

# Finland

Squeezed between Sweden and Russia, Finland is one of the most mysterious and misunderstood corners of Scandinavia. But more and more travellers are discovering the serenely beautiful land of lakes and forests that lies beyond the Baltic harbour capital of Helsinki.

Although Finland is riding a wave of hi-tech revolution (think Nokia), for travellers, nature reigns supreme here and for most Finns, happiness is still a ramshackle summer cottage by a lakeshore and a properly stoked sauna. With a population of just over five million, much of Finland can seem very empty and remote, and nowhere is this more evident than Lapland, one of Europe's last great wilderness areas. Reindeer herds wander across fells, and above the Arctic Circle the sun never truly sets in midsummer. Here you'll find the kitsch but cool Santa Claus Village and official post office, and in the bluish haze of winter darkness you can witness nature's greatest lightshow, the aurora borealis (northern lights).

In the south, dynamic cities like Turku and Tampere complement the urban sophistication of Helsinki, and it would take a jaded traveller indeed not to fall for medieval Porvoo or the romantic Lakeland town of Savonlinna.

Finland really comes into its own in the surprisingly warm summer months when Finns emerge from hibernation to savour the long hours of daylight. Some of northern Europe's best music festivals and offbeat events spring to life virtually every day in summer – check out the World Wife Carrying Championships or the World Air Guitar Championships!

Like the land itself, Finns have a reputation for being tough, quiet and mysterious, but take the time to explore their country, steam up in their saunas, and scratch under the surface – you'll find some of the warmest people you'll ever meet, and communicating in English is rarely a problem.

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 338,000 sq km
- **Capital** Helsinki
- **Currency** euro; US\$1 = €0.81; £1 = €1.45; A\$1 = €0.58; C\$1 = €0.64; NZ\$1 = €0.54; ¥100 = €0.73
- **Famous for** sauna, reindeer, Formula One drivers, Lordi
- **Official Languages** Finnish, Swedish
- **Phrases** *kiitos* (thank you), *hei* (hello), *anteeksi* (excuse me), *kippis* (cheers)
- **Population** 5.22 million
- **Telephone Codes** country code ☎ 358; international access codes ☎ 00, 990, 994, 999
- **Visas** not required for most visitors for stays of up to 90 days (see p213)



## HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore Finland's dynamic harbour capital, **Helsinki** (p148); picnic with locals on Suomenlinna island, dine on an island restaurant, and dance all night at some of Scandinavia's best nightclubs.
- Steam it up in the world's biggest smoke sauna, then jump into the lake at **Kuopio** (p187).
- Experience high culture at the opera festival, held in a medieval castle in the gorgeous Lakeland town of **Savonlinna** (p184).
- Cross the Arctic Circle, visit Santa in his official grotto and take a reindeer-sleigh or husky ride at **Rovaniemi** (p201) in Lapland.
- Plough through pack ice on a genuine Arctic icebreaker and sleep in the Snow Castle at **Kemi** (p200).
- Best trip: take a **lake ferry** between towns – Savonlinna to Kuopio (p187) or Tampere to Hämeenlinna (p178).

## ITINERARIES

- **One week** Helsinki demands at least a couple of days and is a good base for a day trip to Tallinn (Estonia) or Porvoo. In summer, head to the eastern Lakeland and explore Lappeenranta, Savonlinna and Kuopio (catch a lake ferry between the latter towns). In winter, take an overnight train or budget flight to Lapland (Rovaniemi) and Oulu for a few days, visiting Santa and mushing with the huskies. Helsinki–Savonlinna–Kuopio–Rovaniemi–Helsinki route is a good option.
- **Two weeks** Spend a few days in Helsinki and Porvoo, visit the harbour town of Turku and lively Tampere. Next stop is Savonlinna and Kuopio in the beautiful eastern Lakeland. Head up to Rovaniemi, and perhaps as far north as Inari. You could also fit in a summer festival, some hiking in North Karelia (Ilomantsi or Lake Pielinen) or a quick cycling trip to Åland.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

The high season for most of Finland is summer (June–August), when the days are long, the climate is surprisingly sunny and warm and festivals abound. This is also when Finns are on holiday, abandoning the towns for their *kesämökki* (summer cot-

tages). May and September are good times to visit the south of the country.

In Lapland, summer means the midnight sun and perpetual daylight but mosquitoes can be annoying if you're hiking. September is a beautiful time for the *ruska* (autumn) colours. October and February to early April are the best times to visit Lapland to view the aurora borealis and enjoy winter activities like skiing, ice fishing and dogsledding.

## PEOPLE

Finland is one of Europe's most sparsely populated countries, with 17 people per sq km – a fifth of the population lives in the Greater Helsinki area. There are around 300,000 Swedish-speaking Finns in the west on the Åland islands; and a smaller number of Roma people in the south.

The indigenous Sami population of around 6500 in the far north consists of three distinct groups, each speaking its own dialect. Samis have traditionally been nomads, herding reindeer in the large area of Lapland. Their traditional dwelling, the *kota*, resembles the wigwam of native North Americans, and is easily set up as a temporary shelter. Old traditions are vanishing, though: most Sami now live in permanent villages and use vehicles, snowmobiles and mobile phones to herd their reindeer, rather than migrating with them.

A capacity for silence and reflection are the traits that best sum up the Finnish character (but get a Finn near a stack of duty-free liquor and see if this remains the case!). The image of a log cabin with a sauna by a lake tells much about Finnish culture: independence, endurance (*sisu* or 'guts') and a love of open space and nature.

## RELIGION

The majority of Finns – around 86% – are Evangelical Lutherans, 1.1% Orthodox and the remainder unaffiliated. Minority denominations, including Roman Catholic, make up only a few per cent. Finland has some beautiful Orthodox and Lutheran churches, some dating back to the 17th century, but surveys show Finns to have the lowest church attendance record in Europe, at under 4%.

## HISTORY

Before arriving on the north of the Baltic coast, the Finns' ancestors appear to have dominated half of northern Russia. They established themselves in the forests, driving the nomadic Sami people to the north, where they remain in an area of Lapland known as Sápmi.

By the end of the Viking era, Swedish traders had extended their interests throughout the Baltic region. In 1155 the Swedes made Finland a province, and Swedish culture was swiftly imposed, beginning with the establishment of the first university in the capital Turku. But the heavy-handedness of Sweden's Protestant monarch, Gustav II Adolf, soon split the country along religious lines, and most Orthodox believers fled to Russia.

In 1809, after a bloody war, Sweden ceded Finland to Russia under Tsar Alexander, allowing it greater autonomy as a Grand Duchy. The capital moved to Helsinki in 1812. Finnish nationalism surged, which suited the tsars until the 1880s, when there was a firm policy to dismantle the Finnish state and incorporate it into Russia.

The communist revolution of October 1917 brought the downfall of the Russian tsar and enabled the Finnish senate to declare independence on 6 December 1917. But divisions between socialists (the Reds) and conservatives (the nationalist Whites) in the new government led to a bloody civil

war in which 30,000 Finns died. The conservatives, led by war hero and later president CGE Mannerheim, were victorious, and were gradually replaced by moderate social democrats.

During the Depression of the 1930s Finland gained fame internationally as a brave new nation, as the only country to pay its debts to the USA and as a sporting nation (long-distance runner Paavo Nurmi won seven gold medals in three Olympics).

Anticommunist violence broke out during the 1930s and relations with the Soviet Union remained uneasy. Finland stood firm in the 1939 Winter War, but was forced to cede part of eastern Lakeland (Karelia). Finland resumed hostilities with the Soviets in 1941, winning back large swathes of Karelia in the Continuation War which cost Finland almost 100,000 lives.

## ARTS

### Architecture & Design

Finland's modern architecture – sleek, functionalist and industrial – has been admired throughout the world ever since Alvar Aalto started making a name for himself during the 1930s. His works can be seen all over Finland today, from the angular Finlandia Hall in Helsinki to the public buildings (library, town hall) and street plan of Rovaniemi. Jyväskylä and Seinäjoki are places of pilgrimage for Alvar Aalto fans.

Earlier architecture in Finland can be seen in medieval churches made from stone but more commonly wood – Kerimäki's oversized church is worth seeing, as are the cathedrals at Turku and Tampere. Low-rise Helsinki boasts a patchwork of architectural styles, including the neoclassical buildings of Senate Square, the rich ornamentation of Art Nouveau (or Jugend), the modern functionalism of Aalto's buildings and the postmodern Kiasma museum.

Finland, like Scandinavia as a whole, is also famous for its design. Aalto again laid a foundation with innovative interior design, furniture and the famous Savoy vase. Finns have created and refined their own design style through the craft tradition and using natural materials such as wood, glass and ceramics. Glassware and porcelain such as Iittala and Arabia are world famous.

### HOW MUCH?

- **Sauna** free-€10
- **Museum admission** €2-8
- **Dogsledding (2hr)** €80
- **Lake ferry cruise** €10-15
- **Salmon soup** €8

### LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **1L of unleaded petrol** €1.30
- **1L bottle of water** €2
- **Pint of beer in bar** €5
- **Souvenir T-shirt** €15
- **Snack from a grilli kiosk** €2.50-3



## Cinema

The Finnish film industry is small, with about a dozen films produced annually, but some of the greatest achievements are in documentary work. The best-known Finnish filmmaker is Aki Kaurismäki, director of the 1989 road film *Leningrad Cowboys Go America*. In 2002 he won the Grand Prix at Cannes for his film *The Man Without a Past*, the dark tale of a man who becomes homeless after being mugged and bashed in Helsinki and losing his memory. Kaurismäki latest film is *Lights in the Dusk* released in 2006.

The most famous Finn in Hollywood is Renny Harlin, once married to Geena Davis and director of action movies such as *Die Hard II*, *Cliffhanger*, and scaries *Nightmare on Elm St 4* and *The Exorcist: The Beginning*. An early Harlin film, *Born American*, was banned in Finland for presenting a strong Russians-as-bad-guys view.

Finland hosts some quality film festivals, notably the Midnight Sun Film Festival in Sodankylä and the Tampere International Short Film Festival.

For something completely different, check out the *Dudesons Movie* (2006), featuring the painful madness of a group of young Finnish TV nuts in the style of *Jakass*.

For more information check out the Finnish Film Foundation website at [www.ses.fi](http://www.ses.fi).

## Literature

The *Kalevala*, a collection of folk stories, songs and poems compiled in the 1830s by Elias Lönnrot, is Finland's national epic focusing on Karelia. Translations and compilations can be found in Finnish bookshops.

Aleksis Kivi, perhaps the greatest Finnish writer, was not regarded as a Romantic during his lifetime. Quite the contrary; his so-called crudities met with fierce opposition but it didn't take long before he gained the immense popularity which he has retained to this day. His book *Seven Brothers* is regarded as a foundation of modern Finnish literature. Famous 20th-century writers include Väino Linna (*The Unknown Soldier*) and FE Sillanpää, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1939.

The late Tove Jansson is internationally famous for her Moominland children's

stories, which have found a particular affection in Japan. Her whimsical world of Moomintrolls has been re-created as a theme park in Naantali and a museum in Tampere.

## Music

Finns love music. You only have to look at the wealth of music festivals – opera, jazz, folk, tango, rock and pop – for proof, and while traditional forms of music still have a strong following, Finnish artists such as Darude and Bomfunk MC have made inroads in the electronic, trance and hip-hop genres, and who can forget the monstrous rock band Lordi?

Revered composer Jean Sibelius, one of the most famous late-Romantics, was a Finn at the forefront of the nationalist movement. His stirring tone-poem *Finlandia* has been raised to the status of a national hymn. The Karelian region has its own folk music traditions, typified by the haunting *kantele* (a stringed instrument), while the Sami passed down their traditions and beliefs not through the written word but through the song-like chant called the *yoik*.

Finnish rock and pop bands can be seen performing at venues in Helsinki and other big cities. Names to look out for include the Flaming Sideburns, the resurgent Hanoi Rocks, the Rasmus and Irina. Finland's biggest recent contribution is in the heavy metal scene with bands like Eurovision winners Lordi, Nightwish and HIM.

## Painting

Finland's 'Golden Age' of art was the 19th-century National Romantic era, when artists such as Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Albert Edelfelt, Pekka Halonen and the von Wright brothers were inspired by the country's forests and pastoral landscape. Gallen-Kallela is probably Finland's most famous artist. He is known for his *Kalevala*-inspired works – don't miss his frescoes on display in the Kansallismuseo (National Museum) in Helsinki.

The best of Finnish art can be seen at Ateneum (National Gallery) in Helsinki, but there are modern art galleries and museums (*taidemuseo*) in just about every Finnish city.

## Theatre & Dance

Finns' passion for dance is typified by the tango, which, although borrowed from Latin America, has been refined into a uniquely Finnish style. Older Finns are tango mad and every town has a dance hall or dance restaurant. In summer, outdoor stages are set up for dancing. The annual Tango Festival in Seinäjoki attracts thousands of dancers and performers. A similar form of Finnish dancing is the waltz-like *humppa*.

As with most of Scandinavia, the Finnish theatre season is winter (October–March), when theatre, opera, ballet and concert performances are staged. The exceptions are the summer festivals, such as Kuopio's Dance Festival (p189) and Savonlinna's Ballet Festival (p185).

## ENVIRONMENT

### The Land

Finland is Europe's seventh-biggest country, with one third of its area lying beyond the Arctic Circle. With 187,888 lakes (and 98,050 islands), fed by a network of rivers and 5100 rapids, Finland's reputation as a land of lakes is undisputed. Compared to Sweden and Norway, it is a flat country with a scattering of fells (forested hills) in the northern Lakeland and Lapland area, some of which are cleared and used for downhill skiing.

Forests cover two-thirds of Finland; the main types of forest are pine, spruce and birch. Much of this forest is managed, and timber-harvesting and the associated pulp-milling is an important industry.

### Wildlife

Elk, brown bears and wolves are native to Finland's forests, although sightings are rare. In Lapland, the Sami keep commercial herds of some 230,000 reindeer. Hundreds of species of migratory birds arrive in the Arctic each spring, making Finland a bird-watcher's paradise.

### National Parks

Finland boasts over 120,000 sq km of publicly owned lands and waters in 35 national parks – some of the last great wilderness areas in Europe. Some of the best include Oulanka National Park, Urho Kekkonen National Park, Linnansaari National Park, Lemmen-

joki National Park and Koli National Park. For more information, contact **Metsähallitus** (☎ 09-270 5221; [www.metsa.fi](http://www.metsa.fi)) in Helsinki.

## Environmental Issues

While Finland appears quite pristine and much of its forest is protected, logging and forestry is a major part of the economy. Wood and paper products account for about one third of Finnish exports, but the pulp mills cause air and water pollution (some Finnish towns are completely blighted by these smoke-spewing factories), and extensive logging leads to erosion and a loss of old-growth forest. As a result, much of Finland's forest contains only one or two species of commercially valuable trees such as pine and spruce managed for harvesting.

Finland currently has four nuclear reactors, providing some 27% of its power, and the building of a fifth reactor was given the go ahead by parliament in 2002. This controversial decision was based largely on economic grounds and with strict safety and waste management policies, but has been heavily criticised by environmentalists.

## FOOD & DRINK

Typically Finnish food is similar to the fare you get elsewhere in Scandinavia and has Swedish and Russian influences – lots of fish such as Baltic herring, salmon and whitefish, along with heavy food such as potatoes, thick soups, stews and dark rye bread. Finns tend to make lunch the main meal of the day. Breakfast can be anything from coffee and a wheat bun to a buffet of cold cuts, porridge, eggs and pickled fish.

Strong beers, wines and spirits are sold by the state network, beautifully named Alko. There are stores in every town and they're generally open from 10am to 6pm Monday to Thursday, till 8pm on Friday and until 2pm on Saturday. The legal age is 18 for beer and wine, and 20 for spirits. Beer and cider with less than 5% alcohol can be bought easily at supermarkets, service stations and R-kiosks.

## Staples & Specialities

Simple hamburgers, hot dogs and kebabs are a cheap, common snack, served from grilli kiosks. Fish is a mainstay of the Finnish diet. Fresh salmon, herring and arctic char can be found at markets. *Muikki* and

*vendace*, tiny lake fish, are another Finnish treat. In Lappish restaurants, reindeer, elk and snowgrouse feature on the menu.

Regional specialities from Karelia include *vety*, a sandwich made with ham, eggs and pickles, and the Karelian pastie, made with meat or potato folded in a thin, open crust. In Tampere, try *mustamakkara*, a thick sausage made from cow's blood. In Savo, especially Kuopio, a highlight is *kalakukko*, fish baked in a rye loaf. Åland is known for its fluffy semolina pancakes. Seasonal berries are a delight in Finland – look out for cloudberries and lingonberries from Lapland, and market stalls selling blueberries, strawberries and raspberries.

Finns drink plenty of beer (*olut*) and among the best local brews are Lapinkulta, Karhu and Koff. Ciders (*siderii*) are also popular. Uniquely Finnish drinks to sample while here include *salmiakikokoskenkorva*, a home-made spirit that combines dissolved liquorice/peppermint sweets with the iconic Koskenkorva vodka (a potent combination and an acquired taste!); *sahti*, a sweet, high-alcohol beer and cloudberry or cranberry liqueurs.

### Where to Eat & Drink

Just about every town has a kauppahalli (market hall), the place to head for all sorts of Finnish specialities, breads, cheeses, fresh fish and cheap sandwiches and snacks. The kauppatori (market square) will also often have food stalls and market produce.

Meals in restaurants (*ravintola*) can be expensive, particularly dinner, but Finns tend to eat their main meal in the middle of the day, so most restaurants and some cafés put on a generous lunch (*lounas*) buffet for €7 to €10. These include all-you-can-eat salad, bread, coffee and dessert, plus big helpings of hearty fare – sausage and potatoes or fish and pasta are common. Most hotels include a free breakfast buffet.

Finns are big lovers of chain restaurants such as Rosso, Amarillo (steaks and Tex-Mex), Koti Pizza and Hesperger (Finland's answer to McDonald's), which can be found in most towns. At Golden Rax Pizza Buffet you can get all-you-can-eat pizza, pasta, chicken wings, salad, drinks

and even dessert for €8 – great for filling up cheaply!

Café culture is growing in Finland – in small towns it's country-style cafés (*kahvila* or *baari*) but in cities cafés are trendy meeting places where lattes, quiche and indulgent cakes are all the rage. Pubs and bars also double as restaurants.

### Vegetarians & Vegans

In terms of specifically vegetarian restaurants, there's not a lot around in Finland, Helsinki and Turku have a couple of places, but it's easy to self-cater at markets, or eat only the salad and vegetables at lunch buffets (which is usually cheaper). University cafés and ethnic restaurants (such as Chinese) usually have at least one vegetarian dish on the menu.

## HELSINKI

☎ 09 / pop 560,000

A little bit Russian, a little bit Swedish, but undeniably Finnish, Helsinki is a beautiful harbour city looking confidently across the Baltic Sea towards Europe.

Although the capital and nerve centre of Finland, Helsinki doesn't pretend to be a Stockholm or a St Petersburg, but it nevertheless lives up to the tag of 'cool'. It's small and intimate compared to other Scandinavian capitals; a low-rise Nordic city of understated Art Nouveau and neo-classical architecture, modern shopping centres, broad boulevards and city parks. Summer beer terraces, boutique shopping and chic nightclubs lend Helsinki a confident, progressive and sophisticated air, but without any pretension. 'Must see' sights are few but Helsinki's appeal in summer is as much in the dynamic atmosphere and upbeat nature of its people as in any particular sight. Strolling around the harbour area, picnicking on Suomenlinna island, cruising around the harbour or joining the throngs of people sunning themselves in the many cafés and island beaches is every bit as good as ticking off the museums. In winter, the 'White City of the North' lives up to its name with a blanket of snow covering the city, and the frozen harbour and lakes provide a focus for skating, skiing and ice-fishing.

### HISTORY

Helsinki (Helsingfors in Swedish) was settled in 1550 by the Swedish king Gustav Vasa, who hoped to draw trade away from Tallinn across the Gulf of Finland. In the 18th century the Swedes built a mammoth fortress on the nearby island of Suomenlinna, but it wasn't enough to keep the Russians out. After falling to the tsar in 1808, Helsinki became the seat of the Russian Grand Duchy – although in the process much of the town was wrecked – and in 1812 the capital was moved here from Turku.

### ORIENTATION

Helsinki occupies a peninsula, and is linked by bridge and boat to nearby islands. The compact city centre surrounds the main harbour, Eteläsatama, and the kauppatori, which lies between the huge international ferry terminals. The main street axes are the twin shopping avenues of Pohjoisesplanadi and Eteläesplanadi, and Mannerheimintie. Directly north of the centre are the suburbs of Hakaniemi and Kallio.

### Maps

You can pick up decent city maps and the *See Helsinki on Foot* walking guide free from the city tourist office. For road atlases, city directories and hiking maps, visit the map shop **Karttakeskus Alekski** (☎ 0201-340 580; Vuorikatu 14; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri) above Kaisaniemi metro.

### INFORMATION

#### Bookshops

**Akateeminen Kirjakauppa** (Academic Bookshop; ☎ 12141; Pohjoisesplanadi 39; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat) Finland's biggest bookshop features three floors, an Aalto-designed café and a massive range of books in numerous languages. Big travel section, including maps.

#### Discount Cards

The Helsinki Card is worthwhile if you plan to do a lot of sightseeing in the capital – at least the top museums, Suomenlinna Island and a sightseeing tour. The pass gives free urban transport (including island ferries), plus free entry to more than 50 attractions in and around Helsinki. A card valid for 24/48/72 hours costs €29/42/53 (children €11/14/17). Buy the card at the city tourist office or at hotels, R-kiosks and transport terminals.

### Emergencies

Dial ☎ 112 for all emergencies including ambulance, fire and police; ☎ 10022 for police; and ☎ 10023 for 24-hour medical advice.

### Internet Access

Internet access at Helsinki's public libraries is free. Several cafés and bars also have free internet access for customers. If you have your own computer, Helsinki has lots of free wi-fi hotspots.

**Helsinki University Library** (☎ 1912 3196; Unioninkatu 36; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat) Email is discouraged but the 2nd floor of this superb library is a serene place to surf the Net.

**Lasipalatsi Meeting Point** (☎ 3108 5900; Mannerheimintie 22-24; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Fri) Above Café Lasipalatsi is a bank of free terminals and free wi-fi access.

**Library 10** (☎ 3108 5000; Elielinkatu 2; free; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun, shorter hr summer) Library on the 1st floor of the main post office; ½ hour internet access is free.

**mbar** (☎ 6124 5420; Mannerheimintie 22-24; per 20 min/hr €2/5; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon-Tue, 9am-midnight Wed-Thu, 9am-2am Fri & Sat, 9am-3am Sun) Funky music bar and internet café behind Lasipalatsi where you can email till late; free wi-fi.

### Left Luggage

Luggage can be left at the main train station, bus station and ferry terminals. Small/large lockers cost €2/3 for 24 hours, and the train station and Viking Line terminal have left-luggage counters (€2 per piece per day).

### Medical Services

**Töölö Hospital** (☎ 4711; Töölönkatu 40) Private 24-hour medical clinic.

### Money

There are currency exchange counters at the airport and the Katajanokka ferry terminal. ATMs ('Otto') are plentiful in the city. **Forex** (☎ 8am-9pm) At Pohjoisesplanadi 27, Mannerheimintie 10 and at the train station, Forex offers good rates and is the best place to change cash or travellers cheques (flat fee €2).

### Post

**Main post office** (☎ 0200-71000; Mannerheiminkatu 1, 00100 Helsinki; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun)

**Poste restante office** (☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) At the rear of the main post office.

HELSINKI

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- Länsterminali (West Ferry Terminal).....110 C5
- Local Ferries & Cruise Boats.....111 F4
- Main Bus Station.....112 D4
- Makasiini Ferry Terminal.....113 F5
- Olympia Ferry Terminal.....114 F5
- Regional Buses.....(see 112)
- Sijla Line.....115 E4
- Tallink.....116 E4
- Viking Line.....117 E4

## Tourist Information

**Helsinki City Tourist Office** (☎ 169 3757; www.visithelsinki.fi; Pohjoisesplanadi 19; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, 9am–6pm Sat & Sun May–Sep, 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat & Sun Oct–Apr)

**Tikankontti** (☎ 270 5221; www.metsa.fi; Eteläesplanadi 20; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat) The Helsinki office of Metsähallitus, the Finnish Forest and Park Service, has information and maps for national parks and hiking areas, cabin rentals and fishing licences.

## Travel Agencies

**Helsinki Tour Expert** (☎ 2288 1500; www.helsinkiexpert.fi; Pohjoisesplanadi 19) Organises city tours and specialises in travel around Finland and to Tallinn and St Petersburg. There's a desk at the city tourist office and the train station.

**Kilroy Travels** (☎ 0203-545769; www.kilroytravels.fi; Kaivokatu 10C; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 11am–3pm Sat) Student travel agency.

**Russian Tours Lähialuematkat** (☎ 668 9570; www.russiantours.fi; Vuorimiehenkatu 3; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri) Travel agency specialising in Russian tours & organising Russian visas. Close to the Russian embassy.

## SIGHTS

### Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art

Like a giant Nike swoosh, the curvaceous and quirky metallic building designed by American architect Steven Holl stands testament to modern Helsinki. **Kiasma** (☎ 1733 6501; www.kiasma.fi; Mannerheiminaukio 2; adult/student/child €5.50/4/free; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue, 10am–8.30pm Wed–Sun) exhibits an eclectic collection of Finnish and international modern art from the 1960s to the 1990s, and features changing exhibitions of visual arts, multimedia and a theatre for contemporary performing arts.

Kiasma is a local meeting point in summer – its sleek, glass-sided café and terrace are hugely popular, locals sunbathe on the grassy fringes and people gather around the Mannerheim statue outside.

### Kansallismuseo

The impressive **National Museum of Finland** (☎ 40501; www.nba.fi; Mannerheimintie 34; adult/student/child €6/4/free; ☎ 11am–8pm Tue–Wed, 11am–6pm Thu–Sun), built in National Romantic style in 1916, looks a bit like a Gothic church with its heavy stonework and tall square tower. This is Finland's premier historical museum and is divided into rooms covering different periods of Finnish history, including prehistory and archaeological finds, church

## HELSINKI IN TWO DAYS

Breakfast at Café Esplanad or Strindberg, poke around the *kauppatori* (market square) and stroll up to Senate Square and over to Uspensky Cathedral on Katajanokka island. After lunch visit the Kiasma museum, Kansallismuseo or Ateneum. Have a drink on the beer terrace at Kappeli or the high-rise Atejee Bar.

On day two, grab a bike and head out to the Sibeliuksen monument, Hietaniemi beach and Tempelli-auko Church. Throw a picnic together at Vanha Kauppahalli (Old Market Hall) and catch a boat out to Suomenlinna island in the afternoon. End the day with a sauna at the Kotiharjun Sauna in Kallio.

relics, ethnography and changing cultural exhibitions. Look for the imperial throne of Tsar Alexander I dating from 1809, and the display on the reindeer-herding Sami people of northern Lapland.

From the entrance hall, or better still from the 1st-floor balcony, crane your head up to see the superb frescoes on the ceiling arches, depicting scenes from the epic *Kalevala*, painted by Akseli Gallen-Kallela.

### Ateneum

With the largest collection of artworks in Finland, the **National Gallery** (☎ 1733 6401; www.ateneum.fi; Kaivokatu 2; adult/student/child €6.50/4/free; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue & Fri, 9am–8pm Wed & Thu, 11am–5pm Sat & Sun) reads like a *Who's Who* of Finnish art. The grand 1887 granite building, opposite the railway station square, houses an absorbing collection of Finnish paintings and sculptures from the 18th century to the 1950s, including works by Albert Edelfelt, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, the von Wright brothers and Pekka Halonen, along with 19th and 20th century international art. Downstairs is a café and reading room. The Ateneum is free between 5pm and 8pm on Wednesday.

### Mannerheim Museum

This fascinating **museum** (☎ 635 443; Kallioliinantie 14; adult/child €7/5; ☎ 11am–4pm Fri–Sun) in Kaivopuisto Park was the home of Marshal CGE Mannerheim, former president and commander-in-chief of the Finnish army, Civil War victor and all-round legend. Such was the national regard for Mannerheim that

the house was converted into a museum less than a year after his death in 1951. Entry includes a mandatory but enthusiastic guided tour, with free plastic booties to keep the hallowed floor clean. The display includes personal possessions, the camp bed he slept in and photographs and mementos from his famous Silk Rd journey on which he rode the same faithful horse for two years. It's only open three days a week but worth making time for to gain an appreciation of Finland's national psyche.

### Cable Factory

The massive red-brick **Kaapelitehdas** (Cable Factory; ☎ 4763 8300; www.kaapelitehdas.fi; Tallberginkatu 1; ☎ information 8am–6pm Mon–Fri), was once used for manufacturing sea cable and later became Nokia's main factory until the 1980s. When Nokia moved out, artists moved in, renting every spare space on offer. Grungy theatre, innovative art exhibitions and bohemian dance performances are staged here now – many are free. The venue has a youthful, experimental and slightly anarchic atmosphere. The building also houses three offbeat museums (free with the Helsinki Card): the **Museum of Photography** (☎ 6866 3621; www.fmp.fi; adult/child €6/free; ☎ 11am–6pm Tue–Sun), covering art photography and photographic culture; the **Hotel & Restaurant Museum** (☎ 6859 3700; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 11am–6pm Tue–Sun), with everything you wanted to know about Finnish bars and restaurants; and the **Theatre Museum** (☎ 6850 9150; adult/child €5.50/2.50; ☎ 11am–6pm Tue–Sun), exploring the history of Finnish theatre. Take tram No 8 or the metro to Ruolahti (about 500m away).

### Seurasaaari Open-Air Museum

The peaceful, forested island of Seurasaaari, northwest of the centre, is home to this sprawling open-air folk **museum** (☎ 4050 9660; adult/student/child €5/3.50/free; ☎ 11am–5pm daily, to 7pm Wed Jun–Aug, 9am–3pm Mon–Fri, 11am–5pm Sat & Sun late May & early Sep) with more than 80 wooden buildings from the 18th and 19th centuries. Walking trails link the various log houses, chapels, cottages and farmhouses brought here from all over Finland – you'll get a good impression of what rural Finland was like a century ago. In summer, guides dressed in traditional costume demonstrate folk dancing and crafts.

Seurasaaari is the best place in Helsinki to see the **midsummer bonfires**, a popular local tradition on Midsummer's Eve.

Near the bridge that connects Seurasaaari with the mainland, the **Urho Kekkonen museum** (☎ 4050 9652; Seurasaaarentie 15, Tamminie mi; adult/child €5/free; ☎ 11am–5pm mid-May–mid-Aug) was the presidential residence for 30 years. Built in 1904, it housed three presidents, including Mannerheim and Urho Kekkonen, and now shows off Finnish history and art exhibitions. For the museum and Seurasaaari island, take bus No 24 from central Helsinki, or tram No 4 and walk.

### Suomenlinna

An ideal day or half-day trip from Helsinki is to pack a picnic and take the regular ferry to the island fortress of Suomenlinna (Sveaborg in Swedish). A great deal of Helsinki's history was shaped here – the World Heritage Listed fortress was founded by the Swedes in 1748 to protect against the Russians but following a prolonged attack, Sveaborg was surrendered to the Russians in 1808.

At the bridge connecting the two main islands – Iso Mustasaari and Susisaari – is the **Inventory Chamber Visitor Centre** (☎ 684 1880; ☎ 10am–6pm May–Sep) with tourist information, maps and guided walking tours in summer. In the same building is the illuminating **Suomenlinna Museum** (☎ 40501; adult/student/child €5/4/free), covering the island's history.

You can ramble around the crumbling fortress walls at the southern end of Susisaari island, and there are several museums including the **Ehrensvärd Museum** (☎ 684 1850; adult/child €3/1; ☎ 10am–5pm May–Aug) which preserves an 18th-century officer's home. Three museums relating to Suomenlinna's military history can be visited with a **combination ticket** (adult/student €5.50/2; ☎ 11am–6pm May–Aug) – the most interesting is the **Submarine Vesikko**.

The **church** on Iso Mustasaari was built in 1854 and doubles as a lighthouse – the original gaslight beacon is now electric.

There are several good cafés on Suomenlinna, but many locals like to picnic among the fortress ruins with a few drinks – it can get pretty boozy here on summer weekends. At around 5pm it's worth finding a spot to watch the enormous Baltic ferries pass through the narrow gap.

There's a reasonably well-stocked super-market near the main ferry terminal and a HI youth hostel. **Suomenlinna Panimoravintola** (☎ 228 5030; Rantakasarmi; lunch €11.50; ☎ 3-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-10pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) is a fine brewery pub and restaurant right beside the ferry quay.

HKL ferries depart every 20 minutes from the passenger quay at the *kauppatori*. Buy tickets (€3.80 return) for the 15-minute trip at the pier. The Helsinki Card is valid for all ferries and attractions at Suomenlinna.

There's nowhere to hire bikes, but they can be brought across on the ferries.

## ACTIVITIES

In summer, join the locals sunning themselves on Helsinki's small islands and beaches. The closest city beach is Hietaniemi, a small and very popular curve of sand west of the centre. Pihlajasaari is the pick of the many islands, with several secluded bays and beaches, including a nudist beach. Get there by boat from the dock next to Café Carusel.

In winter and early spring it's possible to go walking, skating or cross-country skiing on parts of the frozen harbour and on Töölönlahti lake, or try your hand at ice-fishing.

For a sauna and swim, the sleek Art Deco **Yrjönkadun Uimahalli** (☎ 3108 7400; Yrjönkatu 21; admission €4-11; ☎ men 6.30am-9pm Tue, Thu, Sat, women noon-9pm Sun & Mon, 6.30am-9pm Wed & Fri) is a Helsinki institution – a fusion of soaring Nordic elegance and Roman baths. There are separate hours for men and women and, like the saunas, it's compulsory to bathe nude.

**Kotiharjun Sauna** (☎ 753 1535; Harjutorinkatu 1; adult/child €7/4; ☎ 2-8pm Tue-Fri, 1-7pm Sat), in Kallio, is Helsinki's last public wood-fired sauna and dates back to 1928. It's a real Finnish experience where you can also get a scrub-down and massage. There are separate saunas for men and women.

