

Turku & the Southwest



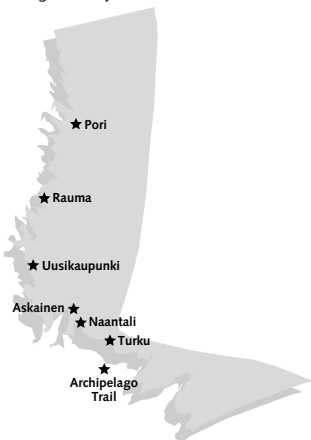
Never heard of Turku? This area once ruled Finland when the Swedes established trading towns along the coast. They used their capital Turku to shine the light of Christianity across the country, with the odd forcible baptism for good measure. Venerable old towns like Uusikaupunki, Rauma and Pori have ports and historic buildings that are testaments to the success of local merchants and artisans. But the 19th century saw the rise of Russia, which wanted a Finnish capital it could keep an eye on at Helsinki, so Turku's fortunes changed.

The Swedish influence remains. Along with Pohjanmaa and Åland, this area is both geographically and culturally close to Sweden with plenty of summer visitors from the west. You'll hear Swedish spoken so often you'll wonder if you're in Stockholm – for language tips see boxed text, p264.

But the traffic runs both ways and the Archipelago Trail is a popular trip for Finns in summer, and a step closer to Sweden. As well as historic sights like the postcard-perfect old towns of Rauma or Naantali, there's the strong draw of Moomin trolls and Pori's hopping jazz festival. Turku itself is a strong challenger to Helsinki's cultural cred with galleries and museums that are turning heads in the EU.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Having a religious experience at the massive **Turku Cathedral** (p218), Finland's first church that's still divine
- Finding your inner child and outer troll at the delightful **Moominworld** (p225) in Naantali with characters leaping to life from the much-loved books
- Partying on the island festival **Ruisrock** (p220) or watching the city's artistic blaze with **Turku on Fire 2011** (p220)
- Listening out for the unique language that sailors brought back to Rauma as you sample odd-tasting **Puksprööt** (p237) on the terrace in **Vanha Rauma's kauppatori** (p234)
- Taking on the **Archipelago Trail** (p229), which meanders out to remote **Houtskär** (p230)
- Seeing Rauma's finest on display as they celebrate the lace festival, **Pitsiviikko** (p236), or award the kooky Herring Oscars at the **Blue Sea Film Festival** (p236)
- Cruising to Naantali aboard the **SS Ukkopekka** (p219), a traditional steamship that turns into a dinner dance in summer





Activities

The various archipelagos are much beloved of yachties in summer; even tiny islands have guest harbours that are well equipped; you can also arrange charters in Turku. The area is very well suited to exploration by bicycle, and can be combined into a circular route around the Archipelago Trail (p229) or heading out to Åland.

TURKU

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The old Finnish joke that Turku brought culture to Finland but it never returned to the city is an obsolete gag probably borne from

its joshing rivalry with Tampere. True, the historic castle and cathedral point to a rich cultural history when the city was capital but the future is bright for this 'second city'. There's a plethora of museums, and art galleries with experimental works, and there's a hectic festival calendar. There's a local TV station, Turku TV, and several of Finland's contemporary writers and artists call it home.

It's also the first Finnish city many visitors see as they get off ferries from Sweden and Åland. But don't just take our word for it: for 2011 Turku has been given the accolade of Capital of Culture by the EU. All this leads Turku's citizens to wipe a proud tear from their collective eye and shout 'In your face Tampere!'

HISTORY

A Catholic settlement began at Koroinen, then the present centre of Turku, in 1229. The consecration of a new church in 1300 and the construction of Turku Castle meant that Finland could be ruled from this administrative and spiritual base. At several points in history, Turku was the second-largest town in Sweden, though fire destroyed Turku on several occasions, including the Great Fire of 1827, which levelled much of the town.

Åbo was the original Swedish name because it's a settlement (*bo*) on a river (*å*). Today, there's a slightly un-PC campaign for Turku's citizens to call themselves Åborigins, including several T-shirts bearing the word. The Finnish name, Turku, is an archaic Russian word for 'marketplace'. The long Swedish connection led to the Russians' decision to swipe the capital title for Helsinki, allowing Turku to concentrate on its status as a merchant town.

ORIENTATION

Turku's centre is its *kauppatori* (market square), 3km northeast of the harbour, with a bus meeting each arriving ferry. The Aurajoki divides the city and locals have been known to ask visitors if they've crossed the river to Åbo yet, though (as this is the old name for Turku) they're really just fooling. Most of the city is within walking distance.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Akateeminen Kirjakauppa (Hansa Shopping Arcade, Yliopistonkatu) Stocks maps, English-language books and foreign newspapers.