



Finland

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

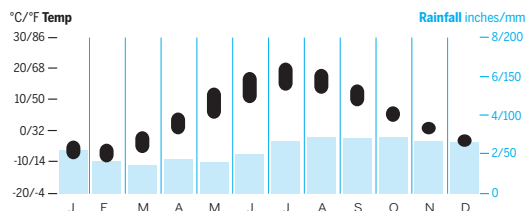
There's something pure in the Finnish air and spirit that's incredibly vital and exciting. It's an invitation to get out and active year-round. A post-sauna dip in an ice hole under the majestic aurora borealis, after whooshing across the snow behind a team of huskies, isn't a typical winter's day just anywhere. And hiking or canoeing under midnight sun through pine forests populated by wolves and bears isn't your typical tanning-oil summer either.

Although socially and economically in the vanguard of nations, large parts of Finland remain gloriously remote; trendsetting modern Helsinki is counterbalanced by vast pine- and birch-forested wildernesses in the north and east.

Nordic peace in a lakeside cottage, summer sunshine on convivial beer terraces, avant-garde Helsinki design, dark melodic music and cafes warm with baking cinnamon aromas are other facets of Suomi seduction. As are the independent, loyal, warm and welcoming Finns, who tend to do their own thing and are much the better for it.

When to Go

Helsinki



Mar There's still plenty of snow, but enough daylight to enjoy winter sports.

Jul Everlasting daylight, countless festivals and discounted accommodation.

Sep The stunning colours of the autumn *ruska* season make this prime hiking time up north.

Connections

Road connections with Norway and Sweden are way up in the north, but ferries are big on the Baltic; an overnight boat can take you to Stockholm or even as far as Germany. Helsinki's harbour also offers quick and easy boat connections to Tallinn in Estonia, launch pad for the Baltic states and Eastern Europe. Finland's also a springboard for Russia, with boat, bus and train services available, some visa-free.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Helsinki demands at least a couple of days and is a good base for a day trip to Tallinn (Estonia) or Porvoo. In summer, head to the eastern Lakeland and explore Lappeenranta, Savonlinna and Kuopio (catch a lake ferry between the latter towns). In winter, take an overnight train or budget flight to Lapland (Rovaniemi) for a few days, visiting Santa, exploring Sámi culture and mushing with the huskies. A Helsinki–Savonlinna–Kuopio–Rovaniemi–Helsinki route is a good option.

Two Weeks

Spend a few days in Helsinki and Porvoo, visit the harbour town of Turku and lively Tampere. Next stops are Savonlinna and Kuopio in the beautiful eastern Lakeland. Head up to Rovaniemi, and perhaps as far north as Inari. You could also fit in a summer festival, some hiking in Lapland or North Karelia, or a quick cycling trip to Åland.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Coffee** To fit in, eight or nine cups a day is about right, best accompanied with a cinnamon-flavoured pastry.
- » **Offbeat meats** Unusual meats appear on menus: reindeer is a staple up north, elk is commonly eaten, and bear is also seasonally available.
- » **Fresh food** The kauppahalli (market hall) is where to go for a stunning array of produce. In summer, stalls at the kauppatori (market square) sell delicious fresh vegetables and fruit.
- » **Alcoholic drinks** Beer is a staple. Finns also love dissolving things in vodka; try a shot of *salmiakikossu* (salty liquorice flavoured) or *fisu* (Fisherman's Friend-flavoured).
- » **Fish** Salmon is ubiquitous; tasty lake fish include arctic char, pike-perch and scrumptious fried *muikku* (vendace).

AT A GLANCE

- » **Capital** Helsinki
- » **Area** 338,145 sq km
- » **Population** 5.4 million
- » **Country code**
☑ 358
- » **Languages** Finnish, Swedish, Sámi languages
- » **Currency** euro

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	€0.73
Canada	C\$1	€0.71
Japan	¥100	€0.83
New Zealand	NZ\$1	€0.54
UK	UK£1	€1.12
USA	US\$1	€0.67

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room** €60
- » **Two-course evening meal** €40
- » **Museum entrance** €6
- » **Beer** €5.50
- » **City transport ticket** €3

Resources

- » **Finnish Tourist Board** (www.visitfinland.com)
- » **Helsingin Sanomat** (www.hs.fi/english) News
- » **Matkahuolto** (www.matkahuolto.fi) Bus travel
- » **Metsähallitus** (www.outdoors.fi) Great hiking resource
- » **This is Finland** (www.finland.fi) Informative and entertaining
- » **VR** (www.vr.fi) Train travel