accommodate 5000 churchgoers.

The oversized church was no mistake, but was deliberately inflated from original plans by overexcited locals. At the time the church was built, the population of Kerimäki parish was around 12,000, and the reverend felt that half of the residents should be attending church on any given Sunday. Worshippers arrived by water, crossing the lakes in a *kirkkovenne* (church longboat).

As stunning as the yellow-and-white church appears from outside (dominating the tiny township), the scale isn't apparent until you survey the massive interior – the height of the nave is 27m. Heating it was impossible: the original eight stoves weren't enough, and a smaller winter chapel was built at the rear. The main church is still used for services in summer. It's largely unadorned apart from an altarpiece by Aleksandra Sältin.

There's a cafe and gift shop in the separate bell tower in front of the church (proceeds go to the maintenance, an onerous burden for a small parish), and for €2 you can climb the tower on steep wooden steps for a better view.

A COTTAGE BY A LAKE

The Lakeland is a particularly enticing place to search out a waterside cottage retreat or cosy rural farmstay for a true Finnish holiday. Around 100,000 rental cabins and cottages are dotted around the myriad lakes.

A good first point of investigation is the nationwide operators (p339) – **Lomarengas** has heaps of options in this area and also has links to farmstays and rural B&Bs. A local operator with a decent portfolio is **Saimaa Tours** (www.saimaatours.fi). Local tourist offices and websites also have extensive lists of accommodation options. Savonlinna's travel website, www.savonlinna.travel, and Mikkeli's, www.visitmikkeli.fi, both link to farmstay and cottage-rental providers. **Ready to Go** (www.readytogo.fi) is another worth checking out; other local providers are mentioned throughout this chapter.

Cabins normally provide at least a rowing boat and wood-fired sauna, though you may need your own bedding; cottages come with fully equipped kitchens; and farmstays often offer all manner of summer and winter activities such as horse riding, fishing and snowmobiling.

wooden hotel dating from 1845, was once the gamekeeper's lodge for the royal Russian hunting estates, and includes a villa built for the tsarina. There's a variety of room types and prices, including cabins (€50 plus €10 if you need linen). The doubles have a cramped sleeping space but an extra sitting area; the superiors are huge and beautiful, with views down the hill. It's wonderfully peaceful up here among the pines, and there's also a fine restaurant. Prices rise about 25% in July.

Gasthaus Punkaharju

GUESTHOUSE €€

(050-340 0867; www.naaranlahti.com; Palomäentie 18; s/d €55/75; P) This guesthouse, in Punkaharju village 2km south of the bus station, has simple but comfortable rooms; there's a sauna and pool and you can also rent bikes, boats and snowmobiles. The owners also run the farm-estate Naaranlahti.

Naaranlahti

FARMSTAY €€

(0473 123; www.naaranlahti.com; Kesälahdentie 1614; s/d €60/85; P) This farmstay, run by the owners of Gasthaus Punkaharju, has good apartment rooms. You can relax and take part in rural activities, including canoeing, fishing or gathering berries. It's 15km from Punkaharju but transport to and from the town is provided from the guesthouse.

Punkaharjun Lomakeskus

CAMPGROUND €

(029-007 4050; www.punkaharjunlomakeskus.fi; tent sites €13.50 plus per adult/child €4/2, 2-/4-person cabins €40/60, self-contained cottages €95-159; P) Very handy for Retretti, this enormous lakeside camp site has a whole town's worth of solid cabins and cottages, and a raft of facilities. Good for kids, who'll

soon find a posse of Finnish playmates; there's also a reindeer to feed and the popular waterpark next door.

Kruunupuisto

SPA HOTEL €€

(0775 091; www.kruunupuisto.fi; Vaahersalontie 44; s/d €83/96, superior s/d €96/122; P@) Off the main road in a pretty part between Retretti and Punkaharju village, this spa and rehabilitation centre can understandably sometimes have a hospital-like feel, but it offers great facilities – pool, gym, massages, bike hire – at good prices. The superior rooms are huge. It's 25% more from mid-June to the end of July.

Information

Tourist Information (0527 5400; www.punkaharju.fi; Kauppatie 20; Mon-Fri) There's information here in the town hall in Punkaharju village, but you can also get info at the Lusto train station and at the petrol station by Retretti train station, the latter open long summer hours (9am to 8pm Monday to Friday, 10am to 8pm Saturday & Sunday).

Getting There & Away

Trains between Savonlinna and Parikkala stop at Retretti, Lusto and Punkaharju train stations (€4, 30 minutes, five to six daily). You can also get here on less regular buses from Savonlinna or by boat (see Savonlinna).

The Seal Lakes

015

Enticing Linnansaari and Kolovesi, two primarily water-based national parks in the Savonlinna area, offer fabulous lakescapes dotted with islands, all best explored by hiring a canoe or rowing boat. Several

outfitters offer these services, and free camping spots dot the lakes' shores. This is perhaps the best part of the Lakeland to really get up close and personal with this region's natural beauty.

This is the habitat of the freshwater Saimaa ringed seal. This endangered species was separated from its Baltic cousins at the end of the last Ice Age, and after being in imminent danger of extinction during the 20th century due to hunting and human interference, its population levels have stabilised and are on the increase, although there remain only a precarious 300-odd of the noble greyish beasts.

Late May is the most likely time to see seals, as they are moulting and spend much time on rocks. As well as information points detailed below, the Nestori centre in the Savonlinna museum is a good source of national park information.

There are numerous cabin and cottage rentals available around the two parks. Check www.savonlinna.travel for starters.

LINNANSAARI NATIONAL PARK

This scenic national park (www.outdoors.fi) consists of Haukivesi lake and hundreds of uninhabited islands; the main activity centres around the largest island, Linnansaari, which has marked hiking (5km to 7km) and nature trails (2km). As well as the seal population, rare birds, including ospreys, can also be seen.


The best way to experience the park is to pack camping gear and food, rent a kayak and spend a few days exploring. Rowing boats, motorboats, kayaks, canoes and camping equipment can be hired from the offices of **Saimaaholiday** (www.saimaaholiday.net) Oravi (☎647 290; Kiramontie 15); Porosalmi (☎020-729 1760; Porosalmentie 313). This is an excellent set-up with a comprehensive range of hiring, guiding and advice, as well as great accommodation options at the two main access points for the park (see below). It can book the huts on Linnansaari island and organise activities too; this region is also a good winter destination, with a marked skating track right across the lake, ice-fishing and snowshoe walks.

Oskari (☎020-564 5916; www.outdoors.fi; ☉9am-4pm Mon-Fri late Feb-mid-Jun & mid-Aug-Oct, 10am-6pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug) in Rantasalmi is the visitor information centre for the park and village and also has an environmental display and a film about a Saimaa seal pup (adult/child €3/1.50). It rents canoes too.

If you haven't rented your own, there are scheduled boat services to Linnansaari island from Oravi (adult/child €8.50/4, three daily mid-June to August, 15 minutes), and Porosalmi (adult/child €14/5, two daily, 30 minutes). These are run by Saimaaholiday, who can also arrange on-demand watertaxi departures from May to October at a higher rate.

Buses run to Oravi and Rantasalmi from Savonlinna. From Rantasalmi, it's an extra 7km to the turn-off for Porosalmi (Varkaus-bound buses can drop you here), and a further 3km walk down to the boat dock and accommodation complex. The Savonlinna-Kuopio ferry stops at Oravi.

Sleeping & Eating

 **Oravi Outdoor Centre**

HOTEL, HOSTEL €€

(☎647 290; www.saimaaholiday.net/oravi; Kiramontie 15, Oravi; hostel s/d €30/45, hotel s/d €75/90; ☎☎) Beautifully set by the river in Oravi, the eastern access point for Linnansaari National Park, this excellent facility, as well as providing everything you could possibly need to get on the water (or ice), offers a variety of comfortable accommodation. As well as various self-catering cottages in the vicinity, it has simple summer-only hostel rooms and a cracking modern hotel. The great rooms have a kitchen, drying cabinet and free sauna use; it's more expensive in July, and cheaper outside summer. There's an attractive waterside restaurant in summer and a year-round cafe-shop. They may let you camp here.

Lomakeskus Järvisydän COTTAGE, HOTEL €€

(☎020-729 1760; www.jarvisydan.com; Porosalmentie 313, Porosalmi; s/d/ste €85/105/200, cottages from €125, villas from €250; ☎☎) This rather impressive medieval-themed holiday village is at the Porosalmi embarkation point for the Linnansaari National Park. There's a big variety of accommodation, mostly in log cottages which, despite the old-time look, feature plenty of modern comforts inside. Good meals are available in the highly atmospheric restaurant and hall – get a look at the unusual wine cellar – and it runs activities and rent out all sorts of equipment so you can get canoeing in summer or skate across the lake in winter.

Sammakkoniemi

CAMPGROUND, CABIN €

(☎050-027 5458; www.outdoors.fi; tent sites €7, cabins €45) On the island of Linnansaari in

the park, this camping ground offers a wood sauna, cooking places and (in summer) a kiosk-cafe. Several smaller islands also have designated camping areas.

Rinssi-Eversti

HOTEL €€

(☎440 761; www.rinssieversti.fi; Ohitustie 5; s/d €55/75; P) In Rantasalmi itself, this hotel-restaurant near the water offers bright simple rooms with bathroom that are a decent deal.

KOLOVESI NATIONAL PARK

Northeast of Linnansaari, less-trafficked Kolovesi (www.outdoors.fi) covers several islands, which feature well-preserved pine forests. There are high hills, rocky cliffs and caves, and prehistoric rock paintings dating back 5000 years. Saimaa seals, as well as otters and eagle owls, call Kolovesi home.

