

Karelia



Karelia is almost a magical word in Finland, with more connotations than can be explained. This was deep Finland, a unique zone where old traditions were maintained in isolated forest communities. When Elias Lönnrot was compiling records of Finnish folk traditions, it was here that he found the tales he wove into the *Kalevala* epic. Fuelled with enthusiasm, artists and architects headed for the Karelian wilderness in search of the 'soul' of Finnishness. Karelia became the symbol of Finnish distinctiveness and the totem of the independence movement.

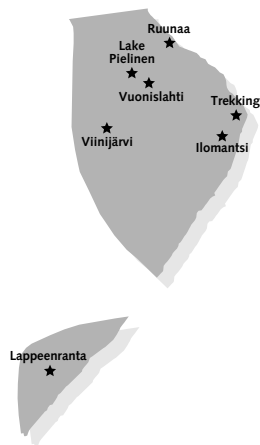
Sad and ironic, then, that most of Karelia today lies over the Russian border. Much of the gruelling attrition of the Winter and Continuation Wars against the Soviet Union was in this area, and large swathes of territory were lost. In a way, Finns see Russian Karelia as a child torn from its mother, although cross-border excursions are increasingly possible and popular.

The Karelia that remains in Finland is two separate strips of territory; South Karelia, around Lappeenranta, and North Karelia, with Joensuu as its major town. It's a fantastic destination, with a different culture and distinct traditional languages. You'll see Karelian food at markets, and traditional Karelian architecture, hear Karelian music at festivals and see the scars of the Winter War along the Russian border.

Karelia has some stunning wilderness, and is perfect for trekking and canoeing. There's a very good infrastructure of environmentally sensitive tour operators who will do anything from hire you equipment and wave you out the door, to arranging full holiday packages.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Striding out on one of North Karelia's fantastic **trekking routes** (p158) and hearing elks call
- Taking a **cruise** (p146) from Lappeenranta, perhaps along the Saimaa Canal to Vyborg in Russia
- Listening to a **kantele** performance at the **Parppeinvaara** (p155) in Ilomantsi
- Rowing across the lake to visit the **Paateri sculpture museum** (p163)
- Cycling around **Viinijärvi** (p155), with its scenic backroads, old houses and Karelian churches
- **Shooting the rapids** (p161) at Ruunaa in a rubber raft
- Snowmobiling on the frozen **Lake Pielinen** (p159) in the depths of winter



Activities

Karelia is one of the best destinations in Finland for the outdoors-lover. In North Karelia, in particular, there's a huge array of things to do. Karelia has over 1000km of marked trekking routes, some through almost untouched wilderness where you really will be alone with the elk, bears and ravens wolves (so to speak...!).

Lieksa and Nurmes are the best bases for more organized activities like whitewater rafting at the exciting Ruunaa rapids, canoeing and fishing in the remote Nurmijärvi area or, in winter, thrilling dogsled and snowmobile safaris. Located on the other side of Lake Pielinen, Koli is a major trekking trailhead and a winter ski centre.

Throughout North Karelia, the best first point of contact for arranging activities and trips is the excellent **Karelia Expert** (www.kareliaexpert.fi), which functions as a tourist information service for all the major towns of North Karelia, and can sort out anything from tent hire and fishing permits to tour operators.

Self-Catering Accommodation

In North Karelia, **Karelia Expert** (www.kareliaexpert.fi) can organise cottage, cabin and apartment rental. For South Karelia, **Saimaatours** (☎ 05-411 7722; www.matka-miittinen.fi; Kirkkokatu 10, Lappeenranta) has a good selection of lakeside cottages.

SOUTH KARELIA

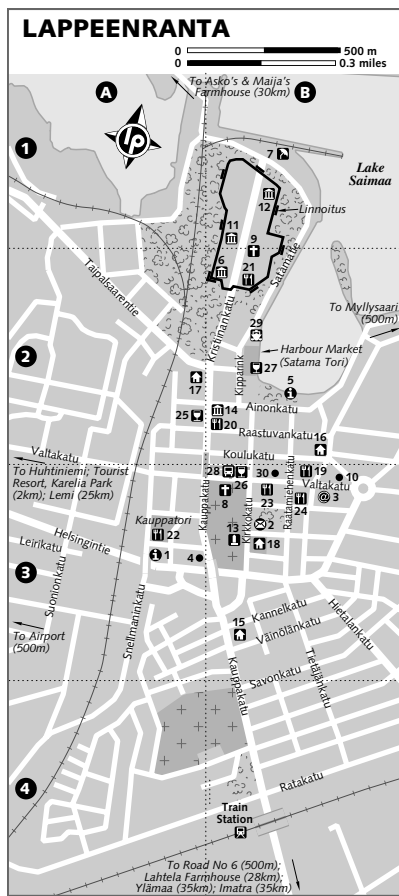
Just a tiny fraction of South Karelia is Finnish territory, and it's a zone where the borders have gone back and forth substantially over the centuries, as Russia and Sweden waxed and waned in power. These days, there is barely 10km between Lake Saimaa and the Russian border at the narrowest point, near Imatra. The once-busy South Karelian trade town of Vyborg (Finnish: Viipuri) and the Karelian Isthmus reaching to St Petersburg are now part of Russia.

The wars that have been a feature in this troubled region have left plenty of evidence in the form of Russian fortifications, particularly in the garrison town of Lappeenranta.

LAPPEENRANTA

☎ 05 / pop 58,982
Set on the shore's of Finland's largest lake, Lappeenranta (Swedish: Villmanstrand), is the capital of South Karelia. It's an old spa and garrison town and a popular destination for many, including Russians, who pop across the border to shop for luxury goods. Although, like most of Karelia, the town was largely destroyed during the Winter and Continuation Wars and has few conventional sights, its lakeside location and relaxed, friendly atmosphere make it an appealing place to spend a few days.

The building of the Saimaa Canal in 1856 made this an important trading port, and



Lappeenranta is now the largest inland port in Finland. The waterway from Lake Saimaa to the Gulf of Finland is 43km long and has eight lochs. A day-cruise along the Saimaa Canal to Vyborg, Russia – Finland's second-largest city until it was lost in WWII – is one of Lappeenranta's main attractions, but you'll need to book and arrange your visa in advance.

History

The early Lappeenranta area on Lake Saimaa was a busy Karelian trade centre. It was established as a town by the busy Count Per Brahe in 1649. Queen Kristina of Sweden accepted the coat of arms depicting a primitive man, after whom the Swedish 'Villmanstrand'

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was unflatteringly adopted (Villmanstrand means 'Wild Man's Shore' in Swedish). Apparently jealous, Vyborg businesses lobbied against their emerging rival, and Lappeenranta lost its town status in 1683.

Following a Russian victory on 23 August 1741, and the town's complete destruction, Lappeenranta was ceded to Russia and remained part of tsarist Russia until independence in 1917. A spa was founded in 1824, but it was only after railways and industries were developed that Lappeenranta

began to grow. Today the beautiful lakeside setting is marred by oversized industries, such as timber milling, that provide work and wealth to many.

Orientation

Kauppakatu and Valtakatu are the main streets. The train and bus stations are together about 1km south of their intersection, but most intercity buses stop on Valtakatu in the middle of town. Bus 9 runs between the bus and train stations and the centre of town.

Information

Main post office (Pormestarinkatu 1)

Main tourist office (☎ 667 788;

matkailuoy@lappeenranta.fi; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) On the southern side of the kauppatori (market square).

Public library (☎ 616 2346; Valtakatu 47; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) There are free bookable Internet terminals here.

Summer tourist office (☎ 9am-8pm Jun-mid-Aug, 9am-9pm Jul) In the wooden restaurant and theatre building at the harbour. There are other summer offices at the fortress and at the Hiekkalinna (sandcastle).

Sights

LINNOITUS

The fortifications in the Linnoitus (Fortress) area of Lappeenranta above the harbour were started by the Swedes and finished by the Russians in the 18th century. It's like a separate village; some of the fortress buildings are craft shops and galleries, while others have been turned into interesting museums (☎ 616 226; www.lappeenranta.fi/linnoitus; adult/child combined ticket €6/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Jun-late Aug, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun rest of year). There are good views from the fortress over the harbour area.

The **South Karelian Museum** (Etelä-Karjalan museo; individual ticket €5) at the northern end of the fortress has good displays on the pre-history and history of the area, as well as temporary exhibitions and a scale model of Vyborg as it looked before it fell to the Russians in 1939. Before WWII, Vyborg was the capital of Karelia and the second biggest town in Finland; it is a source of much wistful nostalgia for Finns in general and Karelians in particular.

South Karelia Art Museum (Etelä-Karjalan Taidemuseo; individual ticket €5) has a permanent collec-

tion of paintings by Finnish and Karelian artists; these are mostly modern works exhibiting not a little of the famous Finnish ironic humour. There's also a space devoted to good temporary exhibitions.

The cavalry tradition is cherished in Lappeenranta – from the 1920s to the 1940s, cavalymen in their red trousers and skeleton jackets were a common sight on town streets (there are still regular parades mounted in summer). The town's oldest building (erected 1772), a former guard-house, houses the small **Cavalry Museum** (Ratsuväkimuseo; individual ticket €2.50; ☎ summer only), which exhibits portraits of commanders, uniforms, saddles and guns, as well as footage of cavalry charges, and scary-looking implements for treating wounded horses.

Other fortress buildings now house a variety of **artists' workshops** selling ceramics, paintings and hand-knitted garments during summer. The **Orthodox church** (☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Jun-mid-Aug) is Finland's oldest. It was built in 1785 by Russian soldiers. It features a glittering iconostasis and other saintly portraits.

There are walking tours of the fortress daily from late May to mid-September, leaving from the Pusupuisto kiosk opposite the Patria hotel at 2.30pm. They last an hour and cost €2.50, with children free. The tours are in Finnish and English. Some of the tours last a little longer, and have added narrative elements (€4).

CITY CENTRE

The city centre also has several attractions worth exploring.

Wolkoff Home Museum (Wolkoffin Talomuseo; ☎ 616 2258; Kauppakatu 26; adult/child €4/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun early Jun-mid-Aug) is the preserved home of a Russian immigrant family. The house, built in 1826, was owned by the Wolkoff family from 1872 to 1986. There are 10 rooms that have been maintained as they were; you must join one of the hourly guided tours (around 40 minutes; leave at quarter past the hour) to see them.

In the centre of town, the **Lappee Church** (☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug) is a lovely wooden church (1794) built to an unusual 'double cruciform' floor plan. It's barely on speaking terms with its belltower, situated across

the park and housing a café. South of the church stretches the graveyard, on one side of which is the evocative **war memorial**, which commemorates those Finns who died in the Winter and Continuation Wars and whose graves are now in Russian territory.

At the start of summer, sand artists from all over Finland gather to build the **Hiekka-linna**, a giant sandcastle that uses around two and a half tons of sand. Designs change every year, but it's a seriously impressive structure before the Karelian rains take their toll.

Activities

There's a public **beach sauna** (admission €4.20) in Myllysaari, just east of the harbour area. Hours for women are 4pm to 8pm Wednesday and Friday, and the same hours Tuesday and Thursday for men.

You can hire bikes at several places in town, including the solid **Pyörä-Expert** (☎ 411 8710; Valtakatu 64), which charges €6 to €8 per day, depending on the bike.

Festivals & Events

The **Lemi-Lappeenranta Musikkijuhlat** (www.lemi.fi/musiikki) is a festival of classical music that takes place in Lappeenranta, Imatra, and Lemi in early August. Most performances are in churches, and cost €20 to €30.