## Walking Tour

Helsinki is an easy and very rewarding city to get around on foot or by bicycle. Start at the *kauppatori*, Helsinki's lively market square. East of the market, on Katajanokka island, you can't miss the magnificent **Orthodox Uspensky Cathedral**. The red-brick exterior supports 13 gilded cupolas ('onion domes')

designed by a Russian architect of the tsar representing Christ and his disciples.

From the market square walk up the cobbled Sofiakatu to **Senaatintori** (Senate Square), Helsinki's majestic central square. Surrounded by early 19th-century buildings, the square was modelled after St Petersburg's. CL Engel's stately **Tuomiokirkko** (Lutheran cathedral), finished in 1852, is the square's most prominent feature and the steps are a favourite meeting place.

Returning to the market square, check out the fountain and mermaid **statue of Havis Amanda**, designed by artist Ville Vallgren in 1908 and regarded as a symbol of Helsinki. From here the **Esplanade Park** stretches west to the main thoroughfare, Mannerheimintie. Head north to visit **Kiasma**, the **Kansallismuseo** (National Museum) and **Parliament House** (☎ 432 2027; ☎ guided tours 11am & noon Sat, noon & 1pm Sun). Across the road is Alvar Aalto's angular **Finlandia talo** (Concert Hall). If you have time, continue north (walk along the shore of lake Töölönlahti) to Aalto's **Opera House** on the corner of Mannerheimintie and Helsinginkatu, then turn right to reach the tiny, beautifully manicured **City Winter Gardens**. Also in this area is the **Olympic Stadium**, built for the 1952 Olympics, with a sports museum and a 72m-high tower offering good views over the city.

Returning along Mannerheimintie, detour along Fredrikinkatu to the **Tempeliaukio Church** (the Church in the Rock). Hewn into rock, the church symbolises the modern meanderings of Finnish religious architecture and features a stunning 24m-diameter roof covered in 22km of copper stripping. There are regular concerts and a service in English at 2pm on Sundays.

Walk down Fredrikinkatu, past the new Kamppi Centre, then east on Lönnrotinkatu to the small park where there's a lovely **old church**. This is a popular lunch-time meeting spot in summer. Heading back down Bulevardi (away from the city), you come to Hietalahden tori where there's a market hall and a popular flea market on summer evenings and weekends.

If you have a bicycle, from here you can ride around the southern shoreline of Helsinki (follow Telakkakatu then Merisatamranta) to **Kaivopuisto park** and return to the *kauppatori*. Alternatively, head north from Hietalahden tori to Hietaniemenkatu and

ride around to **Hietaniemi Beach**, the closest beach to central Helsinki. Continuing north you come to **Sibelius Park** and the steel **monument** to the great Finnish composer. The organlike cluster of steel pipes is said to represent the forest.

## TOURS

**Helsinki Tour Expert** (☎ 2288 1600; www.helsinkiexpert.fi; adult/child €23/11) runs worthwhile 1½-hour city bus tours in summer on the hour from 10am to 2pm (11am and 1pm in May & September, 11am in winter). Ask which tours are free with the Helsinki Card. They depart from the Esplanade Park, near the tourist office, and taped commentary (in 11 languages) comes via a headset.

**Sun Lines** (☎ 741 8210; www.sunlines.fi; adult/child €16/8) and **Royal Lines** (☎ 0207-118 333; www.royalline.fi; €16/8) operate 1½-hour archipelago sea cruises, as well as lunch and dinner cruises, with daily departures in summer from the *kauppatori*.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There's something going on in Helsinki year-round. Check with the tourist office for a current programme or check www.hel2.fi.

**Vappu** (May Day) is celebrated with particular verve in Helsinki. On Vappu Eve (30 April) thousands of students gather around the Havis Amanda fountain to dress up the statue, plant a white cap on her, and so begin a riotous night of partying. On 1 May, crowds of all ages gather for a champagne breakfast and all-day party at Kaivopuisto park.

In late April, the **Espoo Jazz Festival** (www.apriljazz.fi) attracts some big-name local and international performers. On June 6, **Helsinki Day** is celebrated with festivities around town and free concerts in Kaivopuisto park.

The **Helsinki Festival** (www.helsinkifestival.fi) runs for about two weeks in late August-early September with a programme of arts, music and theatre.

## SLEEPING

It pays to make bookings or at least call ahead at any time of year – June to August is the peak tourist season but hostels can fill up with school groups and hotels with business travellers outside these months. The **Hotel Booking Centre** (☎ 2288 1400; hotel@helsinkiexpert.fi; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm

Sat & Sun Sep-May) in the train station or city tourist office can help in a pinch – they charge a €5 booking fee but can sometimes get cheaper deals on hotels.

## Budget

**Rastila Camping** (☎ 321 6551; rastilacamping@hel.fi; Karavaanikatu 4; camp site per adult €5/10, 2-/4- person cabins €45/64, log cottage €120; ☎ ) Although 10km from the city centre, this is a lovely camping ground on Vuosaari and it's easily reached by metro (Rastila stop). Facilities include a beach sauna, restaurant and summer youth hostel.

**Hostel Erottajanpuisto** (☎ 642 169; www.erottajanpuisto.com; Uudenmaankatu 9; dm/s/d/tr €22.50/47/60/78; ☎ 24hr reception; ☎ ☎ ) Helsinki's smallest and most laid-back hostel occupies the top floor of a building in a lively street of bars and restaurants close to the heart of the city. Forget curfews, lockouts, school kids and bringing your own sleeping sheet – this is more like a guesthouse with dormitories.

**Eurohostel** (☎ 622 0470; www.eurohostel.fi; Linnankatu 9; dm/s/d/tr €23.20/38.60/46.40/69.60; ☎ 24hr reception; ☎ ) On Katajanokka island less than 500m from the Viking Line terminal, Eurohostel is a multilevel HI place with plenty of facilities, including free morning sauna, a good café and kitchens on each floor. It's very busy but a bit soulless and the private rooms are poky. Take tram No 4 or 2 from the centre or a 15-minute walk.

**Hostel Academica** (☎ 1311 4334; www.hostelacademica.fi; Hietaniemenkatu 14; dm €18, s/tw/tr €40/60/75, superiors/tw €57/75; ☎ Jun-Aug; ☎ ☎ ) In a quiet part of town, this summer hostel is in a student apartment building so there are no large dorms and each room has private bathroom and kitchenette. It's spotless, welcoming and the facilities are excellent, including sauna and uni café.

**Hostel Mekka** (☎ 630 265; www.hostelmekka.com; Vuorikatu 8B; dm/s/d/tr €24/48.50/58.50/73.50; ☎ ☎ ) This rambling, 200-year-old building has plenty of character – high ceilings, ceramic Swedish stove heaters – and a great central location, though it can feel a bit draughty.

**Hostel Stadion** (☎ 477 8480; www.stadionhostel.com; Pohjoisen Stadionin 3B; dm €16, s/tw/tr with linen €32/44/66; ☎ ☎ ☎ ) In the Olympic Stadium complex about 1.5km north of the centre, this is an 'old school' hostel (it's been around since 1962!) with large dorms,

daytime lockout from rooms and 2am curfew. It has the cheapest beds in town and some travellers love the busy atmosphere and plentiful facilities (café, laundry, wi-fi internet), while others loathe the austerity and charmless staff. Take tram 7A or 3T to Oopera and walk five minutes.

### Midrange

**Gasthaus Omapohja** (☎ 666 211; Itäinen Teatterikuja 3; s/d €44/65, s/d with shared bathroom €64/85; ☒) A convenient two-minute walk from the train station, this intimate, theatre-inspired guesthouse is Helsinki's cosiest. It's very small, with no common areas and minute shared bathrooms, but it's worth this price. Book ahead.

**Matkakoti Margarita** (☎ 622 4261; Itäinen Teatterikuja 3; s/d/t €40/54/69, s/d with bathroom €55/70; ☒) Next door to Omapohja, this guesthouse is not as charming and no English is spoken, but it's clean, well priced and worth a try if Omapohja is full.

**Hotelli Finn** (☎ 684 4360; www.hotellifinn.fi; Kavelankatu 38; s/d €55/65, s/d with shower €65/80) Although not flash, this small, friendly hotel on the top floor of a central city building offers very reasonable rates for the location. Rooms are compact but tidy, with TV.

**Hotel Arthur** (☎ 173 441; www.hotelarthur.fi; Vuorikatu 19; s/d/tr €94/113/134, weekend & summer €73/92/112; ☒) Close to the train station, Arthur is small enough to feel you're getting some personal attention but big enough to have all the mod-cons, with pleasant décor, spacious rooms, satellite TV and a good restaurant.

**Marttahoelli** (☎ 618 7400; www.marttahoelli.fi; Uudenmaankatu 24A; s/tw/tr €98/130/150, s/d/tr discount weekends €75/85/100; ☒) Central but quiet as most rooms face an inner courtyard with free parking. Smallish rooms but sunny décor, well furnished and one of Helsinki's friendliest hotels.

### Top End

Helsinki has plenty of big, central business hotels, including the Sokos, Radisson, Scandic and Cumulus chains.

**Accome Parliament** (☎ 2511 050; www.accome.com; Museokatu 18; studio d from €102; 1-2-bed apts €128/147, weekends €72/90/103; ☒) A step up in style and comfort from many hotels, the apartments here have sleek modern furnishings, kitchenette, internet connections

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Hotel Linna** (☎ 615 815; www.palacekamp.fi; Lönnrotinkatu 29; s/d €162/190, weekends & summer from €84; ☒) The National Romantic-style granite façade and distinctive castle-like turret belies a very classy, modern hotel within. Refurbished rooms are decorated in soft tones, stylish furniture and Nordic elegance. With a quality restaurant and leafy courtyard, this is a cut above most hotels and great value when discounted.

and cable TV. Prices vary seasonally and there are discounts for longer stays. Great location.

**Scandic Grand Marina** (☎ 16661; www.scandic-hotels.com; Katajanokanlaituri 7; s/d from €140/180, weekends & summer €95/105; ☒) In a converted brick harbour warehouse near the Viking Line terminal on Katajanokka, the Grand Marina is an outstanding hotel with one of Helsinki's best outlooks. Facilities are top notch, with spacious, refurbished rooms, business centre, gym and the excellent Makasiini restaurant and bar.

### EATING

Helsinki has by far Finland's best range of cafés and restaurants: from Finnish and Russian to Asian and Italian, sushi joints to kebab stands and terrace cafés to fine French dining. Seek out the lunchtime specials if your budget is tight – many restaurants (even the fancy ones) have buffet lunch deals for under €10. Good places to follow your nose include the Esplanade, Mikonkatu, Uudenmaankatu and the tangle of side streets between the train station and Stockmann. In summer, several island restaurants serve lavish seafood dishes.

For everything from Asian noodles to burgers and kebabs, head to the food court in the basement of the **Forum shopping centre** (Mannerheimintie 20), where you'll also find a supermarket and Alko store.

Helsinki University has several student cafeterias around the city, where meals cost under €5. They include **Porthania** (☎ 1311 4298; Hallituskatu 11-13; ☒) 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) and the huge **Ylioppilasaukio** (☎ 260 9491; Mannerheimintie 38; ☒) 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), tucked away down an alley next to Zetor.

### Restaurants

**Zetor** (☎ 666 966; www.zetor.net; Mannerheimintie 3-5; mains €7-26; ☒) 3pm-late Sun-Fri, 11am-late Sat) The deeply ironic pastoral décor at this whacky Finnish restaurant-bar features tractors, milk cans and other farm stuff. The menu is mainly traditional Finnish dishes (reindeer, vendace etc) and steaks and burgers, and it becomes a rock-music bar later in the night. Great fun.

**Eatz** (☎ 687 7240; Kaisaniemenkatu 2; mains €9-23; ☒) noon-midnight Mon-Thu & Sun, noon-4am Fri & Sat) The versatile and colourful Eatz manages to serve up everything from Thai and Indian to Mexican and Italian in various themed dining rooms – though you may start to wonder where in the world you are. There's even a sushi bar and an Aussie Outback theme bar.

**Lappi** (☎ 645 550; Annankatu 22; mains €16-37; ☒) 5-10.30pm Mon-Fri, 1-10.30pm Sat & Sun) Costumed staff serve up Sami specialities in this delightfully rustic 'log cabin' restaurant. Try sirloin of elk, as well as various reindeer preparations, vendace (lake fish) and cloudberry desserts.

**Konstan Möljä** (☎ 694 750; Hietalahdenkatu 14; lunch/dinner buffet €8/14; ☒) 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, 2-10pm Sat) Great place for hearty, home-style Finnish fare enjoyed in a pleasant atmosphere – much of the maritime décor comes from an old harbour near Vyborg. The buffet always includes reindeer.

**Belge Bar & Bistro** (☎ 622 9620; Kluuvikatu 5; mains €8-25; ☒) 11-2am Mon-Thu, 11-3am Fri & Sat, 2-10pm Sun) A steaming bowl of mussels, grilled sausages and those fantastic Belgian beers make this little piece of Brussels a great place for lunch or dinner. Stylish restaurant upstairs and more casual bar and bistro at street level.

**Seahorse** (☎ 628 169; Kapteeninkatu 11; €11-25; ☒) 10.30am-midnight Mon-Thu, 10.30-1am Fri & Sat, 10.30am-midnight Sun) Barely changed since the 1930s, Seahorse is as traditional a Finnish restaurant as you'll find anywhere. Smoking locals gather to meet and drink over Baltic herring, Finnish meatballs and cabbage rolls.

**Soul Kitchen** (☎ 773 2233; Fleminginkatu 26-28; ☒) 11-2am Mon-Fri, 2pm-2am Sat, 2pm-midnight Sun) In Kallio, Soul Kitchen is a loungey, retro café and bar – the menu is on a record sleeve and the burgers, salads and steaks are some of the best around.

**Hariton** (☎ 622 1717; Kasarmikatu 44; mains €9-22; ☒) 11.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 1-11pm Sat, noon-6pm

Sun) Helsinki has some fine Russian restaurants and Hariton is one of the newest and most reasonably priced. Charming dining room with antique furniture, a gallery and varied Orthodox menu, including blini.

**Gastone** (☎ 666 116; Korkeavuorenkatu 45; mains €7-20; ☒) 11.30am-midnight Mon-Fri, 2pm-midnight Sat, 3-11pm Sun) Vying for the title of Helsinki's best Italian restaurant, Gastone boasts a diverse list of pasta and antipasto, a fine wine list and an intimate yet not too formal ambience.

Also recommended:

**Maithai** (☎ 685 6850; Annankatu 31-33; mains €9-17; ☒) 11am-11pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat & Sun) An intimate little place and a local favourite for Thai food – only a handful of tables so book ahead.

**Bar Tapasta** (☎ 640 724; Uudenmaankatu 13; tapas €2.50-5; ☒) Mon-Thu 11am-midnight, Fri 11-2am, Sat 1pm-2am) Intimate, hole-in-the-wall bar with a welcoming atmosphere and wonderful tapas, including gorgonzola mushrooms and chilli olives. Wash it all down with a jug of sangria.

**New Bamboo Centre** (☎ 694 3117; Annankatu 29; mains €5-10; ☒) 11am-9pm Mon-Fri, noon-1pm Sat & Sun) Cheap & filling Asian dishes in simple surroundings.

### AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Kappeli** (☎ 681 2440; Eteläesplanadi 1; ☒) 9-2am Mon-Sat, 9am-midnight Sun) Behind the glass and iron façade of this Helsinki institution is an excellent restaurant and café which has been the haunt of Helsinki's artistic elite since 1867. In the stone-walled cellar is an ambient vaultlike bar. Kappeli has a prime position in Esplanade Park – its summer terrace is one of the city's best people watching spots – and the facing stage regularly has free performances in summer.

### Cafés

**Café Esplanad** (☎ 665 496; Pohjoisesplanadi 37; light meals €3-12, bistro €8-26; ☒) 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) Helsinki's most popular café is always crowded. Part breakfast café, bistro, bakery and bar, you can start the morning here with Danish pastries and giant Finnish *pulla* (wheat bun), or enjoy spectacular salads on the terrace.

**Cafe Strindberg** (☎ 681 2030; Pohjoisesplanadi 33; light meals €4-12; ☒) 9am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun, bar to 1am) This little piece of Paris in



Helsinki has a prime people-watching terrace on the Esplanade. Upstairs is an up-market restaurant but the highlight is the cosy wine bar with squishy leather couches, classical music and candlelight.

**Café Ekberg** (☎ 6811 8660; Bulevardi 9; buffet breakfast & lunch €7.50; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-5pm Sat, 10.30am-5pm Sun) Helsinki's oldest café has a spacious, bohemian atmosphere and it's still one of the best places for a smorgasbord breakfast in the city. The lunch buffet is also great value.

**Café Carusel** (☎ 622 4522; Merisatamanranta 10; dishes €2-10; 10am-10pm) In summer this is a super-busy but unpretentious self-service waterfront café on the edge of Kaivopuisto park. Great focaccias and savoury snacks and a sunny terrace.

**Zucchini** (☎ 622 2907; Fabianinkatu 4; dishes €5-12; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri, closed Jul; ☒) Trendy vegetarian café serving quiche, pancakes, soups, salads, juices and a few innovative dishes, including plenty for vegans.

Also recommended:

**Fazer** (☎ 729 6702; Kluuvikatu 3; cakes from €3; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat; ☒) The best café in town for cakes, pastries, ice cream and jaw-dropping sweets – the Fazer family is Finland's most famous candy maker.

**Café Lasipalatsi** (☎ 621 6700; Mannerheimintie 22-24; lunch buffet from €8; ☎ 7.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) With big windows staring across at Kiasma and Helsinki's major city intersection, Lasipalatsi specialises in filling Finnish lunch buffets (11am-4pm). Also an excellent café for free wi-fi access.

**Café Engel** (☎ 652 776; Aleksanterinkatu 26; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-10pm Sat, 10am-10pm Sun) With a fine outlook opposite Senaatintori (Senate Square) and the cathedral (and appropriately named after its architect), Engel is popular with uni students and the arty crowd.

## Self-Catering

In summer there are food stalls, fresh produce and outrageously expensive berries at the kauppatori, but the real gourmet stuff is in the fabulous **Vanha Kauppahalli** (Old Market Hall; Eteläranta 1; ☎ 6.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 6.30am-4pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun summer only) at the harbour, where you can get filled rolls, cheese, breads, fish and an array of Finnish snacks and delicacies, plus there's a small Alko. Another good market hall is the **Hakaniemi kauppahalli** (☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat), a traditional-style Finnish food market near the Hakaniemi metro.

## DRINKING

Helsinki has some of Scandinavia's most diverse nightlife. In winter locals gather in cosy bars and the full gamut of clubs. In summer, drinking starts early at the many beer terraces that sprout up all over town. The biggest is along Mikonkatu at the front of Eatz, On the Rocks and Baarikärpänen.

The main areas for nightlife in the centre include the busy Mikonkatu and nearby Yliopistonkatu, and west of the centre around Uudenmaankatu and Eerikinkatu. Also check out the pedestrian strip Iso Rooberinkatu with several good bars and cafés.

For the cheapest beer in Helsinki (from €2 a pint during the seemingly perpetual happy hours), try a pub crawl in the working-class suburb of Kallio (metro: Sörnäinen), north of the centre. There's a string of earthy local pubs along Helsinginkatu such as the grungy local favourite **Roskapankki** (☎ 735 488; Helsinginkatu 20) – the name means 'trash bank' – and a growing number of trendy bars and cafés.

**Ateljee Bar** (☎ 43360; Yrjönkatu 26; ☎ 2pm-late Sun-Fri, noon-2am Sat) Take the lift up to the tiny rooftop bar on the 14th floor of the Sokos Hotel Torni (Helsinki's tallest building) – the views from the terrace (and the toilets) are some of the best in the city.

**Palace Hotel** (☎ 1345 6660; Eteläranta 10) Another bar with a view is the rooftop terrace of the Palace Hotel which actually has a better outlook over the harbour and cathedrals.

**Molly Malone's** (☎ 5766 7500; Kaisaniemenkatu 1C; ☎ 10-2am Mon, 10-3am Tue, 10-4am Wed-Sat, noon-2am Sun) Helsinki's rocking Irish pub is packed most nights – there's a live band upstairs, cosy snugs downstairs, and this is a great place to meet travellers, expats and Finns out for a good time.

**Corona & Café Mokba** (☎ 642 002; Eerikinkatu 11; ☎ 11-2am Mon-Sat, noon-2am Sun) These two quirky bars are owned by filmmakers Aki and Mika Kaurismäki and attract a savvy, grungy crowd. Corona has cool bar staff and about 20 pool tables, so it's popular with drinkers and sharks. Mokba is a tiny Russian-influenced bar with ironic Soviet-era décor, flock wallpaper and almost comically gruff service.

**Saunabar** (☎ 586 5550; Eerikinkatu 27; ☎ 2am-9pm Mon, 2pm-1am Tue, 2pm-2am Wed-Sat) Feel like a night out and a sauna? Just as the name

suggests, this cool student bar has a couple of basement saunas, as well as a decent music bar.

**Juttutupa** (☎ 774 4860; Säästöpankinranta 6; ☎ 10-1am Mon-Thu, 10-3am Fri & Sat, 11am-midnight Sun) This imposing granite pub across from Hakaniemi Square is a bit of a local institution and has its own Wednesday night jazz club.

**Kola** (☎ 694 8983; Helsinginkatu 13; ☎ noon-2am; ☒) This retro café-bar is part of the new look of the once grungy Kallio district. Loungey, worn furniture, retro art on the walls and chilled music make this a popular hangout with students and a young crowd.

**Spårakoff** (adult/child €7/3.50; ☎ hourly 2-8pm, mid-May-mid-Aug) In summer the bright red pub tram trundles around the city on a one hour circuit, departing hourly from the terminus on Mikonkatu (opposite Eatz). Of course, there's a bar on board so it's not a bad way to go sightseeing.

## ENTERTAINMENT

### Cinemas

**Tennispalatsi** (☎ 0600-007 007; Salomonkatu 15; tickets €8-10) Helsinki's biggest cinema is a 14-screen multiplex screening mainstream movies.

**Kinopalatsi** (☎ 0600 9 4444; Kaisaniemenkatu 2) Another large cinema complex in the central entertainment district.

**Orion Theatre** (☎ 6154 0201; Eerikinkatu 15) Alternative and art-house cinema with a fondness for Woody Allen; screens Finnish Film Archive movies.

### Gay & Lesbian Venues

By Scandinavian standards Helsinki has a low-key gay scene.

**Lost & Found** (☎ 680 1010; Annankatu 6; ☎ 5pm-4am Mon-Fri, 7pm-4am Sat & Sun) This sophisticated gay-hetero bar is still a hugely popular late-night hang-out with people of all persuasions. Regular shows and the hip Hideaway Bar.

**Room Albert** (☎ 643 626; Kalevankatu 36) Helsinki's newest gay venue attracts a young, sophisticated crowd.

**DTM** (☎ 676 315; Iso Roobertinkatu 28; ☎ 9pm-4am Mon-Sat, noon 4am Sun) Said to be Scandinavia's biggest gay club, DTM (Don't Tell Mama) is more than just drag shows and dance tunes – it's a café, nightclub and meeting place on two floors.

## Live Music

Various bars and clubs around Helsinki host live bands.

**Tavastia & Semi-final** (☎ 774 67420; www.tavastiaklubi.fi; Urho Kekkosenkatu 4-6; tickets €6-25; ☎ 9pm-2am Sun-Thu, 9pm-3am Fri & Sat) There's always something happening at Finland's biggest rock music club. Live bands, including international acts, hit the stage in this hangar-sized venue. Also check out what's on at Semi-final (same contact and opening times), the smaller sister venue.

**Storyville** (☎ 408 007; www.storyville.fi in Finnish; Museokatu 8; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat) Helsinki's No 1 jazz club attracts a refined older crowd swinging to boogie-woogie, trad jazz, Dixieland and New Orleans most nights. There's a cool outside terrace in summer.

## Nightclubs

**Helsinki Club** (☎ 43 320; www.helsinkiclub.com; Yliopistonkatu 8; ☎ 10pm-4am) This heaving mainstream dance club is a bit of an institution and pulls in the late-night crowds – including the odd Finnish celebrity – most nights. If you tire of the dancefloor, there's a funky lounge and the iridescent Dome Bar. Minimum age 24.

**Club Uniq** (☎ 0800-94411; Yliopistonkatu 5; ☎ 10pm-4am) Across the road from Helsinki Club, the small dance floor gets busy most nights but the novelty vote goes to the tiny Arctic Icebar (open 5pm to 4am; admission €10) inside: don a coat, sip a vodka shot in a balmy -5°C, and watch the ravers outside through the glass wall. Minimum age 24.

On Iso-Roobertinkatu is a growing list of clubs showcasing the latest in cool Helsinki nightlife. **We Got Beef** (☎ 679 268; Iso-Roobertinkatu 21; ☎ 1pm-2am Sun-Tue, 1pm-3am Wed-Sat) and **Rose-garden** (Iso-Roobertinkatu 10; ☎ 10pm-4am Wed-Sat) are two worth checking out for DJ club music, drum & bass, dancing or lounging.

## Sport

If you're around in winter (September-March), take the chance to see a major ice hockey game. Big matches are played at the huge **Hartwall Arena** (☎ 204 1997, tickets ☎ 0600-10800; www.hartwall-arena.com; Areenakuja 1) in Pasila, north of the centre (tram 7A or 7B). The stadium hosted ice hockey world championships in 1997 and 2004, and is home to Helsinki superleague side Jokerit. You can also catch games at the indoor arena of the Olympic Stadium off Mannerheimintie.

## Theatre & Concerts

For concerts and performances, see *Helsinki This Week*, inquire at the tourist office, or check the website of ticket outlet **Lippupiste** (☎ 0600-900 900; www.lippu.fi). Tickets are available through Lippupiste or at the box office at Stockmann department store. Opera, ballet and classical concerts are held at the **Opera House** (☎ 4030 2211; Helsinginkatu 58; tickets from €15), while performances by the Finnish National Theatre are at the **Kansalliset Teatteri** (☎ 1733 1331; www.kansallisteatteri.fi in Finnish; Länntinen teatterikuja 1), near the train station.

Big-name rock concerts and international acts often perform at Hartwall Arena.

## SHOPPING

Helsinki's main shopping strip is Pohjoisesplanadi, running along Esplanade park, where you'll find chic boutiques of **Kämp Galleria**, the flagship branch of **Marimekko** (☎ 686 0240; Pohjoisesplanadi 31), the trendy Finnish design and homewares store, and **Stockmann** (Aleksanterinkatu 52; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun), Scandinavia's biggest department store with seven floors of everything. Iso Rooberinkatu and Uudenmunkkatu are other strips for boutique shops with less pose value.

For music, check out **Digelius Music** (☎ 666 375; Laivuririnne 2). They stock a range of Finnish music and world music. It's one of those small independent record shops where the staff know everything and they stock obscure CDs like High Fidelity!

The kaupattori at the harbour, has a produce and souvenir market in summer where you can browse for everything from woollen knitwear and Sami dolls, to reindeer antler carvings. **Hietalahti Flea Market** (☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun in summer) is the place to hunt for bargains and secondhand gear.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

There are flights to Helsinki from all major European cities. Vantaa airport, one of Europe's most user-friendly terminals, is 19km north of Helsinki.

**Finnair** (☎ 0203-140160 for reservations; Asema-aukio 3; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) flies to 20 Finnish cities, generally at least once a day but several times daily on routes such as Turku, Tampere, Rovaniemi and Oulu. **Blue1**

(☎ 0600 25831; www.blue1.com) has budget flights to a handful of major Finnish destinations.

### Boat

International ferries depart from five main terminals and travel to Stockholm (Sweden), Tallinn (Estonia) and Travemünde (Germany). See p214 for more details.

Ferry tickets can be bought at the terminals or from the ferry companies' offices in the city centre.

**Eckerö Line** (☎ 228 8544; www.eckeroline.fi; Mannerheimintie 10; Länsiterminaalit (West) terminal)

**Linda Line** (☎ 668 9700; www.lindaliini.ee; Makasiini terminal)

**Nordic Jet Line** (☎ 0600 01 655; www.njl.fi; Kanava terminal)

**Silja Line** (☎ 0600-174552; www.siljaline.fi; Mannerheimintie 2; Olympia & Makasiini terminals)

**Tallink** (☎ 228 311; www.tallink.fi; Erottajankatu 19; West terminal)

**Viking Line** (☎ 12 351; www.vikingline.fi; Lönnrotinkatu 2; Katajanokka terminal)

From the train station, Kanava and Katajanokka terminals are served by bus No 13 and tram Nos 2, 2V and 4; Olympia and Makasiini terminals by tram Nos 3B and 3T; and Länsiterminaalit by bus No 15, or walk from Ruoholahti metro.

### Bus

Regional and long-distance buses arrive and depart from the huge new underground **Kamppi Bus Terminal** (☎ 24hrs; ticket office 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun), below the Kamppi Centre off Salomonkatu or Frederinkatu. There's a separate set of platforms on the eastern side for buses to Espoo, while express buses to most major towns in Finland leave from long-distance platforms. Destinations include: Tampere (€28.20, 2½ hours), Turku (€25.70, 2½ hours), Savonlinna (€46.30, 5½ hours) and Kuopio (€50.90, seven hours).

### Train

Helsinki's large but orderly **train station** (☎ 0600 41902; ☎ 24hrs, tickets 6.30am-9.30pm) is central and easy to find your way around. Long-distance and international tickets (to Russia) can be purchased from the hall to the left of the main entrance. A pedestrian tunnel links the train station to Helsinki's metro system (Rautatietori stop).

The train is the best way to get from Helsinki to major centres – express trains run daily to Turku, Tampere, Kuopio and Lappeenranta among others, and there's a choice of day and overnight trains to Oulu, Rovaniemi and Joensuu. There are also daily trains to the Russian cities of Vyborg, St Petersburg and Moscow.

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Bus No 615 (€3.60, 40 minutes) shuttles between Vantaa airport (all international and domestic flights) and platform No 10 at Rautatietori (Railway Square) next to the main train station. Finnair buses (€5.20, 30 minutes) depart from the Finnair office at Asema-aukio, also next to the main train station, every 20 minutes from 5am to midnight.

There are door-to-door shared **airport taxis** (☎ 0600-555555; www.airporttaxi.fi; 1-2 people €20, 3-4 people €28). A regular taxi costs around €30.

### Bicycle

Helsinki is ideal for cycling: the small inner city is flat, and there are well-marked and high-quality bicycle paths. Pick up a copy of the *Helsinki cycling map* from the tourist office.

In summer, the city provides distinctive green 'City Bikes' at some 26 stands within a radius of 2km from the kaupattori – although sometimes you'll wonder where they're all hiding. These bikes are free: you deposit a €2 coin into the stand which locks them, then reclaim it when you return the bike to any stand.

For something a bit more sophisticated and reliable, **Greenbike** (☎ 050-4040 4000; www.greenbike.fi; Bulevardi 32; ☎ 10am-8pm May-Sep) rents quality bikes for €13/20/50 per day/24 hours/week (€20/25/70 for mountain bikes).

### Local Transport

Central Helsinki is easy enough to get around on foot or by bicycle, but there's also a metro line and a reasonably comprehensive tram, bus and train network. A one-hour flat-fare ticket for the bus, tram, metro, Suomenlinna ferry and local trains within Helsinki's **HKL network** (www.hel2.fi/HKL) costs €2 from a ticket machine (€2.20 from a tram driver). It allows un-

limited transfers but should be validated in the stamping machine on board when you first use it.

One-/three-/five-day tourist tickets cost €6/12/18. The Helsinki Card gets you free travel anywhere within Helsinki (see Information, p149). The city's green-and-yellow trams are a fun way to get around – tram No 3T from the kaupattori makes for a good sightseeing trip. The metro is also useful for getting to Kallio (Hakaniemi or Sörnäinen).

There are also regional tickets for travel by bus or train to neighbouring cities such as Vantaa and Espoo which cost €3.50 for a single one-hour ticket, or €10/20/30 for 1/3/5 days. Children's tickets are usually half-price.

The *Helsinki Route Map*, available at HKL offices and the city tourist office, is good for making sense of local transport.

## AROUND HELSINKI

If your time is short but you want to see a bit of Finland outside the capital, there are a number of easy day trips. The most rewarding is Porvoo, 50km to the east, but if you're interested in the lives of some of Finland's great artists, Espoo and the Museum Rd are worth a look.

### Espoo

☎ 09 / pop 221,600

Helsinki's fast-growing, high population satellite city of Espoo is easily reached by bus and train from the capital and offers enough to warrant a long day-trip.

For anyone interested in Finnish art, the big-ticket attraction here is the amazing **Gallen-Kallela Museum** (☎ 541 3388; www.gallen-kallela.fi; Gallen-Kallelantie 27; adult/child €8/4; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Aug, 10am-4pm Tue-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun Sep-Apr), the pastiche studio-castle of Akseli Gallen-Kallela, one of Finland's most notable painters. The Art Nouveau building was designed by the artist and is now a rich museum of his work and life. To get there take tram No 4 from central Helsinki to Munkkiniemi, then walk about 2km, alternatively take bus No 33 (on Saturdays and Sundays only).

Finland is big on indoor pools and spas, but Espoo's **Serena Water Park** (☎ 8870 5555; www.serena.fi; Tornimäentie 10; day pass €17-19; ☎ 11am-8pm) is the best, with indoor and

outdoor pools, spas, saunas, water-slides and even a winter ski centre. It's pricey but great for families.

## Porvoo

☎ 019 / pop 46,000

If you only make one day-trip out of Helsinki, the charming medieval town of Porvoo (known as Borgå in Swedish), 50km away, should be it. This town is Finland's second-oldest settlement (founded in 1346) after Turku. Although the 'new' town centre is drably modern, the distinctly Swedish, cobbled **Old Town**, with its charmingly atmospheric wooden houses, meandering streets and active riverfront is great for exploring.

The **tourist office** (☎ 520 2316; www.porvoo.fi; Rihkamakatu 4; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat & Sun Sep-May; ☒), on the southern edge of the Old Town, has plenty of information and a free internet terminal.

