

Handbook of Finland

– the Insider's Guide



Visit Finland

Finland in a nutshell

1. Aurora Borealis

In the northernmost parts of the country, seeing the Northern Lights is almost guaranteed every other night of the winter.

2. Midnight Sun

During the summer months, the sun does not set at all in the northernmost parts of the country.

3. Sauna

The Finns' favourite pastime is going to the sauna – at least once a week.

4. Clean lakes

The waters in Finland, both in nature and tap, are the purest in the world.

5. Forest

Over 70% of Finland is covered by beautiful forest where everyone has the right to roam and forage freely – as long as you are responsible and respectful towards the nature.

6. Wild food

Our exceptional climate and Nordic soil have created a wide range of local plants and wildlife.

7. Finnish design

Some of the world's most imitated and admired designers and architects come from Finland.

8. Real Santa Claus

Although originally from Korvatunturi, Santa now resides in Rovaniemi, Lapland, where he greets visitors all year round.

9. Moomins

Finland is the home of Moomins, who can be met in Naantali from spring to autumn. Moomins hibernate during winter, as we all know.

10. Wildlife

Our beautiful nature hosts magnificent creatures, such as moose, reindeer, brown bears and swans.

Finns in a nutshell

It's fair to say Finns are civilized and sociable, but have a mischievous way of showing it.

Finns are not small-talkers, but when we talk, we mean what we say.

Finnish people are warm, open and sincere, although we might tell you otherwise.

Finns are masters of self-deprecating humour and we regularly rip on ourselves for being shy and introverted.

Regions

Divided into four large areas that all offer unique, distinct experiences, Finland has a lot to offer at any time of the year.

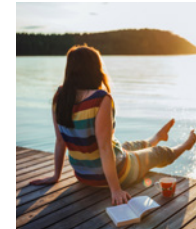


Seasons

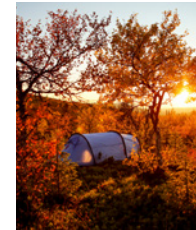
Finland's annual cycle of nature is characterised by stark contrasts between the four seasons.



Spring instantly changes the mood of the nation, its nature and its people.



Summer isn't endless, but there are almost endless summer days. In the far north, the sun doesn't set for two months.



Autumn is the season of "ruska", an explosion of fall colours.



Winter can last up to five months, with temperatures ranging from a balmy zero to a lung-freezing -35°C.

How to get here?

Located at the crossroads of east and west, Finland is an easy destination from every corner of the world. The main hub is Helsinki International Airport, from which the city centre is only a 30-minute bus or train ride away. Getting around in Finland is both effortless and ecological. Finland's public transport is reliable and runs smoothly. You can get basically anywhere by road, railroad or plane in any weather.

You are here sooner than you think!

1. New York 8 h
2. London 3 h
3. Paris 3 h
4. Rome 3.5 h
5. Frankfurt 2.5 h
6. Stockholm 1 h
7. St. Petersburg 1 h
8. Dubai 6 h
9. Delhi 7 h
10. Singapore 12 h
11. Beijing 9 h
12. Seoul 9.5 h
13. Tokyo 10.5 h



Coast and Archipelago of Finland

Finland's coast boasts the world's largest archipelago. Old wooden towns, lighthouses, historical manors and stone churches, large national parks stretching over land and sea – this sums up coastal Finland.

The laid-back islander lifestyle and a strong maritime culture are key characteristics of this fascinating area. Beaches, handicraft markets, small-town events, cafés and village shops – Finnish coastal towns are especially lively in the summer months.

Coastal Finland has dozens of secluded lighthouses, many with restaurants and accommodation for travellers, and former ironwork villages that offer a great selection of quaint scenery, art, design and antiques. Also, you can follow the footsteps of the world-famous creator of Moomins, Tove Jansson, whose favourite places can be found around the southern coast.

Finland holds seven Unesco World Heritage sites, of which three can be experienced in the Coastal area.

1. ÅLAND-ISLANDS
2. TURKU-ARCHIPELAGO
3. HANKO-RAASEPORI-LOHJA
4. KOTKA-HAMINA
5. RAUMA
6. PORI
7. SEINÄJOKI
8. VAASA
9. KOKKOLA-KALAJOKI
10. OULU





Photo: Visit Finland

There are over 70,000 islands, rocks and skerries. One out of 100 Finns live on an island.

Old maritime culture attracts sailors and travellers from all over.

The Finnish archipelago has the most sunshine in Finland.

Flavours from land and sea

The Finnish Coast and Archipelago provide experiences for any traveller. To fuel your adventures, there are plenty of unique foods the coast has to offer. Enjoy nature's best with crispy apples and sea-buckthorn – or "tyrni", as the locals call it. Be sure to taste the traditional Archipelago bread, a rye and malt bread sweetened with syrup.

The largest of the islands is Åland, which has its own take on pancake, spiced with cardamom or cinnamon. Seafood is a big part of coastal cuisine. If the many restaurants in the area don't serve a fish to your liking, you can also take a trip to catch your own.