Tours

Cruises on Lake Saimaa and the Saimaa Canal are popular and there are daily departures from late May to mid-September from the passenger quay at the harbour.

Saimaa Risteilyt (☎ 415 6955; www.saimaanristeilyt.fi; adult/child €10/5) at the harbour offers two-hour cruises aboard the 95-passenger *M/S El Faro*, either around the archipelago or down the Saimaa Canal. Canal cruises depart daily at noon, with an additional 3pm cruise and a 6pm archipelago cruise from early June to late August. **Karelia Lines** (☎ 453 0380; www.kareliainlines.fi; adult/child €11/6) has two-hour cruises on Lake Saimaa aboard the spacious *MS Camilla* at noon and 6pm from Monday to Saturday, June to late August.

The big hotels sometimes offer packages including a night's accommodation and a cruise; check their websites or ask the tourist office.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Huhtiniemi Tourist Resort (☎ 451 5555; www.huhtiniemi.com; Kuusimäenkatu 18; tent sites €14-17.50, 2-/4-person cottages €30/42, apt €34-74; ☎ mid-May-Sep) About 2km west of the centre, this is a one-stop accommodation extravaganza. It's a large, businesslike camping ground that stretches down to the lake (bring

mosquito repellent). Buses 1, 3 and 5 run past; you may also want to jump off an incoming intercity bus here, as most pass by. As well as cottages with bunks and fridge, and self-contained apartments on the mainland, there are eight upmarket cottages (for four people from €170) on an island just offshore and reached by row-boat. There are also two HI hostels at this location, with the same contact details: **Huhtiniemi Hostel** (dm €10; ☎ Jun-Aug; ☎ ☎) is two simple six-bed dorms; it books up fast. **Finnhostel Lappeenranta** (s/d €52/69; ☎ all year; ☎ ☎ ☎) is a bit flash to be called a hostel; it's really a hotel, and that's reflected in the price. Tidy rooms with bathroom include linen, breakfast and a morning swim and sauna.

Karelia Park (☎ 453 0405; fax 452 8454; Korpraalinkuja 1; dm from €17, s/d €45/54; ☎ Jun-Aug; ☎ ☎) An HI-affiliated summer hotel 300m west of Huhtiniemi, this offers good-value budget accommodation. It's in a student apartment block – the spotless two-bed rooms each have kitchen facilities and attached bathroom. Breakfast is €2.50 if you're paying the dorm rate and there's a communal kitchen, sauna and laundry.

MIDRANGE

Kantolankulma (☎ 328 7595; www.gasthauslapeenranta.com; Kimpisenkatu 19; s/d from €50/65; ☎ ☎) Right in the centre of Lappeenranta, this place is the best value in town. Accommodation is in charming, refurbished apartments that are beautifully decorated and boast an excellent kitchen and seriously comfortable beds. There's also laundry facilities and a shared sauna.

Scandic Hotel Patria (☎ 677 511; www.scandic-hotels.com; Kauppakatu 21; s/d €109/133, d Sat, Sun & summer €79-84; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This place close to the harbour is Lappeenranta's best hotel. Most of the doubles have a balcony, some looking across at the park, and the rooms are nicely decorated with thoughtful art and bright colours. Superior rooms cost €10 to €15 more and have their own sauna. The service is very helpful.

Gasthaus Turistilappee (☎ 415 0800; Kauppakatu 52; s/d/tr €50/67/84; ☎ ☎) Not far from the train station, this homely place is set behind a row of shops and offers a friendly welcome and tidy rooms with bathroom and TV. There's a kitchen and sauna available

for guests' use (small fee), and breakfast is available for €2 to €4.

Sokos Hotel Lappee (☎ 67861; www.sokoshotels.fi; Brahenkatu 1; s/d €105/125, d Sat, Sun & summer €84; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This large business hotel is convenient to the centre, and by the churchyard park. It has great facilities and rooms with attractive modern bathrooms that look either outwards or inwards onto a central atrium; the former are lighter. The sauna is free and there are gym facilities also.

FARMHOUSES

Many farmhouses in the countryside around Lappeenranta offer B&B accommodation, a unique opportunity to meet local people and observe their way of life. In some cases no English is spoken on these farms, so it may be easier to make bookings or inquiries through the tourist office at Lappeenranta.

Asko's & Maija's Farmhouse (☎/fax 454 4606; http://users.reppu.net/askomaija.saikko/; Suolahdentie 461; adult/child €28/14; ☎ mid-May-late Sep; ☎ ☎) This friendly dairy farm is 30km north-west of Lappeenranta in the village of Peltöi in the district of Taipalsaari. Accommodation is in a traditional log outbuilding, and breakfast and sauna is included; there's also a barbecue for guests' use. There are also three cottages for daily (€70 to €80) or weekly (€380 to €450) rental. Linen costs €10 extra.

Lahtela Farmhouse (☎ 457 8034; http://matkailu.lahtela.info; Lahtelantie 120; d €60-70; ☎ ☎) This farm, 9km from Ylämaa, south of Lappeenranta, is a dairy farm run by Hellevi and Lauri Lahtela. There's accommodation in a smart Alpine-roofed villa, as well as a simpler cottage. Rates include breakfast, sauna and use of a rowing boat on their small lake. No English is spoken.

Eating

Stalls at the kauppatori sell local Karelian specialties such as *vety* (bread roll or pie with smoked ham, sliced boiled egg, mince, and spices), rice pie, or waffles with jam and whipped cream. There are a dozen more snack stands at the harbour during summer.

Tiglio (☎ 411 8311; Raatimiehenkatu 18; pasta & pizza €9-12, other mains €12-22; ☎ lunch & dinner) A pleasant find – an authentic Italian restaurant with reasonably priced meals, including

CRUISING TO RUSSIA

One of the highlights of a visit to Lappeenranta is a boat trip along the Saimaa Canal, and the best way to experience it is the cruise across the border to Vyborg, 60km away in Russia. You'll need a Russian visa, so this trip requires advance planning.

The company that runs the cruises is **Saimaan Matkaverkko** (☎ 541 0100; fax 541 0140; www.saimaa.travel.fi; Valtakatu 48). If you are a European Union citizen, they can organize a 'cruise visa' for you. You'll need to provide them with a copy of your passport at least four working days before departure (we recommend booking significantly in advance, as these cruises are heavily subscribed).

The return cruise aboard the *M/S Carelia* departs at 8am (three to four times weekly from late May to mid-September), arriving in Vyborg five and a half hours later. You get about 3½ hours to sightsee and shop in the Russian city before returning by bus (you can also do it the other way around). A return ticket costs adult/child €59/39 and includes a sightseeing tour in Vyborg. Meals are available on board. There are also packages involving a night in Vyborg, a trip to St Petersburg, etc. This price includes the cost of the cruise visa for EU citizens. A booking fee of €10 may apply.

If you aren't an EU citizen, you'll have to obtain a Russian tourist visa. This is best done in Helsinki (see p341), but there is a **Russian consulate** (☎ 872 0700; ☎ 9am-noon Mon, Wed & Fri) in Lappeenranta in the same building as the tourist office. They take up to six days to process a visa, although they may rush through a same-day visa if you are lucky (and pay an extremely hefty supplement).

There are also two adjacent travel agents in Lappeenranta specializing in travel to Russia that can process your visa for you. These are: **Sojuz** (☎ 453 0024; www.tourcentersojuz.inet.fi; Kauppakatu 53) and **RTT** (☎ 020-178 8130; www.rtt-matkapalvelut.fi; Kauppakatu 53).

Orientation & Information

Although Imatra has four dispersed 'centres', separated by highways and shopping parks, the one of most interest to travellers is Imatrakoski at the rapids, where you'll also find the best restaurants and hotels. All incoming buses make a stop here, on Olavinkatu. Three kilometres north, Mansikkala houses the bus and train station; bus 1 connects it with the centre (€2.50).

Public library (Virastokatu 1; Mansikkala) The library in the Kaupungintalo (Cultural Centre) near the bus and train stations has free Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 020-495 2500; www.travel.imatra.fi; Heikinkatu 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Jun-mid-Aug, plus 10am-4pm Sat from mid-Jul, 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri mid-Aug-May) Exceedingly helpful and friendly; extended opening hours for Big Band Festival.

Sights & Activities

Imatra's highlight is the 3km stroll along the mighty **Vuoksi River**, from the bus and train station in Mansikkala to the power station in Imatrakoski. In spring and summer it's a haven of nesting geese, gulls and terns. Until the hydroelectric station was built and the river dammed in 1929, Imatra's **rapids** were one of the highest waterfalls in Finland. These days, the water is allowed to flow free only for the 20-minute **Rapids Shows** from May to September. There's a nightly show at 1am from early May to early July. Check the tourist office's information website for other shows between May and September (it's on, for example, at 10pm every Saturday in August, and 9pm every Saturday in September). There's an accompanying sound-and-light show. It's undeniably spectacular and definitely worth seeing if you're in town that day, but not quite memorable enough to structure your trip around.

Vuoksen Kalastuspuisto (☎ 432 3123; www.vuoksenkalastuspuisto.com; Kotipolku 4; ☎ 9am-10pm May-Sep) is a fishing park on Varpasaari in Mansikkala. Pike and salmon can be caught in the river here. A kiosk sells permits (per day/week €6/10) and rents equipment and boats. You can also camp here (per tent site €13), sleep in cabins (per night €40) and hire bicycles (per day €10); and there's also a bar.

Signposted as 'Ulkomuseo', **Karjalainen Kotitalo** (Pässiniemi; admission €2; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug) is an open-air museum with a dozen traditional Karelian buildings, moved here from other locations. They are typical of the

region, with overlapping corner joints and overhanging eaves. The granary and the main house are particularly atmospheric; there are even real sheep in the barn.

Imatran Taidemuseo (Virastokatu 1; admission free; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Thu, 11am-4pm Fri Jun-Aug, 11am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat Sep-May) Just south of the bus and train stations, in the same building as the library, the town art gallery is worthwhile. Most space is taken up with good temporary exhibitions, but the permanent collection includes a pensive young violinist by Eero Järnefelt, and a Gallen-Kallela water-colour of the rapids in 1893, which gives an idea of what they were once like.

Kolmen Ristin Kirkko (Church of the Three Crosses; Ruokolahdentie 27; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Aug) in Vuoksenniska was designed in 1957 by Alvar Aalto; its clean white lines and soaring narrow tower are typical of the man. As an interesting detail, only two of the 103 windows of the church are identical. Take bus 1.

Festivals & Events

The **Imatra Big Band Festival** (www.ibbf.fi) takes place every year in early July and draws world-famous jazz and swing bands.

Sleeping

Imatran Valtionhotelli (☎ 625 2000; www.rantasipi.fi; Torkkelinkatu 2; castle s/d €119/144, weekends & summer €96/105, congress centre s/d €109/134, weekends & summer €89/91; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒ ☒) This classic hotel is a turreted Art Nouveau gem overlooking the rapids in Imatrakoski. Built in 1902, it was a favourite spot of the St Petersburg aristocracy. The rooms are decorated in appropriate style, with replica Art Nouveau furnishings. The Tower Suite (€300) is a highlight with its own sauna and view of Russia; the best standard rooms are on the 4th floor, with curious shapes and ceilings, though they are hot in summer. Next door, the congress centre is much better than it sounds and has large, attractive rooms, some looking over the park behind.