## SIGHTS

The historic stone and timber **Porvoo cathedral** (☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat, 2-5pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-2pm Tue-Sat, 2-4pm Sun Oct-Apr) sits atop a hill looking over the quaint old town. In the small Old Town square, the **Porvoo Historical Museum** (☎ 574 7500; adult/child €5/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat, 11am-4pm Sat May-Aug, 11am-4pm Wed-Sun Sep-Apr) is housed in two buildings and is packed with local memorabilia, furniture, jewellery and art, including paintings by Albert Edelfelt and sculptures by Ville Vallgren, two of Porvoo's most famous artists. Crossing the old bridge to the west bank of the Porvoonjoki provides a fantastic view of the photogenic, rust-red **shore houses** lining the river bank. These houses were first painted with red ochre to impress the visiting King of Sweden, Gustavus III, in the late 18th century.

On the south side of Porvoo in the Russian-built 19th-century 'Empire quarter', is **Runeberg House** (☎ 582 330; adult/child €5/2; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sun May-Aug, 10am-4pm Wed-Sun Sep-Apr), the well-preserved, beautiful home of Finland's national poet JL Runeberg. The adjacent **Walter Runeberg Sculpture Museum**, containing 150 sculptures by the poet's son, can be visited on the same ticket.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Porvoo Hostel** (☎ 523 0012; www.porvoohostel.cb.net; Linnankoskenkatu 1-3; dm/s/d €15/28/36, linen hire €4) Porvoo's HI hostel, a 10-minute walk southeast of the old town, is in a lovely old building with spotless rooms and a well-equipped kitchen. Reception is closed between 10am and 4pm.

**Gasthaus Werner** (☎ 0400-494 876; www.werner.net in Finnish; Adlercreutzinkatu 29; s/d/tr €35/50/75) This cosy family-run guesthouse, located about 1km east of the old town, is excellent value with just five rooms (shared bathrooms) and a self-contained apartment.

Although there are plenty of places to eat in the new part of town, especially around the kauppatori (market square), Porvoo's most atmospheric cafés, restaurants and bars are in the Old Town and along the riverfront. In summer, the terraces along cobblestoned Välikatu are overflowing with visitors.

**Restaurant Timbaali** (☎ 523 1020; Välikatu 8; mains €10-24; ☎ 11am-11pm May-Aug, shorter hrs winter) In the heart of the Old Town, this rustic restaurant is all about escargot – the speciality is locally farmed snails prepared in a variety of innovative ways. There's also a broad menu of gourmet Finnish cuisine, served in quaint dining rooms or the inner courtyard.

**Porvoon Paahtimo** (☎ 617 040; Mannerheiminkatu 2; ☎ noon-10pm Mon-Thu, noon-2am Fri, 11-2am Sat, noon-10pm Sun) Right at the main bridge and with a great little terrace hanging over the water, this atmospheric red-brick former storehouse is part cosy bar and part café – fresh coffee is roasted here.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

The bus station is on the kauppatori; buses run every half-hour between Porvoo and Helsinki (€8.40, one hour), but the best way to reach Porvoo in summer is by ferry.

The historic steamship **JL Runeberg** (☎ 019-524 3331; www.msjlrunenberg.fi; one way/return €21/31) sails daily at 10am from Helsinki in summer (exact dates vary), returning at 4pm. **Royal Line** (☎ 09-612 2950; www.royalline.fi; one way/return €21/32) has three-hour cruises on a more modern boat between Helsinki and Porvoo daily except Monday from June to mid-August.

## SOUTH COAST

The south coast of Finland meanders east and west of Helsinki, revealing harbour towns, marinas, islands and farmland. This is something of a summer playground for Finnish families, with a handful of fading resort towns and the pretty bays, beaches and convoluted islands and waterways of the southern archipelago. Medieval churches, old manors and castles show the strong influence of early Swedish settlers.

## TURKU

☎ 02 / pop 175,000

If a city is, as they say, defined by water, then Turku's heart and soul is undoubtedly the lovely Aurajoki (Aura River), a broad ribbon spilling into the Baltic Sea harbour and lined with riverboat bars and restaurants. Turku is Finland's oldest town, but today it's a modern maritime city, brimming with museums and boasting a robust harbour-side castle and magnificent cathedral.

For travellers, Turku is one of Finland's most visited cities after Helsinki, thanks to the direct ferries from Stockholm, and this is the place to catch a ferry to the Åland islands or the base for exploring the west coast or southern archipelago.

Once the capital under the Swedes, Turku (Swedish: Åbo) was founded as a Catholic settlement in 1229, and grew into an important trading centre despite being ravaged by fire many times.

## WORTH A DETOUR

With your own transport, the tiny but impossibly picturesque village of **Ruotsinpyhtä**, just off highway E18, is a glimpse into Finland's industrial past. At its heart are the quaint brick buildings of the 18th-century **bruk**, the **Strömfors Iron Works**, which is now a museum. The Kyma river became the Swedish-Russian international border in 1743, splitting the village in half.

In the old forge building in the centre of the village is a **café** (☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug, 8am-4pm Sep-May), and there's an **information centre** (☎ 618 474) at the nearby hostel. As well as wandering around the ironworks, there's a walking trail circling the lake and you can rent canoes and rowing boats.

**Finnhostel Krouvinmäki** (☎ 618 474; s/d €26/52; ☎ reception 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) is a wonderful hostel in a renovated former tavern house (1805) opposite the forge buildings. It offers cosy twin rooms (no bunks) and there's a good kitchen and laundry. Call ahead if you're visiting on the weekend.

**Ravintola Ruukinmylly** (☎ 618 693; pizza & pasta €4.50-9, mains €11.50-19; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Thu & Sun, 11-2am Fri & Sat May-Aug), in a 17th-century former mill on a lovely pond, is a rustic restaurant with wood-fired pizzas and some Finnish specialities, including creamy salmon soup.

## Information

### DISCOUNT CARDS

**Turku Card** (24/48hrs €21/28) Gives free admission to most museums and attractions in the region, free public transport, and various other discounts. Available from the tourist office or any participating attraction.

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Hansa Cyber Café** (Hansa Arcade; per min 4c; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun) Coin-op terminals.

**Public Library** (☎ 262 3611; Linnankatu 2; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Free internet access.

**Surf City** (Aninkaistenkatu 3; per 30 min €1.20; ☎ 3pm-midnight)

### MONEY

**Forex** (☎ 251 0800; Eerikinkatu 12; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat) Exchange bureau on the south side of the kauppatori (market square).

### POST

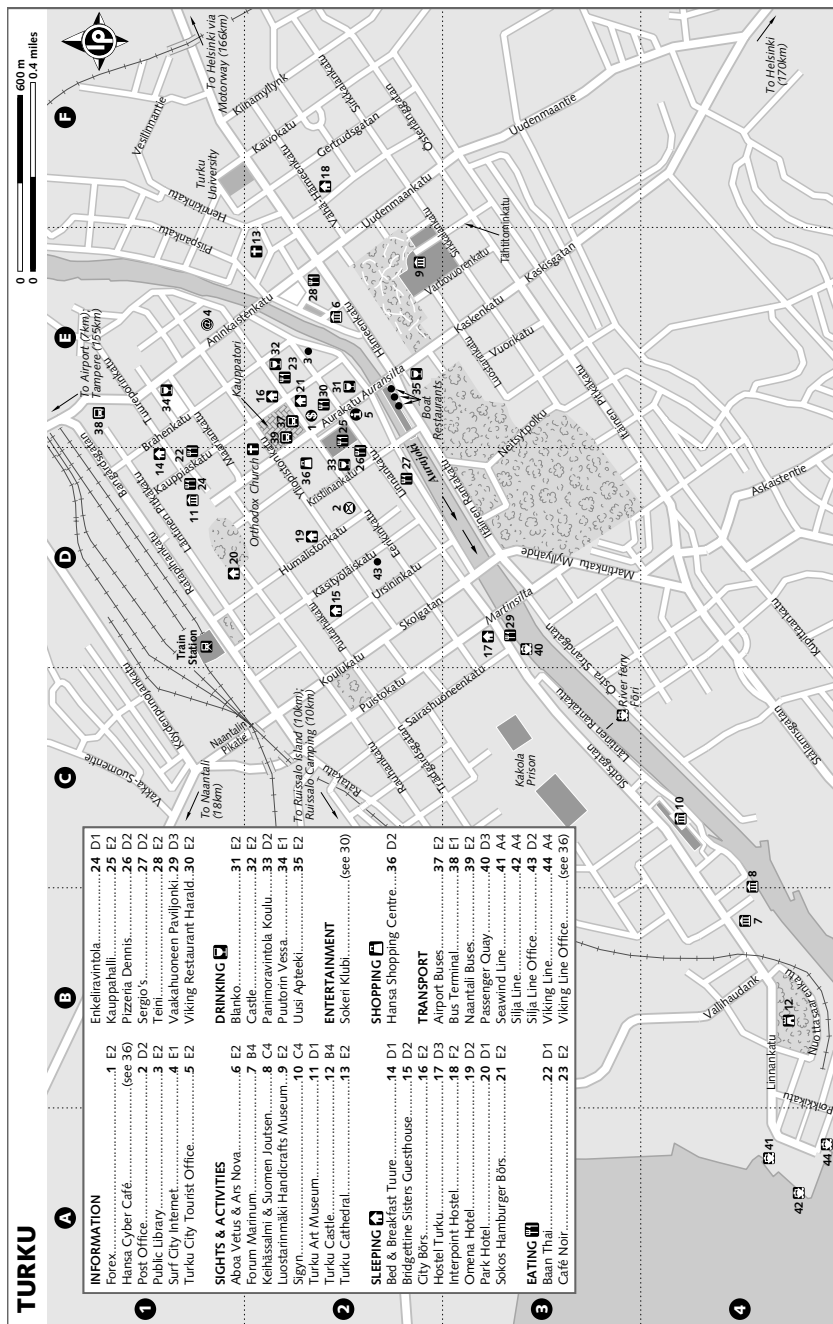
**Post Office** (☎ 0200-71000; Humalistonkatu 1; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri)

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Turku City Tourist Office** (☎ 262 7444; www.turku.touring.fi; Aurakatu 4; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun) Internet access, bike hire, accommodation and information.

### Sights & Activities

A great way to soak up Turku's summertime vibe is simply to walk or cycle along the river bank between the cathedral and the castle, crossing via bridges or the much-loved local



pedestrian ferry (*föri*) – pick up a walking tour brochure from the tourist office.

A visit to the lofty **Turku Castle** (☎ 262 0300; Linnankatu 80; adult/child €6/3.50, guided tours €1.50; ☎ 10am–6pm mid-Apr–mid-Sep, 10am–3pm Tue–Sun mid-Sep–mid-Apr), near the harbour, should be your first stop. Founded in 1280 at the mouth of the Aurajoki, the castle has been rebuilt a number of times since. Notable occupants have included Count Per Brahe, founder of many towns in Finland, and Sweden's King Eric XIV, who was imprisoned in the castle's Round Tower in the late 16th century, having been declared insane. Guided tours of the stronghold area are given in English hourly between 11am and 4pm, but do not include the Renaissance rooms on the upper floor, or the extensive museums in the bailey section of the castle, so allow time to explore those yourself.

The open-air **Luostarinmäki Handicrafts Museum** (☎ 262 0350; Luostarinmäki; adult/student & child €4/2; ☎ 10am–6pm mid-Apr–mid-Sep, 10am–3pm Tue–Sun mid-Sep–mid-Apr), in the only surviving 18th-century area of this medieval town, is one of the best of its kind in Finland. In summer artisans work inside its 40 old wooden houses and musicians stroll its paths.

**Forum Marinum** (☎ 282 9511; www.forum-mari-num.fi; Linnankatu 72; adult/child €12/7; ☎ 11am–7pm May–Sep, 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Oct–Apr) is an impressive maritime museum near Turku Castle. As well as a nautically crammed exhibition space devoted to Turku's shipping background, it incorporates three **museum ships**: the mine layer **Keihässalmi**, the three-masted barque **Signy** and the impressive 1902 sailing ship **Suomen Joutsen** (Swan of Finland). The ships can be visited independently of the museum for adult/child €5/3, or the museum alone is adult/child €7/4.

The **Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova** (☎ 250 0552; www.aboavetusarsnova.fi; Itäinen Rantakatu 4–6; adult/student/child €8/7/5.50; ☎ 11am–7pm Apr–mid-Sep, closed Mon mid-Sep–Apr), two museums under the one roof in the Rettig Palace, are respectively an archaeological exhibition and a modern art collection. The fascinating archaeological museum features a slice of medieval Turku – a section of buried streets and housing uncovered during restoration work. In summer there are free guided tours daily at 11.30am and 1.30pm.

The **Turku Art Museum** (☎ 262 7100; www.turuntaidemuseo.fi; Aurakatu 26; adult/child €6/3.50; ☎ 11am–7pm Tue–Fri, 11am–5pm Sat & Sun) houses some of Finland's finest artworks.

The commanding **Turku Cathedral** (☎ 261 7100; Tuomiokirkkokatu 20; ☎ 9am–7pm, to 8pm in summer), dating from the 13th century, is the national shrine and 'mother church' of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland. Services in English are held every Sunday at 4pm and in summer there are music recitals on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. In the south gallery of the cathedral is a small **museum** (adult/child €2/1) containing church relics and artworks.

Archipelago cruises are popular in summer, with daily departures from Martinsilta bridge at the passenger quay. The best option is the two-hour cruise out to Naantali aboard the steamship **SS Ukkopekka** (☎ 515 3300; www.ukkopekka.fi; one way/return €15/20; ☎ 10am & 2pm Jun–Aug). The same boat also has an evening dinner cruise with buffet meal on Loistokari island from €28.

## Festivals & Events

Big events on the Turku calendar include the **Turku Music Festival** in the second week in August and **Ruisrock**, Finland's oldest rock festival, held on Ruissalo island in early July.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

**Ruissalo Camping** (☎ 262 5100; camp sites €12, 2-/4-/5-person r €30/60/80; ☎ Jun–late Aug) Popular camping area on Ruissalo island, 10km west of the city centre. There are no cabins, but there is a villa with comfortable rooms. Take bus No 8 from kauppatori.

**Hostel Turku** (☎ 262 7680; hostel@turku.fi; Linnankatu 39; dm/s/d €15/35/40, linen hire €4.70; ☎ reception 6–10am & 3pm–midnight) Well located on the river close to the town centre, this warren of rooms is one of the busiest HI hostels in Finland. Well-equipped kitchen, laundry, lockers and bike hire.

**Interpoint Hostel** (☎ 231 4011; interpoint.hostel@pp.inet.fi; Vähä-Hämeenkatu 12a; dm €8.50, d €21; ☎ 15 Jul–15 Aug) At the Turku YMCA, it's open for one month and is the cheapest place to stay in Turku. It's cheerful and good fun if you don't mind a mattress on the floor and queuing for the solitary shower.

**MIDRANGE**

**Bed & Breakfast Tuure** (☎ 233 0230; tuure@netti.fi; Tuureporinkatu 17C; s/d with shared bathroom €37/50; 📺) Don't be fooled by the 'apartment block' façade and dull location, Tuure is a secure, friendly guesthouse close to the bus station, and the best value in town. Bright rooms have shared bathrooms and a good buffet breakfast is served.

**Bridgettine Sisters Guesthouse** (☎ 250 1910; www.kolumbus.fi/birgitta.turku; Ursininkatu 15A; s/d €42/61; 📺) This clean, simple B&B guesthouse run by the nuns of a Catholic convent is a haven of peace, without being too officious – silence is expected around the corridors and reception areas after 10pm.

**Omena Hotel** (www.omena.com; Humalistonkatu 7; r €55) In a refurbished Alvar Aalto–designed building, the Omena is a staff-free hotel where you book and pay over the internet (possible even same day) and use a code to get in (access after 4pm). As with others in the chain, the rooms are the quality of hotels twice this price and can sleep up to four if you use the sofa bed.

**TOP END**

**Park Hotel** (☎ 273 2555; www.parkhotelturku.fi; Rauhankatu 1; s/d €115/145, s/d weekends & summer €90/120, ste €240; 📺) All the rooms in this lovely 1902 Art Nouveau building are individually decorated and exquisitely furnished, making this Turku's most romantic hotel by a long shot – check out the top-floor rooms. There's a billiard lounge and tranquil garden.

**Sokos Hamburger Börs** (☎ 337 381; www.sokos-hotels.fi; Kauppiaskatu 6; s/d €129/148, weekends & summer €96; 📺) This enormous business hotel overlooking the market square is popular for its location alone but it is also packed with facilities including a pool, a whole floor of saunas, functional rooms and a veritable smorgasbord of bars, cafés and restaurants at street level (it is a free wi-fi hotspot).

**City Börs** (Eerikinkatu 11) Across the road from Sokos is this slightly cheaper sister hotel.

**Eating**

In summer you can dine in style on the water aboard one of a number of boat restaurants lining the Aurajoki river (see opposite for information).

**Vaakahuoneen Paviljonki** (☎ 515 3300; Linnankatu 38; mains €7-18, fish buffet €9; 📺) 11am-10pm May-Aug) This riverfront jazz restaurant is the place to go for great-value food and entertainment in summer. As well as an à la carte menu there's a daily 'archipelago fish buffet' (June to August), plus a changing ethnic buffet such as Thai, Vietnamese and Indian, all served to foot-tapping live trad jazz bands. Recommended.

**Enkeliravintola** (☎ 231 8088; Kauppiaskatu 16; mains €8-22; 📺) 1-11pm Tue-Sat, 1-7pm Sun) You can't help feeling the celestial presence in the 'angel restaurant', an atmospheric old café and dinner restaurant serving thoughtfully prepared Finnish cuisine.

**Café Noir** (☎ 233 2918; Eerikinkatu 8; mains €5-10.50; 📺) 11am-10pm) It's not flash but this unpretentious first-floor diner and bar is a local classic and one of Turku's cheapest for light meals such as pasta, meatballs and omelettes.

**Pizzeria Dennis** (☎ 469 1191; Linnankatu 17; dishes €8-15; 📺) 11am-11.30pm Mon-Thu, 11am-mid Fri & Sat, 12.30-11pm Sun) With its warden of cosy rooms adorned with Chianti bottles and strings of garlic, this place has genuine Italian flavour, innovative slants on pizza, and food that's a cut above most Finnish pizza and pasta restaurants.

**Sergio's** (☎ 233 0033; Lätinien Rantakatu 27; mains €8.50-21.50; 📺) 11am-11pm Mon-Fri, 1-11pm Sat) Get a room by the window in this lovely old riverside restaurant. Fine Italian food and wines by candlelight, and tables out the front in summer.

**Viking Restaurant Harald** (☎ 276 5050; Aurakatu 3; mains €12-22; 📺) 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11am-1am Fri, noon-1am Sat, 1-9pm Sun) This is a fun theme-restaurant where you get to mix with Norse warriors and eat with your hands. Naturally it's heavy on the meat – wild boar fillets and reindeer come served on Viking shields. There are three-course set menus from €28.

There are plenty of cheap eateries on and around Turku's bustling central kauppatori. The **Hansa Shopping Centre** (📺) 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-10pm Sun), on the west side of the square has some inexpensive lunch cafés, as well as a supermarket and Alko store. The **kauppahalli** (Eerikinkatu 16; 📺) 7am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 7am-3pm Sat) is packed with produce, meat, a sushi bar, and a cool café in a converted train carriage.

Also recommended:

**Baan Thai** (☎ 233 8290; Kauppiaskatu 15; mains €7-12.50, lunch from €6; 📺) 11am-9pm Mon-Thu, 11am-10pm Fri & Sat, noon-9pm Sun) Authentic spicy Thai food with great-value lunch specials.

**Teini** (☎ 233 0203; Uudenmaankatu 1; mains €10-20; 📺) lunch & dinner) Local institution for traditional Finnish cuisine.

**Drinking & Entertainment**

In summer the heart of Turku's nightlife scene is along the river. The evening usually begins on the decks of any of half a dozen boats lining the south bank of the river. Although most of these also serve food, they are primarily floating beer terraces with music and lots of shipboard socialising.

If the €5 pints make you wince, first join the hard-up locals gathering on the grassy river bank drinking takeaway alcohol.

**Blanko** (☎ 233 3966; Aurakatu 1; 📺) 11am-midnight Mon-Tue, 11-2am Wed-Thu, 11-4am Fri, noon-4am Sat, noon-midnight Sun) This ultrachic café by the main bridge is where Turku's hip young things get down to DJs on weekend nights; great sidewalk terrace and excellent tapas and light meals.

**Castle** (☎ 230 2886; Eerikinkatu 6; 📺) 11-3am) Turku's newest pub is fast gaining a local following. Like all Irish pubs, the emphasis is on fun, live music and an international beer list with Irish stouts on tap.

Turku also has some of Finland's most eccentric bars – try these for an offbeat pub crawl.

**Puutorin Vessa** (☎ 233 8123; Puutori; 📺) noon-midnight) In the middle of a small square near the bus terminal, this novel bar was a public toilet in a former life – from 1933 to 1968. Toilet humour and memorabilia adorns the walls and you can even have your drink in a tin potty.

**Uusi Apteeki** (☎ 250 2595; Kaskenkatu 1; 📺) 10-3am) This characterful bar was once an old pharmacy; the antique shelving and desks have been retained, but they are filled with hundreds of old beer bottles.

**Panimoravintola Koulou** (☎ 274 575; Eerikinkatu 18; lunch buffet €5.50-7.70; mains €10.20-16; 📺) 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat) In an enormous former schoolhouse built in 1889, this is an upmarket restaurant, a brewery pub and wine bar serving good lunches. Creamy home-brewed stout on tap and a big beer garden.

**Sokeri Klubi** (☎ 276 5700; Aurakatu 3; 📺) 10am-4am) The 'Sugar Club' is popular with a young crowd. Turku's best young DJs and the place to be seen late into the night.

**Getting There & Away**

Finnair flies regularly to/from Helsinki to the Turku airport, 8km north of the city. **Blue1** (☎ 06000-25831; www.blue1.com) has direct flights to Copenhagen and Stockholm at very cheap internet fares.

From the main bus terminal (☎ 0200-4000; Aninkaistenkatu 20) there are hourly express buses to Helsinki (€25.70, 2½ hours), and frequent services to Tampere (€25.70, 2¾ hours), Rauma (€16.80, 1½ hours) and other points in southern Finland.

Express trains run from the **train station** (Ratapihankatu 37) to and from Helsinki (€25.60, two hours) and Tampere (€21, two hours). For Oulu and Rovaniemi you'll need to change in Tampere. There are direct train connections from Turku harbour to Helsinki. Bus No 30 shuttles between the centre and the train station.

Silja Line and Viking Line ferries sail from Stockholm (9½ hours) and Mariehamn (six hours). Seaward Line sails to Stockholm via Långnäs (Åland). All three have offices at the harbour, and Viking Line has an office in the Hansa shopping centre.

**Getting Around**

Bus No 1 runs to/from the airport and between the centre (€2, 25 minutes). This same bus also goes from kauppatori to the harbour.

The city and regional bus services (both gold and blue buses) are frequent and cost €2 for a single journey or €4.50 for a 24-hour ticket.

Bikes can be hired from the city tourist office for €10/50 per day/week.

**AROUND TURKU Naantali**

☎ 02 / pop 13,500

Naantali, 13km from Turku, is one of Finland's loveliest seaside towns, with its gorgeous horseshoe harbour, but that can sometimes be lost on the hordes of Finnish families descending on the star attraction, the extraordinarily popular **Moomin World theme park** (☎ 511 1111; www.muumimailma.fi; day pass €17; 📺) 10am-6pm Jun–mid-Aug). It's a sort

of Disneyland based on the popular children's books written by Tove Jansson and set on an island linked to the mainland by a footbridge.

The village was developed after the founding of a convent in the 1440s. Today the harbour, lined with cafés and restaurants, the delightful cobbled **Old Town** and the huge **Convent Church** are enough incentive for a day trip here from Turku. Outside the tourist summer season, Naantali is practically deserted. Tourist information is available at **Naantali Tourist Service** (☎ 435 9800; [www.naantalinmatkailu.fi](http://www.naantalinmatkailu.fi), Kaivotori 2; ☹ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat & Sun Jun–mid-Aug, 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri mid-Aug–May) near the harbour.

**Kulturanta** (adult/child €6/4; ☹ guided tour 3pm Tue–Sun 29 Jun–15 Aug), the summer residence of the president of Finland, is a fanciful stone castle on nearby Luonnonmaa island, surrounded by a 56 hectare estate with beautiful, formal rose gardens. It can only be visited by guided tour; book through the tourist office.

#### SLEEPING & EATING

Although an easy day trip from Turku, spending a night in Naantali is a good way to beat the crowds and the town has some of southern Finland's loveliest guesthouses.

**Villa Antonius** (☎ 435 1938; Mannerheiminkatu 9; s/d €85/120) In the heart of the old town, Antonius is a romantic boutique B&B with a variety of rooms decked out with historical memorabilia and furnishings. Downstairs is a charming old-world café with light meals, mouth-watering sweets and the house speciality, home-made gingerbread.

**Naantali Spa Hotel** (☎ 44 550; [www.naantalispafinland.fi](http://www.naantalispafinland.fi); Matkailijantie 2; s/d €127/152) For the last word in pampering, this spa hotel is ranked one of the best in Finland. Luxurious rooms, exotic restaurants, awesome spa and health facilities and there's even a stationary cruise ship docked outside where you can stay in luxury shipboard cabins. It's like something out of Monte Carlo! If this is too much for the budget, nonguests can use the spa and pool facilities for €10 for two hours.

**Merisali** (☎ 435 2477; Nunnakatu 1; buffet breakfast/lunch/dinner €7/9.50/11.50, Sun lunch €13.50) Just below the Convent Church, this iconic restaurant in an old waterfront spa pavilion has a shaded terrace and a mind-blowing smorgasbord for lunch and dinner, including lavish seafood and salads – pack an appetite!

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are buses every 15 minutes from Turku's market square (€3.70, 20 minutes), and in summer the steamship *Ukkopekka* cruises between Turku and Naantali several times daily (see p167).

#### HANKO

☎ 019 / pop 10,600

With its grand wooden Russian villas, sweep of beach and bustling marina, Hanko (otherwise known as Hangö) is easily the pick of Finland's south coast resorts. The town blossomed as a spa resort in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when it was a popular and glamorous summer retreat for Russian nobles and artists. These cashed-up holidaymakers built lofty wooden villas on the sandy shore east of the harbour and with several of them now converted into charming guesthouses, they continue to attract tourists with a taste for the romantic.

The **tourist office** (☎ 220 3411; [www.hanko.fi](http://www.hanko.fi); Raatihuoneentori 5; ☹ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun Jun–Jul, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun Aug, 8am–4pm Mon–Fri Sep–May) can help with tourist information and the myriad summer activities in town.

#### Sleeping & Eating

**Villa Tellina** (☎ 248 6356; [www.tellina.com](http://www.tellina.com) in Finnish; Appelgrenintie 1–2; s/d from €60/80, d with bathroom €100; ☹ Jun–mid-Aug) This quaint but slightly ramshackle villa is close to the beach and town centre. The same owners run two other places, Villa Thalatta and Villa Eva, so this is a good first choice when it's busy.

**Villa Doris** (☎ 248 1228; Appelgrenintie 23; s/d from €55/85) This stylish Russian B&B dating from 1881 is in the area known as Spa Park. Rooms with shared bathroom are fitted with antique furniture.

**Villa Maija** (☎ 248 2900; [www.villamaija.fi](http://www.villamaija.fi); Appelgrenintie 7; s/d from €80/99) Maija is another outstanding 19th-century timber house with loads of Imperial character. The newer rooms have bathrooms and those with sea views have superb glassed-in verandahs or balconies.

Across from the East Harbour is a string of excellent restaurant-bars in converted wooden storehouses, most specialising in seafood, but also pizza and pasta.

#### Getting There & Away

There are regular daily express buses to/from Helsinki (€22.10, 2¼ hours) and two locals buses from Turku (€20.50, 3½ hours). The train from Helsinki (€20.20, two hours) requires a change to a local train or bus at Karjaa.

**Superfast Ferries** ([www.superfast.com](http://www.superfast.com)) has a daily international service between Rostock (Germany) and Hango, departing from Hango's West Harbour at 9pm (10am on Sunday). The journey takes about 24 hours and costs from €87 one way for a seat only.

## ÅLAND

☎ 018 / pop 26,300

The Åland islands comprise a stunning archipelago stretching west like a string of emeralds from the Finnish mainland to within less than 100km of Sweden.

As flat and green as a billiard table (well, maybe not that flat), these islands are made for cycling in the summertime. Ribbons of bicycle paths crisscross the islands, linked by bridges or good old-fashioned ferries, and along the way you'll pass medieval parish churches, ancient ruins and undisturbed fishing villages. Some islands are so remote and pastoral you'll feel like you've stepped back in time. With plenty of camping grounds and guesthouses, you can easily spend a week or more of cycle touring here, and distances between places of interest are mercifully short.

The islands themselves have a fascinating historical and political background. The autonomous, self-governed islands have their own flag, stamps and culture, which leans more to Sweden than to Finland – several Swedish dialects are spoken but few Ålanders speak Finnish. This situation goes back to a League of Nations' decision in 1921 after a Swedish-Finnish dispute over sovereignty. Åland took its own flag in 1954 and has issued stamps (prized by collectors) since 1984. Although Åland joined the EU along with Finland in 1995, it was granted a number of exemptions, including duty-free tax laws which allowed the essential ferry services between the islands and mainland Finland and Sweden to continue operating profitably.

#### Information

The main tourist office is **Åland Tourist Information** (☎ 24000; [www.visitaland.com](http://www.visitaland.com); Storgatan 8; ☹ 9am–6pm Jun–Aug, 9am–4pm Mon–Fri Sep–May, 10am–3pm Sat Oct–Apr) in Mariehamn. For accommodation bookings, **Ålandsresor** (☎ 28040; [www.alandsresor.fi](http://www.alandsresor.fi); Torggatan 2) and **Destination Åland** (☎ 0403-008001; [www.destinationaland.com](http://www.destinationaland.com); Elverksgatan 5) in Mariehamn handle hotel, guesthouse and cottage bookings for the entire island.

In emergencies call ☎ 112, for police ☎ 10022 and for medical services ☎ 10023.

#### Getting There & Away

##### AIR

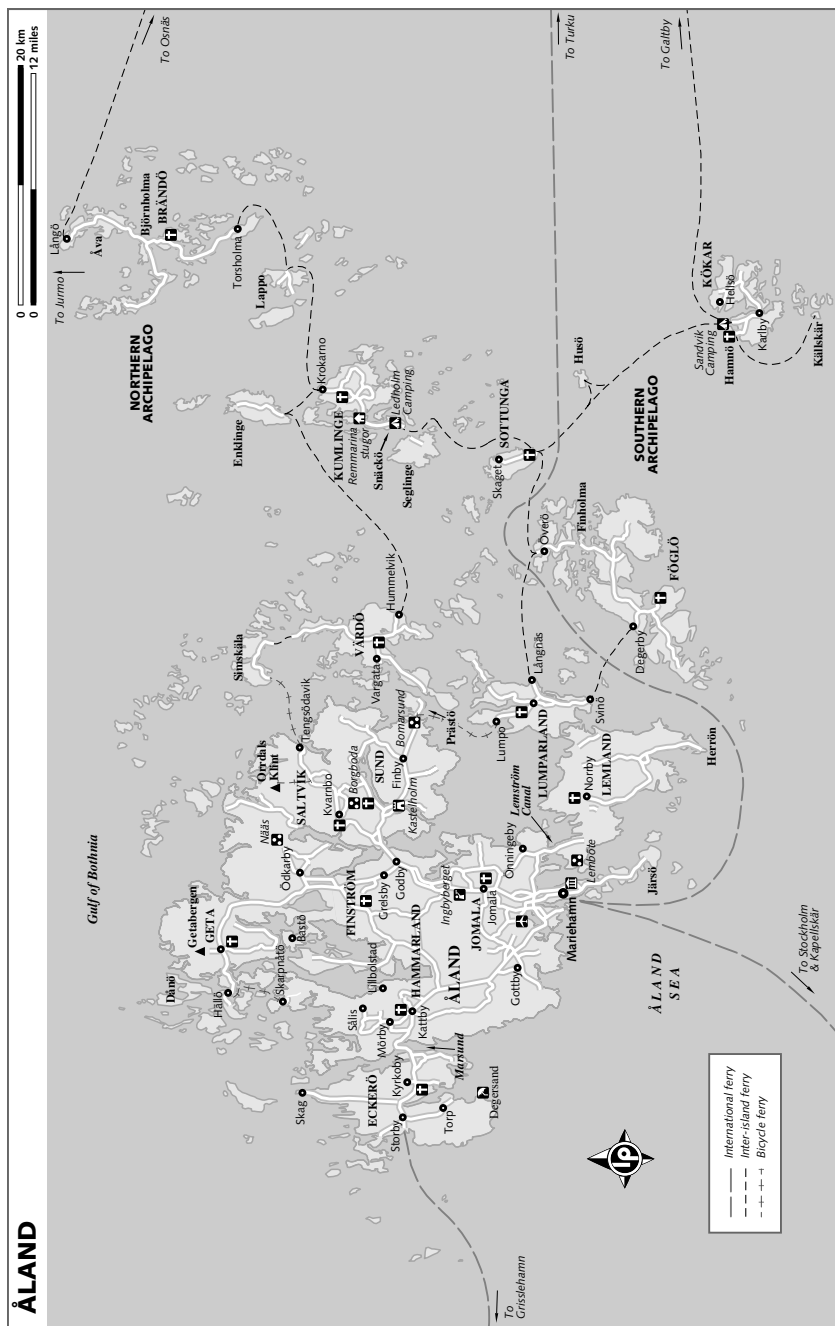
**Finnair** (☎ 634500) runs a direct service to/from Stockholm on weekdays and a daily service to/from Helsinki via Turku. **Air Åland** (☎ 117 110; Elverksgatan 10; [www.airaland.com](http://www.airaland.com)), a new company, also has daily flights from Mariehamn to Helsinki (from €44, two hours) and weekday flights to Sweden (€145, 30 minutes). The airport is 4km north of Mariehamn and there's a connecting bus service.