The park's a paradise for canoeing, the best way to explore the fantastic scenery. Motorboats are prohibited. There are several restricted areas, and the islands are out-of-bounds all winter to protect the seals, whose pups are born in February.

The gateway town to the park is pleasant Enonkoski, with a bright stream and rapids dividing it in two. There's a **park information cabin** here. The park starts a further 12km north. A free ferry north of Enonkoski crosses the narrows between two lakes on Rd 471.

Nahkiaissalo walking trail (3.3km) is in the south of the park, signposted 17km north of Enonkoski, and accessible without a boat. Mäntysalo, an island in the north, has another trail (3.8km). Just north of the park, **Vierunvuori hill** has prehistoric rock paintings depicting stick figures and elk.

Kolovesi Retkeily (☎040-558 9163; www.sealtrail.com) is the best and most experienced tour operator, specialising in canoe rental, outfitting and multiday journeys for all abilities. The office is located east of the park at Leipämäki, north of Enonkoski by the junction with the Savonranta road. The website www.norppateam.com lists other operators.

You can head from Kolovesi National Park to Oravi and thence Linnansaari National Park by canoe; Saimaaholiday (see Linnansaari above) will deliver canoes to Kolovesi for you if you want to do this.

Sleeping & Eating

Inside the national park are 12 simple camping grounds and a cabin on Mäntysalo. You

can book this via Oskari (see Linnansaari above) in Rantasalmi or the Wild North website www.villipohjola.fi.

Kievari Enonhovi

GUESTHOUSE €

(☎479 431; www.norppateam.com/enonhovi; Urheilukentäntie 1, Enonkoski; s/d €40/70, d with shower €90; P) This curious spot is the heart of Enonkoski village and handy for Kolovesi National Park. It's pleasant, with a terrace, parkland leading down to the river and occasional live music in summer. There are two grades of rooms, all simple and likeable. The better ones have their own shower and kitchenette. HI discount.

Sulkava

☎015

Scenic Sulkava, 39km southwest of Savonlinna, is quiet for most of the year but leaps into life in July when it hosts an enormous rowing festival that's an equally enormous party. Sulkava is the finishing point for the Squirrel Route (see p174).

There's tourist information in **Alina** (☎044-417 5215; www.sulkava.fi; Alanteentie 28; ☎9am-4pm Mon-Fri), a cafe that can provide details of the numerous rental cottages in the area. It opens until 6pm and weekends too in July.

Sulkavan Suursoudut (www.suursoudut.fi) is a massive rowing festival that attracts big crowds and some 7000 competitors over its four days in mid-July. Competitors row wooden boats around Partalansaari over a 70km two-day course or a 60km one-day course, then get thoroughly hammered. The highlights are races between large longboats – *kirkkovenettä* – traditionally used to get to church across the lakes. There are competitions for all abilities, and you might be able to find an oar for yourself in one of the teams.

There are various camp sites in and around Sulkava. In the centre, **Muikkukukko** (☎471 651; www.muikkukukko.fi; Alanteentie 4; s/d €45/70; P) is a small motel behind a restaurant/bar. The 10 doubles are simply decorated and comfortable; go for an upstairs one, which have balconies.

Sulkava is served by daily buses from Savonlinna and weekday ones from Mikkelii. There are two buses from Sulkava to Juva each weekday, leaving at 7am and 12.25pm.

Mikkeli

☎015 / POP 48,824

Mikkeli is a sizeable provincial town on the shores of Saimaa, Finland's largest lake. It's an important transport hub and was the headquarters of the Finnish army during WWII; museums relating to those years are the main sights in town. It's still an important military base, and soldiers sometimes seem to outnumber civilians. It's a friendly place though, and although there's little to see, it often makes a convenient stopover

between the northern and southern parts of the country.

Päämajamuseo (Headquarters Museum; www.mikkeli.fi/museot; Päämajankatu 1-3; adult/child €5/free; ☎10am-5pm Fri-Sun Sep-Apr, 10am-5pm daily May-Aug) was Gustav Mannerheim's command centre during the war; and **Jalkaväkimuseo** (Infantry Museum; www.jalkavakimuseo.fi; Jäkärintätkatu 6-8; adult/child €6/free; ☎10am-6pm May-Sep, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Oct-Apr) is one of the largest military museums in Finland. You can also visit Mannerheim's wartime railway carriage at the train station.

CANOEING THE SQUIRREL ROUTE

The 57km Juva to Sulkava canoeing route, known as **Oravareitti** (Squirrel Route; www.oravareitti.net) is a Lakeland highlight. The beginner- and family-friendly route starts at Juva on Jukajärvi and traverses lakes, rivers and gentle rapids on the way to Sulkava. It's a very pretty journey – you feel miles away from the stresses of everyday life; information boards along the route describe the local nature.

You can do the trip in two fairly strenuous days; there's a good camp site midway. But this means 6-8 hours of paddling each day, so you may want to take it easier and do it in three, or even four days. This would mean taking a tent, which you can hire at Juva Camping. Another option is to get dropped off a little further along the route, making for an easier first day.

Early summer sees the highest water levels, which means little portage. The rapids are fairly simple, although you might want to carry the canoe round Kuhakoski, depending on conditions.

Getting Started

The best starting point, **Juva Camping** (☎015-451 930; www.juvacamping.com), provides everything you need: it rents two-person Canadian canoes (per day €38) or single kayaks (per day €28), supplies a good waterproof route map, rents tents and camping gear, and can arrange to pick you (or just the canoe) up at Sulkava. It's just off the north-south highway between Mikkeli and Varkaus, 3km west of the town of Juva and 63km west of Savonlinna. Buses will drop you nearby. There are tent sites and cottages here.

The Route

There are regular rest stops with fireplaces and toilets, as well as a camping area midway. From Juva Camping it's an easy 8km paddle across Jukajärvi to the first resting place and beginning of the river section, Polvijoki, where you must carry your canoe around the dam to the right. Passing through the small lakes Riemiö (where there's a resting place) and Souru, you come to the first rapids, gentle 200m Voikoski, followed by a rest area to the left of a small island. Continue along the canal, carrying the canoe across the road at the end, before negotiating the Karijoki.

There's a friendly camping ground on the 2km-long Kaitajärvi, **Sulkavan Oranpesä** (☎040-093 8076; www.oranpesa.fi), with tent sites, cottages and a much-appreciated sauna. These folk can also rent you canoes and kayaks and arrange transport along the route. This is more or less the halfway point. Next comes a series of rapids including Kissakoski and the strong currents of the Kyrsyänjoki. You continue through the Rasakanjoki and Tikanjoki before coming to the large Halmejärvi, where there is another resting place at the end. The route continues on the western shore of Lohnajärvi to the Lohnankoski. From here it's a leisurely paddle down the Kuhajärvi, past a final set of rapids and into Sulkava, where you pull in at the Kulkemus Boat Centre on the right after the bridge. There's a camping ground and a cafe here.


The Mikkeli area is excellent for **fishing** – the lakes teem with perch, salmon and trout, and ice-fishing is popular in winter. The tourist office can help with permits, guides and equipment rental.

Mikkeli Music Festival (www.mikkelimusic.net), held here in late June/early July, is a week-long classical music event featuring top Finnish and Russian conductors. Balancing it out is **Jurassic Rock** (www.jurassicrock.fi), a two-day festival in early August that features plenty of Finnish and Scandinavian bands.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotelli Uusikuu

HOTEL €

(☎221 5420; www.uusikuu.fi; Raviradantie 13; s/d €49/59; ) This staffless hotel is quite a bargain. Rooms are clean, comfortable, modern and spacious. There's a free internet jack, and some rooms also have a fold-out bed so can sleep up to four. Book online. It's about 15 minutes' walk from the centre; turn right out of the train or bus station, then left on Savilahdenkatu; Raviradantie is on your right after crossing the small river.

Sokos Hotel Vaakuna

HOTEL €€

(☎20201; www.sokoshotels.fi; Porrassalmenkatu 9; s/d around €99/107;  ) Mikkeli's most central hotel is just a block south of the kauppatori. It's been designed more with the business traveller in mind, but it's in a handy location and the rooms are attractive enough if a little short on space.

Kenkävero

FINNISH €€

(www.kenkavero.fi; Pursialankatu; lunch €25; ☎10am-6pm Sun-Fri, to 4pm Sat) This design shop and art centre is picturesquely set in a lovely vicarage building a short walk south-east of town (cross the railway tracks away from the centre and turn right, cross a roundabout and you'll be there in ten minutes). The cafe still feels like an elegant drawing room and you half expect the vicar himself to bring in tea and cucumber sandwiches. Instead there's a reader-praised lunch buffet (11am to 4pm daily) that pulls out all the stops.

Hilla

FINNISH €€

(www.ravintolahilla.com; Hallituskatu 7; mains €18-24; ☎lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, noon-7pm Sun) This elegant basement restaurant on the pedestrian street has a few typical Finnish dishes, along with some rather-far-south reindeer offerings. Perch fillets are good, as is the short menu of choices obtained from local producers.

Information

Tourist office (☎044-794 5669; www.visitmikkeli.fi; Maaherrankatu 16; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri, also 10am-3pm Sat Jun-Aug) On the western side of the kauppatori. Staff can help find you a cottage to rent – there are hundreds around the area.