Ukonlinna Hostel (☎ 432 1270; Leiritie 8; dm €15, f per person €22.50; ☎ ☒) This place, alongside the camping ground, is one of the most idyllically situated HI hostels in Finland, nestled in the forest with a lake frontage and lakeside sauna. It's a small, cosy place and since it's close to a popular cross-country skiing area, it's open year-round – in winter there's ice fishing and skating on the lake.

Camping Ukoniemi (☎ 472 4055; www.loma.liitto.fi; Leiritie 1; tent sites €13, 3-/4-/5-person cabins €36/42/54; ☎ early Jun-mid-Aug) This is a pleasant lakefront camping ground near the Imatra Leisure Centre. It has two saunas (for hire) and a camp kitchen. Bus 3 travels from the bus station every hour.

Also see Vuoksen Kalastuspuisto (opposite) for a further lodging option.

Eating & Drinking

Imatra's centre for cafés and restaurants is at Imatrakoski.

Buttenhoff (☎ 476 1433; Koskenparras 4; lunch €7-11, mains €14-26; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) This is a legendary upstairs restaurant with Finnish and Karelian cuisine in a very French mould. There are fine set menus for €39 and €47 and well-priced à la carte options. Delights such as reindeer carpaccio, veal tournedos and salmon blini feature; there's also an invariably good vegetarian plate.

Café Julia (pastries €1.50-3; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, plus 9am-3pm Sat in summer) Downstairs of Buttenhoff, this café, decorated with teddy bears, is the place for coffee and tempting cakes.

Café Milli (☎ 337 8005; Torkkelinkatu 1) Opposite Valtionhotelli, Milli is a good spot for coffee and it sells local produce and handicrafts.

Parnell's Irish Bar (☎ 476 3555; Koskenparras 5) This Irish chain pub, also on the pedestrian strip, is the pick of the pubs along here.

Getting There & Away

Imatra is served by trains (€38.70, three hours, seven daily) and buses from Helsinki, and by hourly buses from Lappeenranta (€6.20, 40 minutes). The central train station is near the river at Mansikkala; it's also the bus station and has lockers. It's dead after 5.30pm. Buses also pick up and drop off in Imatrakoski (on Olavinkatu, a small lane between Helsingintie and the pedestrian zone), a handier option.

NORTH KARELIA

This sparsely populated frontier region, where the artists found inspiration, does its best to live up to all Karelian legends. For the traveller, it is a unique place where you can meet friendly people, visit beautiful Orthodox churches and explore deep wilderness on trekking paths.

Although just outside the North Karelia province, Kuhmo (p280) is another town worth visiting if you are intrigued by Karelia and want to learn more about the *Kalevala*.

History

In 1227 a crusade from Novgorod (situated in present-day Russia) forcibly baptised Karelians into the Orthodox faith, sparking skirmishes that did not end until the Treaty of Nöteborg in 1323 established Novgorod's suzerainty over the region.

Karelians have survived repeated wars with Sweden and Russia. In 1617 Sweden annexed much of Karelia. North Karelia was constantly attacked by Russia and religious intolerance forced Orthodox believers across the border into Russia. The Treaty of Uusikaupunki in 1721 resulted in North Karelia remaining Swedish territory and South Karelia falling to Russian feudalism.

Getting Around

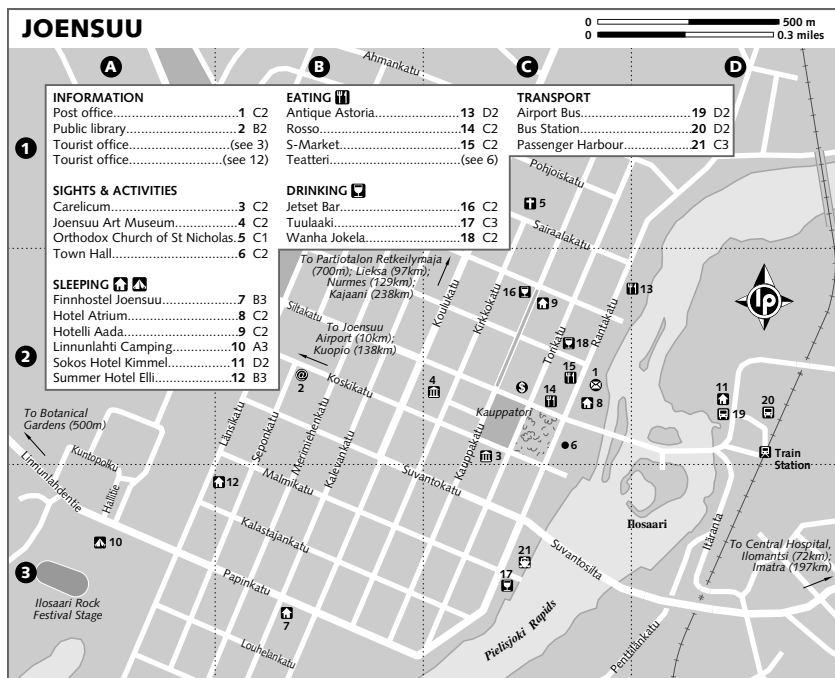
In the North Karelia area, a particularly useful service, given the scarcity of buses, is the *kimppakyyti* (shared taxi) system. They run several times daily along a variety of routes (eg Joensuu-Lieksa), and have a flat fare that is about the same price as the bus. You need to book a day in advance. There's a different telephone number for each route; call ☎ 0100 9986 for Joensuu-Koli, ☎ 0200 45200 for Joensuu-Lieksa or ☎ 013-525 902 for general information. As English levels vary, it may be easier to ask the local tourist office or someone at the hotel to phone for you in Finnish.

JOENSUU

☎ 013 / pop 57,558

Capital of the province of North Karelia, Joensuu is a sizeable university town at the mouth of the Pielisjoki (the name means 'river mouth'). It's the region's major travel hub and has plenty of services, a good market, and lively nocturnal life, which compensate somewhat for the lack of anything of real interest. You'll probably find yourself in Joensuu anyway if you're heading into North Karelia, as it's a base for hiking in surrounding Karelian wilderness areas.

Joensuu was founded in 1848. It soon became an important trading post and then an international port after the completion of the Saimaa Canal in the 1850s.



Orientation & Information

The gentle Pielisjoki rapids divide Joensuu into two parts. The train and bus stations are in the east; the town centre, including the market square and most accommodation, is in the west. Siltakatu and Kauppakatu are the two main streets.

Post office (☎ 0200 71000; Rantakatu 26) By the river.

Public library (☎ 267 6201; Koskikatu 25) The library near the university campus has several free Internet terminals.

Tourist service (☎ 248 5319; www.kareliaexpert.com, www.jns.fi; Koskikatu 5; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, also 11am–4pm Sat May–Sep, 11am–4pm Sun Jul) This office is in the Carelicum, and handles tourism information and bookings for the town and region. Free Internet access.

Sights

The **Carelicum** (☎ 267 5222; Koskikatu 5; admission €4; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat & Sun) is a fine conceptual museum focusing on Karelia – its history, people and customs. This is an excellent place to get acquainted with Karelia before heading further east or north. There's one main floor of pho-

tographic exhibits and static displays, an interactive area for kids modelled on part of old Joensuu, and a miniature model of Sortavala (now in Russia) upstairs. There is also a gift shop and a good café on the ground floor.

The unusual **town hall** (Rantakatu 20) dominates the town centre, between the kauppatori and the river. It was designed by Eliel Saarinen, who also designed Helsinki's train station, and was built in 1914. Part of the building now houses the local theatre and a restaurant.

Near the kauppatori, **Joensuu Art Museum** (☎ 267 5388; Kirkkokatu 23; admission €4; ☎ 11am–4pm Tue–Sun, 11am–8pm Wed) is a good display, with a diverse range of both Finnish and foreign pieces, including a good selection of Orthodox icons salvaged from the Soviets.

The most interesting church in Joensuu is the wooden **Orthodox Church of St Nicholas** (☎ 266 000; Kirkkokatu; ☎ 10am–4pm Mon–Fri mid-Jun–mid-Aug), built in 1887. The icons were painted in St Petersburg in the late 1880s. There are services at 6pm on Saturday and 10am on Sunday; worth a visit.

Tours

In summer there are **scenic cruises** on the Pielisjoki, a centuries-old trading route. The *M/S Vinkeri II* has day and evening cruises (€15, 2½ to three hours) on Mondays to Fridays from early June to early August, leaving from the passenger harbour south of Suvantosilta bridge. You can book and check timetables with **Saimaa Ferries** (☎ 481 244; www.saimaafferries.fi) or the city tourist office. The **M/S Satumaa** (☎ 050-5660 815, www.satumaaristeilyt.fi) also runs cruises on the Pielisjoki and nearby lakes (€15) from June to mid-August.

For ferry cruises to Koli and Lieksa, see p154.

Festivals & Events

The **Ilosaari Rock Festival** (☎ 225 550; www.ilosaari.rock.fi) is a highly charged annual event held over a weekend in mid-July. The **Gospel Festival** (www.suomengospel.fi) in late July is another important music event.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Finnhostel Joensuu (☎ 267 5076; finnhotel@islo.jns.fi; Kalevankatu 8; shared r per person €28.50–31, s/d from €41/57; ☎) This excellent HI-affiliated establishment is run by a sports institute. Accommodation is in rooms within a two- or three-room apartment, with excellent kitchen facilities and plenty of space. The rooms have linen and TV, and some have balconies. There are two separate buildings, and breakfast is included. There's also a sauna and gym facilities.

Linnunlahti Camping (☎ 126 272; www.linnunlahticamping.fi; Linnunlahdentie 1; tent sites €12, 4–6-person cabins €35–42) Just south of the centre, this place has a pleasant lakeside location. It's mobbed during the rock festival.

Partiotalon Retkeilymaja (☎ 123 381; www.youthhostel-joensuu.net; Vanamokatu 25; dm €12–15, r €50; ☎ reception 9–11am & 4–10pm Jun–Aug; ☎) This place provides basic accommodation in the slightly run-down old scout hall, but it's certainly the cheapest in town.

MIDRANGE

Summer Hotel Elli (☎ 225 927; www.summerhotelli.fi; Länsikatu 18; s/d €38/60; ☎ mid-May–mid-Aug; ☎) A student apartment building that becomes a summer hotel. The facilities are excellent, including sauna and laundry, and rooms share a kitchen and bathroom between two.

Hotel Atrium (☎ 225 888; www.hotelliatrium.fi; Siltakatu 4; s/d €74/101, weekends & summer €64/75; ☎) This is a pleasant central hotel overlooking the river, with a restaurant, sauna and comfortable rooms, some with balcony. Some of the doubles have their own sauna for only a couple of euros extra. There's a cheeky pet parrot in the lobby.

Sokos Hotel Kimmel (☎ 020-123 4663; www.sokoshotels.fi; Itäranta 1; s/d €114/138, r weekends & summer €88; ☎) The largest hotel in Joensuu is on the eastern side of the river, very close to the bus and train stations. The rooms are comfortable and stylish and some have good views. The sauna and pool are free, and there are restaurants and a nightclub. There's another Sokos hotel on Siltakatu, near the kauppatori.

Hotelli Aada (☎ 256 2200; www.hotelaada.fi; Kauppakatu 32; s/d €75/93, weekends & summer €68/76; ☎) This is a comfortable, central hotel, recently renovated and renamed, and with a popular nightclub. They also run a nearby hostel, Aaro (single/double €39/52). During the week, the price includes breakfast and a sauna.