##### BOAT

The main companies operating between the Finnish mainland and Åland (and on to Sweden) are **Viking Line** (☎ 26011; [www.vikingline.fi](http://www.vikingline.fi); Storgatan 2) and **Silja Line** (☎ 16711; [www.silja.fi](http://www.silja.fi); Torggatan 14). **Eckerö Line** (☎ 28300; [www.eckeronlinen.fi](http://www.eckeronlinen.fi); Torggatan 2) and **Birka Cruises** (☎ 27027; [www.birkaline.com](http://www.birkaline.com); Esplanadgatan 7) operate only between Åland and Sweden.

Viking and Silja lines have daily ferries to Mariehamn from Turku (low/high season from €14/23 one way, six hours) and night ferries from Helsinki (low/high season from €24/38) as part of their links with Stockholm. Viking Line also has a ferry between Mariehamn and Kapellskär in Sweden, with bus connections to Stockholm. Eckerö Line sails from Grisslehamn to Eckerö (low/high season from €8.90/5.50, two hours).

Another alternative, if you have the time, are the smaller local ferries that ply the waters from minor Finnish ports to the remote northern and southern archipelago islands of Åland. Free travel for pedestrians and cyclists is possible from mainland Finland via Korppoo (southern route, from Galtby passenger harbour) or Kustavi (northern route, from Osnäs passenger harbour), but only if you break your journey to stay on one or more islands.



## Getting Around

### BICYCLE

Cycling is the most rewarding way to explore the islands. Some of the main roads have clearly marked separate bike lanes and many of the back roads are virtually traffic-free. You can cover a lot of ground on the main islands in two or three days and with a week or so it's possible to explore as far as the northern and southern archipelagos. **Ro-No Rent** (☎ 018-12 820, 0400-529 315) rents bicycles at Mariehamn and Eckerö harbours for a day/week starting from €7/35 (€13/65 for a mountain bike, and €17/85 for a tandem bike). It also rents boats, canoes, scooters and beach buggies.

### BUS

Five main bus lines depart from Mariehamn's regional bus terminal on Torggatan opposite the library. No 1 goes to Hammarland and Eckerö; No 2 to Godby and Geta; No 3 to Godby and Saltvik; No 4 to Godby, Sund and Vårdö (Hummelvik); and No 5 to Lemland and Lumparland (Långnäs).

### BOAT

Ferries are constantly plying the shorter straits and are free. For longer routes, ferries run according to schedule and carry cars, bikes and pedestrians.

There are also three bicycle ferries in summer (€6 to €9 with bicycle). For timetables and car-ferry fares, ask at the tourist office or **Ålandstrafiken** (☎ 018-25155; Strandgatan 25, Mariehamn).

## MARIEHAMN

☎ 018 / pop 11,000

Mariehamn is Åland's main port and capital, a town of broad avenues lined with linden trees and timber houses set between two large harbours. Coming from Finland, this is the obvious starting point for any tour of the islands. In summer it buzzes with tourists but still manages to retain its village flavour, and the marinas at the East and West harbours are quite pretty when loaded up with gleaming sailing boats. The main pedestrian street, Torggatan, is a colourful and crowded hive of activity, and there are some fine museums – enough to allow a leisurely day's exploration. Outside the summer season you could safely fire a cannon through the town.

## Orientation & Information

Mariehamn lies on a peninsula and has two harbours, Västra Hamnen (West Harbour), where the ferries pull in, and Östra Hamnen (East Harbour).

The **tourist office** (☎ 24000; www.visitaland.com; Storgatan 8; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May, 10am-3pm Sat Oct-Apr; ☒), on the main Esplanade, has free internet access and plenty of information on the islands. The **library** (☎ 531 441; Strandgatan; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat) also has free internet access.

The **main post office** (☎ 6360; Torggatan 4; ☎ Mon-Sat) sells collectible Åland postage stamps and changes money.

## Sights & Activities

The fine **Ålands Museum & Åland Art Museum** (☎ 25426; Stadhsparken; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 11am-6pm Jun-Aug, 10am-8pm Tue & Thu, 10am-4pm Wed & Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun Sep-May), housed together in the same building near the market square, gives an absorbing account of Åland's history and culture, from prehistory to the present, with displays on local music, seafaring, wildlife and festivals. The art museum features a permanent collection of works by Åland artists as well as changing exhibitions.

The stalwarts of Åland are mariners and the best place to get a feel for their exploits is down at the West Harbour. The **Maritime Museum** (☎ 19930; Hamngatan 2; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Jun & Aug, 9am-7pm Jul, 10am-4pm Sep-Apr, noon-4pm Sat & Sun mid-Jan-Apr) is a wonderfully kitsch museum of fishing and maritime commerce and ship figureheads. The central feature of the museum is a recreation of a ship with mast, saloon, galley and cabins. Anchored outside is the real thing – the museum ship **Pommern** (☎ 531 421; adult/child €4.50/3.50), a beautifully preserved four-masted barque built in Glasgow in 1903. The audio guide (€3.50) can help bring the old ship to life. A combined ticket to the ship and museum is €8/5.

Over at the East Harbour, **Sjökvarteret** (Maritime Quarter; ☎ 16033; www.sjokvarteret.com; adult/child €4/free; ☎ 10am-6pm daily mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 9-11am Mon-Fri mid-Aug-mid-Jun) is a marina, boat-building yard and museum with exhibitions on shipbuilding, craft workshops and a café.

If you want to get out on the water in style, the traditional wooden schooner

**Linden** (☎ 12055; www.linden.aland.fi) has four-hour lunch (€39) and dinner (€49) cruises daily in July. You can also try your hand at sailing through courses run by the **Åland Sailing Club** (☎ 040-724 5797; Västra Hamnen).

### Sleeping

Rates for Mariehamn's hotels and guesthouses peak in July and August, but expect some hefty discounts outside the summer season.

**Gröna Uddens Camping** (☎ 21121; www.gronaud den.com; Osternäsvägen; camp sites per person/tent €5/5; 2-/4-person cabins from €50/80; ☎ May-Sep; (P)) In a beachside park 1km south of town, Mariehamn's camping ground has tent and van sites, newly built cabins, bike and canoe rental and saunas on the water's edge.

**Gästhem Kronan** (☎ 12617; Neptunigatan 52; s/d €41/62; (P) ☎) Mariehamn has no hostels, but Kronan is a good-value guesthouse with basic but spotless, renovated rooms with shared bathroom. It's in a quiet street a short walk from the ferry terminal. Rooms are discounted outside the June–August high season. The welcoming owners also have another summer-only guesthouse, **Gästhem Neptun** (Neptunigatan 41; s/d €46/67) in the same street, with a better standard of rooms.

**Park Alandia Hotel** (☎ 14130; Norra Esplanadgatan 3; s/d €80/100; (P) ☎) The Park is a modern, comfortable hotel on Mariehamn's main boulevard. A range of modern rooms with TV – some with kitchenette and bathtub – are complemented by a small swimming pool and sauna. Rooms are a bargain on a Sunday when discounted to €60. There's a good restaurant, café and a lively terrace bar at the front.

### Eating

Mariehamn has some good cafés and the most active nightlife (such as it is) on the islands. The pedestrian strip Torggatan and the Galleria shopping arcade running off it have several cafés and cheap lunch eateries.

**Kaffestugan Svarta Katten** (☎ 21599; Norragatan 15; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat) The 'black cat' is a cosy old café and one of the best places to try the local speciality **Ålandspannkaka** (Åland pancakes), made with semolina and served with fruit and whipped cream.

**Café Julius** (Torggatan 10; ☎ 8am–5pm) On the pedestrian strip, this is another good café that opens early for breakfast.

**Dino's Bar & Grill** (☎ 13939; Strandgatan 12; mains €9–20; ☎ 10.30am–midnight Mon–Tue & Sun, 10.30–2am Wed–Thu, 10.30–4am Fri & Sat, kitchen till 9pm) Dino's is a popular, earthy pub and meeting spot with hearty pasta and pizza dishes, enormous hamburgers and a brilliant summer terrace in the side courtyard.

**Mannechai** (☎ 16727; Östra Hamnen; mains €9; ☎ 10.30am–8pm Mon–Thu, 11.30am–8pm Fri & Sat) On a refurbished boat in the East Harbour, this is Mariehamn's only Thai restaurant, serving authentic curries, soups and a salad bar.

**Indigo** (☎ 16550; Nygatan 1; mains €18.50–26; ☎ 5pm–midnight Mon–Sat, 3–11pm Sun, lunch 11am–3pm Mon–Fri) Mariehamn's most stylish restaurant is in an historic brick and timber building but the menu is contemporary Scandinavian.

**FP von Knorring** (Östra Hamnen) This boat restaurant has a great beer terrace for sunny afternoons.

## AROUND THE ISLANDS Finström & Sund

pop 950

About 20km north of Mariehamn, the small village of Godby makes a good first stop. A little way north in Grelsby is the island's only brewery, **Stallhagen** (☎ 48500; Getavägen 196), which you can tour Wednesday to Sunday at 2pm in July or by prior arrangement.

Crossing the bridge into the municipality of Sund brings you to Åland's most striking attraction, the medieval 14th-century **Kastelholm** (☎ 432 150; adult/child €5/3.50; ☎ 10am–5pm Jun & Aug, 10am–6pm Jul, 10am–4pm Mon–Fri May & Sep). The beautifully situated castle stronghold can be visited by a guided tour. Next to the castle, **Jan Karlsgården Museum** (admission free; ☎ 10am–4pm May–mid-Sep, 10am–5pm Jun–Aug) is a typical open-air museum consisting of about 20 wooden buildings, including three windmills, transported here from around the archipelago.

Further east, the ruins of the Russian fortress at **Bomarsund** are accessible all year, as are the cemeteries on Prästö (Priest island). The impressive Russian fortifications date from the 1830s and were destroyed during the Crimean War (1853–56). Near Bomarsund, **Puttes Camping** (☎ 44016; camp site per person €3, cabins €29; ☎ May–Aug) is a large, well-equipped site with a beach sauna, minigolf and cabins.

### Eckerö

pop 800

Finland's westernmost municipality, Eckerö is all blonde hair and tanned bodies in summer, packed with holidaying Swedish families making the short hop across from Grisslehamn. The best beach is at **Degersand** in the south, but away from the coast, Eckerö is typical rural Åland, with winding country lanes, tiny villages and two 18-hole golf courses.

The ferry terminal is at Storby village, about 40km (two hours by bicycle) from Mariehamn. The historic **Mail & Customs House** (☎ 38689) now houses a café, post office, bank and the **Mailboat Museum** (☎ 39000; admission €1.70; ☎ 10am–3pm Jun–mid-Aug, 10am–4pm mid-Jun–Jul), which tells the fascinating story of the treacherous archipelago 'mail route' that linked Sweden and Finland. Bus No 1 runs to Mariehamn.

If you're camping, head for **Käringsund Camping** (☎ 38309; Käringsundsvägen 147; camp sites €9, 3-/4-person cabins €35/45; ☎ mid-May–Aug) just north of Storby, or the beachy **Degersands Camping** (☎ 38004; ☎ mid-Jun–mid-Aug) at the southern end of the island. Eckerö is packed with cottage rentals and guesthouses which can be booked from agents in Mariehamn (see p171).

### Eastern Archipelago Routes

If you have a bit of time on your hands it's possible to island-hop eastwards through the northeast and southeast archipelago routes using ferry transport (free to pedestrians). Accommodation options are limited compared with the main islands so it's useful to carry a tent or make advance bookings.

To the north you can travel through Vårdö then take the 1½-hour ferry ride to Kumlinge. Another 1½ hours by ferry via Lappo brings you to Torsholma on the scattered island group of Brändö. It's then possible to hop via Jurmo all the way to Turku. By public transport, take bus No 4 from Mariehamn to Hummelvik harbour on Vårdö island. From Turku, take a bus to Kustavi, and on to Vartsala island to reach the harbour of Osnäs (Vuosnainen).

To the south, it's an easier trip travelling through Lemland and Lumparland to the port of Långnäs, which is a stop on the Viking Line and Sija Line overnight routes to Turku. Local ferries use the port of Svinö

to get across to Degerby on the Föglö island group. From there you can hop to the small and sparsely populated island of Sottunga, then take a 1½-hour ferry to the far-flung but picturesque island of Kökar, with hiking trails, a 14th-century abbey and an 18th-century church. By local transport from Mariehamn, take bus No 5 to Långnäs harbour. From Kökar there are ferries to Galtby harbour on Korppoo island (two hours), then it's 75km by bus to Turku.

## SOUTHWESTERN FINLAND

### TAMPERE

☎ 03 / pop 199,800

Finland's most dynamic city outside the capital, Tampere is an enthralling post-industrial town beautifully wedged between lakes Näsijärvi and Pyhäjärvi. Long known as the 'Manchester of Finland', this 19th-century manufacturing centre was famous for its powerful textile industry, and dozens of red-brick chimneys from former factories still point skyward, but most have now been transformed into superb cultural centres, bars or restaurants. On a grey day Tampere takes on a sort of Dickensian quality, with steam rising in the air like industrial fog. But don't be put off: Tampere works beautifully, combining working-class energy with cool Finnish sophistication.

### Information

#### BOOKSHOPS

**Akateeminen Kirjakauppa** (☎ 248 0300; Hämeenkatu 6; ☎ 9am–9pm Mon–Fri, 9am–6pm Sat, noon–8pm Sun) English-language books, maps and newspapers.

#### INTERNET ACCESS

**Main Library Metso** (☎ 314 614; Pirkankatu 2; ☎ 9.30am–8pm Mon–Fri, 9.30am–3pm Sat, noon–6pm Sun, closed Sun winter) Free internet access in the main library and on 1st floor.

**Internet Madi** (☎ 2418513; Tuomiokirkonkatu; per hr €3; ☎ 10am–10pm Mon–Fri, 11am–10pm Sat & Sun) Excellent internet café offering CD burning, laptop connections and free coffee.

**Vuoltsu Internet Café** (☎ 7146 4899; Vuolteenkatu 13; per hr €3; ☎ noon–6pm Mon–Fri Jun–Aug, 1–8pm Sep–May) Youth centre with an internet café near bus station.



## MONEY

**Forex** (Hämeenkatu 14B; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat)

## TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tampere City Tourist Office** (☎ 3146 6800; www.tampere.fi/tourism; Verkatehtaankatu 2; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May; 📺) Just off Hämeenkatu by the Tammerkoski, the busy tourist office has two free internet terminals and can help out with accommodation.

## Sights

A walk along the banks of the **Tammerkoski rapids** gives a good feel for Tampere's industrial past. From the tourist office, cross Hämeenkatu and walk north along the west bank of the river passing another set of man-made rapids before crossing the bridge at the Finlayson Centre and wandering up to the old Tampella mills and Vapriikki Centre. Return along the east bank, past the Sokos Hotel Tammer and through Koskipuisto, a popular riverside park.

There's quite a lot to see in Tampere in terms of galleries and museums, but some are reserved for those with unique interests – the Coffee Cup Museum, Shoe Museum and, the *pièce de résistance*, the Finnish Museum of Refrigeration, to name a few!

## FINLAYSON CENTRE

The Finlayson cotton mill was founded by Scottish industrialist James Finlayson in the 19th century and was the first building in the Nordic countries to boast electric lighting, which went on in 1882. Although the massive red-brick building remains intact, the interior has now been converted into a modern complex of restaurants, bars, shops, exhibition spaces and a cinema. Downstairs, the offbeat **Spys Museum** (☎ 212 3007; adult/child €7/5.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun May-Aug, noon-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat Sep-Apr) explores the world of espionage with an archaic collection of James Bond-type toys, KGB documents and a lie-detector machine – some of it looking a bit comical given today's technology. Also in the complex is the **Central Museum of Labour** (☎ 253 8800; www.tkm.fi; Väinö Linnan aukio 8; adult/child €5/2; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun), aptly devoted to the history of the labour industry and workers' movements;

and the **Rupriikki Media Museum** (☎ 260 4180; www.rupriikki.fi; Väinö Linnan aukio 13; adult/child €4/1; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun), of interest if you have a passion for the history of media and mass communications.

## VAPRIIKKI MUSEUM CENTRE

The **Vapriikki Museum Centre** (☎ 020-716 6966; www.tampere.fi/vapriikki; Veturiaukio 4; adult/child €5/1; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue & Thu-Sun, 11am-8pm Wed) is Tampere's premier exhibition space, in a renovated Tampella mill factory building. As well as changing exhibitions throughout the year, you'll also find the **Finnish Hockey Hall of Fame**, a small display dedicated to Finland's winter passion, with photos, jerseys, sticks and pucks galore. Pride of place goes to the 1995 World Champions trophy.

## LENIN MUSEUM

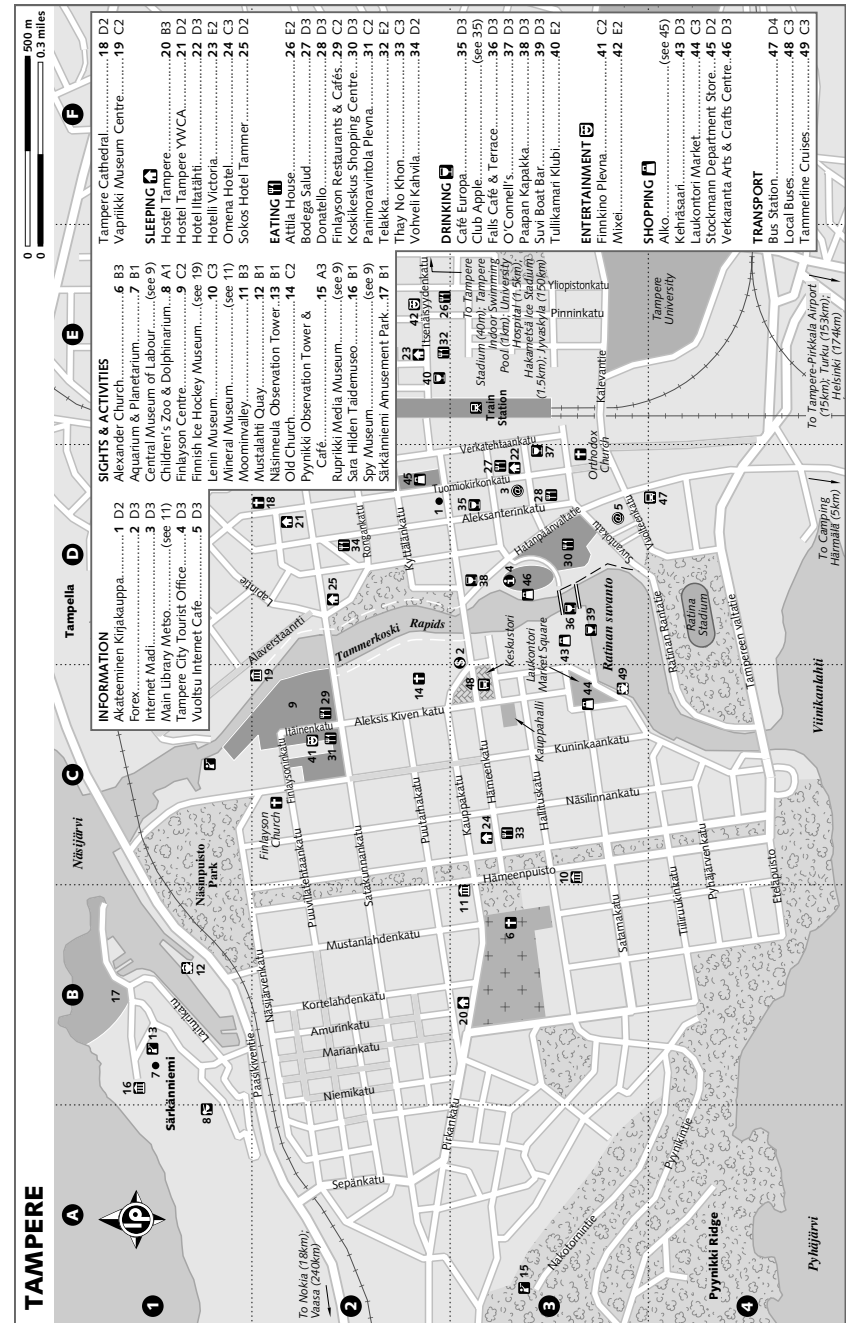
Don't miss the tiny **Lenin Museum** (☎ 276 8100; www.lenin.fi; Hämeenpuisto 28; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun), which gives a fascinating insight into the life and work of the Russian revolutionary leader who spent some time drumming up support in Tampere; there's a zany gift shop and also the couch he slept on while in Helsinki.

## MOOMINVALLEY

In the basement of the public library, **Moominvalley** (☎ 716 6578; Hämeenpuisto 20; adult/child €4/1; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun, closed Mon Sep-May) is a whimsical exhibition based on the children's books of Tove Jansson. It features original drawings and tableaux models from the world of Moomintrols – a Finnish cultural phenomenon. Kids and fans of Moominworld will love it. In the same building the small **Mineral Museum** (☎ 716 6046; adult/child €4/1) is devoted to glittering rocks and gemstones and has the same hours as Moominvalley, but not the same crowds.

## SÄRKÄNNIEMI

**Särkänniemi amusement park** (☎ 713 0200; www.sarkanniemi.fi; adult/child day pass €29/20; entry-only €5; ☎ 11am-9pm Sun-Fri, 11am-10pm Sat Jul-Aug, reduced hours in winter) is great for kids, with carnival rides, an **aquarium** and **planetarium**, a **children's zoo** and the **Dolphinarium**. A pass gives unlimited rides, or you can pay as you go.



Different parts of the park have different seasons and opening hours so call ahead or check the website. The park's 168m **Näsinneula Observation Tower** (€3.50) is the tallest in Finland and has a revolving restaurant at the top.

Adults may want to visit the **Sara Hilden Taidemuseo** (☎ 714 3500; Särkänniemi; adult/child from €4/1; ☎ 11am-6pm), which is included in the park ticket. It displays changing exhibitions of modern and Finnish art and sculpture from the 4500-strong collection of the Sara Hilden Foundation.

## CHURCHES

**Tampere Cathedral** (Tuomiokirkonkatu; ☎ 9am-6pm), built in the National Romantic style, features the weird frescoes of Hugo Simberg. There is a small but beautifully ornate **Orthodox church** (☎ 9.30am-3pm Mon-Fri May-Aug) south of the train station area.

## Activities

**Pyynikki Ridge**, rising between the two lakes, is a forested area of walking trails with fine views on both sides. There is an **observation tower** (adult/child €1/0.50; ☎ 9am-8pm) on the ridge, which also has a great café serving Tampere's best doughnuts.

Lake cruises are popular in the summer months; **Tammerlines** (☎ 254 2500; www.tammerline.fi; late-Jun-Aug) operates 1½-hour cruises from Laukontori quay (adult/child €12/4) on Lake Pyhäjärvi on Mondays at 1.30pm and 3½-hour return cruises to Nokia (€18/8) on Mondays at 4.30pm. More frequent are the hourly 25-minute **cruises** (adult/child €6/3; ☎ Tue-Sun Jun-Aug) to Viikinsaari. SS *Tarjanne*, a steam ship, departs from **Mustalahdi quay** for longer trips on the 'Poet's Way' to Virrat.

Bikes can be rented from the tourist office in summer.

## Festivals & Events

**Tammerfest** in mid-July is a big weekend of rock music with the main concert venue at the Ratina Stadium, and plenty of smaller gigs around town. **Tampere Jazz Happening**, in early November, is a four-day event featuring Finnish and international jazz musicians. Twice a year in autumn and mid-winter, the **Tampere Illuminations** light up the city streets with 40,000 coloured lights.

## Sleeping BUDGET

**Camping Härmälä** (☎ 265 1355; Leirintäkatu 8; camp sites €11.50 plus €4 per extra person, 3-5-person cabins €30-68; ☎ mid-May-Aug; ☎) This is a beautifully located and well-equipped lakeside camping ground, though at 5km south of the centre (bus No 1) it's not particularly convenient.

**Hostel Tampere** (☎ 222 9460; www.hosteltampere.com; Pirkankatu 10-12; dm/s/d €20/38.50/54; ☎) Also called Uimahallin Maja, Tampere's only year-round hostel is a good choice for backpackers. Rooms are bright, with linen included and no bunks. There's a small kitchen and breakfast room, but check out Paprilla, a café-bar on the first floor with reasonably priced meals and drinks.

**Hostel Tampere YWCA** (☎ 254 4020; Tuomiokirkonkatu 12A; dm/s/d €14-16/34/46; ☎ Jun-late Aug; reception closed 10am-4pm; ☎) About 300m north of the train station near the cathedral, this summer hostel is simple, clean and efficiently run, with kitchen and laundry facilities. Neither hostel accepts credit cards.

## MIDRANGE

**Omena Hotel** (☎ 0200-39000; www.omenahoteli.fi; Hämeenkatu 28; r €55; ☎) In a great location on Tampere's main strip, this new brand of staff-free hotel is unbeatable value. Book and pay over the internet (possible even same day) and use a code to get in (access after 4pm). The rooms are the quality of hotels twice this price, with fluffy beds, large TV, fridge and coffee-making facilities. They can sleep up to four if you use the sofa bed.

**Hotelli Iltatähti** (☎ 315 161; www.hotelliltatahti.fi; Tuomiokirkonkatu 19; s/d/tr €40/50/55, s/d/tr with private bathroom €55/60/65; ☎ reception 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, noon-6pm Sat & Sun; ☎) A stone's throw from the train station and handy for nightlife and restaurants, this unassuming family-run hotel contains a surprisingly dense warren of rooms. Reasonably priced and well equipped with kitchen and lounge areas.

**Hotelli Victoria** (☎ 242 5111; www.hotellivictoria.fi; Itsenäisyydenkatu 1; s/d €100/135, s/d discount €80/85; ☎) Close to the train station this is one of Tampere's better-value full-service hotels with comfy rooms, sauna and swimming pool, a bar and restaurant and friendly staff. Buffet breakfast included.

## TOP END

**Sokos Hotel Tammer** (☎ 262 6265; www.sokoshotels.fi; Satakunnankatu 13; s/d €119/149, s/d discount from €83/94; ☎) One of three Sokos hotels in town, this is Tampere's oldest and most stylish address, overlooking the river in a quiet but central location. Modern facilities combine with an old-fashioned elegance and class.

## Eating

Cobbled Hämeenkatu is Tampere's broad main street, running east-west from the train station to Hämeenpuisto, and it's along (or just off) here that you'll find most of the city's top restaurants, cafés, bars and the kauppari (market square), where you can sample Tampere's scary speciality, *mustamakkara* (blood sausage). Also here is the kauppahalli (market hall), but in Tampere it's indistinguishable from the rest of the streetscape.

Another good place for food stalls in summer is the south harbour where there's a weekend market on Laukontori.

## RESTAURANTS

**Panimoravintola Plevna** (☎ 260 1200; Itäinenkatu 8; mains €9-23; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon, 11-1am Tue-Thu, 11-2am Fri & Sat, noon-1pm Sun) This cavernous German-style brewery pub-restaurant in the old Finlayson textile mill is all polished timber and high ceilings and is one of Tampere's best choices for informal dining. The house speciality here is German sausage such as bratwurst (€8.20 to €15.50), but there are soups, fish and steaks – wash it down with a pint of Plevna's strong stout.

**Bodega Salud** (☎ 223 4400; Tuomiokirkonkatu 19; tapas from €6, mains €14-28; ☎ Mon-Fri 11am-midnight, Sat noon-midnight, Sun 1-10pm) Salud is a Tampere institution – a classic Spanish restaurant with everything from tapas plates, paella and the best steaks in town to such delicacies as kangaroo fillet. Great atmosphere.

**Telakka** (☎ 225 0720; Tullikamarin aukio 3; mains €7-15; ☎ 11-2am Mon-Tue, 11-3am Wed-Sat, 11-2am Sun, kitchen till 8 or 10pm) In another of Tampere's restored red-brick warehouses, this bohemian bar-theatre-restaurant offers an innovative menu and décor, live music, theatre performances and a bright summer terrace.

**Donatello** (☎ 222 0169; Aleksanterinkatu 37; buffet €5.50-7; ☎ 10.30am-9pm Mon-Thu, 10.30am-10pm Fri, 11.30am-10pm Sat, 11.30am-9pm Sun) Lavish all-you-can-eat pizza and pasta buffet for lunch and dinner.

**Thay No Khon** (Hämeenkatu 29; lunch buffet €7, mains €12.50-15.50; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat & Sun) Cheap and cheerful with tasty Thai dishes, noodles and decent lunch buffet.

## CAFÉS & QUICK EATS

The central **Koskikeskus shopping centre** (Hatanpään Valtatie) has lots of fast-food outlets and a few chain restaurants. The **Finlayson Centre** (p174) is another complex of modern restaurants and cafés with a penchant for American-style diners.

Tampere University's student cafeteria in **Attila House** (Yliopistonkatu 38; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, lunch Sat) has cheap meals.

**Vohveli Kahvila** (☎ 214 255; Ojakatu 4; waffles €3-4; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) This homey café in a quaint stone house specialises in Tampere's best waffles – the name means 'waffle café' – delicious with whipped cream, fruit and sticky sweet toppings.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Tampere has arguably the best nightlife in Finland after Helsinki and locals are blessed with plenty of music venues. In summer, **Suvi Boat Bar** (Laukontori) is a floating beer terrace.

**Café Europa** (☎ 223 5526; Aleksanterinkatu 29; ☎ noon-1am Sun-Mon, noon-2am Tue) Still Tampere's coolest bar for the décor alone, with old-world couches, candlelight, and a good summer terrace. There's also a range of international beers and cocktails and a discerning young crowd.

**Club Apple** (☎ 10pm-3am Wed-Sat) Upstairs from Café Europa is this small but stylish dance club with DJs playing house, hip-hop and funk. Entry is free before 11pm.

**O'Connell's** (Rautatiekatu 24; ☎ 4pm-2am) This unpretentious Irish pub has a strong local following and is a good place to meet travellers, expats and Tampere locals. As well as the dark stuff on tap, there's a back room with big screen for showing sports, free internet and live music on weekends.

**Falls Café & Terrace** (☎ 223 0061; Kehäsaari; ☎ 3pm-3am Mon-Fri, noon-3am Sat, 3pm-midnight Sun) In a part of an old brick factory overlooking the Tammerkoski rapids, Falls can be difficult to find but it has a great waterfront terrace, a laid-back atmosphere and live music in summer.

**Groove Bar & Cellar** (☎ 389 9000; Aleksanterinkatu 22; ☎ 4pm-4am Mon-Sat, 10pm-4am Sun) Intimate one-room bar with loungey furniture and

board games. Below is a cellar nightclub with DJs playing from 10pm.

**Paapan Kapakka** (☎ 211 0037; Koskikatu 9; noon-2am Mon-Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun) This small but swinging music bar hosts regular live jazz and blues sessions; the terrace, looking over the Hämeenkatu bridge, is a great place to be in summer.

**Mixei** (☎ 222 0364; Itsenäisyydenkatu 7-9; ☎ 8pm-2am Tue-Thu, 8pm-4am Fri & Sat) Tampere's No 1 gay club hosts theme parties, live music, DJs on weekends and karaoke on Thursday.

**Tullikamari klubi** (☎ 3146 6391; Tullikamarinaukio 2; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Tue, 11-2am Wed-Thu, 11-4am Fri, noon-4am Sat, noon-midnight Sun) This cavernous club in the old customs house near the train station is Tampere's main indoor venue for rock concerts and music sessions. Big-name Finnish bands sometimes perform here and the cover charge varies from free to €15. It's also the venue for the film festival and jazz events.

**Finnkino Plevna** (☎ 3138 3831; Itäenkatu 4; tickets €8) A 10-screen cinema in the old Finlayson factory showing international mainstream movies.

## Shopping

Beautiful textiles and handicrafts are sold at the **Verkaranta Arts & Crafts Centre** (Verkatehtaankatu 2; adult/child €2.50/2; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) near the tourist office, which also hosts craft exhibitions. There's a café here in a lovely spot overlooking the river.

There is a summer market at **Laukontori** (☎ 6am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 6am-3pm Sat). **Ke-hräsäari** (☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat), in a converted brick factory building east of Laukontori market square, has boutiques selling authentic Finnish designs, handicrafts and clothing. Tampere has a branch of famous **Stockmann Department Store** (☎ 248 0111; Hämeenkatu 4; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, noon-6pm Sun) with an Alko store.

## Getting There & Away

There are frequent daily Finnair services to/from Helsinki; flights to other destinations are via Helsinki. **Ryanair** (☎ 0200-39000; www.ryanair.com) flies from London Stansted, Liverpool, Frankfurt and Rigá to Tampere once daily for as little as €30. **Blue1** (☎ 06000-25831; www.blue1.com) has direct flights to Copenhagen and Stockholm at very cheap internet fares if you book early. Tampere's airport,

Pirkkala, is 15km southwest of the centre but all flights are met by a bus.

The **bus station** (☎ 0200-4000; Hatanpäänvaltie 5-7) is a block south of the Koskikeskus shopping centre. Regular express buses run on Finland's biggest motorway from Helsinki (€28.20, 2½ hours) and to Turku (€25.70, 2¾ hours).

Express trains run hourly to/from Helsinki (€25.60, two hours). Intercity trains go to Oulu (€51.40, five hours) and Turku (€21, two hours); there are direct trains to Pori, Jyväskylä, Vaasa and Joensuu.

You can cruise down to Hämeenlinna by lake ferry in summer. **Suomen Hopealinja** (Finnish Silverline; ☎ 212 4804; www.finnishsilverline.com) operates cruises from Tampere's Laukontori quay daily from July to August, and Tuesday to Saturday in June (€40 one way, 8½ hours).

## Getting Around

Tampere's bus service is extensive and a one-hour ticket costs €2. A 24-hour Traveller's Ticket is €6. Bus No 61 goes to the airport (€2, 30 minutes); Ryanair flights are served by a separate bus (€6).

## HÄMEENLINNA

☎ 03 / pop 47,500

Historical Hämeenlinna has a scenic outlook at the southern tip of a lake network, dominated by a medieval castle and boasting Finland's only 'urban national park', the beautiful Aulanko. There are enough sights here to keep you busy for a day and it's an easy trip from Helsinki or Tampere.