Getting There & Away

Mikkeli is a transport hub served by many trains and buses that run between Helsinki and the eastern Lakeland or Kuopio. Train and bus stations are adjacent, a block east (downhill) from the kauppatori.

Bus destinations include Helsinki (€38.10, 3½ hours) and Savonlinna (€22.40, 1½ hours). Trains run to Helsinki (€41.30, 2¾ hours), Kuopio (€25.80, 1½ hours) and further north around five times daily. For other cities, change at Piekämäki or Kouvola.

Around Mikkeli

Twenty kilometres south of Mikkeli, **Ris-tiina** is one of the region's most historic villages, founded by Count Per Brahe in 1649 and named after his wife. Little remains of the village's glorious past, though it has a pleasant enough lakeside location.

It's a further 19km (along Rd 4323 to Puumala) to the region's main attraction, the **rock paintings** of Astuvansalmi (Astuvansalmen Kalliomaalaus). Estimated to be 5000 years old, they cover a 15m stretch of steep cliffs, and include elk, human and animal tracks. Amber artefacts have been found in the lake. From the car park, it's a 2.5km walk to the paintings.

Varkaus

☎017 / POP 22,757

Spread-out Varkaus is surrounded by water and covers several islands cut by canals. The location is appealing to the timber-pulp industry, whose factory complex is in the heart of the town. Varkaus is a transport hub, and you might find yourself changing buses here, especially to visit the monastery of Valamo. The town's name means 'theft' in Finnish.



Mekaanisen

Musiikin Muse

MUSEUM OF MECHANICAL MUSIC

(www.mekaanisenmusiikinmuseo.fi; Pelimanninkatu 8; adult/child €14/7; 11am-6pm Tue-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun Mar-mid-Dec, 11am-6pm daily Jul) is Varkaus's stand-out attraction. 'You must

understand', says the personable owner, 'it's not a normal museum; more a madhouse'. A truly astonishing collection of musical instruments ranges from a ghostly keyboard-tinkling Steinway piano to a robotic violinist to a full-scale orchestra emanating from a large cabinet. This is just the beginning; political cabaret in several languages and an overwhelming sense of good humour and imagination make it a cross between a Victorian theatre and Wonka's chocolate factory. Having a coffee outside under the steely gaze of sizeable macaws seems like a return to normality. The museum is signposted 1km west of the main north-south highway and also provides tourist information.

Varkaus has a few places to stay. Turn left out of the bus and train station, then left again across the bridge to reach **Hotelli Joutsenkulma** (☎366 9797; www.joutsenkulma.fi; Käärmeniementie 20; s/d €66/89; ☐). Reception is up the back of a low-key local drinking den, but the modern rooms have zippy silver sheets and a big comfy armchair as well as plenty of space.

Most eateries are around the kauppatori, 1km east of the station (head for the factory chimneys). The best is **Kaks Ruusua** (www.kaksruusua.fi; Ahlströminkatu 25; mains €17-26; ☺lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Sat) in a fine old building across the street from the pulp complex. It does all-day service as a popular cafe and offers a cheap lunch buffet and tasty dinners in the early evening.

Daily FlyBe flights connect Helsinki with Varkaus except in high summer. Keskusliikenneasema is the central station, which includes the train and bus terminals. Frequent trains run east to Joensuu (€17.10, 1½ hours), and west to Pieksämäki (€6.60, 30 minutes), where you can change for westbound, southbound or northbound services.

Heinävesi & Around

☎017

Heinävesi village lies amid hills north of Kolovesi National Park and among some of the most scenic lakeland in Finland. The Savonlinna to Kuopio boat route passes through here and canals provide a means of local transport. The town itself isn't a beauty, but waterescapes and nearby monasteries are the drawcard.

A huge yellow wooden **church** perches on a hill at the end of Kirkkokatu, a kilometre from the centre. It was built in 1890, seats

2000 people, and offers good views over Kermajärvi. Just below is the local **museum** (admission by donation; ☎11am-6pm Jul) in a former grain store.

Sleeping

There's also accommodation at Valamo and Lintula.

Gasthaus-Hotelli Heinävesi GUESTHOUSE ☐☐
(☎562 411; www.gasthausheinavesi.fi; Askeltie 2; s/d €65/85; ☐) This well-cared-for spot in the bustling heart of Heinävesi makes a good base for exploring the region. The rooms offer value – some have a balcony – and the kindly owners run a decent cheap restaurant downstairs.

Information

Tourist information (☎040-710 1919; www.heinavesi.fi; Kermanrannantie 7; ☺Mon-Fri) In the town hall on the main street.

Getting There & Around

Heinävesi is easily reached by bus from Varkaus and Kuopio. Trains between Varkaus and Joensuu stop at Heinävesi station, but it's several kilometres south of the town.

In summer, the lakeboat *MS Puijo*, which runs between Kuopio and Savonlinna, calls at the Heinävesi jetty just south of the village. For a short trip, you can do one leg by boat and return by bus, or vice versa (€19).

Valamo

Finland's only Orthodox **monastery** (☎017-570 111; www.valamo.fi) is one of Savo's most popular attractions and, although it's only been at this location for 70 years, it has a long prior history on a Karelian island (which is now part of Russia).

One of the great, ancient Russian monasteries, old Valamo, set on an island in gigantic Lake Ladoga, survived the aftermath of the Russian Revolution because it fell just within the territory of newly independent Finland, but was soon after under grave threat during the Winter War of 1939. Ladoga froze (a rare occurrence), allowing a hurried evacuation from Russia of monks, icons and treasures. Those men that survived the journey resettled here in a beautiful lakeside estate. Monks and novices, almost a thousand strong a century ago, can now be counted on one hand, but the complex in general is thriving.

The first church was made by connecting two sheds; the rustic architecture contrasts curiously with the fine gilded icons.

The new church, completed in 1977, has an onion-shaped dome, icons, and is redolent with incense.

Visitors are free to roam and enter the churches; from June to August there's a **service** at 1pm. A **guided tour** (€5), which lasts an hour, is recommended for an insight into the monastery and Orthodox beliefs and symbolism; they are available in English and German. Take time to stroll to the peaceful **cemetery**, with a *tsasouna* (chapel) dedicated to Herman, a Valamo missionary monk who took Christianity to Alaska. There's also a museum and summer boat cruises to fill out the day, or you could take a walk to the Pilgrims' Cross or to Lintula convent, 18km away.

Aware of the need to redefine a monastery's place in 21st-century Europe, the community openly encourages visitors, whether they just want a coffee, or to browse the icons and chant-CDs in the shop. The monastery also offers visitors peace and relaxation in the beautiful surrounds, or the opportunity to engage further in Orthodox culture by attending a service or doing a course in theology, philosophy or icon-painting.

Valamo makes an excellent place to stay, and is even more peaceful once evening descends. Two **guesthouses** (s/d €32/54; P) in picturesque wooden buildings provide comfortable, no-frills sleeping with shared bathroom; there are also two grades of **hotel room** (s/d €60/70 or €75/120; P) offering a higher standard of accommodation. The complex's eatery, **Trapesa** (☺breakfast, lunch & dinner) has high-quality buffet spreads (€12 to €15), Russian-style high tea (€8), and evening meals with not a hint of monastic frugality; try the monastery's own range of berry wines.

i Getting There & Away

Valamo is clearly signposted 4km north of the main Varkaus–Joensuu road. A couple of daily buses run to Valamo from Joensuu and from Helsinki via Mikkeli and Varkaus. From Heinävesi change at Karvio.

The most pleasant way to get to Valamo (and Lintula, below) in summer is on a **Monastery Cruise** (☎015-250 250; www.mspuijo.fi) from Kuopio. The cruise uses a combination of the regular Kuopio to Savonlinna ferry and road transport. The ferry departs Kuopio at 9am Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, then there's car transport from Palokki to Lintula and Valamo, then a bus back to Kuopio (adult €79). On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, transport

is reversed with a bus to Valamo at noon and a ferry back from Palokki (adult €60); you don't get to see Lintula.

Lintula

Not far from Valamo, the nation's only Orthodox **convent** (☎017-563 106; http://sites.google.com/site/lintulanluostari; ☺9am–6pm Jun–Aug) is much quieter. It's a serene contrast that is worth the short detour.

Lintula was founded in Karelia in 1895 and transferred to Savo and then Häme during WWII. A convent was founded at the present location in 1946; it's now at more or less full capacity, home to 15 nuns. A souvenir shop on the premises sells wool and candles hand-made here (the nuns supply all the Orthodox churches in Finland with candles), and there's a pleasant coffee shop. The highlight is the lovely grounds, which are perfect for strolling. In the garden is a beautifully simple log chapel, whose icons glint in the candlelight.

Lintulan Vierasmaja (☎017-563 225; s/d €24/40; P) is a small red house at the back of the convent. There are simple but clean rooms, with separate bathrooms, and it's open to men and women.

i Getting There & Away

A daily bus from Kuopio stops in the nearby village of Palokki. The convent is an 18km walk from Valamo monastery. See Valamo for details of cruises.