Eating

At the busy kauppatori look for Karelian specialities such as the classic *Karjalan piirakka*, a rice-filled savoury pastry. There are all sorts of food stalls up here, along with cheap grills. Joensuu is short on quality restaurants, but there are a couple of standouts.

Antique Astoria (☎ 229 766; mains €11–26; ☎ dinner Mon–Fri, lunch & dinner Sat & Sun, closed Sun Sep–Apr) This is a stylish little restaurant with a riverfront terrace and a charming, rustic interior. It specializes in hearty Hungarian dishes, with paprika and sour cream in delicious abundance. Many of the signature dishes (goulash, for example) can only be ordered for two. There are several Hungarian wines (don't go for the cheapest one here), and a range of tempting aperitifs such as chilled slivovitz.

Teatteri (☎ 256 6900; Rantakatu 20; mains €12–29; ☎ 9am–midnight Mon–Fri, 11.30am–midnight Sat, also noon–8pm Sun Jun–Aug) Beautifully located in the town hall, with an elegant terrace to one side, this classy restaurant showcases the best of Karelian cuisine, with everything from *muikku* (small whitefish) to hefty ox steaks.

Rosso (Siltakatu 8; mains €7-15; ☎ 10am-10pm, later at weekends) While this chain is never going to hit any culinary heights, this is a branch worth considering for its excellent terrace in the centre of town.

Drinking

Joensuu's main action area is the pedestrian section of Kauppakatu, with several late-night bars and nightclubs. It's pretty boisterous at weekends, but there are a couple of more discerning places in town.

Wanha Jokela (☎ 122 891; Torikatu 26; ☎ 10am-2am, till 3am at weekends) The oldest and best-known pub in town, this is a classic, much favoured by artists and the alternative and bohemian sets. There's cheap beer and a friendly atmosphere, as well as rooms upstairs (single/double €30/60) if you have one too many.

Tuulaaki (Rantakatu; ☎ 11am-3am Jun-Aug) This summer café and bar is right where the passenger ferries dock. It's a great place, with a lively terrace that often features live rock. A night away from the Joensuu mainstream has to pass through here at some point.

Jetset Bar (Kauppakatu 35; ☎ from 4pm Mon-Fri, from 11am Sat & Sun) This bar is the latest and trendiest spot in Joensuu, on a corner at the end of the pedestrian section of Kauppakatu. It would be easy to be snide about the name, but it's a cheery spot where people like to be seen, although it gets impossibly crowded at weekends.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are several flights a day between Helsinki and Joensuu. The airport is 11km west of town; bus service one way is €5 and departs from the Sokos Hotel Kimmel 50 minutes before every departure. A taxi is €15.

BOAT

In summer the MS *Vinkeri II* operates twice weekly from Joensuu to Koli (one way/return €30/45, 6½ hours), from where you can connect with another ferry to Lieksa, across Lake Pielinen. The ferry departs at 9am on Saturday, returning from Koli at 12.10pm Sunday. You can also return the same evening from Koli to Joensuu on a bus. Book with **Saimaa Ferries** (☎ 481 244; www.saimaafferries.fi).

BUS

Joensuu is a transport hub for North Karelia so there are regular buses to all points, departing from the bus terminal east of the river. Services include Kuopio (€23.20, 2½ hours), Savonlinna (€22.90, three hours), Jyväskylä (€36.90, four hours), Helsinki (€58.50, eight hours) via Mikkeli, Ilomantsi (€11.50, one to two hours) and Nurmes (€20.50, 2½ hours). For Kuhmo, change at Nurmes or Sotkamo.

SHARED TAXI

The *kimppakyyti* system is a good way to head on from Joensuu to the Lake Pielinen area, with departures to Koli and to Lieksa. See p151 for details.

TRAIN

Direct trains run frequently to/from Helsinki (€52.70, 5¼ hours), Turku, Jyväskylä and Kajaani, as well as north to Lieksa and Nurmes. From Savonlinna you have to change at Parikkala.

AROUND JOENSUU

Outokumpu

☎ 013 / pop 7803

Outokumpu, about 50km west of Joensuu, was a wealthy copper mining town until the 1980s, when all three mining operations were permanently closed, turning this area into a shadow of its former industrial self. The abandoned **Vanha Kaiivos Mine** (☎ 554 795; www.vanhakaivos.fi; Kiisukatu 6; adult/child €9/6; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug), on a hill overlooking the town centre, is now an extensive mining museum and there's an adjacent tunnel with mining equipment. There's also an underground restaurant and a café, as well as a **summer hotel** (☎ 554 795; palvelut@vanhakaivos.fi; per person/f €20/50; ☎ mid-Jun-early Aug; ☎).

One of the best bird-nesting lakes in Finland, **Sysmäjärvi Bird Sanctuary**, lies south of Outokumpu. Sysmäjärvi was declared dead in the 1950s, due to polluted mining deposits that flowed freely into the lake. It has since been rehabilitated, and the lake is now surrounded by lush vegetation, and birds have returned here in large numbers. There are several observation towers. May and June are the best months to visit. It's a half-hour walk from the carpark to the lake itself.

ILOMANTSI

☎ 013 / pop 6538

Ilomantsi, 72km east of Joensuu, is the centre of a charming region and Finland's most Karelian, Orthodox and eastern municipality. It is one of three regions with a non-mainstream indigenous culture (the others being Åland and the Sámi culture of northern Lapland) and indigenous Karelians see themselves as distinct from Russians and Finns.

This is the ideal place to base yourself for hiking and other activities in the Karelian wilderness. It's a very friendly region and is a good place to witness local culture in the form of Praasniekka festivals. The village centre itself is modern and quite ugly, having been trampled by the Russians, but it's the surrounding region that demands exploration, either on foot or by bicycle.

Information

Karelia Expert (☎ 248 5309; www.kareliaexpert.fi; Kalevalantie 11; ☎ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug, also 10am-3pm Sat in Jul) Reservations and information. If it's shut, you can get brochures and maps by entering via the supermarket.

Library (Mantsintie; ☎ 1-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-3pm Fri) Free Internet access.

Sights

PARPPEINVAARA

One of the most famous of Ilomantsi's historical characters was Jaakko Parppe (1792-1885), a bard and a player of the *kantele*, a traditional Karelian stringed instrument. He is the namesake of Parppeinvaara hill (where he lived), which now features a re-created **Karelian village** (☎ 881 248; adult/child €3/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug). It is the oldest of the Karelian theme villages in Finland and one of the most interesting. To qualify for their job, guides wearing *feresi* (traditional Karelian work dress) must know how to play the *kantele*; a highlight is the regular performance of folk music. Runonlaulajan pirtti, the main building, has exhibitions on the *Kalevala* epic and Orthodox arts.

An **Orthodox tsasouna** stands behind the Matelin *museoaitta*, a tiny museum commemorating female rune singer Mateli Kuivalatar, renowned in the 19th century for her renditions of the *Kanteletar* epic.

PELTOHERMANNI WINE TOWER & WINERY

The local water tower was reborn in 1994 as a **viinitorni** (wine tower; admission €2; ☎ noon-8pm Jun-late Aug) when some enterprising locals started a café at the top and specialized in serving their own wine. Strawberry, blackcurrant,

CYCLING THE VIINIJÄRVI LOOP

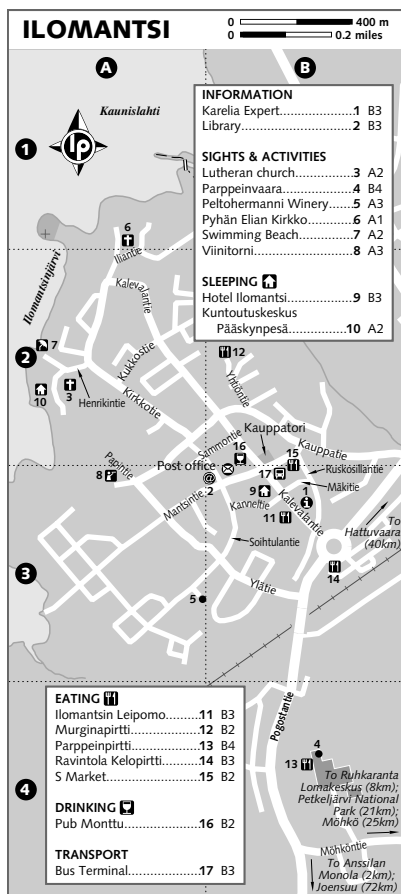
Roads around Viinijärvi are scenic, with beautiful churches and old houses. In August, you can find blueberries in the nearby forests. If you have a bicycle (you can hire one in Joensuu or Ilomantsi), you can bring it to Viinijärvi by train or bus from Joensuu, Varkaus or Kuopio, and ride the 60km loop between Viinijärvi, Sotkuma, Polvijärvi and Outokumpu in a day. Another option is to take a bus from Joensuu to Polvijärvi, bypassing Sotkuma.

The tiny village of **Viinijärvi**, on the southern shore of the lake, is quite famous domestically for its champion women's *pesäpallo* (baseball) team. The local field gets pretty packed on Sunday during matches. The beautiful **Orthodox church** is west of the village centre. Its 19th-century icons are copies of those in Kyiv Cathedral.

The narrow 14km road from Viinijärvi north to **Sotkuma** is scenic. The small *tsasouna* (chapel), built in 1914, also has interesting icons inside. The traditional Praasniekka Festival is held here on 20 July each year.

A further 14km, **Polvijärvi** is a larger town with an interesting background. When a canal was being constructed at the southern end of Lake Höytiäinen in 1859, the embankment collapsed and the water level sank 10m, revealing fertile land. Polvijärvi was soon incorporated as a municipality and its population soared. The **Orthodox church**, built in 1914, is not far from the village centre. Its icons are from St Petersburg and were probably painted in the early 20th century. The church has its Praasniekka Festival on 24 June.

It's another 22km along road 504 to Outokumpu. There are several buses a day from Joensuu and a few others from Kuopio and Juuka. Buses from Outokumpu run on school days only.



whitecurrant, crowberry and blueberry are used as raw materials to produce the half-dozen varieties of wine sold here by the glass. The tower has a panoramic viewing deck, which is a great place to sit on a summer afternoon or evening. If you want to buy the wine by the bottle, you have to visit the **Peltohermanni winery** (☎ 882 281; www.peltohermanni.fi; ☎ 9am-5pm) about 200m down the road from the wine tower.

CHURCHES

Ilomantsi features two fabulous churches. **Pyhän Elian Kirkko** (☎ 11am-5.30pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug) is the beautiful wooden Orthodox church, 1km west of the village centre, towards Ilomantsinjärvi. The *kalmisto* (graveyard) sign

near the church points to the old graveyard at the waterfront. It is a peaceful place, where old trees give shade to a few graves.

The **Lutheran church** (☎ noon-6pm late Jun-mid-Aug), from 1796, is almost as impressive. Following the Swedish conquest, a Lutheran congregation was established in 1653 and the new religion soon overshadowed the eastern one. Colourful paintings from 1832, an achievement of Samuel Elm-gren, are the highlight of this big wooden church.

Festivals & Events

As Ilomantsi has so many Orthodox believers, several Praasniekka festivals are held here. Originally, these were strictly religious events, but these days they also attract tourists. Sometimes there is dancing afterwards. Ilomantsi village celebrates **Petru Praasniekka** on 28 and 29 June and **Ilja Praasniekka** on 19 and 20 July every year.

