

Finland

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

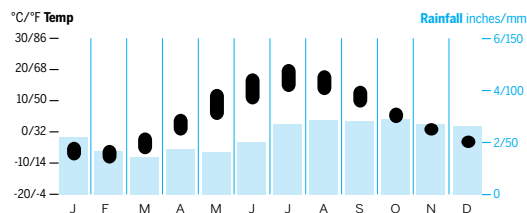
There's something pure in the Finnish air; it's an invitation to get out and active year-round. A post-sauna dip in an ice hole under the majestic aurora borealis (northern lights), after whooshing across the snow behind a team of huskies, isn't a typical winter's day just anywhere. And hiking or canoeing under the 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 forested wildernesses elsewhere.

Nordic peace in lakeside cottages, summer sunshine on convivial beer terraces, avant-garde design, dark melodic music and cafes warm with aromas of homebaking are other facets of Suomi (Finnish) 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 & Apr 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 *ruska* (autumn) season make this prime hiking time up north.

Connections

Good roads and bus connections make getting around easy, while there's a comprehensive train network in the south and centre. Road connections with Norway and Sweden are way up north, but ferries are big on the Baltic; an overnight boat can take you to Stockholm or as far as Germany. Helsinki's harbour also offers quick and easy 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 at **Napapiiri**, exploring Sávuomi culture and mushing with 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 the Sámi capital **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 *pulla* (cardamom-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.

Gastro Helsinki is the best venue for fabulous New Suomi cuisine, with sumptuous degustation menus presenting traditional Finnish ingredients in crest-of-the-wave ways.

Alcoholic drinks Beer is a staple, and great microbreweries are on the increase. Finns also love dissolving things in vodka; try a shot of *salmiakikossu* (salty-liquorice flavoured) or *fisu* (Fisher-man's Friend-flavoured).

Fish Salmon is ubiquitous; tasty lake fish include arctic char, lavaret, pike-perch and scrumptious fried *muikku* (vendace).

AT A GLANCE

Capital Helsinki

Area 338,145 sq km

Population 5.46 million

Country code ☎ 358

Languages Finnish, Swedish, Sámi languages

Currency euro (€)

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	€0.72
Canada	C\$1	€0.71
Japan	¥100	€0.73
New Zealand	NZ\$1	€0.64
UK	UK£1	€1.25
USA	US\$1	€0.77

Set Your Budget

Budget hotel room €75

Two-course evening meal
€45–€60

Museum entrance €7–€12

Beer €6–€8

City transport ticket
€3–€4

Resources

Visit Finland (www.visitfinland.com)

Helsinki Times (www.helsinkitimes.fi)

Matkahuolto (www.matkahuolto.fi)

Metsähallitus (www.outdoors.fi)

This is Finland (finland.fi)

VR (www.vr.fi)