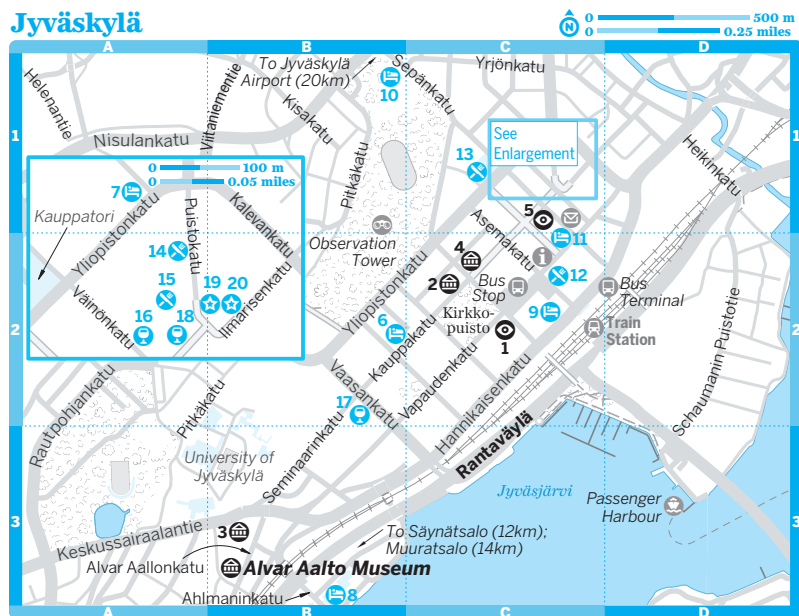
Jyväskylä

☎014 / POP 130,974

Vivacious and young-at-heart, western Lakeland's main town has a wonderful waterside location and an optimistic feel that makes it a real drawcard. Jyväskylä (pronounced *yoo-vah-skoo-lah*) was founded in 1837 and, in the mid-19th century, was the site of the country's first Finnish-language school and teacher-training college. The city's reputation for scholarship was boosted with the 1966 inauguration of its university. Thanks to the work of Alvar Aalto, the city also has a global reputation for its architecture, and petrolheads know it as the legendary venue for the Finnish leg of the World Rally Championships.

The 16,000 students and lively academic and arts scenes give the town plenty of energy and nightlife. In summer you can't

Jyväskylä



Jyväskylä

Top Sights

- Alvar Aalto Museum.....B3

Sights

- 1 City Theatre.....C2
2 Jyväskylän Taidemuseo.....C2
3 Keski-Suomen Museo.....B3
4 Suomen Käsiyön Museo.....C2
5 Workers' Club Building.....C1

Sleeping

- 6 Hotel Pension Kampus.....B2
7 Hotel Yöpuu.....A1
8 Hotelli Alba.....B3
9 Hotelli Milton.....C2
10 Kesähotelli Harju/Amis.....B1
11 Omenahotelli.....C2

Eating

- 12 Figaro.....C2
Katriinan Kasvisravintola.....(see 6)
13 Kauppahalli.....C1
14 Kissanviikset.....A2
Pöllöwaari.....(see 7)
15 Soppabaari.....A2

Drinking

- 16 Katse.....A2
17 Sohvi.....B2
18 Ye Old Brick's Inn.....A2

Entertainment

- 19 London.....B2
20 Poppari.....B2

beat arriving by lakeboat from Lahti, while in winter there are plenty of winter sports on offer.

Sights

Many people come to Jyväskylä for its modern architecture; at times the whole city centre is full of folk curiously pointing wide-angled lenses at every Aalto building. If you're coming for that, the best time is from

Tuesday to Friday, as many buildings are closed at weekends and the Aalto Museum is closed on Mondays. Jyväskylä's other museums are all free on Fridays outside summer and closed on Mondays.

Alvar Aalto Buildings

ARCHITECTURE

Alvar Aalto (see p327) was a giant of 20th-century architecture. He was schooled in Jyväskylä, opened his first offices here and spent his summers in nearby Muuratsalo.

The city has dozens of Aalto buildings, but stop first at one of his last creations, the **Alvar Aalto Museo** (www.alvaraalto.fi; Alvar Aallonkatu 7; adult/child €6/free, free Fri Oct-May; ☺11am-6pm Tue-Sun, from 10am Tue-Fri Jul; @), near the university to the southwest of the city centre. It chronicles his life and work, with a detailed focus on a number of his major buildings, as well as a section on his furniture design and a display of his glassware. It's very engaging, and you get a real feel for the man and his philosophy. The cafe does awful espresso but decent lunch, and the museum also has a free internet terminal.

The museum stocks the free pamphlet *Alvar Aalto's Jyväskylä*, which plots some of the significant buildings in and around Jyväskylä, designed by Aalto. It also has simple bikes for hire (per day/two days €10/15) to help you explore them.

Aalto's list includes the university's main buildings and the **City Theatre** (Vapaudenkatu 36). On the corner of Kauppakatu and Väinönkatu is the old **Workers' Club Building** (1925), an early work with Renaissance-inspired features such as columns and a Palladian balcony; there's a pub and restaurant downstairs.

Also see Säynätsalo and Muuratsalo under Around Jyväskylä p182.

Keski-Suomen Museo MUSEUM
(www.jyvaskyla.fi/keskisuomenmuseo; Alvar Aallonkatu 7; adult/child €6/free; ☺11am-6pm Tue-Sun) The Museum of Central Finland is adjacent to the Alvar Aalto Museum and designed by him, but sees a fraction of the visitors. A pity, for it's a well-presented display. The main exhibition is an attractive overview of rural life in central Finland from prehistoric times onwards. There's an ancient sledge-runner dated to 4000 BC, and displays on hunting, fishing and logging, with English translations. It gives a good feel for traditional Finnish life and finishes in a typical old grocery. Upstairs is a history of Jyväskylä itself, with great scale models; the top floor holds temporary art exhibitions, often associated with the arts festival.

Jyväskylän Taidemuseo GALLERY
(www.jyvaskyla.fi/taidemuseo; Kauppakatu 23; adult/child €6/free; ☺11am-6pm Tue-Sun) Opposite the church, this houses temporary exhibitions of modern art and sculpture, often arranged by the active local artists' association. Don't miss the astonishingly grand toilets.

Suomen Käsityön Museo MUSEUM
(www.craftmuseum.fi; Kauppakatu 25; adult/child €5/free; ☺11am-6pm Tue-Sun) This craft museum is all about Finnish handicrafts and their history, and incorporates the National Costume Centre, which displays regional dress from around Finland. The permanent collection is small, and most space is taken up with temporary exhibitions. It's an enjoyable insight into activities that, partly due to the long Finnish winters, have always been an important part of life here. There's also a good shop attached.

Activities

It's a nice walk or cycle around the lake on a sunny day; it's about 12km, which you can cut in half using the road bridge.

Laajavuori SKIING
(www.laajavuori.com; Laajavuorentie) Very handy for town, this has five modest slopes plus a kids' run and 62km of cross-country trails, as well as a number of scary ski jumps. There's a good ski area for children and the resort is popular with families; there's a **hotel** (www.rantasipi.fi) here that offers packages as well as a hostel (see below). It's 4km from the centre of Jyväskylä; catch bus 25.

Lake Cruises

There are numerous boating options – check www.jyvaskyla.fi for more choices.

Päijänne Risteilyt Hilden CRUISE
(☎263 447; www.paijanne-risteilyhilden.fi; ☺early Jun–mid-Aug) The main cruise operator runs several routes on several different boats, including the SS *Suomi*, one of the oldest steamers plying the Finnish lakes.

Short cruises on Lake Päijänne depart daily from the passenger harbour (some are lunch or dinner cruises) and cost €17 to €24, half-price for kids. Longer trips include trips northwards to the Keitele canal.

For the Jyväskylä to Lahti route see Getting There & Away.

Festivals & Events

Jyväskylän Kesä ART
(Jyväskylä Arts Festival; www.jyvaskylankesa.fi) In mid-July, this has an international program of concerts, exhibitions, theatre and dance. Over 50 years old, it has a strong liberal and radical tradition and is one of Finland's most important arts festivals.

Neste Oil Rally Finland

(www.nesteoilrallyfinland.fi) In early August, Jyväskylä is the centre of what many Finns regard as the most important event of the summer calendar. Formerly called the Thousand Lakes, this is the Finnish leg of the World Rally Championship, which Finns follow closely and have traditionally been very successful at. It's perhaps the most spectacular of all the stages, and draws half a million spectators. The event goes for four days, with big concerts and parties on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. Book tickets (€60) through **Jyväskylä Booking** (☎020-748 1830; www.jyvaskylabooking.fi; Piippukatu 7). Staff here can also find you accommodation, which should be booked well in advance.

Sleeping

As well as the following options, Sokos (www.sokoshotels.fi) and Scandic (www.scandichotels.com) have chain hotels right in the centre.



Hotel Yöpuu

HOTEL €€

(☎333 900; www.hotelliyopuu.fi; Yliopistonkatu 23; s/d/ste €105/146/175, weekend s/d €88/125; ) Among Finland's most enchanting boutique hotels, this exquisite spot has lavishly decorated rooms, all individually designed in markedly different styles (the Africa room is really something to behold). Service is warm and welcoming with an assured personal touch – including a welcome drink – that makes for a delightful stay. They're always renovating and improving here so standards are kept high. Suites offer excellent value.

Hotelli Milton

HOTEL €€

(☎337 7900; www.hotellimilton.com; Hannikaisenkatu 29; s/d €80/110; ) Right in the thick of things, this family-run hotel has an old-fashioned dark foyer, but the modern rooms offer plenty of natural light, space and attractive wooden floors; most have a balcony. An evening sauna on weekdays is included and it's very handy for the bus and train stations. Weekend prices are great (s/d €60/80).

Kesähotelli Harju/Amis

HOTEL €

(☎443 0100; www.hotelliamis.com; Sepänkatu 3; s/d/tr €49/60/72; ☉Jun-early Aug; ) Five minutes uphill from the city centre, this excellent summer hotel has modern, light, spacious student rooms each with a kitchenette (no utensils, but there's an equipped kitchen downstairs) and good bathrooms. It's a real

bargain, especially given that breakfast and an evening sauna are included.