Insider's Guide

Krister

"I'm from the Archipelago, from a small island called Nötö. I love the peace and ease of islander life. Life here is simple."

Krister's tips

1. Island hopping

To truly experience these beautiful islands, I suggest travelling by boat.

2. Old wooden towns

A visit to one of these historic towns is like entering a living time capsule from Finland's past.

3. Bengtskär lighthouse

The tallest lighthouse in the Nordics is a magical place.

Lakeland – The Heart of Finland

Finland is not known as the Land of a Thousand Lakes for nothing, since we do have over 187,000 lakes. The Lakeland is a geographical wonder, a blue labyrinth of lakes, islands and forests. This is the largest lake district in Europe, with 200,000 cottages for slowing down and relaxing.

The largest of the lakes and a Finnish national treasure is Lake Saimaa. The green forests and blue lakes offer a wonderful outdoor experience. Many national parks offer untouched forests and pristine lakes combined with modern services. Head out for a hike or enjoy an overnight stay in a tent or cottage. There are many old industrial cities and towns that have become centres for culture and events, such as Tampere, Outokumpu and Verla.

Artists have drawn inspiration from the Lakeland over hundreds of years. Painters from the golden era of Finnish art, such as Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Eero Järnefelt, etched the landscapes into the national consciousness.

In the summer, Finns retreat to lakeside cottages. We spend our holidays with friends and families away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

1. HÄMEENLINNA
2. JOENSUU
3. JYVÄSKYLÄ REGION
4. KAJAANI-KUHMO-VUOKATTI
5. KUOPIO
6. LAHTI REGION
7. LAPPEENRANTA-IMATRA
8. MIKKELI
9. SAVONLINNA
10. TAMPERE
11. KOUVOLA





Photo: Julia Kivelä

Serenity of sauna

Sauna is at the heart of Finnish culture. Finns go to the sauna whether it's raining or shining, summer or winter, alone or together. Experiencing one of the thousands of saunas in Lakeland is a true baptism into Finland. If you are feeling a bit extreme during the winter, you can take a dip in an "avanto" – a hole in the ice of a lake or the sea – or go rolling in the snow. Each sauna has its unique "löyly" – roughly translated as sauna steam, the essence of sauna. A bundle of birch known as "vihta" or "vasta" is often used to whip yourself gently. It massages and stimulates the skin.

Saimaa is the fourth-largest lake in Europe. There are 40 lakes per 100 square kilometres.

Finns spend 79 days a year at their summer cottages.

80% of the land area is covered by forests.

There are countless beliefs surrounding saunas. It's believed that a spirit, a sauna elf, lives in each sauna. Treat the elf with respect, or otherwise it might cause trouble! In case of a fire in the sauna, the elf is said to warn the residents. Little gifts, such as food, can be left for the elf, and the sauna is occasionally warmed up just for them.



Insider's Guide

Ilkka

"Our summer cottage and especially its sauna is a place of peace and quiet for me. All the stress and fuss of my daily life can be forgotten in the löyly."

Ilkka's tips

1. Experience nature

This is the national scenery of Finland. Go hiking and grab a tent to spend a night under the stars.

2. Smoke sauna

Heating up and bathing in a smoke sauna near a lake is an unforgettable experience.

3. Steamboat cruise

Steamboat cruises are a piece of history. Some of the boats have operated for decades.

Helsinki Region

Helsinki, the capital of Finland, is a vibrant seaside city of islands and great green parks. The city has a laid back yet refreshingly active rhythm all at once. Like all capitals around the world, Helsinki is also a melting pot of all kinds of people. It's known for urban street festivals and old working-class districts which have transformed into hotspots for design.

You can find Art Nouveau and modernist architecture all within walking distance. Legends such as Alvar Aalto and Eliel Saarinen have left their mark on Finnish history during the 20th century. A piece of contemporary architecture, the Helsinki Central Library Oodi, is located right in the heart of the city.

The food scene in Helsinki is cutting edge and always evolving. You can find almost any type of cuisine here. Finnish food itself is all about local, seasonal ingredients like game, wild berries and mushrooms. The Restaurant Day event takes over the city four times a year, popping up restaurants in people's homes and backyards.

Helsinki offers experiences all year round. In the summer it's all about sunshine and the outdoors, as restaurant terraces bustle with people. Wintertime brings along cheerful Christmas markets and holiday spirit. In January, the LUX Helsinki light festival enchants the city with luminous street art installations.

Like in all of Finland, nature is always close in Helsinki. Take a day trip to the sea fortress of Suomenlinna or one of the many islands off the coast. If the beat of the city seems too hectic, you can have wonderful nature experiences in the Nuukio National Park.

1. HELSINKI
2. ESPOO
3. VANTAA
4. PORVOO-LOVIISA
5. LAKE TUUSULA





Photo: Julia Kivelä

Helsinki has been named the 2019 European Capital of Smart Tourism.