Sleeping

Anssilan Monola (☎ 0400 881 181; anssila@ilomantsi.com; Anssilantie; s/d €28/56, 4-person cottages €112; ☎ ☎) This is a former dairy farm on a hill 3km south of the village centre and about 500m off the main road. The friendly family rents rooms in a range of converted farmhouse buildings. Breakfast and linen are included. You can also camp in the garden here for a negotiable (but cheap) price.

Hotel Ilomantsi (☎ 683 5300; www.hotelliilomantsi.com; Kalevalantie 12; s/d €58/78, small tw €66; ☎ ☎) In the centre of the village, the Ilomantsi is clean and comfortable. It's also a pub, restaurant, karaoke bar and local disco. This is where you should find Ilomantsi on a Saturday night.

Kuntoutuskeskus Pääskynpesä (☎ 682 1200; www.paaskynpesa.fi; Henrikintie 4; s/d €69/106; ☎ ☎ ☎) This is an anonymous-looking spa hotel, popular with older Finns and families. It's right on Lake Ilomantsi, and facilities include saunas (naturally) and various therapy treatments.

Ruhkaranta Lomakeskus (☎ 843 161; www.ruhkaranta.fi; Ruhkarannantie 21; tent sites €9 plus €3 per person, cottages €34-85; ☎ Jun-Aug) About 9km east of Ilomantsi, in a thick pine forest, is a camping ground with spectacular views of several lakes. There's a traditional smoke sauna here for groups and an electric sauna. The restaurant is open only on weekends.

Eating & Drinking

Parpeinapirtti (☎ 881 094; lunch €10; ☎ noon-3pm) For a real *pitopöytä* (Karelian buffet) come to this place in Parpeinvaara, where there's a daily lunch buffet. Try the *vatruska* (Karelian pies of pastry and potato), and the slightly sweet *vuassa* (milk-malt drink).

Murginapirtti (☎ 881 250; Yhtiöntie; lunch buffet €6-8; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) This is an old-style Finnish farmhouse restaurant up a dirt road near the centre of town. There's a delicious lunch buffet for around €8 served on weekdays.

Ilomantsin Leipomo (☎ 881 273; Kalevalantie 10; ☎ 6am-4pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) Opposite the tourist office, this café is great for grabbing an early coffee and a loaf of fresh picnic bread before heading out wilderness-bound. It also does lunches and is the social hub of town.

Ravintola Kelopirtti (lunch buffet €8; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-mid-Aug) On the main-road roundabout is a log cabin with a café and an interesting Karelian craft shop.

Pub Monttu (Kalevalantie; ☎ 11am-1am Mon-Thu, to 3am Fri & Sat, noon-1am Sun) A little further along from Hotel Ilomantsi, where the nightclub action is, this is a local bar that gets busy on weekends and also serves food.

Getting There & Away

Buses run frequently between Joensuu and Ilomantsi from Monday to Friday (€11.50, one to two hours). There are fewer buses on weekends. During school term there are Monday to Friday buses from here to surrounding villages, but in summer you'll have to rely on taxi buses, which you might have to charter.

AROUND ILOMANTSI

From Ilomantsi, road 5004 heads east towards the Russian border, through a patchwork of lakes and into the start of some fine wilderness trekking country.

Petkeljärvi National Park

The turn-off to one of Finland's smallest (6.3 sq km) national parks is about 14km east of the main highway. The main reason to visit Petkeljärvi is to walk the nature trails that cover birch and pine forest and *eskers* (gravel ridges). The marked, 35km 'Taitajan Taival' trek starts here and runs northeast to the village of Mekrijärvi, about

13km north of Ilomantsi. More than one-third of the park is water, with two sizeable lakes dominating. There are also several remnants of bunkers and fortifications from the Winter War.

Petkeljärvi Nature Centre (☎ 013-844 199; s/ family tent sites €7/12, lodge s/d/q €36/46/76; ☎ Jun-Aug), in the heart of the park, is an excellent retreat. As well as tent and caravan sites, there's a modern lodge building with kitchen, a café, sauna and boats and canoes for use on the lake. Park information, including maps, is also available here.

Möhkö

☎ 013

The tiny village of Möhkö, only a few kilometres from the Russian border, is at the southern end of the Wolf's Trail (see boxed text, p158).

This remote outpost was once the unlikely scene of heavy industry. An ironworks was established here in 1849 and at its peak it employed more than 2000 people and was one of the largest ore-processing works in Finland. The site included a sawmill and tar works, and a canal was dug in 1872 to transport ore and timber out of the wilderness. The small **ironworks museum** (☎ 844 111; €3.50; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Aug) explains the story.

As well as a fine lakeside camping ground location, **Möhkön Karhumajat** (☎ 844 180; beat rice.ekberg@kolumbus.fi; Jokivaarantie 4; tent sites from €9, 2-person cabins €35, cottages from €68; ☎ May-Sep) has pleasant cottages, a small beach, a couple of saunas, friendly owners and Finland's 'easternmost beer terrace'. Nearby is **Möhkön Manta** (☎ 040-861 6373; ☎ May-Aug), a café in an old, grounded canal boat. Traditional Karelian pies, soups and sweets are dished up here.

HATTUVAARA

☎ 013

Hattuvaara, about 40km northeast of Ilomantsi, is a convenient base for exploring easternmost Finland. The village is the main landmark along the little-travelled *runon ja rajan tie* ('Poem and Border Route'). Experiencing a summer night in this quaint little village is therapeutic: birds sing and cow bells tinkle.

The main attraction here is the striking wooden **Taistelijan Talo** (Heroes House; ☎ 830 111; ☎ 11am-8pm Jun-mid-Aug daily, 11am-6pm Wed-Sun

KARELIAN TREKS

Some of the best trekking routes in North Karelia have been linked up to create **Karjalan Kierros** (Karelian Circuit; www.karjalankierros.com), a loop of marked trails with a total length of over 1000km between Ilomantsi and Lake Pielinen. The best known are the Bear's Trail (not to be confused with the more famous Bear's Ring in Oulanka National Park) and the Wolf's Trail, which link up in Patvinsuo National Park (see p160). These can be walked in either direction, but are described here in a south-to-north direction. You'll need to arrange transport to trailheads, including Patvinsuo National Park, in advance, although there is a bus service to Möhkö village.

Although there are wilderness huts and lean-to shelters along the way, it's advisable to carry a tent. Hire of hiking equipment can be arranged at the Ilomantsi or Lieksa offices of Karelia Expert. Much of the Ilomantsi region is boggy marshland, so waterproof footwear is essential. For more information on these and other routes contact the Lieksa or Ilomantsi offices of Karelia Expert, or **Metsähallitus** (☎ 0205-645 500; Urheilukatu 3A, Lieksa), the information office for the Forest & Park Service. See also the Activities chapter (p45) for general information about trekking.

Susitaival (Wolf's Trail)

The 90km Wolf's Trail is a marked three-day trek running north from Möhkö village to the marshlands of Patvinsuo National Park. The terrain consists mostly of dry heath, pine forest and swampy marshland which can be wet underfoot. This trail runs close to the Russian border in places and it was here that many of the battles in the Winter War and Continuation War were fought. Early in the trek, at Lake Sysmä, you'll see a memorial and anti-tank gun. There are wilderness cabins at Sarkkajärvi, Pitkajärvi and Jorho, and farm or camping accommodation in the village of Naarva. In the Ilomantsi wilderness area there are about 100 bears and 50 wolves – chances of running into one are slim but not impossible.

Karhunpolku (Bear's Trail)

The Bear's Trail is a 133km marked hiking trail of medium difficulty leading north from Patvinsuo National Park near Lieksa, through a string of national parks and nature reserves, including Ruunaa Recreation Area, along the Russian border. Because of this accessibility, the trail can be walked in relatively short stages. The trail ends at Teljo, about 50km south of Kuhmo. You'll need to arrange transport from either end.

From Patvinsuo, the trail crosses heathland and boardwalks for 15km to the first wilderness hut at Kangas-Piilo, then another 14km to a hut and lean-to at Valkealampi. From here there's a short trail detouring to the WWII battleline of Kitsi. The trail then heads northwest to the Ruunaa Recreation Area, where there are several choices of accommodation, and opportunities for fishing canoeing and rafting.

Beyond Ruunaa it's around 42km to Änäkäinen, another WWII battlefield. The trail follows the Jongunjoki on its final leg to the Ostroskoski wilderness hut, about 6km from Teljo.

Tapios Trail (Tapion Taival)

The easternmost trekking route in Finland, Tapion Taival (Fighter's Trail) gives you the choice of a 13km wilderness track along the Koitajoki, or an 8km northern extension across the Koivusuo Nature Reserve, or yet another extension north of Koivusuo to Kivivaara. The Koitajoki section is certainly the highlight, a stunning walk through epic wilderness. The path is marked by orange paint on tree trunks.

You will need a private car and good local map to reach the trekking area, or you can negotiate at Taistelijan Talo in Hattuvaara about transport and price.

May & mid-Aug–Sep), designed by Joensuu architect Erkki Helasvuo to symbolise the meeting of East and West. There is a fascinating **WWII museum** (€3.50) downstairs, with a short film in several languages, multimedia, photo

exhibitions, weapons and displays relating chiefly to the Winter War and Continuation War fought along the nearby border. The house is also the place to contact for accommodation in the village.

Hattuvaara has the oldest **Orthodox tsasouna** in Finland. Built in the 1720s, it has several old Russian icons inside. Its small tower was used as a watchtower during WWII. On 29 June, a wonderfully colourful **Praasniekka festival** takes place here, with a *ristinsaatto*, or Orthodox procession commemorating a saint, beginning at the *tsasouna*.

Sleeping & Eating

Arhipanpirtti (☎ 830 111, 0400 173 607; Hatunraitti 5B; s/d €22/40) This is the main place to stay in Hattuvaara and is run out of Taistelijan Talo. There are rooms available in several buildings, plus a four-person cottage at €70 a night, and the price includes linen and sauna. There are also some cottages and self-contained flats nearby for the same price. Some readers have complained about the lack of cleanliness when booking during off-season, but when we visited it was spotless.

Taistelijan Talo (buffet €10) This place serves a fabulous all-day Finnish buffet in a beautiful high wooden dining room. As well as hearty meat and fish dishes, salads, bread, cheese and Karelian pies, there's a range of desserts.

AROUND HATTUVAARA

Easternmost Point

With a vehicle you can journey east to the Finnish-Russian border crossing at **Virmajärvi**, the easternmost point of Finland and therefore of the European Union (at least until Turkey is accepted as an EU member). You need a permit from the **Border Guards Station** (☎ 8am–4pm Mon–Fri) next to Taistelijan Talo in Hattuvaara, issued free on the spot provided you have your passport details with you. It's then a 15km drive down a fairly rough gravel road, signposted by blue 'EU' markers. There's not much to see and nothing to do at the end – it's sort of a spiritual (for Karelians) and geographical pilgrimage to say you've been.

The actual border is marked by two posts on a small island in the lake. About 2km back is the **log house**, which contains nothing of interest but you can stay here overnight with permission from Taistelijan Talo, and along the way you pass several WWII *sotapaikka* (battle locations) and memorials.

LAKE PIELINEN REGION

The northernmost part of Finnish Karelia is centred around Pielinen, Finland's sixth largest lake, and impressive even in a region dominated by water features. Several attractions can be found on its shores; the Koli National Park for summer views and winter skiing, the active centres of Lieksa and Nurmes, and, nearby, the Ruunaa whitewater rafting centre. It's a place to be active; the towns offer little apart from bases for getting into the great outdoors. A main road and numerous minor roads encircle the lake, ferries cross it in several directions, and, in winter, an ice road provides a thrilling short cut across it.