Kesähotelli Rentukka

HOTEL €

(☎010-279 2006; www.hotelrentukka.fi; Taitoniekantie 9; s/d/tr €42/54/66; ☉mid-May–Aug; ) A half-hour walk from the centre (pleasant if you cut across parkland), or a short trip on bus 18, this student accommodation offers light, no-frills rooms which are particularly good for families, in a campus with restaurant, shops and a bar. Rooms have bathroom and kitchen facilities but no utensils. Breakfast is included.



Retkeilyhotelli Laajari

HOSTEL €

(☎266 7053; www.laajavuori.com; Laajavuorentie 15; dm/s/d €29/45/64; ) Part of Laajavuori sports complex 4km from town, this hostel is often booked out in winter by ski groups. It's easily accessed by bus 25 (get off when you see the caravan park on your left) and has institutional rooms with whitewashed brick walls, OK beds, and shared bathrooms and kitchen. There's also a burger cafe. HI discount, and it's a little cheaper in summer and at weekends.


Hotelli Alba

HOTEL €€

(☎636 311; www.hotellialba.fi; Ahlmaninkatu 4; s/d €88/118; ) Within the university, and very handy for the Aalto museum, this hotel is right by the water, and the terrace of its restaurant and bar takes full advantage. The telescopic corridors lead onto mediocre rooms with narrow beds and parquet floors, but the view from those facing the water compensates for this; you could fish out of the windows.

Hotel Pension Kampus

GUESTHOUSE €€

(☎010-279 2002; www.hotelkampus.fi; Kauppakatu 11A; s/d €62/76; ) Central, spotless 3rd-floor option with kitchen facilities in rooms. Breakfast included. Price drops a little at weekends.

Omenahotelli

HOTEL €€

(☎060-018 018; www.omena.com; Vapaudenkatu 57; r usually €70-90; ) Central reception-less hotel. One of the best, with comfortable beds and endless corridors. Book online or via the lobby terminal.



Eating

Jyväskylä's kauppahalli isn't Finland's most intriguing, but it's still a place to go to grab fresh produce or a quick snack.

Pöytäwaari

FINNISH €€

(☎333 900; www.hotelliopuu.fi; Yliopistonkatu 23; mains €22-27; ☎11am-midnight Mon-Fri, 1pm-midnight Sat, Sundays by prior reservation) The Yöpuu hotel's fine-dining restaurant makes a very tempting meal stop. There are various set menus, including an eight-course degustation special, but à la carte dining is rewarding here too, with main courses very fairly priced for the exceptional quality on offer. Wines are pricey, but there's a good selection including some great Burgundy, and the welcoming staff are keen to explain the matching possibilities.

Figaro

FINNISH €€

(☎212 255; www.figaro-restaurant.com; Asemakatu 4; mains €21-27; ☎11am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat, 1-9pm Sun) With a warm drawing-room feel and cordial service, this backs up the atmosphere with excellent food served in generous portions. The fish is especially good, served with creamy sauces and inventive garnishes. Sizeable steaks are a given, and reindeer and bear make occasional appearances. There are good vegetarian mains too, and it's youngster-friendly.

Kissanviikset

FINNISH €€

(☎010-666 5150; www.kissanviikset.fi; Puistokatu 3; mains €16-24; ☎lunch & dinner) Quiet, romantic and welcoming, the 'cat's whiskers' is an enticing choice. The genteel upstairs dining room is complemented by an atmospheric cellar space when busy. Dishes are thoughtfully prepared and feature delicious combinations of flavours such as salmon with baked fennel, or meat dishes with sinfully creamy wild mushroom sauces.

Soppabaari

SOUP €

(www.soppabaari.fi; Väinönkeskus; soup & pasta €7.50; ☎lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This cute wee spot is situated in a little arcade out the back of Ye Old Brick's Inn. They do three daily soups and pastas, either of which is €7.50 and pretty much guaranteed to be delicious.

Katriinan Kasvisravintola

VEGETARIAN €

(www.majasilvennoinen.fi; Kauppakatu 11; lunch €6-9; ☎lunch Mon-Fri) A couple of blocks west of the pedestrian zone, this vegetarian lunch restaurant is an excellent bet. Six euros gets you soup and salad bar, seven buys a hot dish instead of the soup, and nine gets you the lot. It changes daily – you might get pasta, ratatouille or curry – but it's always tasty.

**Drinking & Entertainment**

Jyväskylän's students ensure a lively nightlife when they're not on holidays.

Ye Old Brick's Inn

PUB €€

(www.oldbricksinn.fi; Kauppakatu 41; most mains €13-20; ☎11am-2am or 3am, food until 11pm) In the liveliest part of the pedestrian zone, this warm and welcoming pub has several excellent beers on tap, a cosy interior and an outdoor terrace screened by plastic plants – the place to be on a summer evening. It also has a good upmarket bar menu. The kitchen shuts at 9pm on Mondays.

Sohwi

PUB

(www.sohwi.fi; Vaasankatu 21; ☎2pm-midnight Mon, 2pm-1am Tue-Thu, 2pm-2am Fri, noon-2am Sat, 2-10pm Sun) A short walk from the city centre is this excellent bar with a spacious wooden terrace, a good menu of snacks and soak-it-all-up bar meals, and plenty of lively student and academic discussion lubricated by a range of good bottled and draught beers. There's an internet terminal too. A great place.

Katse

NIGHTCLUB

(www.pubkatse.fi; Väinönkatu 26; ☎3pm-3am) This looks like a constricted dive from outside, but actually has an enormous, popular upstairs bar playing alternative and heavier music to Finns in their 20s and 30s.

Poppari

JAZZ

(www.jazz-bar.com; Puistokatu 2; ☎3pm-late) This downstairs venue is the place for relaxing live music, with regular jazz slots and jam sessions, particularly on weekends (cover usually €2 to €5).

London

NIGHTCLUB

(www.london.fi; Puistokatu 2; entry €5-8; ☎nightly until 4am) This massive space has several areas with live music, disco, Suomi-pop and rock.

i Information

Public library (Vapaudenkatu 39-41; ☎11am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat) Free internet.

Tourist office (☎266 0113; www.jyvaskyla.region.fi; Asemakatu 6; ☎9am-5pm Mon-Fri, plus 9am-2pm Sat Jun-Aug) Has comprehensive information on the whole of Finland, ticket sales and a free internet terminal.

i Getting There & Away

Air

Finnair operates daily flights from Helsinki to Jyväskylä. The airport is 21km north of the centre; a bus leaves the Matkakeskus (bus and train station building) an hour before departures and meets arriving flights (€5). Shared taxis make the journey for €21. A normal cab is around €35. Both taxi types can be reserved on ☎100 6900.

Boat

There is a regular boat service on Lake Päijänne between Jyväskylä and Lahti, operated by **Päijänne Risteilyt Hildén** (☎263 447; www.paijanne-risteilyt.hilden.fi). Boats leave Lahti at 9am on Tuesdays from mid-June to mid-August and return from Jyväskylä on Wednesdays at 9am (one-way €60, 1½ hours).

Bus

The bus terminal shares the Matkakeskus building with the train station and has many daily express buses connecting Jyväskylä to southern Finnish towns, including hourly departures to Helsinki (€46.90, 4½ hours). Some services require a change.

Train

The train station is in the Matkakeskus building. There are regular trains from Helsinki (€46.90, 3½ hours) via Tampere, and some quicker direct trains.

i Getting Around

Bicycle

Jyväskylä is a good spot to explore by bike. The tourist office also has maps of suggested circular routes in central Lakeland of three to five days. You can rent a 3-gear hybrid at **Rent@Bike** (☎050-443 3820; Humppekujä 2; per day/week €15/50); they'll deliver anywhere in town for €5. The tourist office has a list of other operators.

Bus

For reaching Aalto buildings or the ski centre, you'll find the network of local buses useful. Local buses all leave from Vapaudenkatu, near the tourist office. Tickets cost €3.10 to €6.30 depending on distance. Day tickets can be bought at the tourist office – value if you'll be making three or more journeys.

Around Jyväskylä

SÄYNÄTSALO

FREE Säynätsalon

Kunnantalo

(☎266 1522; www.jyvaskyla.fi/saynatsalo; Parviaisen-tie 9, Säynätsalo; voluntary donation; ☎8.30am-

ARCHITECTURE

3.30pm Mon-Fri) Säynätsalo town hall is on an island 10km southeast of Jyväskylä. It's one of Alvar Aalto's most famous works, the architect having won a competition in 1949 to design it. The sturdy brick tower of this 'fortress of democracy' recalls a castle, but the grassy patio bathes the interior with light and reflects a relationship with nature that is present in much of Aalto's work. The classroom-like council chamber is on the top floor.

Two **rooms** (r €50) are available here; they are furnished with Aalto chairs and stools and named after the man and his second wife, who often slept here while supervising construction. They are singles (although extra beds can be put in), share a bathroom, and have simple kitchen facilities.

Säynätsalo can be reached from central Jyväskylä on bus 16 or 21 (€4.40, 30 minutes); get off at the **SS-Kunnantalo** stop.

