

Welcome to Finland

Finland is deep north: vast horizons of forests and lakes with revitalising crisp air plus cutting-edge urbanity. Choose summer's endless light or winter's eerie frozen magic.

Call of the Wild

The Finland you encounter will depend on the season of your visit, but whatever the month, the call of the wilderness is a siren song not to be resisted. There's something pure in the Finnish air and spirit that's really vital and exciting; it's an invitation to get out and active year-round. With vast tracts of forest, speckled by picture-perfect lakes as if an artist had flicked a blue paintbrush at the map, Suomi offers some of Europe's best hiking, kayaking and canoeing. A fabulous network of national parks has well-marked routes and regularly spaced huts for overnighting. Bears and elk deep in the forests can be observed on nature-watching trips.

Summer Days

Finland's short but reliable sunny season sees the country burst into life. Finns seem to want to suck every last golden drop out of the summer in the hope that it will last them through the long dark winter months, and there's an explosion of good cheer and optimism. It's a time for music festivals, art exhibitions, lake cruises, midnight sunshine on convivial beer terraces, lazy days at remote waterside cottages and mouth-watering market produce.

After the Snowfall

Winter, too, has a special charm as snow blankets the pines and lakes freeze over. The best way to banish those frosty subzero temperatures is to get out and active. For starters, there's great skiing until May. But how about chartering a team of dogs, a posse of reindeer, or a snowmobile for a trek across snowy solitudes, lit by a beautiful, pale winter sun? Catch the aurora borealis (Northern Lights) after your wood-fired sauna and you'll feel blessed by the universe. Need to cool down? A night in an ice hotel or a session of ice-fishing – drill your own hole – should do the trick.

City Lights

Don't get the idea that the country's just a backwoods emptiness, though. Vibrant cities stock the southern parts, headed by the capital, Helsinki, a cutting-edge urban space with world-famous design and music scenes. Embraced by the Baltic, it's an enticing ensemble of modern and stately architecture, island restaurants, and stylish and quirky bars. And complaints about Finnish food are so last century: the 'new Suomi' restaurant scene is kicking, with locally foraged flavours to the fore.



Why I Love Finland

By Andy Symington, Author

My first impression of Finland was a winter one, when snow-hushed forests and Christmastime conviviality made an instant impact. You must come back in summer, everyone said, so I did, for midnight daytime saunas by impossibly picturesque lakes and melt-in-the-mouth fresh berries and potatoes. Fresh air, the Lapland wilderness, the hiking, the wildlife: it's a natural wonderland within an impressively technological modern nation. The real bonus? The Finns, who do their own thing and are much the better for it. Independent, loyal and welcoming – memorable people in an inspirational country. Make it your business to get to know some.

For more about our authors, see page 312

Above: Sámi man with reindeer