LIEKSA

☎ 013 / pop 14,080

The small centre of Lieksa, on Lake Pielinen about 100km north of Joensuu, is an active place. It's known as a whitewater-rafting destination, and also has several canoeing routes of greater and lesser difficulty in the area. Operators in Lieksa can kit you out for all these. It has good transport links, including lake ferries across to Koli, accommodation and all services.

Information

Library (☎ 689 4125; Urheilukatu 4) Has free Internet access.

Karelia Expert (☎ 248 5312; kareliaexpert.lieksa@kareliaexpert.fi; Pielisentie 7; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat Jun–Aug, plus 11am–3pm Sun Jul, 8am–4pm Mon–Fri Sep–May) Loads of information on whitewater rafting, accommodation, fishing, smoke saunas and national parks, and sells trekking maps for local routes. Staff can also book tours and accommodation.

Post office (☎ 020 4511; Pielisentie 34) At the northern end of the main street.

Sights

Pielisen Museo (☎ 689 4151; Pappilantie 2; adult/child €4.50/1.50; ☎ 10am–6pm mid-May–mid-Sep) is a huge complex of almost 100 Karelian buildings and open-air exhibits, divided into several sections according to the century or the trade featured (eg, farming, milling, fire-fighting, forestry). It's certainly a comprehensive display in a relatively small area – the collection comprises some 100,000 objects and 15,000 photographs. There's a

separate **indoor museum** (admission in winter €3, ☞ summer as above, plus 10am–3pm Tue–Fri winter) featuring photographs and static displays on Karelian folk history. It's open in winter when the open-air display is closed.

Activities

The most popular activity in the Lieksa area is **whitewater rafting** at the Ruunaa Recreation Area. See opposite for details; operators will pick you up from Lieksa, and trips can be booked at the tourist office at Karelia Expert.

Pony-trekking on hardy Icelandic horses can be arranged through the tourist office. It normally costs from about €12 per hour. **Ratsastalli Ahaa** (☎ 040-525 7742; www.ahaatalli.com) has riding lessons and cross-country treks for more experienced riders.

In winter, husky-dog, cross-country skiing, and snowmobile **expeditions** along the Russian border are popular – the tourist office has a list of tour operators. These trips can largely be tailored to your own needs, with up to four hours travel per day, and lasting up to a week. **Carelian Dogsledding and Outdoor** (☎ 854 106; bear.hill@pp.inet.fi) are one of the best operators, based near Hattuvaara.

Fishing is good in Lake Pielinen, Pudasjoki River and the Ruunaa and Änäkäinen recreational fishing areas. They each require separate permits, available from local sports shops or the Lieksa tourist office.

Festivals & Events

Lieksa Brass Week (☎/fax 689 4144; www.lieksabrass.com; Koski-Jaakonkatu 4), held during the last week in July, attracts quite a number of international musicians. There's a programme of concerts each day, with ticket prices ranging from €5 to €30.

Sleeping & Eating

There are a few places to stay in Lieksa, but it's also worth considering the surrounding options in Vuonislampi (p163), Koli (p164) and Ruunaa (p162).

Most places to eat and drink are on Lieksa's main street, Pielisentie.

Hotelli Puustelli (☎ 511 5500; www.finlandiahotels.fi; Hovileirinkatu 3; s/d €80/95, Sat, Sun & summer €65/80; ☎ ☒ ☕ ☕) This is a pleasant riverside hotel in the town centre, and rates include breakfast and sauna. There are good facilities for the disabled.

Aikuisopiston Asuntola (☎ 244 3674; Oravatie 1; dm €21; ☎ ☒ ☕) It may be a mouthful to pronounce, but this is basically apartment-style student accommodation with kitchen facilities. The price includes linen and a sauna; there's also a laundry available. Call ahead to book as there's no-one on site.

Timitraniemi Camping (☎ 521 780; www.timitra.com; tent sites €12, cabins €32–84; ☞ mid-May–Sep) This camping ground at the river mouth has log cabins, cottages of varying sizes, plenty of tent sites and facilities like lake-side saunas and bikes and boats for hire. There's also a café.

Café Sanna (☎ 524 921; Pielisentie 2-6; meals €6–8) This place offers reasonably priced, home-style lunches.

Tinatahti (☎ 521 914; Pielisentie 28) A lively pub that also serves meals.

Getting There & Away

Buses from Joensuu are relatively frequent (€16.20, 1¼ hours), and shared taxis (see p151) even more so. There are daily trains to Lieksa from Helsinki (€60.50, seven hours), via Joensuu (€11.20, 1¼ hours). The more scenic mode of transport is by ferry from Joensuu, via Koli; see p154 for more information.

The car ferry **MF Pielinen** (☎ 481 244; www.saimaaferry.fi) from Lieksa to Koli operates twice daily from early June to mid-August, departing from Lieksa at 9.30am and 3.30pm, and returning from Koli at 11.30am and 5.30pm. The trip takes 1¼ hours and costs per adult/child €15/8, €8 for a car, €5 for a motorcycle and €2 for a bicycle. In winter, when the ice is thick enough, there is an ice road crossing the lake from Vuonislampi to Koli, a substantial short cut.

PATVINSUO NATIONAL PARK

Patvinsuo is a large marshland area between Lieksa and Ilomantsi. Swans, cranes and other birds nest here and bears and other mammals can be seen if you're lucky. With the excellent *pitkospuu* (boardwalk) network, you can easily hike around, observing the life of a Finnish marshland.

If you have little time, go to the southern shore of Suomunjärvi. It's 3.5km from the main road to **Teretin lintutorni**, a bird-watching tower. This is a good walk through forests and wetlands, and you will see some birds.

There are three nature trails and several good hiking routes along the boardwalk path. You can walk around Lake Suomu or follow *pitkospuu* trails through the wetlands.

Suomu Park Centre (☎ 548 506) has a warden in attendance from early May to mid-September for advice, fishing permits and free maps. There is a dormitory with nine beds, including the use of a small kitchen. You can use the telephone and the sauna for a fee. There are seven camping sites and one *laavu* (an open shelter with sloping roof) within the park boundaries; all have toilets and firewood and are free of charge. You can also hire canoes and rowing boats here (per hour/day €5/20).

Getting There & Away

There is no public transport. From Lieksa, drive 18km east towards Hatunkylä, then turn right to Kontiovaara, along a narrow, very scenic road. When you reach a sealed road (Uimaharjuntie), turn left, drive a few hundred metres and turn right. If you drive along the eastern *runon ja rajan tie* route, turn west as you see the small 'Uimaharju' sign, just south of the Lieksa-Ilomantsi border. If you are trekking, the Karhunkolku (Bear's Trail) and Susitaival (Wolf's Trail) both lead here, as the park is where these trails meet.

RUUNAA RECREATION AREA

☎ 013

Ruunaa (www.ruunaa.fi), 30km northeast of Lieksa, is adventurous Finns' most sought-after destination east of Lake Pielinen, mainly for the huge variety of outdoor activities that can easily be arranged here. It boasts 38km of waterways with six white-water rapids, plus unpolluted wilderness, excellent trekking paths and good fishing. Designated camp sites (with fire rings) are also provided and maintained.

There's an observation tower situated at Huuhkajavaara. Set atop a hill, it offers a magnificent panorama over Neitijärvi. The **Ruunaa Nature Centre** (☎ 020-564 5757; ☞ 10am–5pm May, 9am–6pm Jun & Jul, 9am–5pm Aug) is near the bridge over the Naarajoki, where most boat trips start. There are exhibitions, maps, a library and a free slide show in English. This is a good stop to find out about rafting operators and hiking trails.

Activities

Ruunaa is busy all year round, as it hosts skiing and other snow sports in winter. All activities can be booked from the tourist office in Lieksa.

BOATING, CANOEING & RAFTING

There are six rapids (class II–III), and you can shoot them in wooden or rubber boats. There are several launches daily in summer from Naarajoki bridge (near the Nature Centre). A two- to four-hour trip costs €35 to €45 per adult (including lunch; most operators also offer trips without lunch for €22 to €25) and the Nature Centre or **Karelia Expert** (☎ 248 5312) in Lieksa can line you up with an operator. Transport can also be arranged from Lieksa if you book a tour. **Erästely** (☎ 0400 271 581; www.erastely.com; per person €55) organizes canoeing expeditions from the Nature Centre, and has several other self-guided routes available. You will need to book in advance. Rafting operators include the following:

Koski-Jaako (☎ 0500 366 033; www.koski-jaako.fi; €36) Noon departure; wooden boat. Rubber boat also available.

Lieksan Koskikiertos (☎ 521 645, 040-766 7148; www.lieksankoskikiertos.fi; expeditions €38) Departs 11am, noon and 3.30pm; wooden boat or electric-powered boat.

Lieksan Matkakaverit (☎ 040-708 5726; www.lieksanmatkakaverit.fi; expeditions €37–45) Departures at 11am, 11.30am, noon and 12.30pm, wooden and rubber boats.

Ruunaan Matkailu (☎ 533 130, 0400 352 207; www.ruunaanmatkailu.fi; expeditions €37–45) Departs 10am, 11am, noon and 2.30pm; wooden and rubber boats.

FISHING

Ruunaa is one of the most popular fishing spots in North Karelia. The trout and salmon fishing is excellent in the numerous rapids, and good fishing spots are accessible along a long wooden walkway. One-day fishing permits cost €13 in summer and are available in Lieksa and at the Ruunaa Nature Centre. There is also a fishing-permit machine near the Neitijoki rapids. Fishing is allowed from June to early September and from mid-November to late December, and only lures and flies may be used. There are several places to hire fishing equipment, including **Lieksan Retkiantta** (☎ 0400 172 226; Pielisentie 33) in Lieksa.

TREKKING

There are two trekking routes within the Ruunaa area. The **Karhunpolku** (Bear's Trail), a longer trekking route, passes through Ruunaa. You can find it just 50m north of the Naarajoki bridge. The path is marked with round orange symbols on trees. See p158 for more details.

Around the river system, and over two beautiful suspension bridges, runs **Ruunaan koskikiertros**, a marked 29km loop along good *pitkospuu* paths. If you have more time, there are another 20km of side trips you can take. If you start at the Naarajoki bridge, you will have to walk 5km along the Bear's Trail to reach the Ruunaan koskikiertros trail. Another 3.3km brings you to the **Neitikoski**, where you'll find commercial services. Neitikoski also has road access and a parking area.

Sleeping & Eating

There are at least 10 *laavu* shelters and another 10 designated camp sites in the area. Camping and sleeping in a *laavu* is free of charge. Get the free *Ruunaa Government Hiking Area* map and guide for accommodation information. You will need a lightweight mattress, a sleeping bag and some mosquito repellent. Lighting a fire is allowed, except during fire alerts (watch for posted signs).

Ruunaan Matkailu (☎/fax 533 130; www.ruunaanmatkailu.fi; Siikakoskentie 47; s/d from €18.50/26, cabins €36-85; (P) ☒) Five kilometres east of Naarajoki bridge. This place, has tidy accommodation, as well as a café, lakeside sauna, smoke sauna, rental boats and various snowmobile, rafting and boating tours.

Neitikoski Hiking Centre (☎ 533 170; neitikoski@ruunaa.fi; tent sites €12-18, cabins/cottages €35/95) Near the Neitikoski rapids is this centre with a large café, camping area, kitchen, sauna and luxurious four- to six-bed cottages as well as simpler cabins. There are mountain bikes, canoes and rowing boats for hire. The boardwalk to the rapids starts near here.