MUURATSALO

Muuratsalon Koetalo

ARCHITECTURE

(☎266 7113; www.alvaraalto.fi; adult/student-child €17/7/free; ☎1.30-3.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri Jun-mid-Sep) The peaceful wooded islet of Muuratsalo is connected to Säynätsalo by bridges and was Alvar Aalto's summer retreat from the early 1950s onwards. On Päijänne's shores he built his **Experimental House**, a must-see for Aalto lovers, but pricey if you're not. Entrance is by guided tour, and must be pre-arranged by phone or email (the Aalto Museum or tourist office in Jyväskylä can do this). You first see his beloved boat, *Nemo Propheta in Patria* ('nobody is a prophet in their own land') on dry land, never having been particularly seaworthy. Then it's the lakeside sauna and house itself. It's often called the 'experimental house', because Aalto used the charming patio to try out various types and patterns of bricks and tiles to see how they looked in different seasons and how they weathered.

The interior is surprisingly small; it's cool and colourful, but doesn't particularly evoke the man's spirit. A guest wing is perched on timber and stones (another playful experiment), but is deemed too precarious to enter.

The setting's very Finnish, and you can well imagine Aalto looking out over the beautiful lake and pondering his designs. It's a quiet, peaceful place (apart from the mosquitoes).

To get here, take bus 16 from central Jyväskylä and ride it to the end, where there's a small cafe. The house is 500m further along this road on the right. For the 1.30pm tour, get the bus at 12.15pm (€4.40, 40 minutes).

PETÄJÄVESI

Thirty-five kilometres west of Jyväskylä, pause at Petäjävesi to see the wonderfully gnarled Unesco-listed wooden **church** (☎040-582 2461; Vanhankirkontie; adult/child €5/3; ☀10am-6pm Jun-Aug, call for winter visits). Finished in 1765, it's a marvellous example of 18th-century rustic Finnish architecture with crooked wooden pews and a fairy-tale shingle roof. Burials took place under the floorboards, and there's also a spooky wine cellar under the nave – ask the guide to show you.

Buses from Jyväskylä to Keuruu stop in Petäjävesi. If coming by car, walk across a road bridge to the church from the car park.

Kuopio

☎017 / POP 96,830

Most things a reasonable person could desire from a summery lakeside town are in Kuopio, with pleasure cruises on the azure water, spruce forests to stroll in, wooden waterside pubs, and local fish specialties to taste. And what better than a traditional smoke sauna to give necessary impetus to jump into the chilly waters?

But Kuopio has year-round appeal, with its fistful of interesting museums, student-driven cultural scene and nightlife, and winter activities like ice-fishing and snowmobiling on offer.

Kuopio has good transport connections but there's no better way to arrive than by leisurely lakeboat from Savonlinna.

👁️ Sights

Kuopio has several worthwhile museums; if you're going to visit a few, grab the Museum Card from the Kuopio Tourist Service or any museum, which gives discounted entry (€12).

Jätäkämpä

SAUNA

(www.rauhalahti.com; adult/child €12/6; ☀4-10pm Tue, also Thu Jun-Aug) There are different types of saunas, but the *savusauna* (smoke sauna) is the original and, some say, the best. This, by the lakeside near Rauhalahti hotel south of town, is a memorable and sociable experience that draws locals and visitors.

The 60-person, mixed sauna is heated 24 hours in advance with a large wood fire (ie there's no sauna stove). Guests are given towels to wear, but bring a swimsuit for a dip in the lake. Sweat it out for a while, cool off in the lake, then repeat the process sev-

SHE AIN'T HEAVY, SHE'S MY WIFE

What began as a heathenish medieval habit of pillaging neighbouring villages in search of nubile women has become one of Finland's oddest – and most publicised – events. Get to Sonkajärvi, in the northern Lakeland, for the **Wife-Carrying World Championships** (www.eukonkanto.fi) in early July.

The championship is a race over a 253.5m obstacle course, where competitors must carry their 'wives' through water traps and over hurdles to achieve the fastest time. Dropping your cargo means a 15-second penalty. The winner gets the wife's weight in beer and, of course, the prestigious title of World Wife-Carrying Champion. To enter, men need only €50 and a consenting female. There's also a sprint and a team competition.

The championship is accompanied by a weekend of drinking, dancing and typical Finnish frivolity.

eral times – devoted sauna-goers do so even when the lake is covered with ice. Then buy a beer and relax, looking over the lake in Nordic peace.

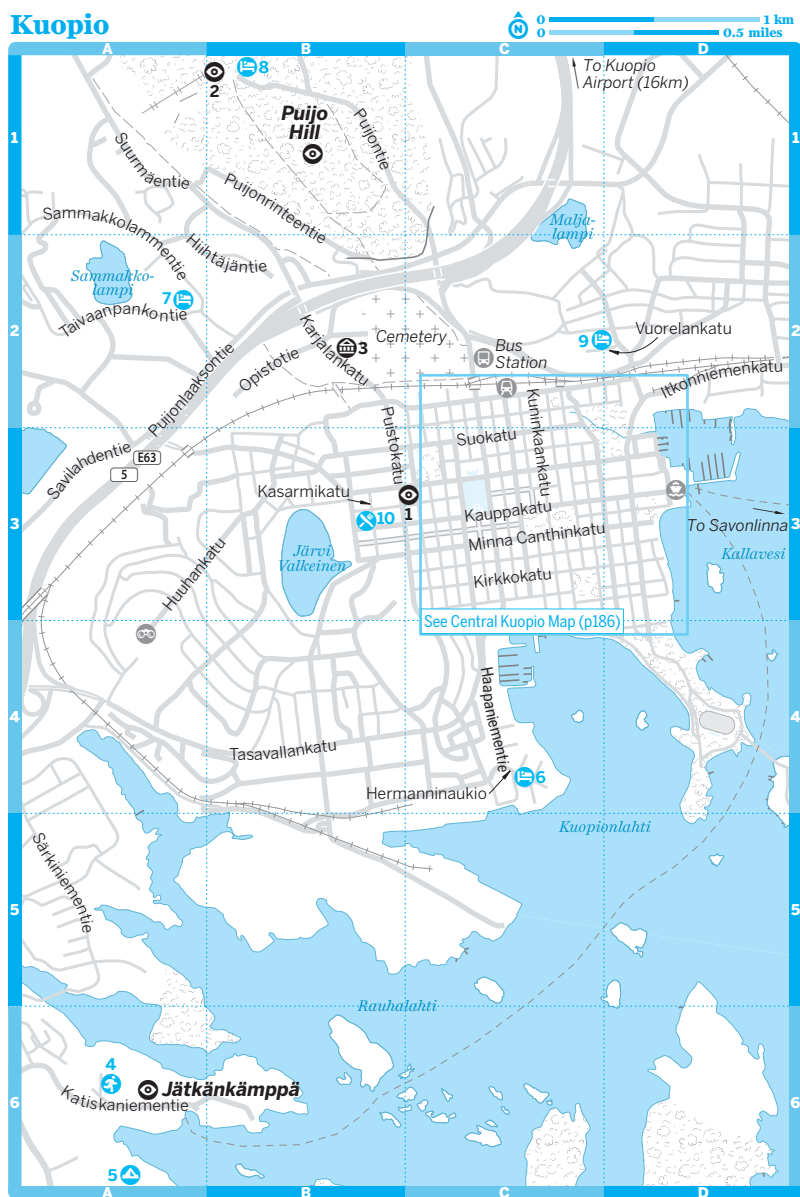
There's a **restaurant** (adult/child buffet plus hot plate €20/10; ☀4-8pm) in the adjacent loggers' cabin serving traditional Finnish dinners when the sauna's on, with accordion entertainment and a lumberjack show. Bus 7 departs every half-hour from the kauppatori to the Rauhalahti hotel complex, from which it's a 600m walk to the sauna, or take the lakeboat from the passenger harbour in summer.

Puijo

HILL

Even small hills have cachet in flat Finland, and Kuopio was so proud of Puijo that it was crowned with a tower. The views from the top of the **Puijon Torni** (www.puijo.com; adult/child €6/3; ☀10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm Sun Jun-Aug, 10am-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-9pm Fri, 11am-9pm Sat, 11am-4pm Sun Sep-May) are very impressive; the vast perspectives of (yes, you guessed correctly) lakes and forests represent a sort of idealised Finnish vista. Atop the structure is a revolving restaurant, cafe and open-air viewing deck.

Kuopio



Surrounding it is one of the region's best-preserved **spruce forests**, popular for walks and picnics. Also here is a ski jump and chairlift. Even in summer you can see ski jumpers in training; the whoosh as they descend the ramp sounds like a small fighter

plane. There are no public buses to Puijo, but it's a nice walk through the trees, or a short drive or cab ride.

Puijo Hill has mountain-bike and walking tracks; in winter there are cross-country ski trails and equipment rentals.

Kuopio

📍 Top Sights

- JätkänkämpäA6
Puijo HillB1

📍 Sights

- 1 Pikku-Pietarin Torikuja.....C3
2 Puijon TorniB1
3 Suomen Ortodoksinen
KirkkomuseoB2

📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 4 Rauhalahdi.....A6

📍 Sleeping

- Apartment Hotel Rauhalahdi.....(see 4)
5 Camping Rauhalahdi.....A6
6 Hostelli Hermannin.....C4
Hostelli Rauhalahdi.....(see 4)
7 Hotelli Savonia.....A2
8 Puijon Maja.....B1
9 Retkeilymaja Virkkula.....C2
Spa Hotel Rauhalahdi.....(see 4)

📍 Eating

- 10 Lounas-SalonkiB3

Kuopio Museo

MUSEUM

(www.kuopiomuseo.fi; Kauppakatu 23; adult/child €6/4; ☉10am-5pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-7pm Wed, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) Kuopio's city museum, in a castlelike art-nouveau mansion, has wide scope. The top two floors are devoted to cultural history, with household objects, a boat builder's workshop, coffee shop and a re-created wooden house among the attractions. But the real highlight is the natural history display, with a wide variety of beautifully presented Finnish wildlife, including a mammoth and an ostrich wearing snow-boots. The ground floor is devoted to temporary exhibitions.