The **tourist office** (☎ 621 3373; www.hameenlinna.fi; Raatihuoneenkatu 11; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon, 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, also 10am-2pm Sat May-Aug; ☎) has plenty of local information, accommodation bookings and a free internet terminal.

The star attraction here is the medieval **Häme Castle** (☎ 675 6820; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 10am-6pm May-mid-Aug, 10am-4pm mid-Aug-Apr), which was built by the Swedes in the 1260s and converted into a jail in 1837. There are free guided tours and an extensive museum inside. Around the castle are three more **museums** which can be visited on a combined ticket with the castle (adult/child €12/6). The most interesting is the Prison Museum, set in a prison block that only closed in 1997. You can get a feel for Finnish prison life and visit preserved cells that look as if the occupants have just been released.

Finland's most famous composer, Jean Sibelius, was born in Hämeenlinna in 1865 and his childhood home is now an unassuming **museum** (☎ 621 2755; Hallituskatu 11; adult/child €3/1; ☎ 10am-4pm May-Aug, noon-4pm Sep-Apr) where you can learn something of the man's life and work.

There are no hostels in town, but there's summer camping and cabins at **Aulanko Camping** (☎ 675 9772; dm €15, camp sites €20, cabins €40-65; ☎ May-Sep) on the edge of the nature park, 6km north of the centre.

**Hotelli Emilia** (☎ 612 2106; www.hotelliemilia.net; Raatihuoneenkatu 23; s/d/tr €65/87/105, weekends €60/77/93; ☎) This central hotel is Hämeenlinna's best-value option.

Hämeenlinna is located on the Helsinki-Tampere motorway and rail line, so trains and express buses to both cities are frequent and fast. In summer you can cruise on a lake ferry to or from Tampere (see opposite).

## RAUMA

☎ 02 / pop 38,000

Some 600 wooden houses from the 18th and 19th centuries make up Vanha Rauma (Old Rauma), Finland's first Unesco World Heritage Site and the main attraction of this seaside town. With its narrow cobbled streets, cafés, **house museums** (combined ticket €4) and 15th-century stone **Church of the Holy Cross**, the Old Town makes modern-day Rauma worthy of a quick stop along the west coast.

The **tourist office** (☎ 8378 7730; www.visitrauma.fi; Valtakatu 2; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, 11am-2pm Sun mid-Jun-Aug, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-mid-May) publishes a free map and a self-guided walking tour.

## Sleeping

**Poroholma Camping & Hostel** (☎ 8388 2500; Poroholmantie; camp sites per person/tent €4/10, dm €10, s/d €30/45, cottages €45-55; ☎ mid-May-late Aug) On pretty Otanlahti bay about 2km northwest of the town centre, this pleasant camping ground also has a HI hostel in an old villa, as well as summer cottages.

**Kesähotelli Rauma** (☎ 824 0130; Satamakatu 20; s/d from €40/52/72; ☎ Jun-Aug; ☎) About 1km west of the Old Town, this summer hostel is student accommodation most of the year, so it's clean and the facilities are excellent with private kitchen and bathrooms shared between two rooms.

**Hotel Kalatori** (☎ 8378 6150; www.hotelkalatori.fi; Kalatori 4; s/d €105/130, weekends & summer €89/100; ☎ ☎ ☎) This renovated Art Deco warehouse, on the eastern edge of Vanha Rauma, is the closest accommodation to the Old Town. Rooms are bright and airy with bathrooms and pine furniture. There's a good restaurant, the ambitiously named Ravintola Delicio, downstairs.

## Eating

Head to the kauppatori (market square), in the Old Town, for cheap food stalls and a colourful market in the summer. Vanha Rauma's quaint charm lends itself to old-world cafés where you can sip coffee in antique and old lace surroundings.

**Wähä Tallbo** (☎ 822 6610; Vanhankirkonkatu 3; mains €6-20; ☎ 10.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat) This old café serves up a full menu and does a good value lunch special.

**Wanhan Rauman Kellari** (☎ 866 6700; Anundilankatu 8; lunch €10, mains €12-24; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon, 11am-midnight Tue-Thu, 11-1am Fri & Sat, noon-10pm Sun) On the edge of Vanha Rauma, this stone and timber cellar restaurant is a great place to splurge on Finnish specialities, seafood and steak. The rooftop beer terrace is terrific in summer.

## Getting There & Away

Rauma is connected by regular buses to Pori (€11.60, one hour), Turku (€16.80, 1½ hours) and Tampere (€23.30, three hours). The nearest mainline train station is Kokemäki (take a connecting bus).

## PORI

☎ 02 / pop 75,900

Pori's biggest claim to fame – apart from having a hamburger named after it – is the internationally renowned **Pori Jazz Festival**. For around 10 days in mid-July, all roads lead to Pori, so pencil it into your trip and try to make it here. Despite being one of Finland's oldest towns, and with a handful of historical buildings remaining, there's not much else of interest to travellers in this modern, industrial port city – the town centre appears to be made up entirely of shopping malls.

The festival is known worldwide among jazz and blues performers, and has hosted truckloads of big names over the past 40 years. And it's not only jazz these days – the

2006 line-up included Sting, Roberta Flack, the Neville Brothers and hip hop star Kayne West. Many scheduled and impromptu performances, jam sessions and street shows are free, creating a nonstop buzz around town. The headliners play on an open-air stage on Kirjurinluoto. For tickets, program details and information contact **Pori Jazz** (☎ 626 2200; www.porijazz.fi; Pohjoisranta 11D, 28100 Pori)

Local sights in town include **Pori Art Museum** (☎ 621 1080; Eteläranta 1; adult/child €3.50/1; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun, 11am-8pm Wed), one of Finland's better modern art galleries; and the **Juselius Mausoleum** (☎ 623 8746; Käppära, Maantiekatu; admission free; ☎ noon-3pm daily May-Aug, noon-2pm Sun Sep-Apr), a poignant memorial built by a local businessman for his 11-year-old daughter who died of tuberculosis. The original frescoes inside were painted by Akseli Gallen-Kallela.

### Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation during the festival should be booked a year in advance, but the **tourist office** (☎ 621 1271; www.pori.fi; Yrjönkatu 17; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May; ☎), in the Promenade shopping centre, can help organise a cheap bed (around €30 to €45) on a first-come, first-served basis, either in a private home or on the floor of a school classroom.

**Yteri** (☎ 634 5700; Yterinsatojentie; camp sites €9-16, 4-bed cabins €45-55; ☎ May-Aug) This is the nearest camping ground, 18km northwest of Pori.

**Hostel Buisto** (☎ 633 0646; www.hostelbuisto.net; Itäpuisto 13; s/d/tr €34/48/68) This slick new hostel is the best budget accommodation in the town centre. It's been completely refurbished with colourful rooms (shared bathrooms) and a full kitchen. You'll find it wedged between the fire station and a popular dance restaurant.

Pori's huge market square is the centre of attention, and the main strip, Yrjönkatu, is lined with cafés, restaurants, bars and shops. Be sure to try Porilainen (Pori burger), a local speciality made with onion, sausage, pickles and a bun, available at grillis around town.

During festival time, the waterfront Eteläranta becomes 'Jazz Street', a pulsating strip of makeshift bars and food stalls.

**Beerhunters** (☎ 641 5599; Antinkatu 1; ☎ 11-2am) Across from the market square, this is a terrific and always busy pub-brewery (try the award-winning 'Mufloni stout') and restaurant with internet access.

### Getting There & Away

Pori is well connected by express buses to Turku, Tampere and Helsinki. There are frequent trains to/from Tampere (€14.60, 1½ hours) and one direct service from Helsinki (€32.10, 3¾ hours).

### VAASA

☎ 06 / pop 56,900

Vaasa, a bilingual harbour city and the hub of the 'Swedish coast' (so named because of the high number of Swedish speakers) – bills itself, with some justification, as Finland's sunniest city. A lively, bustling place spread over several tight islands, Vaasa lacks the charm and character of some of the smaller towns on the west coast, but it's an important entry or exit point, only three hours from the Swedish mainland by ferry.

The busy **tourist office** (☎ 325 1145; www.vaasa.fi; Kaupungintalo; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Jun-mid-Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri mid-Aug-May; ☎), in the town hall building just off Raastuvankatu, books accommodation and rents bikes.

The most interesting of Vaasa's numerous museums and art collections is the **Museum of Ostrobothnia** (☎ 325 3800; Museokatu 3; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 10am-3pm Tue, Thu-Fri, noon-8pm Wed, noon-5pm Sat & Sun), with one of the best collections of art from Finland's Golden Era and artefacts from all over the region. Entry is free on Wednesdays.

On Vaskiluoto island, linked by a bridge to the town centre, is the amusement park, **Wasalandia** (☎ 211 1200; www.wasalandia.fi) and a 'tropical spa', **Tropiclandia** (☎ 211 1300; www.tropiclandia.fi), both popular with Finnish families and great for young kids.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hostel Vaasa** (☎ 324 1555; www.hostelvaasa.com; Niemeläntie 1; dm/s/d €17.50/40/46; ☎ ☎) On Vaskiluoto island, this hostel is a cut above most with all rooms having attached bathrooms and TV. Handy for the ferries from Sweden and only 1.5km west of the town centre (bus No 5 or 10).

**Kenraali Wasa Hostel** (☎ 0400-66 8521; www.kenraalivasahostel.com; Korsholmanpuistikko 6-8; s/d/tr €37/46/50; ☎) More like a guesthouse than a hostel, this friendly place in a former military hospital is quiet and intimate with cosy rooms (shared bathrooms) and a good kitchen.

There's no shortage of restaurants and bars around the kauppatori and Hovioikeudenpuistikko. **Strampen** (☎ 451 4512; Rantakatu 6; mains €12-23; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, 1pm-late Fri & Sat) In summer, one of the best places for a meal or drink is this lovely wooden restaurant and terrace bar in the waterfront Hovioikeuden park.

For a drink with a bird's-eye view over the city, head to the **Sky Bar** (☎ 212 4115; Rewell Centre; ☎ 4pm-4am) on the rooftop of the Sokos Hotel Vakuna.

### Getting There & Away

There are frequent buses up and down the coast from the **terminal** (☎ 0200-4061; Sepänkyläntie 1). From the **train station** (☎ 037010; Asemkatu 1) there are daily trains to Helsinki (€48.10, 4½ hours, six daily) via Tampere or Seinäjoki.

From May to September there are daily ferries (adult/student/child €55/43/30, three hours) between Vaasa and the Swedish town of Umeå (Uumaja) with **RG Lines** (☎ 320 0300; www.rgline.com). There are no scheduled bus transfers from the ferry terminals at Vaasa or Umeå; call a taxi or take bus No 5 or 10 from Vaasa's Vaskiluoto island to the town centre.

### PIETARSAARI (JAKOBSTAD)

☎ 06 / pop 20,000

The quaint town of Pietarsaari (Jakobstad), about 100km north of Vaasa, is distinctively Swedish and the most interesting place to sample the curious world of *parallelsverige* (parallel Sweden) – that part of the Finnish west coast that Swedes consider to be populated by lost brethren.

The **tourist office** (☎ 723 1796; www.jakobstad.fi; Kauppiaankatu 12; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat Jun-Aug, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) is next to the town square. There's free internet access at **After Eight** (☎ 781 6500; Isokatu 6; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri), a music café and local youth meeting centre.

**Skata**, the town's historic area filled with 18th-century wooden houses, is just north

of the centre and worth a stroll. In the old harbour area at Gamla Hamn is the pride of Pietarsaari, the **Jacobstad Wapen** (☎ 723 3639; adult/child €4/2; ☎) when in dock mid-May-late Aug), a meticulously built replica of a 17th-century galleon.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hostel Lilja** (☎ 781 6500; www.aftereight.fi/hostellilja; Isokatu 6; dm/s/d/tr €22.50/40/50/65; ☎ ☎ ☎) This stylish, modern hostel in the town centre is attached to the funky After Eight music café. Spotless rooms have that Scandinavian style; there's a TV room, wood-fired sauna and bike rental.

**Westerlund Resandehem** (☎ 723 0440; Pohjoisnummikatu 8; s/d/tr €27/41/54; ☎) Old-fashioned charm in the heart of the historic Skata part of town make this lovely family-run B&B the first choice for romantics.

There are plenty of cheap places to eat and drink along the partly pedestrian Kävelykatu (Kanalesplanaden), one block north of the market square.

**Café Trend** (☎ 723 1265; Isokatu 13; ☎ 9am-11pm Mon-Thu, 9-1am Fri & Sat, noon-midnight Sun) On the pedestrian strip, this popular meeting spot is where Pietarsaari's beautiful people crowd the terrace or read magazines over coffee or beer.

### Getting there & Away

There are regular buses to/from Vaasa (€16.80, 1½ hours) and to Oulu (€33.60, 3½ hours) via Kokkola (the closest main-line train station).

## LAKELAND & THE EAST

If you're looking for quintessential summertime Finland, this is it. Eastern Finland is a romantic region of lakes, rivers, locks and canals. There's more water here than *terra firma* – a glistening patchwork of waterways in summer where a highlight is canoeing or taking a lake ferry between towns. Lakeland encompasses the border region of Karelia, part of which was taken by Russia in the bitter Winter War, and the Savo region of which Savonlinna is the centre. If you've only got the time or money to visit one part of Finland outside Helsinki in the summertime, make this the place.

## LAPPEENRANTA

☎ 05 / pop 58,700

On the southern shores of the vast Lake Saimaa, the South Karelian capital of Lappeenranta is an animated Lakeland town with a visible history, a giant sandcastle and a canal that goes all the way to Russia.

Lappeenranta was a frontier garrison town until the construction of the Saimaa Canal in 1856 made it an important trading centre. These days the canal is a major attraction for tourists with boats cruising as far as Vyborg, Finland's second-largest city until it was lost to Russia (along with large swathes of Karelia) in WWII. Finland's largest lake spreads out from Lappeenranta's harbour, but even if you stick to dry land, Lappeenranta is a vibrant town with plenty of historical links in its old fortress, and it's a good place to sample Karelian food and culture.

### Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 667 788; www.lappeenranta.fi; Kievarinkatu 1; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Jun-late Aug, 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri late Aug-May; ☎) is on the south side of the market square but is moving to a new location about 100m west, just off Lapeenkatu, in late 2007. From June to August there's a summer **tourist information kiosk** (☎ 9am-8pm) by the harbour.

The **public library** (☎ 616 2346; Valtakatu 47; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) has free internet terminals (book ahead).

### Sights & Activities

The fortifications in **Linnoitus** (Fortress), on a small hill overlooking the harbour, were started by the Swedes and finished by the Russians in the 18th century. Some of the fortress buildings have been turned into interesting **museums** (☎ 616 2255; combined ticket adult/child €7/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Jun-late Aug, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun late Aug-May). They include the **South Karelia Museum**, with a variety of folk costumes, local history and a scale model of Vyborg as it looked before it fell to the Russians in 1939; the **South Karelia Art Museum**, with a permanent collection of paintings by Finnish and Karelian artists, including a good representation of modern art; and the small **Cavalry Museum**, which exhibits portraits of commanders, uniforms, saddles and guns. There are guided tours (€2.50) at 2.30pm daily in summer.

On the harbour's edge, just north of the fortress walls, is Lappeenranta's latest attraction – an enormous and unmissable **sandcastle** (Hiekkalinna; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Jun-early Sep). Sand sculptors from around Finland have been constructing the fantasy sculpture – using some three million kilos of sand – since 2003 and it's certainly worth seeing.

In the city centre, the **Wolkoff Home Museum** (☎ 616 2258; Kauppakatu 26; adult/child €4.50/free; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun Jun-late Aug, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun late Aug-May) is the preserved 19th-century home of a Russian emigrant family. Obligatory guided tours are held on the hour.

There is a public **beach sauna** (admission €4.20/1.50; ☎ 4-8pm Wed & Fri women, Tue & Thu men) on Myllysaari just east of the harbour.

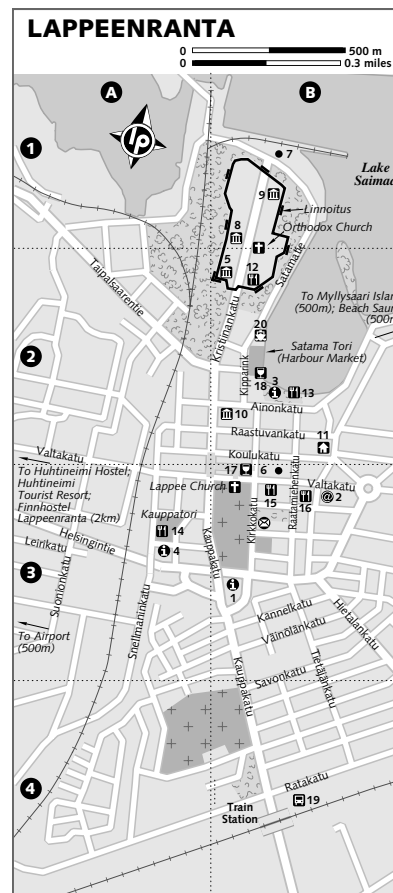
### Tours

Short cruises of two to three hours with **Karelia Lines** (☎ 453 0380; www.kareliainlines.fi; adult/child from €12/5; ☎ noon, 3pm & 6pm) on Lake Saimaa and the canal leave from the harbour daily in summer.

The day cruise along the Saimaa Canal to Vyborg (Russia) is one of Lappeenranta's biggest drawcards, though it's no longer 'visa-free'. **Saimaan Matkaverkk** (☎ 541 0100; www.saimaatravel.fi; Valtakatu 48) arranges the necessary Russian visas but you will need to request one at least a week ahead and provide passport details. EU citizens need only a group visa, but non-EU citizens need an individual visa (which cost around €33 to €44). From mid-May to September, the **MS Carelia** (adult/child €59/44; ☎ Sat late Jun-early Aug €65/44) departs at 8am for the 6½-hour trip and stops for around 4½ hours in Vyborg. The return trip is by bus.

### Sleeping

**Huhtiniemi Tourist Resort** (☎ 451 5555; www.huhtiniemi.com; Kuusimäenkatu 18; tent/per person €12/4, 2-/4-person cottages €32/42, apt from €65; ☎ P) This well-kept complex on the shores of Lake Saimaa offers a bit of everything – camping, hostel, cottage and apartment accommodation catering for a range of budgets. On site is the **Huhtiniemi Hostel** (dm €10; ☎ Jun-mid-Aug), with six-bed dorms and the cheapest accommodation in town, and the upmarket **Finnhostel Lappeenranta** (s/d



€52/69; ☎), with tidy hotel-style rooms with bathroom and linen, breakfast and a morning swim and sauna included. The resort has a café, pool, and you can rent boats for paddling around the lake. It's located about 2km west of the centre; take bus No 1 or 3 from the centre or No 5 from the train station.

**Guesthouse Kantolankulma** (☎ 050-328 7595; www.gasthauslappenranta.com; Kimpisenkatu 19; s/d €52/75; ☎ P) Close to the harbour and town centre, this is a spiffing guesthouse with apartment-style rooms ranging from a studio to four-room apartment, but all have full kitchen with utensils, cable TV and bathroom. Call ahead as it is quite often unstaffed.

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## Eating & Drinking

In summer, head to Satama tori (Harbour market), just below the fortress walls, where food stalls set up and locals gather. Don't miss trying the delicious Karelian favourite *vety* (a pie or sandwich made with ham, eggs, butter and relish). The **kauppatori** and **kauphalli**, just south of the centre, also has Karelian specialities and fresh produce.

**Kahvila Majruska** (☎ 453 0554; Kristiinankatu 7; ☎ 10am-7pm, shorter hrs in winter; ☎) In a beautifully furnished 18th-century wooden building at the fortress complex, Majruska oozes old-fashioned charm and does a good range of home-made cakes and quiches.

**Kasino Restaurant & Terassi** (☎ 415 6063; Aioninkatu 10; lunch buffet €9; ☎ lunch & dinner) This century-old former casino now houses a stylish harbourside restaurant with an excellent value lunch buffet. It's a bit formal inside, but the terrace hanging over the harbour attracts the summer crowds.

**Tiglio's** (☎ 411 8311; Raatamiehenkatu 18; pasta & pizza €9.50-13, other mains €12-24; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon, 11am-11pm Tue-Thu, 11am-mid Fri, noon-mid Sat,

noon-11pm Sun) Authentic, relaxed Italian restaurant with tasty, reasonably priced meals and a hefty salad buffet.

**Tassos** (☎ 678 6565; Valtakatu 41; mains €10-28, lunch buffet €12; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri, noon-midnight Sat) You don't see many Greek restaurants in Finland but at this Greek-Finnish fusion place, pheasant and reindeer share a menu with dolmades and moussaka.

In summer, the best place for a drink is down at the harbour where two boats, **SS Suvi-Saamai** and **Prinsessa Armaada**, welcome you to their busy beer terraces.

In town, Kauppakatu and Valtakatu each have a lively strip of bars and clubs.

**Old Park** (☎ 678 6563; Valtakatu 36; ☎ noon-1am Sun-Thu, noon-3am Fri & Sat) is a lively Irish pub that gets very crowded most nights. Downstairs, the **Green Apple** (☎ 8am-3am) is a bright café-pub with a more relaxed crowd, and further still (in the basement) is the **Golden Apple** (☎ 10pm-4am Wed, Fri & Sat, 10pm-3am Thu & Sun), a nightclub where the dance floor is the place to be.

## Getting There & Away

Finair has daily flights between Helsinki and Lappeenranta; take bus No 4 to the airport.

All bus and train tickets can be booked at the central office of **Matkahuolto** (☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri), opposite the town park. Regular express bus services include: Helsinki (€33.60, four hours) and Joensuu (€36.10, 4½ hours), while local buses go to Savonlinna (€22.90, four hours, weekdays only) and Imatra (€6.40, one hour). For Kuopio (€32.10) change at Mikkeli. The bus and train stations are together about 500m south of the centre along Ratakatu, though most buses stop in the centre.

Lappeenranta is on the main rail link between Helsinki (€35.60, three hours) and Joensuu (€31.10, 2½ hours). Local services to Savonlinna (€22, 2½ hours) require a change at Parikkala.

## SAVONLINNA

☎ 015 / pop 28,700

Split by two stunning lakes and graced with one of the best-preserved medieval castles in the northern countries, Savonlinna is the prettiest of all the eastern Lakeland towns. While others sit on the shores of lakes, Savonlinna seems to float on them.

The town is famous throughout Finland for the month-long Opera Festival held every July – a cultural extravaganza contained within the castle walls that draws people from around the world. It's worth being here during the festival for the atmosphere alone, but at any time in late spring or summer, the Savo region is a wonderful place to cruise on the waters, stay in rural cottages and explore the surrounding countryside.

## Information

The **Savonlinna tourist service** (☎ 517 510; www.savonlinnatravel.com; Puistokatu 1; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat & Sun Jul, 9am-5pm daily Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun) is a good place to find opera festival information and make accommodation bookings.

The **public library** (☎ 571 5100; Tottinkatu; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) has free internet access. **Knut Posse Bookshop** (☎ 576 960; Olavinkatu 44) has one free terminal.

Hire bikes at **Intersport** (☎ 517 680; Olavinkatu; day/week €10/35).

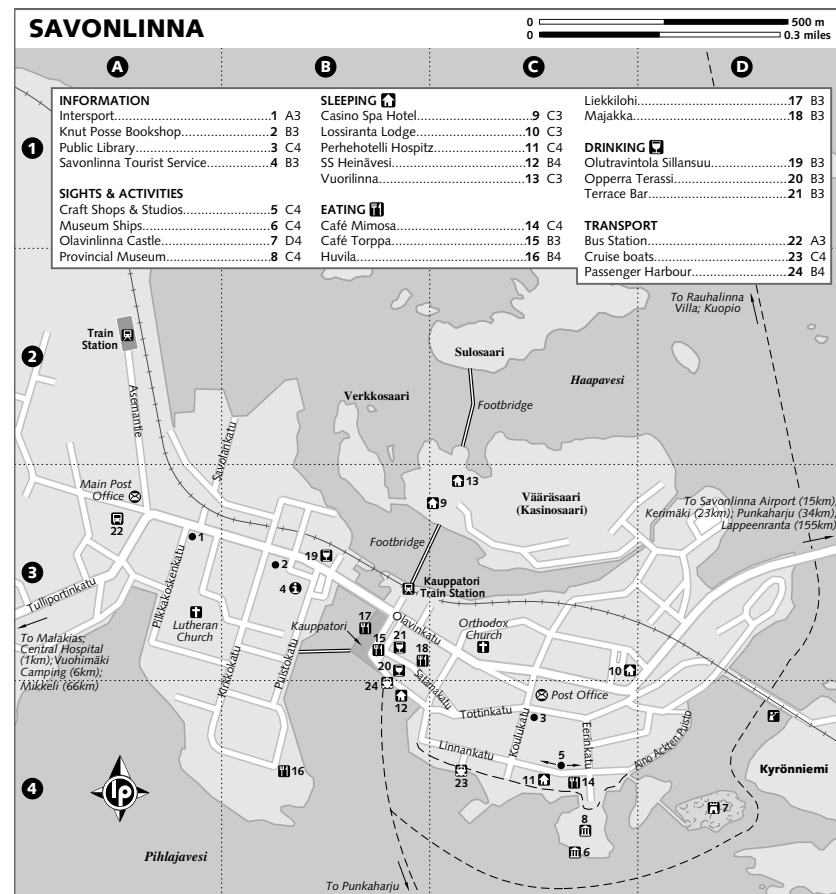
## Sights & Activities

Take a walk out to forested Sulosaari via the footbridges (behind the Casino Spa Hotel) – it's beautiful on summer evenings, although be aware that it's also popular with boozing local teens on weekends. Another good walk is from the kauppatori to the castle along the lakefront and back along **Linnankatu**, a charming street lined with old wooden houses, cafés and **craft shops and studios**.

The late-afternoon reflection of dramatic **Olavinlinna Castle** (☎ 531 164; www.olavinlinna.fi; adult/student & child €5/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Jun-Aug, 10am-3pm Sep-May) on Lake Pihlajavesi is a memorable sight. The castle was used by both Swedish and Russian overlords, but today is best known as the setting for the month-long Savonlinna Opera Festival. For a tour of the castle, including its original towers, bastions and chambers, join the excellent hourly guided tours.

Across from the castle is the **provincial museum** with a large exhibition space related to local and maritime history, and four **museum ships** (combined ticket adult/child €5/1; ☎ 11am-5pm daily Jul, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun Aug-Jun).

Dozens of 1½-hour **scenic cruises** (€8-12) leave from the harbour near the kauppatori



daily in summer, and there are ferries to Linnansaari National Park and Punkaharju. **SS Heinävesi** (☎ 514 320) sails to Punkaharju daily at 11am in summer, returning at 3.40pm (one-way adult/child €20/8, two hours).

## Festivals

The **Savonlinna Opera Festival** (☎ 476 750; www.operafestival.fi; Olavinkatu 27), held throughout July, is the most famous cultural festival in Finland, with an international cadre of performers, along with concerts of chamber and classical music, all within the walls and covered courtyard of Olavinlinna Castle. The 2006 program included the operas *Carmina* and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Tickets

cost from €30 to €130 (more for premieres and box seats), but can be picked up for as little as €20 on some nights. Tickets can be booked over the internet. If you arrive in late June you may be able to see performers in rehearsal.

Maintaining the high culture, Savonlinna has a **Ballet Festival** (☎ 555 0200; www.savonlinnaballet.net; tickets €45-140), also at Olavinlinna Castle, over the first week in August. In recent years Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet company and Hungarian National Ballet have performed.

The most recent addition to Finland's whacky festival list is the **Mobile Phone Throwing World Championships**, held in Savonlinna in late August since 2000.

## Sleeping

Book accommodation well in advance during the opera festival – six months for hotels and a couple of months for hostels, although it's always worth a phone call to see if you can get in on any given day. If you have your own transport there are lots of cottages for rent around Savonlinna.

**Vuohimäki Camping** (☎ 537 353; [myyntipalvelu@lomaliitto.fi](http://myyntipalvelu@lomaliitto.fi); camp sites tents/per adult/child €12/4/2, cabins €56-82; ☎ Jun-Aug) About 7km west of town, this camping ground on Lake Pihlajavasi fills up quickly in July.

**SS Heinävesi** (☎ 514 320; cabins upper/lower deck per person €24/27) This small lake cruiser offers cramped harbourside accommodation in twin cabins after the last cruise every evening during summer.

**Perhehotelli Hospitz** (☎ 515 661; [www.hospitz.com](http://www.hospitz.com); Linnankatu 20; s €65-90, d €75-115; ☎) Savonlinna's most stylish hotel is a stone's throw from the castle; spacious rooms have polished floors, chandeliers, old world charm, and two front rooms have balconies. The restaurant dining room looks more like a ballroom.

**Casino Spa Hotel** (☎ 739 5430; [www.spahotelcasino.fi](http://www.spahotelcasino.fi); Kasinosaaari; s/d from €87/99, €108/140 Jul-Aug; ☎ ☎ ☎) Top-notch rooms with a romantic view of the lake are great value at this price (difficult to get in July), plus you have all the facilities of a spa hotel with spas, saunas, steam bath, gym and pool. It's just over the bridge from the kauppatori train station.

**Vuorilinna** (s/d €59/69, with bathroom €67/79) Also located at Casino Spa Hotel is this cheaper wing.

**Lossiranta Lodge** (☎ 511 2323; [www.lossiranta.net](http://www.lossiranta.net); Aino Aktén puistotie; d from €90-110, d with sauna €150; ☎ ☎) This beautifully designed boutique villa boasts a stunning lakeside location and the closest possible view of Olavinlinna. The five unique rooms are impossibly cute, lovingly designed and surprisingly functional. Recommended but book ahead in summer.

## Eating

The lively market at the kauppatori is where to find local pastries such as *omena-lörtsy*, a tasty apple turnover. Also on the kauppatori, **Café Torppa** is a popular student-run kiosk for coffee and late-night snacks.

**Liekkilohi** (Flamed Salmon; fishy mains €7-10; ☎ to 2am in summer) This bright-red, covered pontoon anchored just off the kauppatori serves portions of flamed salmon and fried

vendace – perfect for a very Finnish late-night snack.

**Café Mimosa** (☎ 532 257; Linnankatu; light meals €6-10) With a view of the castle, this café has a fine terrace and bar, and serves salads, cakes and light meals.

**Majakka** (☎ 531 456; Satamakatu 11; mains €12-21, lunch from €7; ☎ 11am-1pm Mon-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) Facing the harbour and making the most of the nautical theme, Majakka is adorned with model lighthouses and ships and is a good place for seafood and Finnish fare. The lunch special is a bargain.

**Huvila** (☎ 555 0555; [www.panimoravintolohuvila.fi](http://www.panimoravintolohuvila.fi); Puistokatu 4; mains €13.50-24; ☎ noon-midnight) The finest place in town to dine or enjoy a beer, this stylish restaurant across the harbour mixes gourmet local food with refined brewing – wash down poached Arctic char or breast of duck with a lovingly brewed Porter ale. The summer terrace looks across the lake to the harbour area. There are two boutique guest rooms upstairs.

## Drinking & Entertainment

With only a small student population, Savonlinna is quiet most of the year but explodes into life in July and August. Hotel Seurahuone's top-floor **Terrace Bar** (☎ 5731; Kauppatori 4; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat Jun-Aug) is a great place for a drink with a fine view over the town. It's also famous for its fried vendace.

Terraces are also set up all around the harbour – the busiest is **Opperra Terassi** in front of Majakka.

**Huvila** (see above) is a must for lovers of fine ale, with several types of beer brewed on the premises and some of the best *sahiti* (a high-alcohol, sweet Finnish beer) in the country.

Near the main bridge just off Olavinkatu **Olutravintola Sillansuu** (☎ 531 451; Verkkosaarencatu 1; ☎ 2pm-midnight Sun-Mon, 2pm-2am Tue-Wed, 2pm-2.30am Thu-Sat) an English-style pub is another place for connoisseurs, with a huge selection of international beers and whiskies.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Finnair and FinnComm Airlines fly to Savonlinna from Helsinki from Monday to Friday. The airport is 15km from the centre and a shuttle bus operates during the opera festival (€6).

## BOAT

From mid-June to mid-August the lake ferry **MS Puijo** (☎ 555 0120; €75) travels to Kuopio (10½ hours) on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 9am, returning the following day on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. This scenic lake journey follows the Heinävesi route, passing through some canals and locks and sailing close to the Valamo Monastery.

## BUS

From the bus station located on the western side of Savonlinna there are several daily express buses to the capital Helsinki (€46.30, five hours), Joensuu (€23.30, two hours), Kuopio (€25.70, two hours) and to Lappeenranta (€25.70, two hours). Local buses run services to Kerimäki (€4.80, 35 minutes).

## TRAIN

There are trains running from Helsinki (€49.60, five hours) via Parikkala – you must change to a regional train or get a connecting bus service at Parikkala, otherwise you'll wind up in Joensuu. For Kuopio, you need to take a bus to Pieksämäki and then grab a train to Savonlinna from there. The main train station is a long walk from Savonlinna's centre; get off at the kauppatori platform instead.

## AROUND SAVONLINNA

**Punkaharju**, situated between Savonlinna and Parikkala, is the renowned sand ridge (*esker*) covered with pines; the surrounding forest and lakes, though, are also beautiful and it is a great area for some cycling or walking.

While you're in town, it's worth making the trip to visit the weird art centre of **Retretti** (☎ 775 2200; adults/student/child €15/9/5; ☎ 10am-5pm Jun & Aug, 10am-6pm Jul), which has superb summer exhibitions of modern and experimental art in a walk-through artificial cave.

Punkaharju can be reached from Savonlinna by train, bus or, throughout summer, a two-hour cruise (one way adult/child €20/8) to Retretti jetty.

The world's largest wooden church can be found at **Kerimäki**, about 23km east of Savonlinna. It was built in 1847 to seat a congregation of 3300 people.

## KUOPIO

☎ 017 / pop 87,800

Surrounded by lakes and forest, with a large hill to view them from, and boasting the world's biggest smoke sauna, Kuopio is the most enjoyable of all the northern Lakeland cities. Along with this beautiful location, the town has a vibrant marketplace, varied nightlife and excellent restaurants. Time your visit for a Tuesday or Thursday so you can steam it up in the smoke sauna, but save time for cruising on the lakes and soaking up the atmosphere of a typical Finnish city.