Lomapirtti Sillankorva (☎/fax 533 121; Ruunantie 124; r €32-80; (P) ☒) This place offers superb accommodation right at the Naarajoki bridge. You can rent the entire farmhouse if you have a large group (sleeps at least 12; a night/week €121/467), or either floor of two renovated apartments (a night/

week from €62/239), plus there's an out-building sleeping four (€32). Everything is extremely clean and beautifully designed. There's a smoke sauna (two hours €74) and a summer restaurant.

Getting There & Away

Infrared minibuses make the trip from Lieksa – inquire at Karelia Expert for timetables. The best way to reach the area is on an organized rafting tour from Lieksa, by hitching or by private car.

NURMIJÄRVI AREA

☎ 013

Known for its canoeing routes, the Nurmijärvi area is wild and remote. Nurmijärvi village has enough services to get you to the Jongunjoki or Lieksajoki canoeing routes, or to the Änäkäinen area for fishing and trekking.

Activities

ÄNÄKÄINEN FISHING AREA

Änäkäinen is a government fishing area, with the Bear's Trail running through it. The Forest and Park Service controls fish quantities in three lakes in the area. Fishing is allowed year-round, except in the first three weeks of May. The Aunen Kahvila and Jongunjoen Lomapirtti (opposite) have boats and fishing permits (a day/week in summer €10/35). Permits are also available in Lieksa.

Änäkäinen experienced fierce fighting during the early weeks of the Winter War in December 1939. Finnish soldiers held their positions here, leaving a large number of Russians dead. In order to stop enemy tanks, the Finns built large rock barriers.

CANOEING THE PANKASAARI ROUTE

This is a good circular route from Nurmijärvi village, where you can rent a canoe from **Erästely** (☎ 0400 271 581; www.erastely.com, in Finnish). The paddle route starts across the road. Get yourself a free route guide, which is available at tourist offices in the area. The route follows the Lieksajoki downstream to Pankajärvi. From there, you paddle south-east under a road bridge to Pudasjärvi. Avoiding the Pankakoski power station in the south, paddle upstream to the upper part of the Lieksajoki. Heading northwest from this point, you first reach Naarajoki at Ruunaa, then round Pankasaari, before

returning to Nurmijärvi. There's almost no gradient on this route and it's suitable for beginners. Only the Käpykoskis might present a problem; pull the canoes through with a rope if you're not sure.

CANOEING THE JONGUNJOKI

This beautiful wilderness river has nearly 40 small rapids, none of them very tricky. Karelia Expert in Lieksa has a good guide to the route. You can start at Jonkeri up north (in the municipality of Kuhmo), or further south at Teljo bridge, or at Aittokoski, or even at Lake Kaksinkantaja. Allow four days if you start at Jonkeri and one day from the last point. **Erästely** (☎ 0400 271 581; www.erastely.com, in Finnish) can transport you to Jonkeri, Teljo or Kaksinkantaja, and also rent canoes.

Sleeping & Eating

Erästelyn Melontakeskus (☎ 0400 271 581; www.erastely.com, in Finnish; Kivivaarantie 1, Nurmijärvi village; dm €15; (P) ☒ ☒) The main canoe rental company, Erästely Company, also offers beds at their headquarters, in decent dormitory accommodation with good facilities. Linen is €5 extra.

Jongunjoen Lomapirtti (☎/fax 546 531; Kivivaarantie 21, Jongunjoki; beds per person €24; (P)) This place is 2km from the main road towards Änäkäinen and the Russian border. There are two- to six-person rooms, cabins, tent sites, smoke saunas and bicycles, canoes and boats for rent.

Aunen Kahvila (☎ 546 503; Nurmijärventie 154) A popular roadside café in Nurmijärvi, 15km from the Russian border. There are meals, and you can buy fishing permits and pick up keys for the Änäkäinen-rented fishing boats.

VUONISLAHTI

☎ 013

Vuonislahti is a rural lakeside village, with little more than a train station and a great hostel – which is enough to justify a stay if you have the time.

There is a **war memorial** on a small hill across the road as you come from the train station. This is where Russians were stopped by Finnish soldiers in 1808. The nearby *tanssilava* (dance stage) house has dancing in summer on Saturday evenings.

The brilliant lakeside HI hostel, **Kestikievari Herranniemi** (☎ 542 110; www.herranniemi

.com; Vuonislahdentie 185; dm €13, cabins €28-68, s/d B&B €50/68; (P) ☒) is about 2km south of the train station. The quaint 200-year-old farm building has a restaurant, a range of comfortable accommodation, including cheap dormitories in an old *aitta* (storage) building, two lakeside saunas and rowing boats. The owners even offer a range of treatment therapies such as herbal baths and *turvesauna* (a cross between a sauna and a mud bath). To get to Herranniemi, walk straight from the Vuonislahti train station to the main road, turn left and proceed 500m.

In Vuonislahti itself, **Hotelli Pielinen** (☎ 544 144; www.hotellipielinen.com; Läpikäytäväntie 54; s/d €33/50, hotel d €64; (P) ☒ ☒) is a modern hotel with two grades of rooms, both reasonably good value. There's also a swimming pool, restaurant, smoke sauna and a range of activities.

There are two daily trains to Vuonislahti from Joensuu (€9.40, one hour) and Lieksa (€3.40, 20 minutes). The small Vuonislahti train station keeps short hours, but you can always buy tickets on the train.

Paateri

The village of Paateri is best known for the **church and gallery** (☎ 543 223; admission €4; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-May–mid-Sep) at the studio-home of the late Eva Ryynänen (1915–2001), a respected wood sculptor, on Vuonisjärvi. Her work became widely recognised in Finland in the 1970s, although she had been working since the 1930s. This isolated property, surrounded by pine trees, is a memorable retreat; the Paateri wilderness church was built in 1991 with walls and floor made of Russian pine, and huge doors carved from Canadian cedar. The altar was created using a stump that once belonged to the largest fir tree in Finland. The place also has a café, and is open during the February holidays.

One way to get to Paateri is to row a boat from the Herranniemi hostel, but it's a 1½-hour trip one way – not for the faint-hearted or lazy. By motor boat, also available from the hostel, it takes about 20 minutes and costs €19 return, including admission and coffee. If you are driving or cycling, follow the road signs from the main road or from the secondary road north of Vuonislahti. You can also rent a bicycle at the Herranniemi hostel.

KOLI NATIONAL PARK

☎ 013

The views from the top of 347m Koli Hill offer some of Finland's finest Lakeland scenery – it was these views that inspired many of the famous artists from Finland's National Romantic era, including Pekka Halonen and Eero Järnefelt.

Rising above Lake Pielinen and accessible by ferry from Lieksa, Koli has been dubbed the first-ever tourist attraction in Finland and it continues to draw holiday-makers year-round – as a winter sports resort and for hiking, boating and its unique scenery in summer. Although the lake views are panoramic and the nature trails in the national park are good, don't expect the earth – it's a beautiful hill covered in pine and birch.

Koli Hill was declared a national park in 1991 after hot debate between environmentalists and landowners. The owners agreed to sell their land and environmentalists dropped their demand that the Hotel Koli, up on the hill, be demolished. Most of the area remains relatively pristine and there are some 90km of marked walking tracks.

The hill has road access and from the lower car park there's a short funicular railcar up to the hotel (free). Also here is **Luontokeskus Ukko** (☎ 010-211 3200; www.metla.koli.net; adult/child €5/2; ☎ 9am-7pm late Jun-early Aug, 10am-5pm rest of year), a modern visitor centre with exhibitions on history, nature, and geology of the park, and information on hiking. In Koli itself, **Karelia Expert** (☎ 248 2315; kareliaexpert.koli@kareliaexpert.com; Kolintie 94) is the tourist office and has a comprehensive range of information and maps.

Ukko-Koli is the highest point and 200m further is **Akka-Koli**, another peak. On the western slope of Akka-Koli is a 'Temple of Silence', an open space for contemplation with a stone altar and wooden cross mounted in the rock. The solid rock peak nearby is called **Paha-Koli**. Further south is **Mäkrävaara**, a hill that offers the best views.

In winter, Koli attracts skiers with two slalom centres (Loma-Koli and Ukko-Koli, served by a total of nine lifts) and more than 60km of cross-country trails, including 24km of lit track. If you can't make it up to Lapland, this is one of Finland's most accessible winter ski resorts. Contact the **Koli Ski Centre** (☎ 672 275, 673 141; www.koliski.fi) for lift tickets, equipment hire and more information.

Sleeping & Eating

Koli Retkeilymaja (☎ 673 131; Niinilahdentie 47; dm €12, d €24; (P) ☒) On a gravel road 5km from the bus stop, this family-run hostel, has a kitchen and smoke sauna; you can also sleep in a traditional Sámi hut. It's a great getaway and one of the most relaxing hostels in Finland – if you call ahead you may be able to arrange a pick-up.

Sokos Hotel Koli (☎ 020-1234 662; www.soko-sho.tels.fi; Ylä-Kolintie 39; r from €72; (P) ☒) At the top of Koli Hill is this huge modern concrete-and-glass place dominating the hill top. Although it does nothing to enhance the scenery, the views are pretty special, and it's a very comfortable place to return after a day's skiing or hiking.

Loma-Koli Camping (☎ 673 212; tent sites €12, cabins €30-40; ☎ late Jun-mid-Aug) This camping ground, near the Hiisi Hill slopes, has excellent facilities, including cottages, and rents mountain bikes. There are also some rental tents available (€30).

Kolin Lomaranta (☎ 040-729 5030; Merilänrannantie 15; tent sites €10, cabins €22-40; ☎ Jun-Aug) This place has camping areas and simple 'out-buildings' for two to five people.

There are several basic huts in the national park. They each cost €9 per night and can be booked through the heritage centre or Karelia Expert.

Art-Café Kolin Ryyränen (☎ 672 160; Kolintie 1C) Opposite the supermarket in Koli village, this pleasant café serves as an exhibition space and even has an artist-in-residence living upstairs.

Getting There & Away

There are five to eight daily buses to Koli from Joensuu (€10.20, one hour and 20 minutes), Juuka (€6.20, 20 minutes), and Nurmes (€13.70, 1½ hours), including at least one a day to the top of Koli Hill. The best way to arrive in summer is by lake ferry from Joensuu (p154) or Lieksa (p160). Buses to the top of Koli Hill meet all arriving ferries.

JUUKA

☎ 013 / pop 6177

Juuka, just off the main highway about halfway between Nurmes and Koli, is known for its soapstone mining and handicrafts. It has a small **Puu-Juuka** (old town) of wooden houses, some more than 100 years old. They were preserved from demolition largely

through the efforts of local individuals and have now been restored as shops, galleries and homes. There's also the **Mill Museum** and the **Village Museum**.

The **Suomen Kivikeskus** (Finnish Stone Centre; ☎ 681 1600; www.kivikeskus.com; Kuhnustantie 10; adult/child €5/2; ☎ 9am-7pm daily Jun-mid-Aug, 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun mid-Aug-May), 13 kilometres south of Juuka, is a large modern centre with displays on the geology of Finland, and the uses of stone in building and jewellery. It's an interesting, if slightly impersonal, place.

Lomakylä Piitteri (☎ 472 000; www.piitteri.fi; Piitterintie 144; tent sites €12.50, cabins €32-42; ☎ early Jun-mid-Aug), on the shore of Lake Pielinen, is a good camp site which has a marina and swimming beach. There is a typical Finnish *huvilava* (dancing stage) here, where minor Finnish celebrities sometimes sing on Saturday nights.