There's little information in English, but tours in English are sometimes scheduled during summer.

Kuopio Korttelimuseo

MUSEUM

(www.korttelimuseo.kuopio.fi; Kirkkokatu 22; adult/child €4/free; ☉10am-5pm Tue-Sun mid-May-Aug, 10am-3pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Sep-mid-May) This block of old town houses forms another of Kuopio's delightful museums. Several homes – all with period furniture and decor – are very detailed and thorough and the level of information (in English) is excellent. **Apteekkimuseo** in building 11 contains old pharmacy paraphernalia, while

in another building it's fascinating to compare photos of Kuopio from different decades. There's also a cafe serving a delicious *rahkapiirakka* (a local sweet pastry).

Suomen Ortodoksinen Kirkkomuseo

MUSEUM

(Orthodox Church Museum; www.ortodoksinen.kirkkomuseo.fi; Karjalankatu 1; adult/child €5/1; ☉10am-4pm Tue & Thu-Sun, to 6pm Wed May-Aug, noon-3pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun Sep-Apr) This museum holds an excellent collection of items brought here from monasteries, churches and *tsasounas* (chapels) that are now in Russian-occupied Karelia. It was being renovated at last visit, but will be opening as this book goes to press.

Kuopion Taidemuseo

GALLERY

(www.taidemuseo.kuopio.fi; Kauppakatu 35; adult/child €4/free; ☉10am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 7pm Wed, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) This features mostly modern art in temporary exhibitions, but also displays permanent works. Look out for paintings by the local artist Juho Rissanen (1873-1950), whose realistic portraits of Finnish working people were a contrast to the prevalent Romanticism of the time.

VB Valokuvakeskus

MUSEUM, GALLERY

(www.vb.kuopio.fi; Kuninkaankatu 14; admission €5; ☉11am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 7pm Wed, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Sep-May, 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug) Excellent summer exhibitions grace this photographic centre, devoted to Victor Barsokevitch, one of the pioneers of Finnish photography. His studio is now a gallery, but there are enough old cameras and photos to call this a museum. In the garden you can enjoy a coffee in summer and check out the camera obscura.

Pikku-Pietarin Torikuja

MARKET

(www.pikkupietarintorikuja.net; ☉10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat Jun-Aug) Pikku-Pietarin Torikuja is an atmospheric narrow lane of renovated red wooden houses converted into quirky shops stocking jewellery, clothing, handicrafts and other items. Halfway along is an excellent cafe (open from 8am) with cosy upstairs seating and a great little back deck for the summer sun.



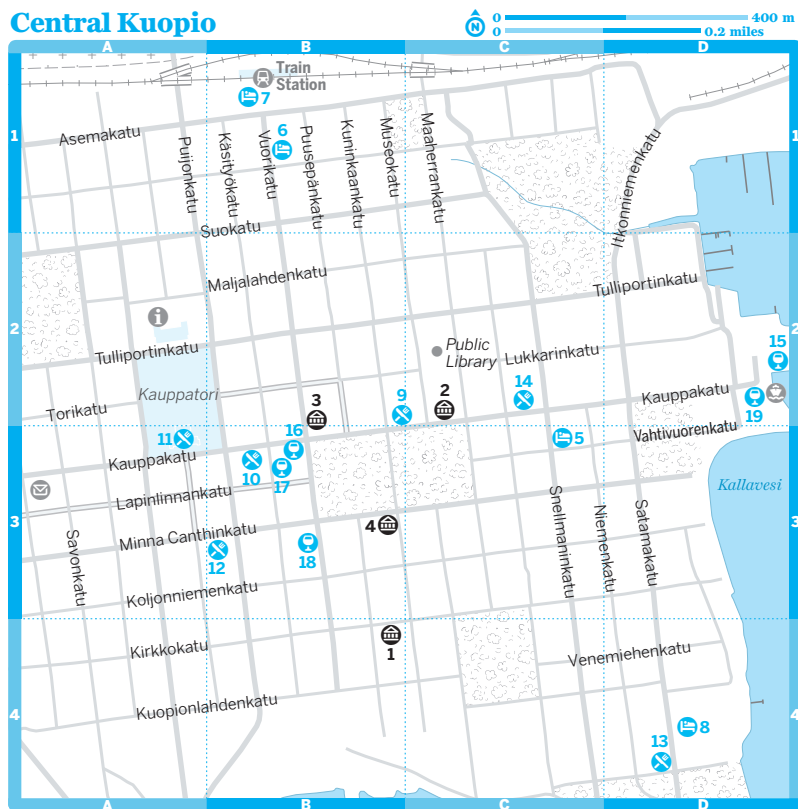
Activities

Rauhalahdi

OUTDOORS

(☎473 000; www.rauhalahdi.com; Katiskaniementie 8) This estate is converted into a year-round family park. The whole area is full of activities for families including boating, cycling,

Central Kuopio



tennis and minigolf in summer, and skating, ice-fishing, snowmobile safaris and a snow castle in winter. You can rent bikes (per day from €20), rowing boats, canoes, in-line skates and even Icelandic ponies for gentle trail rides. Take bus 7 from the town centre or a ferry from the passenger harbour in summer (see Cruises). There's also a variety of accommodation here.

Tours

Several different **cruises** depart from the town's passenger harbour daily during summer. Ninety-minute jaunts from the harbour cost €13/7 for adults/children and depart hourly from 11am to 6pm from late May to late August. There are also cruises to Rauhalahdi (www.koskilaiva.com; €13 return) Monday to Saturday from mid-June to early August; a good way to get to the smoke sauna. Special theme cruises include dinner and dancing, wine tasting or a trip to a local

berry farm. There are also canal cruises and a monastery cruise to Valamo and Lintula, with return bus transport (adult €79).

Tickets for all cruises are available at the tourist office or directly on the boat. Most are run by **Rolli** (☎277 2466; www.rolli.fi), whose website has schedules. The tourist office does too; otherwise just stroll the harbour area to see when the next departure is.

A **tourist train** (adult/child €6/4; ☀Mon-Sat Jun-late Aug) does the city circuit, with departures on the hour from the kauppatori. It has commentary in English.

Festivals & Events

Kuopion Tanssii ja Soi

DANCE

(www.kuopiodancefestival.fi) In mid-June, this is the most international and the most interesting of Kuopio's annual events. There are open-air classical and modern dance performances, comedy and theatre gigs, and the town is generally buzzing at this time.

Central Kuopio

📍 Sights

- 1 Kuopion Korttelimuseo.....B4
- 2 Kuopion Museo.....C2
- 3 Kuopion Taidemuseo.....B2
- 4 VB Valokuvakeskus.....B3

🛏 Sleeping

- 5 Hotelli Jahtihovi.....C3
- 6 Matkustajakoti Rautatie.....B1
- 7 Matkustajakoti Rautatie.....B1
- 8 Scandic Hotel Kuopio.....D4

🍴 Eating

- 9 Isä Camillo.....B2
- 10 Kaneli.....B3
- 11 Kauppahalli.....A3
- 12 Kummisetä.....B3
- 13 Musta Lammas.....D4
- 14 Vapaasatama Sampo.....C2

🍷 Drinking

- 15 Albatrossi.....D2
- 16 Ale Pupi.....B3
- 17 Henry's Pub.....B3
- 18 K Klubi.....B3
- 19 Wanha Satama.....D2

Kuopio Rock Cock

MUSIC

(www.kuopiorock.fi) This is a two-day rock festival in late July which features heaps of concerts by local acts and a couple of big-name headliners.

🛏 Sleeping

Hotelli Jahtihovi

HOTEL €€

(☎264 4400; www.jahtihovi.fi; Snellmaninkatu 23; s/d €89/109, superior s/d €99/109; 📍📞) Well-located near the harbour on a quiet street, this cordial independent hotel makes a good address. Regular rooms are good-sized and pleasant; the superiors, in a modern wing, add big windows, extra mod cons and a stylish look. A session in the smart new sauna is included, and parking's free. Prices drop €20 at weekends.

Matkustajakoti Rautatie

GUESTHOUSE €

(☎580 0569; www.kuopionasemagrilli.com; Asemakatu 1 & Vuorikatu 35; s/d without bathroom €45/60, with bathroom €55/79; 📍) Let's get one thing straight: sleeping as close as you can to transport options isn't lazy, it's practical. True. This friendly place, operating out of the grilli (fast-food outlet) in the railway station, actually offers ensuite rooms in the building itself – very comfortable, exceedingly spa-

cious and surprisingly peaceful. There are more rooms, with shared bathrooms, across the road on Vuorikatu. No wi-fi.

Spa Hotel Rauhalahhti

SPA HOTEL €€

(☎030 60830; www.rauhalahhti.com; Katiskantie 8; s/d €106/140; 📍📞) Though it feels a bit faded in parts, this still makes a great place to stay, largely because of the huge scope for activities here. The spa complex is good (available to non-guests for €12), and the rooms are spacious, with low beds and decent in-room facilities. In the same complex is the cheaper **Hostelli Rauhalahhti** (single/doubles €77/92), with simple Nordic rooms and full use of the hotel's facilities, as well as **Apartment Hotel Rauhalahhti** (2-/4-person apartment from €140/212) which has excellent modern pads with all the trimmings, including (for not much extra dough) a sauna. There are some excellent family packages offered on their website. It's 5km south of town; take bus 7, or it's €20 in a cab.