## Information

The helpful **Kuopio Tourist Office** (☎ 182 584; [www.kuopioinfo.fi](http://www.kuopioinfo.fi); Haapaniemenkatu 17; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug, 10am-3pm Sat Jul, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, Sep-May) is behind the impressive town hall north of the kauppatori (market square). Ask about the **Kuopio Card** (adult/child €12), which offers a range of free museum admissions and discounts.

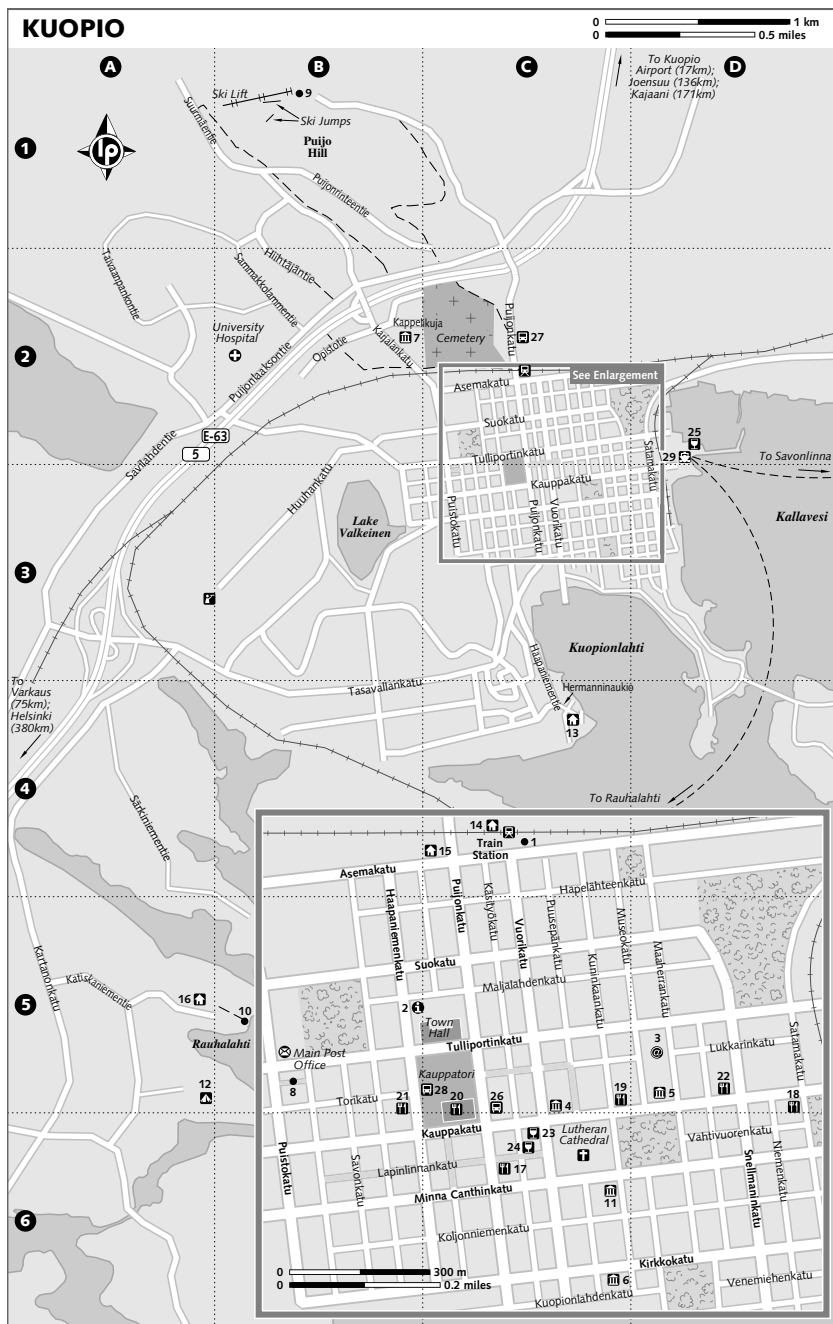
There's free internet access on the 2nd floor of the **public library** (☎ 182 111; Maaherrankatu 12; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat). Bikes can be rented at the **Hertz office** next to the train station.

## Sights & Activities

In a country as flat as Finland, **Puijo Hill** is highly regarded. Take the lift to the top of the 75m-high **Puijo Tower** (adult/child €3.50/2.50; ☎ 11am-10pm Tue-Sat) for spectacular views of Lake Kallavesi and the surrounding spruce forests. The hill is a popular spot for mountain biking, walking and in winter cross-country skiing, and there's a giant all-season ski jump here where you can often see jumpers in training. There's no public transport but you can walk to the top from the town centre in about 45 minutes.

Time your visit for a Tuesday (or Thursday in summer) so you can sweat in what's said to be the world's largest public **smoke sauna** (☎ 030-60830; Jätkänpäällä; adult/child €10/5; ☎ 5-11pm Tue year-round & Thu Jun-mid-Sep) near the Hotel-Spa Rauhalahti. This 60-person log *savusauna* (smoke sauna) is mixed and guests are given towels to wear. Bring a swimsuit for a dip in the lake – devoted locals and brave tourists do so even when the lake is covered with ice, and believe





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us, it's a singularly exhilarating experience! There's a bar and restaurant serving traditional buffet food and 'lumberjack shows' in summer. Bus No 7 goes from the market square to Rauhalahi every half-hour (€2.60), but the best way to get there in summer is by ferry from Kuopio harbour (adult/child €10/5).

The following city museums can all be visited free with the Kuopio Card. The **Kuopio Museum** (☎ 182 603; Kauppakatu 23; adult/student & child €5/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am 7pm Wed, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun, closed Mon Sep-Apr) is housed in a lovely Art Nouveau castle-like building and combines a natural history museum with cultural history. Pride of place goes to a reconstruction of

a woolly mammoth but there are lots of exhibits relating to the region. The **Old Kuopio Museum** (☎ 182 625; Kirkkokatu 22; adult/child €2.50/free; ☎ 10am-5pm May-Sep, 10am-3pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Oct-Apr) is a charming set of wooden buildings that make up a folk museum displaying local homes and shops from the 19th century. The **Kuopio Art Museum** (☎ 182 633; Kauppakatu 35; adult/child €3/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, till 7pm Wed, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun) has a collection of Finnish art from the 19th century to the present, including works by Pekka Halonen.

The **Orthodox Church Museum** (☎ 287 2244; Karjalankatu 1; adult/student/child €5/3/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun May-late Aug, noon-3pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun late Aug-Apr) is a fascinating museum crammed with collections and artefacts rescued from monasteries, churches and *tsasouni* (chapels) in USSR-occupied Karelia. Take bus No 7 from the market square.

**VB Photographic Centre** (☎ 261 5599; Kuningankatu 14-16; adult/child €3-5/free; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug, 11am-5pm Tue, Thu-Fri, 11am-7pm Wed, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun Sep-May) is a quality exhibition of old photos and art by pioneering photographer Victor Barsokevitsch.

**Pikku-Pietari Market Alley** (Hatsalankatu 24 & Puistokatu 21; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Jun-Aug) is a charming narrow alley full of renovated shop houses, boutiques, craft galleries and a café which is open during summer.

In summer there are regular lake and canal cruises from the harbour. They include day trips to Heinävesi (€50/25) and Valamo Monastery (€60/30) and cruises on Lake Kallavesi (from €12). Contact **Roll Cruises** (☎ 266 2466, Kauppakatu 1).

### Festivals & Events

The main event is the week-long **Kuopio Dance Festival** (☎ 282 1541, tickets 0600-10800; www.kuopiodancefestival.fi) in mid-June. There are open-air classical, ballet and modern dance performances and the town is buzzing at this time. You can also take part in dance workshops and courses. For a week at the start of July, the harbour area is transformed into a food and wine village for the annual **Kuopio Wine Festival** (☎ 044-719 7337; www.kuopiowinefestival.com; tickets €19; ☎ 6pm-1am).



## Sleeping

**Camping Rauhalahi** (☎ 473 000; Kiviniementie; camp site per person/tent €47, 2-/4-person cabins from €30/55; ☞ mid-May–Sep) Adjacent to the Rauhalahi spa complex, this upmarket camping ground has a beautiful lakeside location and a truckload of activities for kids, including the nearby pirate theme park.

**Hermannin Salit** (☎ 364 4961; www.hermannin.salit.com; Hermanninaukio 3A; dm/s/d from €20/40/50) Kuopio's best budget option if you want to be within walking distance of the centre. About 1.5km south of the market square, it's a small, simple place with kitchen, lounge and free laundry.

**Retkeilymaja Virkkula** (☎ 418 2178; Asemakatu 3; dm €15; Jun–early-Aug) About 100m from the train station, this is a conveniently central and cheap summer hostel with large dorms. Reception is open from 6pm.

**Rautatie** (☎ 580 0569; Asemakatu 1; s/d from €46/75) Conveniently located inside the train station, this is a surprisingly bright, comfortable and peaceful guesthouse.

**Spa Hotel Rauhalahi** (☎ 030-60830; www.rauhalahi.com; Katsikaniementie 8; s/d €97/124, summer s/d €87/102, apts from €124) This lavish spa hotel is about 6km southwest of the centre and close to the lakeside smoke sauna. Rooms are typical hotel standard and the facilities impressive, including a gym, spa, pool and popular dance restaurant.

**Hostelli Rauhalahi** (s/d €61/70) A HI-affiliated wing of the Spa Hotel where pairs of rooms share a kitchen and bathroom, and you get to use the hotel facilities. Take bus No 7 from the kauppatori.

## Eating

Kuopio's main square dominates the centre of town and here you'll find markets, food stalls and the 105-year-old indoor **kauppahalli** (☞ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, 8am–3pm Sat). Try the Kuopio speciality *kalakukko*, a local fish baked inside a rye loaf (eaten hot or cold).

**Burts Café** (☎ 262 3995; Puijonkatu 15; light meals €3–6; ☞ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–4pm Sat, 11am–3pm Sun) Burts is an arty café and the best place in town for coffee (with refills), home-made cakes, pastries and light meals.

**Café-Restaurant Helmi** (☎ 261 1110; Kauppakatu 2; mains €5–8; ☞ 11am–11pm Mon–Thu, 11am–1am Fri & Sat, noon–10pm Sun) In Kuopio's oldest stone building (1850) near the harbour, this atmospheric bar and restaurant specialises in great pizzas. There's often live music in the courtyard at the side.

**Vapaasatama Sampo** (☎ 261 4677; Kauppakatu 13; meals €8.50–12; ☞ 11am–10pm Sun–Thu, 11am–midnight Fri & Sat) Kuopio's oldest restaurant is famous all over Finland for its *muikku* (whitefish and vendace) – served in various forms, but usually with mashed potato, dill and cucumber. Sampo is very much a typical Finnish pub in the evenings.

## WORTH A DETOUR

Finland's only Orthodox monastery, **Uusi-Valamo** (Valamo Monastery; ☎ 017-570 111; www.valamo.fi; Valamontie 42; ☞ 7.30am–9pm) is hidden away in the heart of the eastern Lakeland but manages to draw thousands of pilgrims and tourists annually. The main reason to detour here is to stay overnight and enjoy the tranquil surroundings and beautiful setting. The original Valamo monastery in Russian Karelia was annexed by the Red Army during WWII and shifted to its present-day site in 1940. The two churches here contain a number of priceless icons and there's a small **museum** (☞ 10am–5pm Mon–Sat, noon–5pm Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug) inside the cultural centre. Like all good monks, the clergy at Valamo produce their own wine using berries such as crowberries, raspberries, strawberries and blackcurrants.

**Valamo Guesthouse** (s €30, 2-5-person r per person €25; ☎ ☒) offers clean, simple rooms with share bathroom, while the **Valamo Hotel** (s/d €65/90) has a higher standard of rooms. **Restaurant Trapesa** serves breakfast, lunch and dinner buffets.

In summer **MS Sergei** (Wed & Sat 2–6pm; one way/return €13/15) cruises through lakes, canals and locks from Valamo to **Lintula Orthodox Convent** (☎ 563 225) which also has accommodation.

The monastery is 4km north of road No 23 to Joensuu from Varkaus. Buses run direct to Valamo from Joensuu, Savonlinna, Kuopio, Mikkeli and there are a couple of services daily from Helsinki (€55.60, 6½ hours). It's also possible to visit Valamo and Lintula from Kuopio on a **monastery cruise** (adult/child €60/30, eight hr), daily except Sunday. One direction is by bus.

## THE FINNISH SAUNA

Nothing is more traditionally or culturally Finnish than the sauna. For centuries it has been a place to bathe, meditate, warm up during cold winters and even give birth, and most Finns still use the sauna at least once a week. Its origins date back over 1000 years, with the earliest saunas dug into hillsides and heated by a fireplace overlaid with stones. The *savusauna* (smoke sauna) in a log cabin is considered by many Finns to be the quintessential experience, but most of Finland's 1.6 million saunas are now electric and many are found in private homes or summer cottages. An invitation to bathe in a family's sauna is a great honour.

Bathing is done in the nude (there are some exceptions in public saunas, which are almost always sex-segregated anyway) and Finns are quite strict about the nonsexual – even sacred – nature of the sauna.

According to sauna etiquette you should wash or shower first. Once inside the sauna (with a temperature of 80° to 90°C), water is thrown onto the stove using a *kauhu* (ladle), producing steam. A whisk of birch twigs and leaves (*vihta*) is sometimes used to lightly strike the skin, improving circulation. Once you're hot enough, go outside and cool off with a cold shower or preferably by jumping into a lake or pool – enthusiastic Finns do so even in winter by cutting a hole in the ice! Repeat the process.

**Isa Camillo** (☎ 581 0450; Kauppakatu 25; mains €10–22; ☞ 11am–midnight Mon–Thu, 11–1am Fri & Sat, 1–8pm Sun) In a beautifully renovated former bank, this is one of Kuopio's finest restaurants, but is reasonably informal and affordable. The menu is international with plenty of Finnish specialities and there's a good enclosed terrace at the side.

**Puijon Tornii** (☎ 255 5255; mains €15–23; ☞ 11am–1pm Mon–Sat, 3–10pm Sun Jun–Sep) Fancy a reindeer stew with a view? The revolving restaurant atop the Puijo observation tower boasts as good an outlook as anywhere in Finland and the food is good to boot. There's a reasonably priced à la carte menu, and the Finnish three-course set menu (€35) includes whitefish, reindeer and cloudberry dessert.

## Drinking & Entertainment

Most of Kuopio's nightlife is conveniently strung along Kauppakatu, running east from the market square to the harbour. At the market end is a block of pubs and clubs that are always jumping on weekends: **Ale Pupi** (Kauppakatu 16), a grungy pub with cheap pints, **Gloria** (Kauppakatu 16) a happening music bar and nightclub on two levels, and the Suomi pop dance club **Giggling Marlin** (Kauppakatu 18), among others.

**Henry's Pub** (☎ 262 2002; Käsitöykäkatu 17; ☞ 7pm–4am) Around the corner, Henry's is one of the best venues in town for live rock music, with gigs every Friday and Saturday night from 10pm and karaoke on Sunday.

**Wanha Satama** (☎ 197 304; ☞ 4–10pm Mon–Fri, 11am–10pm Sat, noon–5pm Sun May–Sep) In an historic harbour building, this lively pub is the place to be on a summer's evening, with a sprawling terrace and occasional live music.

## Getting There & Away

Finnair and the budget air carrier Blue1 both have direct flights to/from Kuopio every day. The airport is 17km north of town – airport buses leave from the kauppatori (€5 one way, 30 minutes). Airport **taxis** (☎ 106 400) cost €24 for up to four people.

Kuopio is a transport hub for buses in the southeast region with regular express services to Helsinki (€50.90, 6½ hours), Joensuu (€20.50, 2½ hours), Kajaani (€25.70, 2½ hours) and Savonlinna (€25.70, two hours). The busy main **bus station** is 100m north of the train station.

The train station is about 300m north of the centre on Asemakatu. There are direct services to Helsinki (€51, 5¼ hours) and Kajaani (€21, two hours).

Kuopio is a good base to experience lake travel: from mid-June to mid-August, the lake ferry **MS Puijo** (☎ 266 2466) departs for Savonlinna (€75, 10½ hours) on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 9am, sailing via Heinävesi and Oravi through locks and canals. It makes the return journey from Savonlinna on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.

## IISALMI & SONKAJÄRVI

☎ 017 / pop 23,500

The pretty little riverside town of Iisalmi, 85km north of Kuopio, is home to the large Olvi brewery, which provides ample excuse for the numerous beer terraces and annual **beer festival** in early July. The tiny village of **Sonkajärvi**, 18km east of Iisalmi, is the place to be in early July when it hosts one of Finland's craziest festivals, the annual **Wife-Carrying World Championships** (see below). The preceding day you can warm up with the **Finnish Barrel Rolling Championships**. It's an entertaining and boozy weekend – accommodation is tight (only available in private homes or by camping in the village) but the **Iisalmi tourist office** (☎ 272 3391; www.iisalmiregion.info; Kauppakatu 22; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri Jun–Aug, 9am–5pm Mon–Fri Sep–May) may be able to help, or try Iisalmi's **YMCA Hostel** (☎/fax 823 940; Sarvikatu 4C; beds from €18; ☎ Jun & Jul, reception 5–11pm).

## JOENSUU

☎ 013 / pop 52,300

The provincial capital of North Karelia, Joensuu is mainly a jumping-off point for hikes into surrounding wilderness areas. During school term it's a lively university town with students cruising around on bikes, and there are enough bars and restaurants to keep you occupied in the evening. The gentle Pielisjoki rapids divide the town into two parts: most of the town centre is west of the river, but the bus and train stations are to the east.

The **tourist office** (☎ 248 5319; www.kareliaexpert.com; Koskikatu 5; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri year-round, 11am–4pm Sat May–Sep, 11am–4pm Sun Jul; 📍) is in the Carelicum Centre, which has a good café, free internet and the town's best museum.

**Carelicum Museum** (North Karelian Museum; ☎ 267 5222; www.pohjoiskarjalanmuseo.fi; Koskikatu 5; adult/student/child €4.50/3/2; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 11am–4pm Sat & Sun) is one of the finest museums to be found in the eastern Lakeland area. The exhibits chart the history, traditions and culture of Karelia, part of which is now in Russia.

Held in Joensuu over a weekend in mid-July, **Ilo Saarirock** (www.ilosaarirock.fi) is a highly charged annual rock festival.

## Sleeping

**Linnunlahti Camping** (☎ 126 272; www.linnunlahti.camping.fi; Linnunlahdentie 1; camp sites €12, 4–6–person cottages €35–42; ☎ June–mid-Aug) Just south of the centre and right next to the Ilo Saarir festival stage, this site has a pleasant lakeside location and good-value cottages.

**Partiotalon Retkeilymaja** (☎ 123 381; www.youthhostel@lu-joensuu.net; Vanamokatu 25; dm €12–15; ☎ Jun–late Aug, reception 9–11am & 4–10pm) Cheapest beds in town, with basic dorms in the slightly run-down old scout hall.

**Apartamentos Joensuu** (☎ 224 886; Torikatu 47; s/d/tr/q €33/46/57/71; 📍 ☎) This quaint little guesthouse is definitely Joensuu's best-value accommodation. Rooms have bathroom, TV, kitchenette and wi-fi internet connection.

## Eating & Drinking

As usual the kauppatori is packed with grills and stalls selling cheap snacks, such as Karelian pies.

**Antique Astoria** (☎ 229 766; Rantakatu 32; mains €8–26; ☎ 4–10pm Mon, 4pm–midnight Tue–Fri, noon–midnight Sat, noon–10pm Sun) This rustic but stylish riverfront restaurant specialises in Hungarian cuisine such as goulash, as well as cheaper

pizza and pasta dishes. There's a great summer terrace and bar.

**Wanha Jokela** (☎ 122 891; Torikatu 26, 10–2am Mon–Thu, 10–3am Fri & Sat) The oldest pub in town, this bohemian hang-out is well-known locally; full of characters and cheap beer.

In summer there's plenty of drinking, socialising and live music at the harbour café **Tuulaaki** (Rantakatu; ☎ 11am–3am Jun–Aug), where the passenger ferries dock.

## Getting There & Away

Finnair flies daily to/from Helsinki. Joensuu's airport is 11km from town; the bus service costs €5 one way and departs from Sokos Hotel Kimmel opposite the bus station.

The bus and train stations are side by side across the river on Itäranta. Local buses go to Savonlinna (€22.90, three hours), Kuopio (€20.50, 2½ hours), Ilomantsi (€12, 1½ hours, weekdays only) and Lieksa (€14.20, 1½).

Joensuu is well connected by train with direct daily services to/from Helsinki (€54.10, 5¼ hours), Lieksa (€11.50, 1½ hours) and Lappeenranta (€31.10, 2½ hours).

In summer the MS *Vinkeri II* sails to Koli at 9am on Saturday, returning at 11.30am on Tuesday (one way/return €30/45, seven hours). You can also go on from Koli to Nurmes on the same boat, or connect with another ferry to Lieksa, across Lake Pielinen. Book through **Saimaa Ferries** (☎ 481 244; www.saimaaferrries.fi).

## ILOMANTSI

☎ 013 / pop 6800

Pushing up against the border that separates Finland from Russia, Ilomantsi is Finland's most Karelian, Orthodox and eastern municipality, and the centre of a charming region where a wealth of wilderness hiking opens up before you.

The excellent **tourist office** (☎ 248 5309; www.kareliaexpert.com; Kalevalantie 11; ☎ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri Jun–Aug & 10am–3pm Sat Jul, 9am–4pm Sep–May) can help with just about everything, from cottage reservations to information on trekking routes and hire of camping equipment, snowshoes and cross-country ski gear.

The village centre itself is modern and quite ugly, having been trampled by the Russians, but it's the surrounding region that demands exploration. The **wine tower** (☎ 0400-572 070; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 10am–10pm Jun–

Aug) is worth ascending, for the views and to sample the locally made berry wine.

**Parppeinvaara** (☎ 881 248; adult/child €3/free; ☎ 10am–6pm Jun–Aug) is the oldest and most interesting of Finland's Karelian theme villages, where you can hear the *kantele* (Karelian stringed instrument) played and try traditional food at the excellent **Parppeinpirtti** (☎ 881 094; lunch €10; ☎ noon–3pm).

**Anssilan Monola** (☎ 881 181; Anssilantie 7; s/d €28/56, cottage €84–112) This former dairy farm about 4km south of town is run by a friendly family who rent comfy rooms in converted farmhouse buildings. You can eat dinner and breakfast with the family, and camping is possible. Recommended, although it helps to have your own transport.

Ask at the tourist offices about camping and cottages in the surrounding region.

## TREKS AROUND KARELIA

Some of the best trekking routes in North Karelia have been linked up to create **Karjalan Kierros**, an 800km loop of marked trails between Ilomantsi and Lake Pielinen. For more information, including maps and trail brochures, contact the Lieksa or Ilomantsi tourist offices, or **Metsähallitus** (☎ 02-0564 5500; www.metsa.fi; Urheilukatu 3A, Lieksa).

## Karhunpolku

The **Bear's Trail** (not to be confused with the Bear's Ring in Lapland) 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 along the Russian border. The trail ends at Teljo, about 50km south of Kuhmo. You'll need to arrange transport from either end.

## Susitaival

The 100km **Wolf's Trail** is a marked trail running south from the marshlands of Patvinsuo National Park to the forests of Petkeljärvi National Park, 21km east of Ilomantsi. This links with the Bear's Trail. It's a three-day trek of medium difficulty (the marshland can be wet underfoot). You will need to be self-sufficient and pre-arrange transport. It passes through some important winter war battlegrounds near the Russian border. There are wolves (and bears) around Ilomantsi but sightings are not common among trekkers.

### SHE AIN'T HEAVY, SHE'S MY WIFE!

What may have begun as a debauched habit of stealing maidens from neighbouring villages has morphed into one of Finland's maddest but most entertaining events. The Wife-Carrying World Championships, held on the first weekend of July, has put the tiny village of Sonkajärvi on the map. The race is held over a 253.5m obstacle course that includes water hazards, hurdles and hills. Dropping your passenger incurs a 15-second penalty. Under Wife-Carrying competition rules the 'wife' to be carried 'can be your own, the neighbour's, or you may have found her further afield'. All borrowed wives must be returned.

Estonians are still the team to beat – they've won the event eight years in a row. The winners receive, among other prizes, the wife's weight in beer.

Along with the heats, finals and novelty races, this is a big weekend of drinking, dancing and mayhem. Don't miss it!

## LAKE PIELINEN REGION

In a land full of lakes, Pielinen, Finland's sixth-largest lake, is pretty special. In summer it's the shimmering jewel of North Karelia, surrounded by some of the most beautiful wilderness areas and action-packed countryside in southeast Finland. Here you can hike, raft, and fish in summer; ski, snowmobile and dogsled in winter. Koli National Park rises in the southeast corner, and the main towns around the lake – Lieksa, Nurmes and Koli – are linked by lake ferry in summer.

### Lieksa & Ruunaa

☎ 013 / pop 16,000

The small lakeside town of Lieksa is primarily a base and service town if you're planning any outdoor activities in the region. In winter, husky tours and snowmobile safaris along the Russian border are popular; in summer, hiking, fishing and white-water rafting are all the rage.

The **tourist office** (☎ 248 5312; www.kareliaexpert.fi; Pielisentie 7; ☹ 9am–5pm Mon–Fri Jun–Aug, 9am–2pm Sat Jul, 8am–4pm Mon–Fri Sep–May) is the place to stop for information on accommodation, fishing, canoeing, smoke saunas and national parks, as well as local hiking maps.

One of Finland's largest open-air museums, the **Pielinen Museum** (☎ 689 4151; Pappilantie 2; adult/child €4.50/1.50; ☹ 10am–6pm mid-May–mid-Sep) is a slightly jumbled complex of almost 100 Karelian buildings (many relocated from Russia) and historical exhibits – along with an indoor museum of local war and folk history. The indoor hall is also open in winter.

The **Ruunaa Recreation Area**, 30km east of Lieksa, is a superb, accessible and carefully managed wilderness area perfect for fishing, white-water rafting, wildlife spotting and easy hiking. The drawback is that public transport barely exists, but you should be able to hitch a lift from Lieksa (or go with an organised tour) in summer. The **Ruunaa Nature Centre** (☎ 02-0564 5757; www.ruunaa.fi; ☹ 9am–7pm summer), near the bridge over the Naarajoki (Naara river), has lots of information and is where most boat trips end.

### SLEEPING

**Kestikievari Herranniemi** (☎ 542 110; www.herranniemi.com; Vuonislahdentie 185; dm €12.50, cottages €28–68, B&B s/d €50/68) It's worth going out of the way and catching a train to Vuonislampi, 28km south of Lieksa, for this brilliant lake-

side retreat. The welcoming farm property has a restaurant, a dormitory outbuilding, a range of comfortable rooms and cottages, two lakeside saunas, rowing boats and even massage and herbal therapy.

**Neitikoski Hiking Centre** (☎ 533 170; camp sites €12, 4–6–bed cabins €34–95) At Ruunaa, in addition to accommodation and services at Naarajoki, the Hiking Centre has a large café, camping sites, kitchen, sauna and cabins ranging from simple to luxurious. A boardwalk goes a short distance from here to the Neitikoski rapids, a popular fishing and kayaking spot.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses ply the route around Lake Pielinen, and trains run to Lieksa from Joensuu and Nurmes, but the coolest way to arrive here is by lake ferry from Joensuu (via Koli). A huge 250-person car ferry (adult/child €15/8 one way, car/bicycle €10/2, 1½ hours) runs twice daily between Lieksa and Koli from June to mid-August, departing at 9.30am and 3.30pm, returning at 11.30am and 5.30pm.

### Koli National Park

Finns consider the views from the heights of Koli, overlooking Lake Pielinen, as the best in the country – the same views inspired several Finnish artists from the National Romantic era. In summer, the national park offers scenic hiking routes, and there's a ferry service between Koli and Lieksa (1½ hours) or Joensuu (seven hours; see p193). In winter, Koli attracts skiers, with two slalom centres and more than 60km of cross-country trails, including 24km of illuminated track.

There's a regular bus service from Koli village up to the top of the hill. At the top, the modern **Ukko-Koli Heritage Centre** (☎ 688 8400; www.metlakoli.net) has displays and information on the national park and cottages for rent.

The family-run **Koli Hostel** (☎ 673 131; Niinilahdentie 47; dm from €12), on a gravel road 5km from the bus stop, has a kitchen and smoke sauna. If you call ahead you may be able to arrange a pick-up.

### Nurmes

☎ 013 / pop 10,000

On the northern shores of Lake Pielinen, Nurmes is another base for wallet-draining activities such as snowmobiling, ice-fishing, dogsledding and cross-country skiing tours in winter, and canoeing and farmhouse tours

in summer. It's a more pleasant town in its own right though, with an 'old town' area (Puu-Nurmes) of historical wooden buildings along Kirkkokatu. A highlight is **Bomba House**, part of a delightful re-creation Karelian village 3km east of the centre. Unlike many folk museums in Finland, this one really comes alive with a minivillage featuring a summer market, craft shops and cafés.

The **tourist office** (☎ 248 5316; www.kareliaexpert.com; Väلتie 2-4; ☹ 9am–4pm Mon–Fri) is hidden away in the ABC service station on the road to Kuopio, about 2km south of town.

The best places to stay in Nurmes are side by side on the lake shore about 3.5km east of the town centre. **Hyvärilä** (☎ 687 2500; www.hyvarila.com; Lomatie 12; camp sites €13, dm/s/d from €16/30/35, hotels/d €60/79) is a sprawling lakefront holiday resort with a manicured camping ground, two youth hostels, an upmarket hotel, restaurant and even a golf course.

**Bomba Spa Hotel** (☎ 687 200; www.bomba.fi; Suojärvenkatu 1; d from €110, apts €110–160), near the Karelian village, is a stylish set-up of rooms and cottages, where you can pamper yourself with the spa and sauna facilities.

There are regular buses from Nurmes to Joensuu, Lieksa, Kajaani and Kuopio; and direct regional trains from Joensuu (€16.40, two hours) and Lieksa (€7.50, 45 minutes). From mid-May to mid-August, the MS *Vinkeri II* cruises once a week to Joensuu (€40, 9½ hours), or you can take the shorter ferry to Koli on Sunday (€20/10). Contact **Saimaa Ferries** (☎ 481 244; www.saimaafferries.fi).

## NORTH-CENTRAL FINLAND

### KAJAANI

☎ 08 / pop 35,000

Once known as the country's largest tar-producer Kajaani is the centre of the Kainuu region, and although a pleasant enough riverside city, for travellers it's mainly a transport hub and stopover on the haul between the south and Lapland. An international **jazz festival** in early June brings Kajaani to life.

**Kajaani Info** (☎ 6155 2555; www.kajaani.fi; Kauppakatu 21; ☹ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat Jun–Aug, 8.30am–4pm Sep–May; ☎) is the helpful tourist office, just off the tiny town square.

Kajaani's most notable historical claim to fame is that writer Elias Lönnrot, author of the epic *Kalevala*, used Kajaani as a base for his travels. The **Kainuu museum** (☎ 6155 2407; Asemakatu 4; adult/child €2/free; noon–4pm Sun–Tue & Thu–Sat, noon–8pm Wed) has a good section on Lönnrot.

At the Ämmäkoski waterfall, near the remnants of Kajaani castle, is a **tar-boat canal**, a type of lock built in 1846 to enable the boats laden with tar barrels to pass. There are tar-boat shows at 11am on Saturday in July.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Kartanohotelli Karolineburg** (☎ 613 1291; www.karolineburg.com; Karolinantie 4; s/d from €60/80, d with sauna €100, ste from €130; ☎ ☒) This elegant 19th-century wooden manor house across the river from the centre beats the modern business hotels hand-down for charm and romance. Some of the buildings date back to 1836, but the refurbished hotel rooms are great value, and even if you don't stay the restaurant is worth a visit for lunch or dinner (book ahead).

The partly pedestrianised Kauppakatu – leading from the market square to the town square – is the main street and is lined with numerous cafés, bars and restaurants.

**Pikantti** (☎ 628 870; Kauppakatu 10; buffet €9; ☹ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat; ☒) This unassuming restaurant offers an excellent Finnish lunch buffet of meat, fish, soups and salads but unlike most places it's available all day.

### Getting There & Away

Finnair flies to/from Helsinki, and trains connect with Helsinki (€22.30, 7½ hours, five daily), Kuopio (€21, 2¼ hours, four daily) and Oulu (€24.40, 2½ hours, four daily). Buses go to most regional centres including Kuusamo (€36.10, 3½ hours) and Kuhmo (€16.20, 1½ hours).

### KUHMO

☎ 08 / pop 6500

Whether you're hoping to spot a brown bear or preparing to hike one of Finland's great trails, Kuhmo is a small piece of civilisation in the heart of real wilderness territory. Like Kajaani, Kuhmo was once a major tar producer, but is now a service town with links to the epic *Kalevala*.

For many travellers, Kuhmo is simply the jumping-off point for the UKK trekking route, the longest marked trekking route in Finland.

The town is also renowned for the annual **Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival** (☎ 652 0936; [www.kuhmofestival.fi](http://www.kuhmofestival.fi); Torikatu 39), held from mid-July to August, which attracts musicians from around the world.

The helpful **tourist office** (☎ 6155 5292; [www.kuhmo.fi](http://www.kuhmo.fi); Kainuuntie 82; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, Aug-Jun, 8am-6 or 10pm daily Jul; ♿) is good for both national park and festival information.

**Kalevala Village theme park** (☎ 652 0114; guided tour adult/child €11/5.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jun-Aug, 9am-6pm daily Jul), 3km from the centre, is an interesting open-air museum of Karelian log buildings and artisan displays is linked by a walking track.

If you have any interest in the *Kalevala* or Karelian culture, **Juminkeko** (☎ 653 0670; [www.juminkeko.fi](http://www.juminkeko.fi); Kontionkatu 25; adult/child €4/free; ☎ noon-6pm Sun-Thu) offers everything from audiovisual presentations, Finland's largest collection of *Kalevala* books, and multimedia translations.