PAALASMAA ISLAND

☎ 013

The largest island in Lake Pielinen is connected to the mainland by a free ferry that winds through smaller islands. The island is noted for its scenery and peaceful atmosphere, and is the highest island in Finland – its tallest point is 132m above water level. There is a wooden **observation tower** on the island, 3km from the camping ground via a marked trail. If you follow the signs that say 'tornille', you will see some **old houses** that tell the long history of Paalasmaa.

The ferry terminal is 15km east of the main road and the turn-off is about 2km north of Juuka. **Paalasmaan Lomamajat** (☎ 040-592 4765; tent sites €10, cabins €25-40; ☎ Jun-mid-Aug) is a camping ground at the eastern end of the island with a nice lakeside spot.

NURMES

☎ 013 / pop 9193

Nurmes, at the northwestern tip of Lake Pielinen, has a picturesque situation, and, like Lieksa, makes an excellent base for winter activities such as dog-sledding, snowmobiling, ice-fishing and cross-country skiing tours, and canoeing and farmhouse tours in summer. It's a more pleasant town in its own right though, with a terraced Puu-Nurmes (Old Town) area of historical wooden buildings, rows of beautiful birch trees lining Kirkkokatu, and a delightful re-creation of a Karelian village. Nurmes was founded in

1876 by Tsar Alexander II of Russia and the Old Town still has the character approved of by the 19th-century Russian ruler.

Orientation & Information

The train and bus stations are in the town centre. The main street is Kirkkokatu, at the northwestern end of which is Puu-Nurmes, while the Bomba (a Karelian theme village) and best places to stay are a few kilometres southeast of the centre.

Karelia Expert (☎ 248 5316; www.nurmes.fi; kareliaexpert.nurmes@kareliaexpert.fi; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat Jun-Aug, plus 11am-3pm Sun Jul, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) Local information and bookings. In the ABC service station on the western edge of town. The reception at the Hyvärilä Holiday Centre 4km southeast of town also has much information.

Post office (☎ 0200 71000; Torikatu 5) In the Siwa supermarket.

Public library (☎ 689 5125; Kötsintie 2) In the Nurmes-talo building at the northeastern end of town, has free Internet access, a reading room and a collection of the *Kalevala* in various languages.

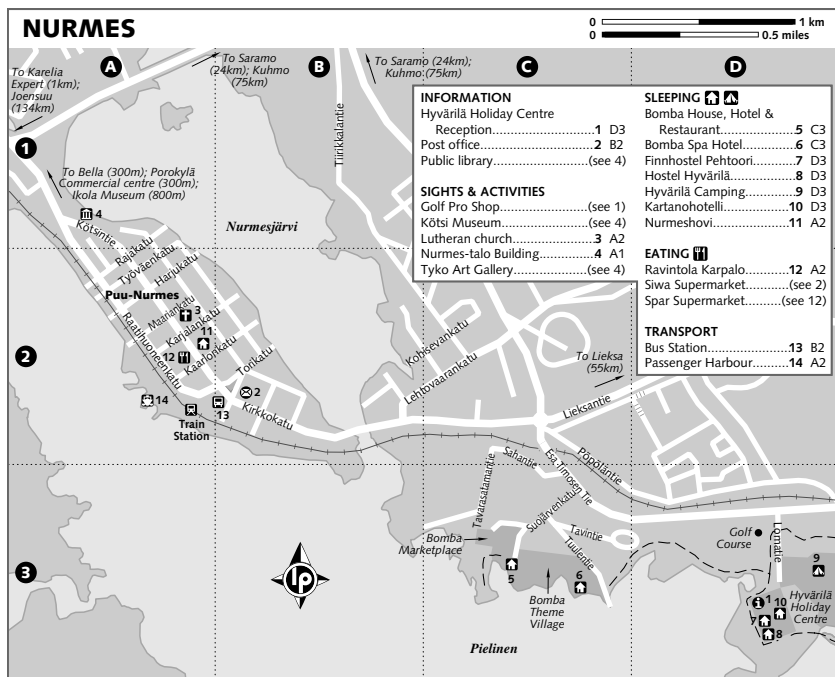
Sights & Activities

Just north of the kauppatori, the **Lutheran church** (☎ 10am-6pm summer) from 1896 is the largest in North Karelia, with 2300 seats. Inside are some miniature models of earlier Lutheran churches.

Continue northwest from the church to reach **Puu-Nurmes**, the Old Town area on the *esker* above the train station. It's a pleasant neighbourhood for a stroll among the traditional wooden houses, which are protected by law and surrounded by birch trees. The plan dates back to 1897.

Kötsi Museum (☎ 689 5149; Kötsintie 2; admission €2; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri), the local museum of history, is in the large Nurmes-talo building. Artefacts on display include some from the Stone Age. With the same ticket you can visit the **Ikola Museum**, an agricultural museum in Tuupala 1km northeast of the centre. It features an open-air exhibit of Karelian wooden buildings. Also in the Nurmes-talo building is the free **Tyko Art Gallery** (☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) with changing monthly exhibitions.

Nurmes' biggest tourist draw is **Bomba Village** (☎ 678 200; Suojärvenkatu), 2.5km southeast of the town centre. The imposing main building, Bomba House, – with its high roof and ornate wooden trim – is a replica of a typical



Karelian family house that was built in 1855 by Jegor Bombin, a farmer from Suojärvi (now in Russian Karelia). It now houses the Bomban Talo restaurant. The surroundings include a charming re-creation of a Karelian village, with an Orthodox *isousuna* and a summer theatre. The village also has shops, craft studios and a summer market, and you can buy locally made wines, homemade ice cream, handicrafts and more.

At the Hyvärilä Holiday Centre is a nine-hole **golf course** (☎ 687 2565; green fees €17, clubs hire per dub €1; ☹ 9am-8pm May-Sep), which, while not especially challenging, has a lovely lake-side location.

Tours

Nurmes offers a well-organized schedule of tours with daily departures – dog-sledding, snowmobiling, ice-fishing and cross-country skiing from January to the end of March, and canoeing, rapids-shooting (at Ruunaa) and farmhouse tours from June to the end of August.

Contact the tourist service for an updated schedule, pricing information and

other details. Bookings at least 24 hours in advance are often required for the tours.

Saimaa Ferries (☎ 481 244; www.saimaafferries.fi) has cruises (€14) on Lake Pielinen in summer from the passenger harbour near the train station.

Sleeping

Hyvärilä Holiday Centre (☎ 687 2500; www.hyvarila.com; Lomatie 12) The main choice for accommodation in Nurmes is this sprawling lake-side complex 4km southeast of town, with a camping ground, two HI-affiliated hostels, a decent hotel, restaurant and a golf course. There's also a small swimming beach, tennis courts, canoe and boat rentals and plenty of other activities. You can walk from here to Bomba Spa (1km) along marked walking routes. Not surprisingly, this is a very popular vacation destination for Finnish families and school groups, and if you're tired of travelling, it's not a bad place to pull up stumps and relax for a while. **Hyvärilä Camping** (tent sites €12-13, cabins €34-50; ☹ mid-May–mid-Sep) is a spacious area of lawn on the lake. **Hostel Hyvärilä** (dm €15, f €38; ☎ ☹) is a purpose-built hostel

with dormitory accommodation, communal kitchen and laundry and access to all resort facilities. Breakfast and linen are €5 extra each. **Finnhostel Pehtoori** (dm/s/d €25/41/60; ☎ ☹) is a better standard of hostel accommodation in a building with bunk-bedded rooms and good shared bathrooms. Breakfast and linen is included. Finally, **Kartanohotelli** (s/d €59/77, ste from €101; ☎ ☹) is the resort's hotel, featuring comfortable rooms with TV and breakfast included.

Bomba Spa Hotel (☎ 687 200; www.bomba.fi; Suojärvenkatu 1; s/d €88/110; ☎ ☹ ☹ ☹) About 1km back towards town near the Karelian theme village, this is a stylish set-up where you can pamper yourself with the spa and sauna facilities, then sleep in modern hotel rooms. It's right by the lake and run by welcoming folk. Nonguests can use the spa facilities for €11. About 200m away from Bomba Spa is a group of attractive apartments in Karelian cabins decorated by local artisans. Some have their own sauna, and sleep either two to four or two to six (€135 to €185). Various special offers add in massage treatments.

Nurmeshoivi (☎ 480 750; www.nurmeshoivi.com; Kirkkokatu 21; s/d €58/74, Sat, Sun & summer €41/64; ☎ ☹) In Nurmes town itself, this hotel is a bit of a travelling salesperson's joint, but it's central with a decent restaurant and functional rooms. Book in advance if you're going to be arriving on a Sunday.

Eating & Drinking

Bomban Talo (☎ 678 200; Bomba Village, Suojärvenkatu; ☎ 678 200; lunch buffet €14.50, mains €12-25; ☹ 10.30am-9pm or later, from 8am in summer) This place has a fantastic Karelian smorgasbord abounding in Karelian pies, *muikku* (fried whitefish) and varieties of *karjalanpaisti* (stew), served throughout the day in summer. The atmosphere is authentic too, it's set in an impressively large wooden building with solid timber tables. There are good à la carte options too.

Bella (☎ 461 332; Porokylänkatu 14; mains from €7) In the commercial centre of Porokylä is a good Italian restaurant, popular with families, and with reasonably priced pizza and pasta. It becomes a fairly lively pub later on.

Ravintola Karpalo (☎ 480 651; Kirkkokatu 18; ☹ lunch & dinner) This is an unpretentious place behind the supermarket. It serves burgers, pizzas, kebabs and steaks and has a €7 lunch buffet. It doubles as a local night-spot with karaoke and dancing nightly.

Getting There & Away

Buses run regularly to Joensuu (€18.60, two to three hours), Kajaani (€18.60, two hours), and Lieksa (€8.70, 50 minutes). For Kuumo, change at Sotkamo.

Regional trains from Joensuu (€16, two hours) via Lieksa, stop in Nurmes.

Saimaa Ferries (☎ 481 244; www.saimaafferries.fi; Kirkkokatu 16) operate on Lake Pielinen in summer. As well as cruises, the MS *Vinkeri II* travels to and from Joensuu (via Koli) weekly, departing from Nurmes at 8.30am on Sunday (to Joensuu €50, 1½ hours, to Koli €20, 3¼ hours).

AROUND NURMES

Saramo

☎ 013

This small, remote village 24km north of Nurmes, is where the *Korpikylien tie* (Road of Wilderness Villages) begins. At the far end of the village, the **Kalastajatalo** (Fishers House; ☎ 434 066; Saramontie 77; ☹ daily summer, Sat & Sun autumn-spring) serves as an information centre and restaurant and has accommodation options. There is a shop and a post office in Saramo.

Saramo can be used as a base for the marked 75km **Saramo Jotos Trek**. Between Saramo and Peurajärvi, there are two campfire sites in addition to Kourukoski, a spot named after rapids there. Between Peurajärvi and road 75, at Jalasjärvi, there's a *laavu*. Between road 75 and Mujejärvi, there are three *laavu* at Markuskoski and cottages for rent at Paalikkavaara. Ask for a trail map in Nurmes or Saramo.

It is also possible to paddle the Saramojoki, starting from Peurajärvi or Mujejärvi and finishing in Saramo itself. Contact Kalastajatalo in Saramo for canoe rentals (per day €50) and transport (one-way around €15).

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