Finland was the world's first country to give full political rights to women.

The world's most northern subway is in Helsinki.

Day trips near the capital

There are several picturesque cities and towns around Helsinki – one of which is Tuusulanjärvi. The shores of Lake Tuusulanjärvi have had a significant part in Finnish art and culture. Here, you can find the homes and ateliers of legendary Finnish artists dotted around the lake, easily reached by bike.

In the nearby town of Porvoo, you can really feel the history by strolling among its cobblestone streets and iconic red wooden houses. Porvoo also has a wide variety of cosy little restaurants and bed & breakfasts for you to enjoy.



Insider's Guide

Laura

"I live in the old working-class neighbourhood of Punavuori. I just love walking around and wandering into the cosy little cafés, art galleries or trendy little boutiques."

Laura's tips

1. All the museums

Helsinki has fantastic museums from art and design to history. Amos Rex right in the city centre is one of my favourites.

2. Lammasaari and Kuusiluoto

You can walk on duckboards to Lammasaari. It's close to downtown and there are sheep in Kuusiluoto!

3. Grab a bike to get around

Helsinki has a lot of city bikes. They work great with public transit.

Lapland – The North of Finland

Contrasts are a key factor in the allure of Finnish Lapland. In Lapland, you can experience not four but in fact eight distinctive seasons. From warm summers filled with around-the-clock light to frosty winter days when the sun refuses to rise above the horizon.

Lapland is home to perhaps the most well-known Finn – Santa Claus himself. Originally from Korvatunturi, a remote fell in Eastern Lapland near the Russian border, Santa now lives in Rovaniemi and can be met all year round. He has received over 17 million letters from all over the world since 1985. Santa couldn't do his job without his trusty reindeer. There are as many reindeer as people in Lapland, and any drive might be often interrupted by a herd of reindeer crossing the road.

This northernmost part of the EU has a number of outdoor resorts just minutes away from the peace and quiet of the wilderness. They offer unique possibilities for any kind of skiing and cycling in addition to many other outdoor activities. Lapland's winter tempts you to try out snowmobiling or sledding, while snow-free seasons are popular among hikers. During the summer and autumn, you can pick your meal straight from the wild, as the Lappish wilderness is bursting with wild herbs, mushrooms and berries, including our famous cloudberries. These bright-orange berries, mostly found on swamps, are a true northern superfood.

One of the minority languages in Finland is Sámi, a group of languages spoken by the indigenous Sámi people. Their cultural region, Sápmi, covers the extreme north of Europe, including the municipalities of Enontekiö, Utsjoki, Inari and northern Sodankylä in the northern part of Finnish Lapland. Utsjoki is the only municipality with a Sámi majority, while the municipality of Inari has four official languages: Finnish, Skolt Sámi, Northern Sámi and Inari Sámi. Inari is also home to Sámi Cultural Centre Sajos and Siida, the National Museum of the Finnish Sámi.

1. ROVANIEMI-RANUA
2. LEVI
3. YLLÄS
4. SAARISELKÄ-IVALO-INARI
5. RUKA-KUUSAMO-POSIO
6. SEA LAPLAND
7. UTSJOKI
8. ENONTEKIÖ
9. KILPISJÄRVI
10. MUONIO-OLOS-PALLAS
11. SALLA
12. PYHÄ-LUOSTO
13. KEMIJÄRVI-SUOMU
14. SYÖTE-TAIVALKOSKI





Courtesy of Ailo's Journey by Matila Röhr Production

120,000 Finns are winter swimmers. Just cut a hole in the ice of a lake, river or sea!

During the summer, the sun doesn't set for 70 days in Northern Lapland.

Santa's post address is *Santa Claus's Main Post Office, 96930 Napapiiri, Finland.*

There are 749 fells and approximately 190,000 reindeer in Lapland.

The magic of Northern Lights

The Northern Lights season in Lapland starts around mid-August and lasts all the way to early April. This magical phenomenon can be witnessed during most nights when the sky is clear. To make the most of it, head to the night with snowshoes, cross-country skis or a snowmobile. If gazing at the dancing Arctic sky outdoors is not your thing, simply add comfort by booking a stay in a glass-sealed abode dedicated to the Northern Lights.

The Aurora Borealis form when different atmospheric gases are agitated by solar wind. The Finnish Meteorological Institute's informative Auroras Now! website lets you sign up for alerts which are sent whenever magnetic conditions in the skies over Finland make auroral displays likely.

Insider's Guide

Henri

"I've lived in big cities but decided to return to Lapland for the unique nature and proper winters. Simple joys are the best kind."

Henri's tips

1. Snowsurfing

A wooden board with no bindings on powder snow. You feel like a kid again.

2. From -30 to +30

Cold winters, warm summers and everything in between. I like change.

3. The light in Lapland

From 24/7 during the Midnight Sun to none in the Polar Night, it's a trip from year to year. The Auroras are cool, too.









Photo: Julia Kivelä

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