White-water rafting trips on the Lentuankoski rapids can be arranged in June and July. Book through the Kuhmo tourist office.

## Sleeping

**Kalevala Camping** (☎ 655 6388; camp sites €11, 2-4-person cabins from €27/35; ☎ Jun-late Aug) Near the Kalevala Village theme park, this lakeside camping ground has good facilities including a smoke sauna and boats.

**Kuhmon Matkakoti** (☎/fax 655 0271; Vienantie 3; s/d/tr €25/45/60; ♿) This is a small but good-value guesthouse (share bathroom) near the town centre with friendly owners. Breakfast and sauna included.

## UKK TREKKING ROUTE

The 240km Urho K Kekkonen (UKK) route is Finland's longest marked hiking trail, passing through pockets of the now-rare Finnish wilderness on the way from Koli Hill in North Karelia to Iso-Syöte Hill far to the north of Kuhmo. Two of the finest sections of the UKK route are the Kuhmo-Hiidenportti and Kuhmo-Lenttiira legs.

The trail is well maintained in the Kuhmo area, with clear markings and *laavu* (simple shelters) spaced every 10km to 20km. In summer, carry a sleeping bag and plenty of mosquito repellent.

You can pick up route maps and information at the Kuhmo tourist office or the **Petola Visitor Centre** (☎ 0205-646 380; Lenttirantie 342; ☎ 9am-5pm daily Jul-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May), near the Kalevala Village theme park in Kuhmo.

## Getting There & Away

There are four to five local buses daily to/from Kajaani (€16.20, 1½ hours), where you can pick up road and rail connections to elsewhere west and south. Buses also run to Nurmes (€21.30, 2½ hours) and Joensuu (€38, four hours).

## OULU

☎ 08 / pop 124,600

This lively, fast-growing university town looks out on the Gulf of Bothnia and a string of interconnected islands. Hi-tech companies like Nokia have recently set up shop here, lending an affluent, progressive air. For travellers it's not so much that Oulu has any must-see sights, but the summertime energy, superb cycling paths, friendly locals and frenetic nightlife make it worth a stop.

Founded in 1605, Oulu grew prosperous in the 18th-century from tar, which was floated down the river from the Kainuu region and shipped to Sweden for shipbuilding. Although pulp factories are a major industry, it's the IT boom that's leading the way in Oulu now and plenty of professional expats live and work here.

## Information

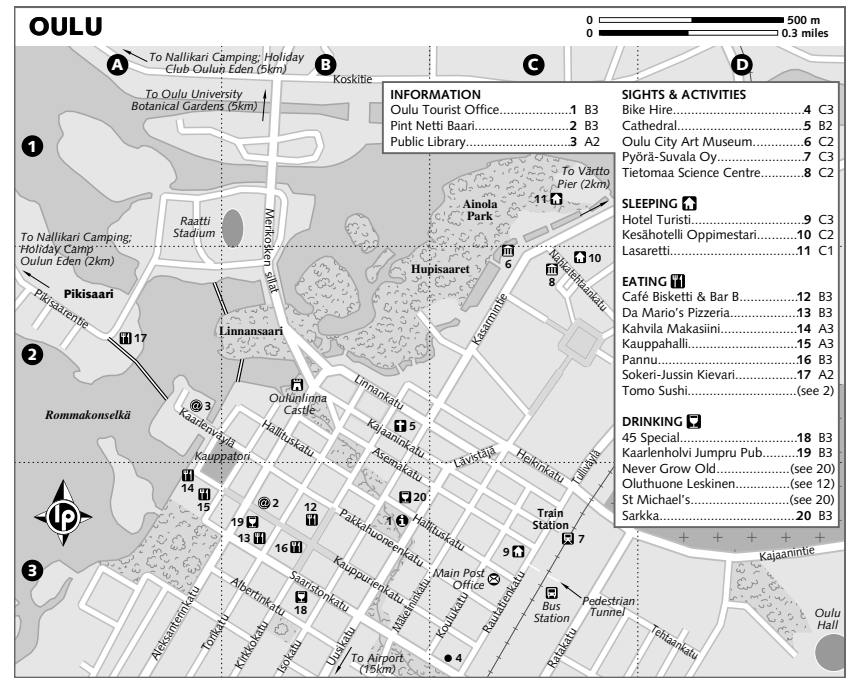
### INTERNET ACCESS

**Public Library** (☎ 558 410; Kaarlenväylä; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Internet terminals (book ahead) and a reading room.

**Pint Netti Baari** (☎ 311 3369; Kauppurienväylä 5; per 10 min €1, free to customers; ☎ noon-3am) Pub with free internet for customers.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Oulu Tourist Office** (☎ 5584 1330; [www.oulutourism.fi](http://www.oulutourism.fi); Uusikatu 26; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-mid-Jun). Publishes the useful guide *Look at Oulu*.



## Sights & Activities

The imposing, 19th-century **cathedral** (Kirkkokatu; ☎ 11am-8pm Jun & Aug, 11am-9pm Jul, noon-1pm Sep-May) was designed by Carl Engel and has Finland's oldest portrait (dating from 1611) hanging in its vestry. The waterside **kauppatori** is one of the liveliest and most colourful in Finland with its red wooden storehouses (now housing restaurants, bars and craft shops), market stalls, bursting summer terraces and its rotund statue of the local constabulary, *Toripoliisi*.

**Tietomaa Science Centre** (☎ 5584 1340; [www.tietomaa.fi](http://www.tietomaa.fi); adult/child €12.50/10; ☎ 10am-8pm Jul-mid-Aug, 10am-6pm mid-Aug-Jun), Scandinavia's largest science museum can occupy kids for the best part of a day with a giant IMAX screen, hands-on interactive exhibits on planets and the human body, and an observation tower.

**Oulu City Art Museum** (☎ 5584 7450; [www.ouka.fi/taidemuseo](http://www.ouka.fi/taidemuseo); Kasarmintie 7; adult/student/child €3/1/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Thu, 10am-6pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat, noon-8pm Sun), on the edge Ainola Park, is a light-filled gallery displaying changing exhibitions from a large collection of

northern Finnish artworks, as well as contemporary art.

**Hupisaaret Island** is a pleasant town park connected by small bridges, with bike paths, greenhouses, a summer café and the blooming **Ainola Park** – popular for strolling and picnics in summer. About 6km north of the centre, **Oulu University Botanical Gardens** (Kaitoväylä 5; ☎ 8am-8pm, greenhouses ☎ 8am-3pm Tue-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun) boasts thousands of exotic plants – including hardy 5m-tall cacti. A pair of greenhouses, named Romeo and Juliet, house tropical species.

Oulu's extensive network of wonderful **bicycle paths** is among the best in Finland and nowhere is the Finns' love of two-wheeled transport more obvious than here in summer. Bikes can be hired from **Pyörä-Suvala Oy** (☎ 375 467; Saarisontkatu 27; per day €10) and an excellent route map is available free from the tourist office. A good ride or walk is out to **Pikisaari** via the pedestrian bridge by the kauppatori. It's a favourite picnic and drinking spot for locals in summer. Continue west to Nallikari and Oulu's best beach.

## Festivals & Events

In a country that wrote the book on oddball festivals, Oulu hosts more than its fair share. The **World Air Guitar Championships** ([www.airguitarworldchampionships.com](http://www.airguitarworldchampionships.com)), part of the **Oulu Music Video Festival** ([www.omvf.net](http://www.omvf.net)) in late August has contestants hitting the stage with imaginary instruments. **Tar-Burning Week** is a midsummer festival in late June, while **Garlic Night**, in mid-July, is one of Oulu's strangest but most popular festivals – it's all about eating or tasting garlic – everything from garlic potatoes, pizzas and bread to garlic-flavoured beer and ice cream – enhanced by festivities and live entertainment. Oulu also hosts the World Championships in **Outdoor Ice Swimming** in early March, when the ice off Raatin-saari is cut away specially for the event.

## Sleeping

Although Oulu has plenty of business hotels, good budget choices are surprisingly limited.

**Nallikari Camping** (☎ 5586 1350; [www.nallikari.camping.fi](http://www.nallikari.camping.fi); Hietasaari; camp sites per person/tent €4/12, cabins €30, 2-/5-/7-person cottages €62/85/115; (P)) This lovely site is Oulu's saviour for budget travellers. It's on Hietasaari island, 5km north-west of the city centre by road, but only 3km by foot or bicycle via the pedestrian bridges. Cheap cabins are only available in summer, but the year-round self-contained cottages (with bathroom and kitchen) are a good alternative to hotels.

**Kesähotelli Oppimestari** (☎ 884 8527; Nahkatehtaankatu 3; s/d €40/58; ☞ early-Jun–early Aug; (P) ☞) Across from the Tietomaa Science Centre, this clean and efficient summer hotel is vacated student accommodation and offers the cheapest rooms in central Oulu.

**Hotel Turisti** (☎ 563 6100; [www.hotellituristi.fi](http://www.hotellituristi.fi); Rautatienkatu 9; s/d/tr €75/90/100, s/d/tr weekends & summer €55/65/80; ☞) Right opposite the train station, this is a surprisingly bright and tidy place; the spacious rooms have private bathrooms, wi-fi internet, and breakfast is included.

**Lasaretti** (☎ 884 8300; [www.lasaretti.com](http://www.lasaretti.com); Kasarmintie 13; s/d/tr €112/127, weekends & summer €60/70; (P) ☞ ☞ ☞) This large, modern hotel complex on Lasarettinsaari island has a bagful of facilities, including spa and pool, tastefully-designed allergy-free rooms and an excellent restaurant. Close to the town centre but with a sense of space.

**Holiday Club Oulun Eden** (☎ 884 2000; [www.holidayclub.fi](http://www.holidayclub.fi); Nallikari; s/d €120/130; (P) ☞ ☞ ☞) Out on Hietasaari island, this luxury spa hotel offers all the saunas, water slides, atrium covered indoor pools, massage and health treatments you could wish for. Quality hotel rooms and a good restaurant make it worth a splurge.

## Eating

Local specialities can be found in the lively kauppatori and the classic indoor **kauppahalli** (☞ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) on the southern side of the square. In summer there are stalls selling fresh salmon, cheese, bread, paella and more. Oulu's hungry student population means there are plenty of cheap kebab and pizza places. On the southwest side of the kauppatori, by the harbour, are a string of red shophouses converted into restaurants and pubs.

**Kahvila Makasiini** (☎ 311 0343; Aittatori 1; ☞ 6am-2am Mon-Fri, 7am-midnight Sun) A classic timber café and pub open long hours in summer.

**Da Mario's Pizzeria** (☎ 379 505; Torikatu 24; pizzas €4.50-5.50) Some of the best-value pizzas are the 25 varieties at De Mario's, a cosy, Italian place with free salad bar.

**Café Bisketti & Bar B** (☎ 375 768; Kirkkokatu 8; snacks €2.50-6; ☞ 8.30am-10pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-1am Fri & Sat, 11am-10pm Sun) Always overflowing, Bisketti is a top spot for lunch with filled rolls, croissants, quiche and cakes. For something stronger, walk through to the casual wine bar, Bar B.

**Tomo Sushi** (☎ 312 1665; Kauppurienkatu 5; sushi from €1, dishes €6-13; ☞ 11am-6pm Mon-Tue, 11am-8pm Wed-Thu, 11am-10pm Fri & Sat) Delicately prepared sushi plates are the speciality at this authentic little Japanese place. Perfect for a relaxed lunch with miso soup and green tea.

**Pannu** (☎ 815 1600; Kauppurienkatu 12; mains €9-25; ☞ 10.30am-10pm Mon-Thu, 10.30am-11pm Fri & Sat, noon-9pm Sun) In the basement of Stockmann department store, this busy, informal grill restaurant offers a huge range of dishes from fresh fish to wild boar and monster steaks, as well as a speciality line in innovative pizzas. Lunch specials from 10.30am to 2pm weekdays.

**Sokeri-Jussin Kievari** (☎ 376 628; Pikisaarentie 2; mains €8.50-21 ☞ 11am-11pm Mon-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat, noon-10pm Sun) One of Oulu's most atmospheric dining experiences, this pub-

restaurant is in a beautiful old wooden storehouse just over the bridge on Pikisaari. The menu is strong on Finnish fish and steak specialities; try elk meatballs (€12), fried *muikki* (whitefish), reindeer stew and crayfish soup.

## Drinking & Entertainment

There's plenty going on in Oulu at night – the number of bikes lined up outside pubs and bars on summer weekends is matched only by the numbers of people inside. In summer, the terraces on the market square are a great place to relax with a drink. The main pedestrian strip between the kauppatori and Isokatu is called Rotuaari and along here you'll find plenty of bars and cafés.

**Oluthuone Leskinen** (☎ 311 7993; Kirkkokatu 10; ☞ 11-2am Sun-Tue, noon-3am Wed-Fri, 11-3am Sat) This friendly British-style pub has a huge range of Finnish and international beers. Try the burnt-flavoured local speciality, tar schnapps – distilled from tar. This is a favourite haunt of expats and locals alike so it's a good place to head first.

**Kaarlenholvi Jumpru Pub** (☎ 562 4510; Kauppurienkatu 6; ☞ 11am-2am Mon-Tue, 11am-4am Wed-Sat, noon-2am Sun) An Oulu institution, this pub-nightclub and live music venue is always jumping. Inside the vaulted cellarlike building is a warren of cosy rooms, and there's a rowdy summer terrace.

**45 Special** (☎ 881 1845; Saaristonkatu 12; ☞ 8pm-4am) Oulu's best rock venue and late-night hot spot, with DJs, live bands, Sunday jams, free entry most nights and wall-to-wall people.

On Hallituskatu is a small strip of bars and cafés with terraces that are worth checking out: **Never Grow Old** (☎ 311 3936; Hallituskatu 17), a reggae bar that hits its stride after 10pm; **Sarrka** (Hallituskatu 11), one of Oulu's oldest pubs and wellknown for its meatballs, pancakes and other traditional Finnish grub; and **St Michael's** (☎ 311 7473; Hallituskatu 13-17), an Irish bar.

## Getting There & Away

**AIR**  
Blue1 ([www.blue1.com](http://www.blue1.com)) has cheap internet fares from Helsinki daily, as well as direct flights to Stockholm most days. Finnair has daily direct flights from Helsinki. The airport is 15km south of town – take bus No 19 (€2.50, 25 mins).

## BUS

Buses connect Oulu with all main centres, though the train is better for most trips. Useful services include Kuusamo (€31.30, three hours), Kajaani (€29.20, three hours) and Kemi (€14.90, 1¼ hours).

## TRAIN

Train is the best way to travel north and south: there are direct services to Helsinki (€63.60, seven to 10 hours), Kemi (€14.90, 1¼ hours) and Rovaniemi (€27.70, 2½ hours).

## KUUSAMO

☎ 08 / pop 19,000

Kuusamo is a remote frontier town 200km northeast of Oulu and close to the Russian border. There are really only two reasons to detour out here: in summer, it's the base for trekking and canoeing the sublime **Oulanka National Park**; in winter, it's only 30km from **Ruka**, one of Finland's most popular ski resorts.

There are many possibilities for cross-country skiing, hiking and fishing as well as fast, rugged rapids on the **Kitkajoki** and **Oulankajoki**. Inquire about organised tours at the **Kuusamo tourist office** (☎ 850 2910; [www.kuusamo.fi](http://www.kuusamo.fi); Torangintäival 2). Most tour operators in Kuusamo and Ruka can organise white-water rafting trips in summer, as well as hiring out canoes and kayaks.

Close to the action in Juuma, **Kitkan Safarit** (☎ 0400 280 569; [www.kitkan safarit.fi](http://www.kitkan safarit.fi); Juumantie 134) is a reliable operator.

**Kuusamon Kansanopisto** (☎ 852 2132; Kitkantie 35; dm from €11, s/d €25/34; ☞ Midsummer-Aug, reception 8am-3.45pm Mon-Fri; (P) ☞) This rambling summer hostel close to Kuusamo's town centre has cheap beds and good facilities.

There's plenty of summer and winter accommodation at Ruka ([www.ruka.fi](http://www.ruka.fi)) and camp sites and wilderness huts in Oulanka National Park – inquire at the tourist office.

Finnair flies daily to Helsinki. Buses run daily from Kajaani, Oulu and Kemijärvi.

## Oulanka National Park

This is one of the most visited national parks in Finland, thanks mainly to the 80km **Karhunkierros Trail** (Bear's Ring), a spectacular three- or four-day trek through rugged cliffs, gorges and suspension bridges, starting from either the Hautajärvi Visitor Centre or the Ristikallio parking area and

ending at the resort village of Ruka, 25km north of Kuusamo.

There are shelters and free overnight huts on the trail. The *Rukatunturi-Oulanka map* (1:40,000) has trail and hut information.

Juuma is another gateway to the region, with accommodation and accessibility to some of the main sights, such as the **Myllöykoski** and **Jyrävä** waterfalls. If you don't have the time or resources for the longer walk, you can do the 12km **Little Bear's Ring** from Juuma in around four hours. The trail starts at **Lomakylä Retkietappi** (☎ 863 218), where there are camp sites and cabins.

## KEMI

☎ 016 / pop 25,000

An unassuming northern coastal town with smoke stacks and pulp factories caressing the skyline, Kemi has managed to fashion itself into one of the big winter destinations of northern Finland – all thanks to a retired icebreaker and a large pile of ice and snow.

From December to April, Kemi is home to two of Lapland's biggest attractions – the **Arctic icebreaker Sampo**, and the **Snow Castle**.

Plough through the Gulf of Bothnia pack ice on a four-hour cruise aboard the *Sampo*, a genuine Arctic icebreaker ship and the only one in the world that regularly accepts tourists. The trip includes surreal ice swimming in special dry-suits, and it's worth paying the extra for the snowmobile trip to meet the ship. The *Sampo* sails at noon three to four days each week from mid-December to late April and costs a whopping €196 per person. Contact **Sampo Tours** (☎ 256 548; www.sampotours.com; Torikatu 2).

The **Snow Castle** (Lumilinna; ☎ 259 502; www.snowcastle.net; adult/child €73/30; ☎ 10am-8pm Feb-mid-Apr) features an ice restaurant with bar (free to visit), ice tables covered with reindeer fur, ice sculptures, a chapel and 'hotel' rooms (see below).

The **tourist office** (☎ 259 690; www.kemi.fi; Kaupakatu 29; ☎ 10am-6pm daily Feb-Apr & Jul-mid-Aug, 8am-4pm other times), in the Gemstone Gallery at the town harbour, can direct you to a handful of other attractions in town.

## Sleeping

Between late January and early April you can spend the night in the **Snow Hotel** (☎ 259 502; s/d €150/220), where heavy-duty Arctic sleeping bags keep you warm in -5°C room

temperature. At this absurd price it's strictly a one-night 'say you've done it' affair.

**Hotel Palomestari** (☎ 257 117; www.hotellipalomestari.com; Valtakatu 12; s/d €78/108) The pick of Kemi's midrange hotels, Palomestari is central and reasonably intimate. There's a sauna with lounge and good views on the top floor and the popular pub Kukko is attached.

**Hotel Yöpuu** (☎ 232 034; www.hotelliyöpuu.com; Eteläntie 227; s/d from €60/68; ☎ ☒) Yöpuu is a little way out of town on road E4 but it's a comfortable, peaceful and reasonably priced guesthouse-style hotel with a licensed restaurant.

## Getting There & Away

Finnair flies daily from Helsinki to Kemi. The airport is 6km north of town; a taxi will costs around €10.

There are direct trains to/from Helsinki (€70.60, nine to 11 hours), Oulu (€14.90, 1¼ hours) and Rovaniemi (€16, 1½ hours). Frequent buses to/from Tornio (€5.20, 30 minutes) are free with a Finnrail pass.

## TORNIO

☎ 016 / pop 23,200

Only a stone's throw – or a well-timed nine iron – from Sweden, Tornio is very much a border town, split from its Swedish twin, Haparanda, by the mighty Tornionjoki. Swedes often trundle across the bridge to take advantage of Finland's slightly cheaper alcohol and an extra hour of daylight!

Tornio is not a place to linger too long but the twin towns share one of the world's most bizarre golf courses, Tornio is home to Lapland's most famous brewery, and 15km north of town are Finland's longest free-flowing rapids – perfect for fishing and white-water rafting. So it's booze, golf and fishing – what more could you want?

## Information

The **Green Line Centre** (☎ 432 733; www.haparanda.tornio.com; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun Jun-mid-Aug, 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri mid-Aug-May; ☎ ☒), near the bridge on the Tornio side of the border, houses the tourist office for both towns, with information on Finland and Sweden.

You'll find free internet access at the **public library** (☎ 432 433; Torikatu 2; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Thu, 11am-5pm Fri, 11am-3pm Sat).

Tornio time is one hour ahead of Haparanda time.

## Sights & Activities

Interesting sights near the town centre include the beautiful wooden **Tornio Church** (1686) on Seminaarinkatu; the tiny **Orthodox Church** on Lukiokatuthe, built by order of Tsar Alexander I; the **Lapin Kultra Brewery** (☎ 43366; Lapinkullankatu 1; free tours 2pm Tue & Thu Jun-mid-Aug); and the **Aine Art Museum** (☎ 432 438; Torikatu 2; adult/child €2/1; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Thu, 11am-3pm Fri-Sun), with a big collection of Finnish art from the 19th and 20th centuries.

The **Green Zone Golf Course** (☎ 431 711; Näräntie 1; green fees €30-35 for 18 holes, €8 for par 3 course, club hire €10) must be one of the world's coolest courses: not only can you play midnight golf (with the sun shining), but the course actually straddles the border of the two countries (the Tornionjoki). You can tee off in Finland and hit the ball into Sweden, which means if you start at, say, 12.30am, the ball will remain in the air for an hour and land in yesterday. All this novelty, and a round on a reasonable course, can be yours when the snow melts away between late May and late August. To play after 9pm you need to book in advance and a green card is required for a full round but not for the par three course.

Two of the most popular activities in summer are rafting and salmon-fishing on the 3.5km-long **Kukkola rapids**, 15km north of town. **Safaris Unlimited** (☎ 253 405; www.safarisunlimited.fi) can organise a range of trips from around €35 to €60 per person.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Camping Tornio** (☎ 445 945; www.campingtornio.com; Matkailijantie; camp sites €10, cabins d €55; ☎ May-Sep) Well-equipped site about 3km from town on the road to Kemi.

**Vandrarhem Haparanda STF Youth Hostel** (☎ 0046 611 71; Strandgatan 26) This well-equipped Swedish STF Youth Hostel just across the bridge in Haparanda is the best choice for hostellers (see p461).

**Guesthouse Kaisari** (☎ 480 897; www.kaisari.com; Saarenpäänkatu 39; s/d/tr €40/60/80; ☎ ☒) This unassuming family-run guesthouse is in a pretty part of town. There's a cosy lounge, sauna and breakfast is included. Bathrooms are shared, except in family rooms.

**Umpitunneli** (☎ 430 360; Hallituskatu 15; lunch €7.50; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Tue, 11-4am Wed-Fri, 1pm-4am Sat, 1pm-2am Sun) For Finnish-style entertainment, head to this classic open-air dance pub where you can see the *humppa*

(Finnish waltz) in full swing on the terrace Wednesday to Saturday in summer; year-round it's a thumping bar and nightclub.

## Getting There & Away

From Kemi, take a bus from the train station (€5.20, free with Finnrail pass, 35 minutes). Road No 21 leads from Tornio to the north, and there are local buses to Muonio (€35.60, 3½ hours) and Rovaniemi (€18.60, 2½ hours). If you're heading to Sweden there are buses to Stockholm (€55, 15 hours).

# LAPLAND

Extending hundreds of kilometres above the Arctic Circle, Lapland is Finland's true wilderness. For many, this northern extreme is the classic Finland – a mysterious land of clear Arctic air where the midnight sun brings continuous daylight in the brief summer (June to August) and the long, polar nights offer the chance to view the stunning aurora borealis (October to March). From September, the period known locally as *ruska* (autumn) produces exceptional colours of gold, red and brown, and in the far north *kaamos*, the season of eerie bluish light, begins late in October.

Opportunities to get out and experience this sugar-coated wonderland are endless. In winter you can mush with husky-dogs, ski in downhill resorts, cheer for reindeer races on frozen lakes, drill a hole and go ice-fishing or snowmobile through forests. In summer, hike through pristine national parks in endless daylight and raft down whitewater rivers. The only limitation here is your budget.

## ROVANIEMI

☎ 016 / pop 57,000

Hovering just below the Arctic Circle, Rovaniemi is Lapland's capital and gateway, a modern town built as much around tourism as any sort of industry, although there's a large student population thanks to the University of Lapland.

The town was completely rebuilt in 1946 after being razed by the Germans and the modern centre is the result of a plan by architectural maestro Alvar Aalto. The main streets are intended to radiate out from Hallituskatu in the shape of reindeer antlers, but this is only obvious from the air.

Apart from the lure of the Arctic Circle, tourists are attracted here by the notion that Santa Claus lives just up the road – a sublime piece of marketing built up from an old Finnish legend. But there's a lot to be said for this latitude: in summer, the mid-night sun really does shine, and in winter it's a convenient base for dog- or reindeer-sledding, skiing or snowmobile safaris, and a chance to see the northern lights.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

**Public Library** (☎ 322 2463; Jorma Eton tie 6; ☎ 11am–8pm Mon–Thu, 11am–5pm Fri, 11am–6pm Sat & Sun) Free internet (three terminals), maximum 20 minutes, or one hour if you reserve in advance. Reached from Hallituskatu.

### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Rovaniemi Health Centre** (☎ 32241, 322 4900; Sairaalakatu 1)

### POST

**Main Post Office** (Postikatu 1; ☎ 9am–8pm Mon–Fri) Near the train station but there is another branch right in the town centre at Koskikatu 9. Most visitors prefer to send their postcards from the busy Santa Claus post office at Napapiiri.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Santa Claus Tourist Centre** (☎ 346 270; www.rova.niemi.fi; Rovakatu 21; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun Jun–late Aug, 8am–5pm Mon–Fri late Aug–May) This small office is an excellent source of information on Rovaniemi and all of Lapland. Internet access per 15 min €2.  
**Ettäinen** (☎ 647 820; ☎ 10am–5pm) At Napapiiri, this is the information centre for the national parks and trekking regions, with information on hiking and fishing in Lapland.

### TRAVEL AGENCIES

The following outfits all offer summer and winter activities including snowmobiling, reindeer and husky safaris, and river cruises.

**Arctic Safaris** (☎ 340 0400; www.arcticsafaris.fi; Koskikatu 6)

**Eräsetti Safaris** (☎ 362 811; www.erasetti.fi; Santa Claus Village)

**Lapland Safaris** (☎ 331 1200; www.laplandsafaris.com; Koskikatu 1)

**Northern Gate Safaris** (☎ 311 042; www.northern.gatesafaris.com; Valtakatu 23)

**Safartica** (☎ 311 485; www.safartica.com; Valtakatu 20)

## Sights & Activities

**Arktikum** (☎ 322 3260; www.arktikum.fi; Pohjoisranta 4; adult/student/child €11/8.50/5; ☎ 9am–7pm mid-Jun–mid-Aug, 10am–6pm early Jun & late Aug, 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Sep–May), with its beautifully designed glass tunnel stretching out to the Kemijoki, spacious layout and engrossing exhibitions, is one of Finland's premier museums. Static and interactive displays focus on Arctic flora and fauna as well as the Sami and other people of Arctic Europe, Asia and North America. Other photographic exhibits examine the lives of ordinary Finns. There's also a theatre screening a short film about the aurora borealis, a library and a good café. Give yourself at least a couple of hours to get around this museum. It's a pleasant walk to Arktikum from the centre of town following the path along the river.

**Rovaniemi Art Museum** (☎ 322 2822; Lapinkävijäntie 4; adult/child €4/2, free Sat; ☎ noon–5pm Tue–Sat) has changing exhibitions of Finnish modern art.

Rovaniemi has several buildings designed by Alvar Aalto, including the library, town hall and **Lappia-talo** (☎ 322 2495; Hallituskatu 11-13), an impressive concert hall.

Across the Ounasjoki and 3km above the town, the **Ounasvaara Ski Centre** (☎ 369 045; www.ounasvaara.net) has six downhill ski slopes and three ski jumps, plus a summer tobogganing run and the Ounasvaara Sky Hotel. It's a good spot for hiking in summer.

In summer there are two-hour **boat cruises** (☎ 0400-292132; adult/child €10/5; ☎ 2pm, 5pm & 8pm) on the Kemijoki. If the cold gets too much, check out the swimming hall **Vesihäisi** (☎ 322 2592; Nuortenkatu 11) with spas and saunas.

## Festivals & Events

Rovaniemi hosts events year-round and is especially busy around Christmas. In late January, the **Arctic Lapland Rally** (www.arcticrally.fi) starts and finishes here, and in mid-March the **Reindeer City Race** flies through the town centre, with riders skiing behind their charges. In summer, **Jutajaiset** (www.jutajaiset.net), a Midsummer festival in late June, is a Lappish arts and folk music event; and there's the **Rovaniemi Rock Festival**, a weekend of concerts in early August.

## Tours

Several tour companies in town (see left) specialise in the 'Lapland experience', so you can you easily organise a reindeer sleigh ride

or snowshoe walk in winter (November–March) or a river cruise in summer (June–August). In winter and early spring the most popular activities include **snowmobiling** (from €90), and **husky and reindeer safaris** (from €105). Summer tours include river cruises from €20, white-water rafting and fishing expeditions from €65 per person.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

**Ounaskoski Camping** (☎ 345 304; Jäämerentie 1; camp sites €5; ☎ Jun–Aug; P) Picturesquely situated just across the river from the town centre, Ounaskoski has a lovely, uncrowded location but has tent and van sites only.

**ROVANIEMI**

INFORMATION		SLEEPING		DRINKING	
Arctic Safaris.....	1 C2	Rovaniemi Art Museum.....	13 B2	S Market & Alko.....	24 B2
Lapland Safaris.....	2 C2	Vesihäisi.....	14 B2	Zoomit.....	(see 19)
Main Post Office.....	3 A3	<b>SLEEPING</b>		<b>DRINKING</b>	
Northern Gate Safaris.....	4 C2	City Hotel.....	15 C2	Igloo Bar.....	25 D2
Post Office.....	5 C2	Guesthouse Borealis.....	16 A3	Irish Times.....	26 C2
Public Library.....	6 B3	Hotel Rudolph.....	17 B2	Oluthuone & Beer	
Rovaniemi Health Centre.....	7 C4	Hotel Aakenus.....	18 B1	Terrace.....	27 C2
Safartica.....	8 C2	Hotel Santa Claus.....	19 C2	Pub Yltyö.....	28 C2
Santa Claus Tourist Centre.....	9 C2	Ounaskoski Camping.....	20 D3	Tivoli.....	29 C2
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		<b>EATING</b>		<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
Arktikum.....	10 B1	Cómico.....	21 B2	Budget.....	(see 5)
Boat Cruises.....	11 C1	Golden Rax Pizza Buffet.....	22 C2	Bus Station.....	30 B3
Lappia-talo.....	12 B3	Kahvila Kauppahäisi.....	23 C2	European.....	31 C2

**Hostel Rudolph** (☎ 321 321; [www.rudolf.fi](http://www.rudolf.fi); Koskikatu 41; dm €24.50, s/d €50/75 Apr–mid-Nov, €37/49 mid-Nov–Mar; P ☒) Rovaniemi's HI hostel is an apartment-style building about five minutes' walk north of the centre. It's a bargain since all rooms have their own bathroom, TV and bedding. There's no staff on site; check in at Hotel Santa Claus.

#### MIDRANGE

**Guesthouse Borealis** (☎ 342 0130; [www.guesthouseborealis.com](http://www.guesthouseborealis.com); Asemieskatu 1; s/d/tr from €45/55/77; apt €185; P ☒ ☒) Rovaniemi's cosiest guesthouse is virtually opposite the train station. It's a friendly, family-run place with clean, simple rooms, all with private bathroom; buffet breakfast is included. Downstairs is a great self-contained apartment that sleeps up to eight.

**Hotel Aakenus** (☎ 342 2051; [www.hotelliaakenus.net](http://www.hotelliaakenus.net); Koskikatu 47; s/d €60/65-95, d summer €54; P ☒) This simple but very welcoming private hotel is just a short walk north of the centre. Comfortable rooms (most nonsmoking) have TV and free wireless internet access, and there is a sauna and restaurant.

#### TOP END

**Hotel Santa Claus** (☎ 321 321; [www.hotelsantaclaus.fi](http://www.hotelsantaclaus.fi); Korkalonkatu 29; s/d €127/152, weekends €89, summer €84) There are no piped Christmas carols or baubles, just a modern, efficiently run hotel. Large rooms (some with strange '70s touches involving red velvet) are the best in town and a few 5th-floor rooms have balconies overlooking Koskikatu.

**City Hotel** (☎ 330 0111; [www.cityhotel.fi](http://www.cityhotel.fi); Pekankatu 9; s/d €95/120, weekends €85/99, d summer €65) This stylish hotel is more boutique than business, with a busy café bar and internet lounge area downstairs, neatly furnished rooms with satellite TV and minibar, and an excellent restaurant (Monte Rosa) and cellar pub. Who needs to go out?

#### Eating

The partly pedestrianised Koskikatu (between Rovakatu and Valtakatu) has plenty of fast-food joints and midrange restaurants, including branches of Rosso, Golden Rax Pizza Buffet and the world's northernmost McDonald's.

**Kahvila Kauppayhtiö** (Valtakatu 24; ☎ 10.30am–6pm Mon–Sat, noon–5pm Sun) By far Rovaniemi's

coolest café, this retro gallery is full of classic old stuff – TVs, a petrol bowser, pinball machine, ancient record players and even an Italian scooter. Relax with a coffee or a light meal on the loungey couches, or access the internet for free. It has a great atmosphere.

**ZoomIt** (☎ 321 321; Koskikatu; ☎ 10am–midnight Mon–Thu, 10am–2pm Fri & Sat, 11am–11pm Sun) On the pedestrian strip, ZoomIt is Rovaniemi's most popular café-bar and a great spot for breakfast or lunch. Weekday lunch features the Wok Bar menu of stir fries (€6.50) as well as panini and wraps. It's also a good place for an evening drink at the full service bar.