Scandic Hotel Kuopio

HOTEL €€

(☎195 111; www.scandichotels.com; Satamakatu 1; s/d €113/133; 📍📞) Down from the busy part of the harbour, this unobtrusive but large hotel has an appealing, quiet lakeside location, professional service, and fine facilities that include a gym, sauna and jacuzzi, as well as a couple of bikes able to be borrowed by guests. Rooms have plenty of natural light and crisscross parquet floors. The superior rooms are worth the extra €10 to €15, as they have king-sized beds and balconies with lake views. The above rates are approximate, as supply-and-demand pricing operates. There can be good summer rates.

Camping Rauhalahhti

CAMPGROUND €

(☎473 000; www.rauhalahhti.com; Kiviniementie; sites €13 plus per person €4, cabins €30-57, cottages €110-239; ☀late May-late Aug; 📍) Next to the Rauhalahhti complex, this place has a great location, plenty of facilities and is well set up for families. Bus 16 will get you here. The upmarket cottages are open all year.

Hotelli Savonia

HOTEL €€

(☎255 5100; www.savonia.com; Sammakkolamentie 2; s/d/ste €91/110/190; 📍📞) Not far from Puijo Hill, this offers easy access from the main road and decent value. The spotless rooms are rather nice, with plenty of space and headroom; the new wing offers even better ones, including suites with huge comfy beds and a tiny jacuzzi. There are also cheaper economy rooms (s/d €80/96).

There's a restaurant and cafe; breakfast, sauna and swimming are included. Buses 5 and 14 stop outside.

Hostelli Hermannii

HOSTEL €

(☎040-910 9083; www.hostellihermannii.fi; Hermanninaukio 3E; dm/s/d €25/45/50; P@) Tucked away in a quiet area 1.5km south of the kauppatori (follow Haapaniemenkatu and bear left when you can; the hostel's in the Metsähallitus building), this is a decent hostel with comfy wooden bunks and beds, high ceilings and reasonable shared bathrooms and kitchen. Check-in is between 2pm and 9pm; if you are going to arrive later, call ahead. Bus 1 from the centre makes occasional appearances nearby.

Puijon Maja

GUESTHOUSE €

(☎255 5253; www.puijo.com; Puijontornintie; s/d €49/65; P) Right by the tower on top of Puijo Hill, this has simple but neat rooms, complete with fridges. Get one backing onto the forest if you can, so you can take advantage of the wide windows. Rates include sauna and admission to the tower, where you have to check in. There's no public transport from the town centre except for a summer bus at 10.50am Mondays to Fridays from the kauppatori.

Retkeilymaja Virkkula

HOSTEL €

(☎040-418 2178; www.kuopionsteinerkoulu.fi; Vuorelankatu 5; dm €19; ☀early Jun-Jul) This school converts to a simple hostel in summer. Bedding is €6 extra. Fridge and microwave but no kitchen.



Eating



Kummisetä

FINNISH €€

(www.kummiseta.com; Minna Canthinkatu 44; mains €14-22; ☀dinner daily, lunch Sat) The sober brown colours of the 'Godfather' restaurant give it a traditional and romantic feel that's replicated on the menu, with a variety of excellent sauces featuring fennel, berries and morel mushrooms garnishing prime cuts of beef, tender-as-young-love lamb, and succulent pike-perch. Food and service are both excellent. There's also a popular back terrace and an attractive bar that is open longer hours.

Musta Lammas

FINNISH €€€

(☎581 0458; www.mustalammas.net; Satamakatu 4; mains €25-32; ☀dinner Mon-Sat) The 'black sheep' is resting on its laurels a bit these days, but it's still Kuopio's best gourmet

meal. Set in an enchantingly romantic vaulted space, it offers delicious mains with Finnish ingredients and French flair. Various set menus include a vegetarian one (€32).



Kauppahalli

MARKET HALL

(Kauppatori; ☀8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) At the southern end of the kauppatori is a classic Finnish indoor market hall. Here stalls sell local speciality *kalakukko*, a large rye loaf stuffed with whitefish and then baked. It's delicious hot or cold. A whole one – a substantial thing – costs around €20, but the bakery by the western door sells mini ones for €2 if you just want a bite.

Kaneli

CAFE €

(www.kahvilakaneli.net; Kauppakatu 22; ☀noon-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun) This cracking cafe just off the kauppatori evokes a bygone age with much of its decor, but offers modern comfort in its shiny espresso machine, as well as many other flavoured coffees to accompany your toothsome and sticky *pulla* (cardamom-flavoured bun). Opens longer hours in summer.

Lounas-Salonki

FINNISH €

(www.lounassalonki.fi; Kasarmikatu 12; lunches €6-9, mains €11-22; ☀9am-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm Sun) This charming wooden building west of the city centre is warm and friendly, with little rooms sporting elegant imperial furniture. They do a salad buffet and daily hot lunch featuring traditional Finnish fare (eg sausage soup and liver 'n' onions) as well as coffee and à la carte options including vegetarian choices like crêpes filled with blue cheese and vegetables.

Vapaasatama Sampo

FINNISH €

(www.wanhamestari.fi; Kauppakatu 13; muikku dishes €11-15) Have it stewed, fried, smoked or in a soup, but it's all about *muikku* here. This is one of Finland's most famous spots to try the small lakefish that drive Savo stomachs. The 70-year-old restaurant is cosy, and classically Finnish.

Isä Camillo

FINNISH €€

(www.isacamillo.net; Kauppakatu 25; mains €16-23; ☀lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) Set in a beautifully renovated former bank – look out for the old strongroom – this is an elegant but informal spot for a meal, offering fair prices for Finnish specialities. There's a good enclosed terrace at the side and a decent pub downstairs.



Drinking & Entertainment

Kuopio's nightlife is conveniently strung along Kauppakatu, running east from the market square to the harbour. Here, grungy, popular and likeable **Ale Pupi** (Sale Pub; www.alepupi.fi; Kauppakatu 16; ☎9am-midnight or later) has a huge interior, surprisingly classy decor and big drawcards of cheap beer and karaoke, but there are many other options in this block, some with summer terraces.



Henry's Pub

LIVE MUSIC

(www.henryspub.net; Käsityökatu 17; ☎9pm-4am) One of Lakeland's best rock and metal venues, this atmospheric cellar has bands playing several times a week, including big Finnish and international names, but it's a good spot for a drink even if there's nothing on.

Wanha Satama

PUB

(www.wanhasatama.net; Matkustajasatama; mains €13-19; ☎from 11am late Apr-Aug) In a noble blue building by the harbour, this has one of Lakeland's best terraces, definitely the place to be on a sunny day to watch the boats come and go. There's Finnish fish and meat dishes and regular live music.

Albatrossi

PUB

(www.ravintolaalbatrossi.fi; Makasiininkatu 1; ☎11am-late May-Sep) This old wooden warehouse conversion is an atmospheric place to see some live music or grab a drink, particularly when you can sit outside and look at the lake. Drinks are served in plastic, but the atmosphere's great.

K Klubi

BAR

(www.k-klubi.com; Vuorikatu 14; ☎8pm-late) This bohemian bar is so bad it's good. Ingrained dirt, armchairs held together by staples, a wiring system that'll turn electricians pale, toilet doors with chunks kicked out of them, seedy red-lit ambience: it's definitely one of Kuopio's best.

LUSCIOUS LIQUEURS

One of Kuopio's signature companies is Lignell & Piispanen, a traditional liqueur maker that has been in business for 230 years. Try some while you're here; their cloudberry (*lakka*) drink is a classic, but the newer strawberry-flavoured Pöple has conquered a younger crowd.



Information

Kuopio Info (☎182 585; www.kuopioinfo.fi; Haapaniemenkatu 17; ☎9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Sep-May, to 5pm Jun-Aug, also 9.30am-3pm Sat Jul) By the kauppatori. Information on regional attractions and accommodation.

Public library (Maaherrankatu 12; ☎10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Free internet.



Getting There & Away

Air

Finnair and Blue1 both fly daily to Helsinki, while Air Baltic serves Riga in Latvia.

Boat

From mid-June to mid-August, **MS Puijo** (☎015-250 250; www.mspuijo.fi) travels to Savonlinna (€88 one-way, 10½ hours) on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 9am, returning on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It passes through scenic waterways, canals and locks, stopping at Heinävesi and Karvio canal, among other places. You can book a return with over-night cabin accommodation for €175. Look for the English PDF on their Finnish-only website.

Bus

Express services to/from Kuopio:

Helsinki (€62, 6½ hours)

Jyväskylä (€23.90, 2¼ hours)

Savonlinna (€30.60, three hours)

Train

Five daily trains run to Kuopio from Helsinki (€59.10, 4½ hours). Trains run north to Kajaani (€24.30, 1¼ hours) and Oulu (€46.10, four hours). Change at Pieksämäki or Kouvola for other destinations.



Getting Around

To/From the Airport

Kuopio airport is 14km north of town. Bus service was down at last visit, but check when you get there. Airport **taxi** (☎106 400, one-way €20) must be booked two hours in advance. A boat service from the terminal to the centre is being planned.

Bike & Car Hire

You can hire bikes for €15 a day at **Hertz** (☎020-555 2670; www.hertz.fi; Asemakatu 1) and **Asemagrilli** (☎580 0569; www.kuopio.nasemagrilli.com; Asemakatu 1), both in the railway station building. Both also hire cars.

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