**Cómico** (☎ 344 433; Koskikatu 25; nachos from €3.50, mains €6–18; ☎ 3–10pm Mon, Tue, Thu, 3pm–2am Wed & Fri, 1pm–2am Sat, 1–8pm Sun) Colourful café-bar and restaurant just below street level with American-diner seating, old movies screening and a big menu of Tex-Mex (nachos and burritos), burgers, steaks and salads.

#### Drinking & Entertainment

Other than the winter ski resorts, Rovaniemi is the only place north of Oulu with a half-decent nightlife – there are plenty of pubs and nightclubs in the town centre. In summer, kick back under the midnight sun in the open-air beer terrace of **Oluthuone** (Koskikatu).

**Pub Ylityö** (Overtime Bar; Koskikatu 5) This is a tiny, eccentric pub with cheap beer, no seats and walls plastered with business cards and other paraphernalia. Bizarrely it was voted one of the world's best bars by *Newsweek* in 1996!

**Igloo Bar** (☎ 0400-985 035; Koskikatu; 4–11pm Tue–Sun Dec–Mar) Finland has a few 'ice bars', but this one is a true igloo and the drinks menu is innovative with hot liqueurs on offer along with the many flavoured vodka shots.

**Irish Times** (☎ 319 925; Valtakatu 33; ☎ 2pm–2am Sun–Thu, 2pm–3am Fri & Sat) Rovaniemi's best Irish pub has a great heated terrace, international beers, good tables downstairs, a relaxed vibe and occasional live folk music.

**Tivoli** (☎ 312 640; Valtakatu 19; ☎ 10pm–4am Wed–Sat) Rovaniemi's biggest rock and live music club is well worth checking out if the right bands are on – you might even catch Rovaniemi's most famous rock band Lordi here.

#### Getting There & Away

##### AIR

**Blue1** ([www.blue1.com](http://www.blue1.com)) has the cheapest flights from Helsinki – as low as €18 for the 1½-hour flight when booked by internet. Finnair has daily flights to Rovaniemi from Helsinki, Kemi and Oulu. An airport bus meets all flights, and departs from the central bus station one hour before flight departures (€5).

##### BUS

Buses are the way to travel further north into Lapland – for Oulu, Kemi and Helsinki, take the train. From the **main bus station** (Lapinkävijäntie) daily services go to Muonio (€33.60, 3½ hours) and Enontekiö (Hetta; €43.70, five hours) in the northwest; Kuusamo (€26.40, three hours) in the east; and north to Sodankylä (€21.40, two hours), Ivalo (€40.80, 4½ hours) and Inari (€46.30, five to six hours), then on to Norway. One bus a day goes all the way to Nordkapp (North Cape; €85.30, 11½ hours) in Norway.

##### TRAIN

For overnight travel between Helsinki and Rovaniemi (€72.20, sleeper from €79, 10 to 12 hours) the train is quicker, cheaper and more comfy than the bus. There are eight daily trains via Oulu (€27.70, 2½ hours) and Tampere (€62.20, eight hours), including four overnight services.

#### Getting Around

Rovaniemi's centre is compact and it's easy enough to get around on foot but bicycles can be rented from **Arctic Safaris** (☎ 340 0400; Koskikatu 6; 3/24hr €11/18). Bus No 8 goes from the train station to town.

Major car rental companies have offices in Rovaniemi or at the airport and a car can be a convenient way of exploring northern Lapland. Try **Europcar** (☎ 04-0043 3507; Koskikatu 6) or **Budget** (☎ 312 266; Koskikatu 9).

#### AROUND ROVANIEMI

##### Napapiiri

The official **Arctic Circle marker** (Napapiiri) is 8km north of Rovaniemi, and built on top of it is the 'official' **Santa Claus Village** ([www.santaclausvillage.info](http://www.santaclausvillage.info); admission free; ☎ 10am–5pm Jan–May & Sep–Nov, 9am–7pm Jun–Aug & Dec). The **Santa Claus post office** receives close to a half a million letters each year – he and his helpers

actually reply to almost half of these! Rarely do you get a chance to see such pure commercialism in such a remote location, but as tacky as it sounds, it's all good fun. You can send a postcard home with an official Santa stamp (arrange to have it delivered at Christmas); meet the bearded man in red in his grotto (that's free, but note that Santa is a registered trademark and he can only be photographed by his elves – the cost is from €19!); and there are some excellent souvenir and handicraft shops here. In winter and spring, giant snowmen stand outside and piped Christmas carols give the whole place a kitsch but jolly atmosphere. Bus No 8 goes to the Santa Claus Village hourly from Rovaniemi train station (return €5.40).

**Santapark** (☎ 333 0000; [www.santapark.com](http://www.santapark.com); adult/child winter €20/15, adult/family summer €10/30; ☎ 10am–4pm Tue–Sat early Jun–late Aug, 10am–6pm Tue–Sun Nov–mid Jan), a Christmas-themed amusement park back on the road to Rovaniemi, is strictly for kids.

#### Ranua Zoo

Although a long detour just to see a zoo, **Ranua Zoo** (☎ 355 1921; [www.ranuawildlife.fi](http://www.ranuawildlife.fi); adult/child & student €12/9; ☎ 9am–7pm Jun–Aug, 10am–4pm Sep–May), 83km south of Rovaniemi on road No 78, is an excellent wildlife park housing over 30 mammal and 30 bird species native to Finland or Scandinavia, including brown and polar bears, lynx, arctic fox and several species of owl. As with any zoo, seeing the animals active is a matter of chance but you'll certainly get a look at the normally elusive *hirvi* – the Finnish elk.

Ranua is most easily reached by bus from Rovaniemi (€22, one hour, two daily).

#### ROVANIEMI TO INARI

North from Rovaniemi, Hwy 4 (E75) heads up to the vast, flat expanse of northern Lapland and Sápmi, home of the Sami people and domesticated reindeer herds.

Subtle landscape changes become more severe as you head north, and the feeling of entering one of Europe's last great wildernesses is palpable. Snow and icy roads are likely until May. The road passes through Sodankylä, the 'gold village' of Tankavaara and the ski-hiking resort village of Saariselkä, a jumping-off point for the UKK National Park and Saariselkä Wilderness that extends east to the Russian border.



## Sodankylä

☎ 016 / pop 9922

The busy market town of Sodankylä is a reasonable place to break the journey between Rovaniemi and northern Lapland, and is renowned for the **Midnight Sun Film Festival** (www.msffilmfestival.fi) held in mid-June.

This is also a base for visiting the **Lampivaara Amethyst Mine** (☎ 624 334; www.amethystmine.fi; Lampivaara Fell; adult/child €14/8; ☎ 11am-5pm Jun-Aug, 11am-4pm Sep, 11am-3pm Tue-Sat Oct & Feb-Apr), 38km south of Sodankylä in Luosto. The only working amethyst mine in Europe can be reached by bus; book at the tourist office.

In the town itself, the **old wooden church** (☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug) is worth a look; it's in the cemetery behind the newer stone church. It was built in 1689, making it one of the oldest in Lapland, and the mummified bodies of local priests and their families are buried beneath the church floor.

The **tourist office** (☎ 618 168; www.sodankyla.fi; Jäämerentie 3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, also Sat in summer) is in the same building as the **Andraes Alariesto Gallery** (☎ 618 643; adult/student/child €5/3/2; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri), which displays art by famous Sami painter Alariesto.

The cosiest place to stay in Sodankylä is **Majatalo Kolme Veljestä** (☎ 611 216; Ivalontie 1; s/d/tr €38/54/65; ☎ P), a welcoming family B&B guesthouse with roaring log fire in the lounge, tidy rooms (shared bathroom), guest kitchen and sauna. It's about 500m north of the bus station on the road to Ivalo.

There are plenty of cafés, supermarkets, takeaways and a couple of bars lined up along the main street, Jäämerentie. The best is **Café In CajMar** (☎ 624 383; Jäämerentie 11; snacks €2-5, mains €9.50-23; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat, noon-6pm Sun).

There are daily buses to/from Rovaniemi (€18.60, two hours) and Ivalo (€25.40, three hours).

## Ivalo

☎ 016 / pop 3500

Ivalo is the administrative and commercial centre of the Inari district, but it's a drab, modern centre with no special attractions – Inari, 40km further north, is a better place to stop. Ivalo is merely somewhere to stock up on provisions, make bus connections or

meet some crusty old gold-panners who come to town to trade their gold chips for beer. The **tourist office** (☎ 661 411; Ivalontie 7; ☎ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is in the Inarilainen agency on the main street.

**Kultahippu Hotel** (☎ 661 825; www.kultahippu.hotel.fi, Petsamontie 1; s/d €60/80, s/d with sauna €75/93; P) At the north end of the main street, this rustic hotel is the town focal point. Comfortable rooms upstairs and reasonably priced restaurant and local pub downstairs; attracts all sorts of local characters on weekends.

**Kamisak** (☎ 667 736; www.kamisak.com; Rovaniementie 915), about 7km south of Ivalo, is an well-established husky farm where you can meet the dogs (€4) or organise dogsledding safaris from a half-day (from €100) to epic five-day journeys.

Express buses from Rovaniemi operate services twice daily (€40.80, 4½ hours), both continuing north into Norway before returning. Gold Line buses run from Ivalo to Saariselka, Inari, Rovaniemi and Murmansk (Russia).

## INARI

☎ 016 / pop 550

At first glance there's not a lot to Inari (Sami: Anâr) other than a pub, a large lake and a few shops lining the Arctic Highway. But this tiny village is the hub of the surrounding Sami community and the most interesting point of civilisation in far northern Lapland. Along with a first class cultural museum, this is a renowned centre for genuine Sami handicrafts produced under the name 'Sami Duodji'.

**Inari Info** (☎ 661 666; www.inarilapland.org; ☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) doubles as the post office and Alko store.

## Sights & Activities

Don't miss **Side** (☎ 665 212; www.samimuseum.fi; adult/student & pensioner/child €7/6/3; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), one of the finest cultural museums in Finland. The exhibitions beautifully bring to life Sami origins, culture, lifestyle and present-day struggles with static and audiovisual displays and photographic collections. There's an excellent nature centre covering Lapland, and outside is an open-air museum with Sami buildings, handicrafts and artefacts (open summer only).

There's a marked 7.5km walking track (starting from the Siida parking area) to the 18th-century **Pielpajärvi wilderness church**. If you have a vehicle, there's another parking area 3km closer. In winter or spring you'll need snowshoes and a keen attitude to tackle this walk.

In summer, boat trips leave for the prominent Ukko island, an ancient cult site for the Inari Samis. The two-hour cruises on Inarijärvi are run by **Lake & Snow** (☎ 0400-295731; adult/child €13/7; ☎ 2pm Jun, Aug & Sep, 2pm & 6pm Jul). When the lake is frozen over (November to late April) you can take a snowmobile out to the island (per person €60 to €100).

**Inarin Porofarmi** (☎ 673 912; www.reindeerfarm.fi) is a reindeer farm run by a Sami family 14km from Inari on the back road to Kittila. You can meet reindeer, try lassoing, see Sami shows, and take reindeer safaris in winter. Most programs require advance notice, so call ahead.

Finland's biggest **reindeer racing championships** are held on the frozen lake in the first week of April, and a big **ice-fishing** competition draws the crowds in mid-April.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Inarin Kultahovi** (☎ 671 221; www.hotel.kultahovi.fi; Saarikoskentie 2; s/d €66/86; P ☎) A short walk from the village centre on the edge of the lovely Alakoski river rapids, this welcoming, family-run hotel is Inari's best, with renovated rooms and a great riverside sauna. There's a good restaurant (mains €9.50 to €26), open 11am to 11pm, offering Lappish specialities and set menus – try the mushroom-filled crepe.

**Hotel Inari** (☎ 671 026; www.hotelliinari.fi; s/d/tr €42/62/90; P ☎) The local hotel is also the hub of the village – pub, restaurant, Saturday-night disco and all-round local hang-out which can get a bit boisterous on weekends. Upstairs are small but clean rooms with private bathrooms.

**Hostel Jokitörmä** (☎ 672 725; www.jokitorma.com; camp sites €13, dm €16/19 s/d/tr €30/38/55, cottages €28-88; P ☎) On the Arctic Hwy about 27km north of Inari, this place offers something for everyone with camping, a HI hostel with cosy two- and four-person rooms, and cottages, each with their own kitchen and bathroom facilities. It's a pity it's not closer to Inari, but all buses (including those heading to Nordkapp) will stop here on request.

## Getting There & Away

The Arctic Hwy runs through Inari and buses from Rovaniemi ply the route right through to Nordkapp, Tana Bru and Kirkenes (all in Norway) in summer. Buses stop outside the tourist office and although you can't make reservations or buy tickets here, you can pick up timetables and there are no problems getting a seat (pay the driver). Gold Line buses run daily to/from Ivalo (€6.40, 40 minutes), with connections south to Rovaniemi.

## LEMMENJOKI NATIONAL PARK

Lemmenjoki is Finland's largest national park (2855 sq km), a remote and wild place and one of Lapland's most diverse environments. Hiking trails extend for over 70km through the vast reserve and there are several free wilderness huts.

### SOMETHING SPECIAL

On the Arctic Hwy, about 10km south of the resort village of Saariselken, is one of Lapland's most weird and wonderful places to stay. **Hotel Kakslauttanen** (☎ 016-667 100; www.kakslauttanen.fi; cabins from €100, igloos from €119-158 per person) is a minivillage made up of rustic log cabins, all with their own sauna, fireplace, separate bedroom and kitchenette. But it's the glass igloos that make this place so unique. Situated away from the cabins are some 20 igloos built from 'thermo glass'. Inside is a reclining double bed, private bathroom, enough room to stand comfortably, and a toasty-warm heater. The idea is that, between September and April, you have a good chance of viewing the northern lights from the comfort of your bed. The experience is not cheap, but if you're lucky enough to see the show – or experience a snowstorm – it's priceless. In winter (Dec-Apr), real snow igloos are also built here and you can sleep in -5°C huddled in a polar sleeping bag. There's also an ice chapel and gallery, restaurant and activities such as dogsledding, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. This is Lapland at its best!

**Lemmenjoki Nature Centre** (☎ 0205-647793; ☒ 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Sep) is just before the village of Njurgulahti, about 50km southwest of Inari.

As well as hiking trails and opportunities for gold panning, there's a boat cruise along the Lemmenjoki valley in summer, from Njurgulahti village to the Kultahamina wilderness hut at Gold Harbour. A 20km marked trail also follows the course of the river, so you can take the boat one way, then hike back. Accommodation at Njurgulahti includes two camping grounds.

In summer, Gold Line runs at least one bus on weekdays from Inari to Lemmenjoki (€9, one hour).

## NORTHWESTERN LAPLAND

Although remote, northwestern Lapland doesn't seem nearly as desolate and empty as its eastern counterpart. For a start it's got 'mountains' and is best known for its ski resorts (Levi, Ylläs and Olos), superb summer hiking (Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park and Kilpisjärvi area), and white-water rafting and canoeing on the fast-flowing Muonionjoki and Tornionjoki rivers, which form the border between Finland and Sweden. Throw in husky dogsledding and you've got plenty of action above the Arctic Circle.

## Muonio

☎ 016

For travellers, the little village of Muonio is mainly a centre for hiking and winter activities – nearby is the small Olos ski resort, a serious husky farm and the start (or end) of the four-day trek through the Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park to Hetta. The Muonionjoki provides white-water thrills.

**Kiela Naturium** (☎ 532 280; www.kielanaturium.fi, www.muonio.fi Kilpisjärventie 15; ☒ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jul-early-Sep, 10am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun) combines tourist information with a nifty 3D-multimedia fells nature display, and a planetarium with aurora borealis show (adult/child €7/5).

About 3km south of the village, **Harriniva Holiday Centre** (☎ 530 0300; www.harriniva.fi; cabins €20-55, s/d €120/140, summer from €68/78) has a vast programme of summer and winter activities, as well as accommodation and a

restaurant. This is probably the best place in Finland to organise a husky safari. Harriniva has a husky breeding centre with some 500 dogs (guided tour adult/child €7/4), and in winter and spring there are dogsledding safaris from one hour (adult/child €60/35) to two days (€470/320) staying overnight in a wilderness hut, as well as snowmobile, snowshoe and reindeer safaris. In summer, the centre offers daily guided white-water rafting trips on the Muonio river from €25 for a 1½-hour trip.

## Levi

☎ 016

Levi is one of Finland's most popular downhill ski resorts, especially with a young, party crowd. One of the great things about Levi is the accessibility and compact nature of the resort, and the spring skiing here is usually excellent.

The **tourist office** (☎ 639 3300; www.levi.fi; Myllyjoentie 2; ☒ 9am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5.30pm Sat & Sun) should be your first stop for accommodation bookings as well as activities like snowmobile safaris and dogsled treks.

The resort has 45 downhill slopes and 26 lifts, including a gondola. Two lifts operate in summer, and mountain bikes can be hired from the ski rental shop. Ice-fishing on the frozen lake is a popular activity in spring.

Accommodation prices go through the roof in the peak season of February to May and in December – there are 19,000 beds here but book ahead or forget it. In summer (May to September), however, you can get a comfortable cabin sleeping up to five people for as little as €45 a night, and hotel prices drop to rates comparable to anywhere else in Finland.

There are four to seven buses a day from Rovaniemi to Levi (€26.60, 2½ hours).

## Hetta & Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park

☎ 016 / pop 700

One of the easiest long-distance walks in Lapland is the excellent 55km trekking route between the northern village of Hetta (also known as Enontekiö) and **Hotelli Pallas** (☎ 532 441; s/d €110/140, summer €52/65; ☐ ☒). The marked trail passes through Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park, Finland's third-

largest, and can easily be completed in four days. There are seven free wilderness huts, but these can be packed with people in summer so it is wise to carry your own tent.

The **Fell Lapland Nature Centre** (☎ 556 215; www.enontekiö.fi; Peuratie, Hetta) is the combined local tourist office and a visitor centre for the national park. At the southern end of the trek, the **Pallastunturi Nature Centre** (☎ 0205-647 930; ☒ 9am-5pm daily Jun-Sep, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-May) at Pallastunturi Fell provides information and can also make hut reservations.

Hetta is the service village for the Sami homeland of Enontekiö, and has plenty of accommodation, including summer camping and cabins.

**Hetan Majatalo** (☎ 554 0400; www.hetan-majatalo.fi; s/d €60/80) This fine guesthouse in the town centre has Nordic-pine country-style rooms, some with spacious lofts. There are cheaper rooms inside the traditional inn (singles/doubles €42/56).

In summer, there's one daily bus from Muonio to Pallastunturi (€5.20, 45 minutes). Buses to Hetta run daily from Rovaniemi (€43.70, five hours) via Kittilä and Muonio.

## Kilpisjärvi

☎ 016

The remote 'left arm' of Finland is home to some of Finland's highest mountains (which aren't very high), however this scenic outpost on the shores of Kilpisjärvi is really only the preserve of serious trekkers or travellers with private transport heading into remote Sweden or Norway. Most people climb the Saana Fell (1029m), or walk (or take a boat taxi) to the **Malla Nature Park**, where you can stand on the joint border of Sweden, Norway and Finland. Serious hikers can walk to the Halti Fell (1328m), the highest in Finland. There are wilderness huts en route but bringing a map is essential. Information, maps and accommodation is available from the hiking centre **Kilpisjärvi Hiking Centre** (☎ 537 771; www.kilpisjarvi.info).

There are two daily bus connections between Rovaniemi and Kilpisjärvi (€55.60, seven hours) both run via Kittilä and Muonio, with one continuing on to Tromsø in Norway.

# FINLAND DIRECTORY

## ACCOMMODATION

In this chapter, we have classified sleeping options as follows:

- Budget: camping and hostels under €30 per person.
- Midrange: guesthouses, cottages and hotels under €80 a double.
- Top End: €80 and upwards.

## Camping

Camping is the cheapest way to travel around Finland – and the best way to get close to the heart of the Finnish countryside. Most camp sites are open only from June to August (ie summer) and popular spots are crowded during July and the Midsummer weekend. Sites cost from €8 to €18. Almost all camping grounds have cabins or cottages for rent, which are usually excellent value from €35 for a basic double cabin to €120 for a cottage with kitchen and bathroom.

If you plan to do a lot of camping, the Camping Card Scandinavia offers useful discounts. Contact the **Finnish Camping Association** (☎ 09-4774 0740; www.camping.fi) for more information.

Finland's *jokamiehenoikeus* (everyman's right) allows access to most land and means you can pitch a tent almost anywhere on public land or at designated free camp sites in national parks. Be sure to ask the owner's permission if you are thinking of camping on private land.

## Guesthouses & Holiday Cottages

In large towns and coastal resorts, guesthouses are a cosy choice, often costing only a little more than a double room at a hostel.

Holiday cottages in the countryside are a great way to experience Finland – just as the Finns themselves do. The cottages vary from very basic lakeside cottages with few facilities to luxurious farmhouses. Rental costs vary from about €250 to €700 per week depending on the time of year and size of the property. For listings and booking information, contact **Lomarengas** (☎ 09-5766 3300; www.lomarengas.fi), **Huvila** (www.huvila.net) or any of Finland's regional tourist offices.

## Hostels

Finnish hostels are always functional, if a little bland. **Finnish Youth Hostel Association** (SRM; ☎ 09-64 0377; www.srmnet.org) operates 84 hostels. Around half of these are open all year; the rest operate in summer only (June to August) and are usually student accommodation buildings that have been vacated for the school holidays. Always call ahead to book a bed – even during winter, hostels can fill up quickly. Hostel prices quoted throughout this chapter do not include the €2.50 discount given to holders of a valid HI card.

## Hotels

Finland has several large business-type hotel chains with all the usual features, including Sokos, Scandic, Cumulus and Radisson – you'll find at least one of these in every large town. In contrast to much of the rest of the world, hotels in Finland offer substantially lower rates on weekends (usually Friday and Saturday nights but sometimes also on Sunday night) and in summer (June to August), when business travel is down, so it's always worth checking out if hotel prices are discounted at these times.

Look out for Omena Hotels (www.omena.com) in Tampere, Turku and Vaasa (two were due to open in Helsinki in 2007). These are staff-free hotels that can only be booked over the internet. They offer excellent rooms sleeping up to four people for the great value price of €55.

## ACTIVITIES

### Canoeing & Rafting

Finland has so much water in the form of lakes and rivers that it seems a shame to stay on dry land. Canoes and kayaks can be hired in most towns near a lake, often from camping grounds, for around €10 a day. Transport to the start/finishing points of popular river trips can usually be arranged at an extra cost.

Good places for organised **white-water rafting** trips include the rapids around Kuhmo (see p195), the Kitkajoki north of Kuusamo (see p199), the rapids of the Tornionjoki and Munionjoki rivers on the Finland-Sweden border (see p201 and p208), and the Ruunaa Recreation Area in North Karelia (see p194).

## Fishing

To fish with a lure you need to buy a one-week (€6) or one-year (€20) fishing licence, available at banks, post offices and the **Forest and Park Service information office** (www.metsa.fi; Eteläesplanadi 20, Helsinki). Fishing in Northern Lapland requires a separate regional licence. In winter and spring, ice-fishing is popular and requires no licence – just bore a hole in the ice and dangle a line.

## Hiking

Hiking or trekking (often called fell walking in Finland) is best from June to September, although in July mosquitoes and other biting insects can be a big problem in Lapland. In summer, given the continuous daylight in northern Finland, you can comfortably walk all night if you feel like it, especially in the north. Wilderness huts line the northern trails (they are free and must be shared). According to the law, a principle of common access to nature applies, so you are generally allowed to hike in any forested or wilderness area.

## Skiing

Finns love to ski, though a lack of any real mountains means Nordic (cross-country) skiing is favoured. There are some reasonable downhill resorts in the far north, and cross-country trails of varying difficulty (some illuminated) all over the country. From February to April, downhill skiers flock to resorts such as Levi and Ylläs in northwest Lapland, Ruka near Kuusamo or Koli in North Karelia. Expect to pay €20 to €30 a day for lift passes and €25 to hire a complete cross-country or downhill kit (skis or snowboard, boots and poles). The full season runs from October to April. Accommodation prices and crowds are highest in the peak season of spring (February to April).

## Swimming & Sauna

What would Finland be without the physically and mentally cleansing sauna? The traditional sauna is a wooden room with benches and a properly stoked wooden stove, although most Finnish saunas now have electric heating. Temperatures should be 80°C to 100°C, and the sauna is taken in the nude. Many hotels – and many hostels and camp-

ing grounds – have men's and women's saunas that are free with a night's stay.

*Uimahalli* (indoor swimming centres) can be found in most towns and they usually have spa and sauna facilities in addition to a pool. *Kylpylä* (spa hotels) are another option for getting hot and wet and some have spectacular facilities as well as massage and hydrotherapy. There are good ones in Turku, Oulu, Kuopio and Savonlinna. In most places nonguests can use the facilities for a fee.

## Winter Activities

As well as skiing and snowboarding, Finland offers a range of snowbound activities including dogsledding, snowmobile safaris, ice-fishing and reindeer sleigh tours. Most of these activities are expensive but there's something magic about being pulled through the snow by a team of huskies. The best place to get involved is Lapland: Rovaniemi (see p201) is a major centre for organised tours, and ski resorts such as Levi and Ylläs also offer tours, plus there are husky farms at Ivalo (p206) and Muonio (p208). The Lake Pie-linen region, especially Lieksa and Nurmes, is also popular for winter activities. The main season is late winter and spring (January to April).

## BUSINESS HOURS

Shops generally open from 9am to 5pm weekdays, and to 1pm on Saturday. Banks are open from 9.15am until 4.15pm weekdays. Many supermarkets and Helsinki department stores stay open until 9pm or 10pm on weeknights and open all day on Saturday.

Cafés are usually open from 9am or 10am to 6pm, however they stay open much later if they're licensed. Restaurants open from around 11am to 10pm with lunch from 11am to 3pm. Pubs open from 11am to 10pm (to 1am or later on Friday and Saturday) and nightclubs stay open as late as 4am.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### Finland Embassies & Consulates

Finland maintains embassies in the following countries:

**Australia** (☎ 02-6273 3800; www.finland.org.au; 12 Darwin Ave, Yarralumla, ACT 2600)

**Canada** (☎ 613-288 2233; www.finland.ca; 55 Metcalfe St, Suite 850, Ottawa K1P 6L5)

**Denmark** (☎ 33 13 4214; www.finamb.dk; Sankt Annæ Plads 24, 1250 Copenhagen K)

**France** (☎ 01 44 18 19 20; www.amb-finlande.fr; 1 Place de Finlande, 75007 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 030-505030; www.finland.de; Rauchstrasse 1, 10787 Berlin)

**Ireland** (☎ 01-478 1344; www.finland.ie; Russell House, Stokes Pl, St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2)

**Netherlands** (☎ 070-346 9754; www.finlande.nl; Groot Hertoginnelaan 16, 251r EG Den Haag)

**New Zealand Honorary Consulate General** (☎ 04-499 4599; Level 24, HSBC Tower, 195 Lambton Quay, Wellington) Or contact the Australian embassy.

**Norway** (☎ 2212 4900; www.finland.no; Thomas Heftyes gate 1, 0244 Oslo)

**Russia** (☎ 095-787 4174; www.finemb-moscow.fi; Kropotkinskij Pereulok 15/17, 119034 Moskva G-34)

**Sweden** (☎ 08-676 6700; www.finland.se; Jakobsgratan 6, 10391 Stockholm)

**UK** (☎ 020-7838 6200; www.finemb-org.uk; 38 Chesham Place, London SW1X 8HW)

**USA** (☎ 202-298 5800; www.finland.org; 3301 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington DC 20008)

## Embassies & Consulates in Finland

The following embassies are in Helsinki: **Australia** (☎ 4777 6640; australian.

consulate@tradimex.fi; Museokatu 25B) This is an Honorary consulate; the nearest embassy is in Stockholm.

**Canada** (☎ 228 530; www.canada.fi; Pohjoisesplanadi 28B)

**Denmark** (☎ 684 1050; www.ambhelsingfors.um.dk/da; Keskuskatu 1A)

**Estonia** (☎ 622 0260; www.estemb.fi; Itäinen Puistotie 10)

**France** (☎ 618 780; www.france.fi; Itäinen Puistotie 13)

**Germany** (☎ 458 580; www.helsinki.diplo.de; Krogiuksentie 4B)

**Ireland** (☎ 646 006; ireland@welho.com; Erottajaankatu 7A)

**Japan** (☎ 686 0200; www.fi.emb-japan.go.jp; Eteläranta 8)

**Latvia** (☎ 4764 7244; embassy.finland@mfa.gov.lv; Armfeltintie 10)

**Lithuania** (☎ 608 210; embassylt@kolumbus.fi; Rauhankatu 13A)

**Netherlands** (☎ 228 920; www.netherlands.fi; Erottajaankatu 19B)

**Norway** (☎ 686 0180; www.norja.fi; Rehbinde-rintie 17)

**Russia** (☎ 661 876; rusembassy@co.inet.fi; Tehtaankatu 1B)

**Sweden** (☎ 651 255; www.sverige.fi; Pohjoisesplanadi 7B)

**UK** (☎ 2286 5100; www.ukembassy.fi; Itäinen Puistotie 17)

**USA** (☎ 616 250; www.usembassy.fi; Itäinen Puistotie 14A)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Finland puts on a barrage of music, arts, cultural, sporting and just plain nutty festivals year-round, but especially between June and mid-August. Midsummer is a big deal in any part of Finland, though for most Finns it's a family time when they disappear to their summer cottages. Pick up the *Finland Festivals* booklet in any tourist office or check out [www.festivals.fi](http://www.festivals.fi).

**Air Guitar World Championships** (p198) Whacky festival held in Oulu, late August.

**Ilosaarirock** (p192) Rock Festival in Joensuu, July.

**Pori Jazz Festival** (p179) Finland's famous jazz festival, held in mid-July.

**Ruisrock** (p165) Held in Turku in early July.

**Savonlinna Opera Festival** (p185) Highbrow festival in medieval castle in July.

**Vappu** (May Day) A big day for Finns, especially students, this holiday is celebrated nationally.

**World Wife-Carrying Championships** (see p192) Manic two-day festival held in Sonkajärvi in early July.

## HOLIDAYS

Finland grinds to a halt twice a year – around Christmas and New Year and during the Midsummer weekend. Plan ahead and avoid travelling during those times. National public holidays are:

**New Year's Day** 1 January

**Epiphany** 6 January

**Good Friday to Easter Monday** March/April

**May Day Eve and May Day** (Vappu) 30 April and 1 May

**Ascension Day** 40 days after Easter

**Whit Sunday** Late May or early June

**Juhannus** Midsummer; third weekend in June

**All Saints Day** 1 November

**Independence Day** 6 December

**Christmas Eve** 24 December

**Christmas Day** 25 December

**Boxing Day** 26 December

## INTERNET ACCESS

All public libraries offer free internet access, and cafés and tourist offices have at least one terminal that you can use free for 15 minutes or so. Wireless (wi-fi) hotspots are becoming widespread and it's often possible to pick up free signals. Many hotels offer free or paid wi-fi access.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

Finland probably has more websites per capita than any other country – all tourist offices have a site and so, it seems, does

every other person, place and institution in the country. Good general sites:

**Aktivist** ([www.aktivist.fi/inenglish](http://www.aktivist.fi/inenglish)) A-Z coverage from Alvar Aalto to Vappu with offbeat cultural observations.

**Finn Guide** ([www.finnguide.fi](http://www.finnguide.fi)) English site dedicated to all things Finnish, from recipes to nightlife.

**Helsingin Sanomat** ([www.helsinginsanomat.fi](http://www.helsinginsanomat.fi)) Site of Helsinki's biggest newspaper has an English summary.

**Virtual Finland** ([www.virtual.finland.fi](http://www.virtual.finland.fi)) Excellent site covering all aspects of Finland in five languages.

## MONEY

Finland adopted the euro in 2001, and it remains the only Nordic country to have done so. Euro notes come in five, 10, 20, 100 and 500 denominations and coins in five, 10, 20, 50 cents and €1 and €2.

## ATMs

There are 24-hour ATMs ('Otto') linked to international networks (Cirrus, Maestro, Visa, MasterCard) in every city, town and almost every village in Finland, so carrying a debit or credit card (and your PIN) is definitely the easiest way to get cash.

## Credit Cards

Credit cards are widely accepted and Finns are dedicated users of the plastic – buying a beer or cup of coffee with a credit card is not unusual and it's commonplace to pay for accommodation and restaurant meals in this way. Keeping your credit account in the black will help you avoid bank charges.

## Travellers Cheques

Finland's major national banks (Osuuspankki, Nordea and Sampo) will change travellers cheques and have similar rates and charges – up to €7 per transaction. In cities, independent exchangers such as Forex are a better alternative for exchanging cash and travellers cheques (€2 per cheque).

## POST

*Posti* (post offices) are generally open from 9am to 7pm weekdays, and in cities they are also open on Saturday. Stamps (€0.65 for letters and postcards) can be bought at bus or train stations and R-kiosks (newsagents). International parcel post is relatively expensive – from €20 to €40 for up to 5kg depending on the destination. See the website [www.posti.fi](http://www.posti.fi) for more information. Poste restante is offered at the main post offices in cities.

## TELEPHONE

Some public phones accept coins, but most accept only plastic Telecards. With just about everyone carrying a mobile phone, public phones don't get much of a workout these days.

International calls are cheapest if you buy one of the prepaid calling cards from any R-kiosk. Off-peak times are 10pm to 8am on weekdays and all day Saturday and Sunday. A three-minute call to the USA during peak time will cost about €4. For national directory assistance dial ☎ 020 202; for international assistance call ☎ 020 208.

The country code for calling Finland from abroad is ☎ 358. To make an international call from Finland, first dial an international prefix (☎ 00, 990, 994 or 999) and then the country code for the country you're calling.

## MOBILE PHONES

Finland has one of the world's highest rates of mobile-phone usage, and getting hooked up to the mobile-phone network is easy with the prepaid system using Sonera, DNA or Elisa.

A great option is to bring your own phone and simply buy a SIM card (around €15) from a phone shop or any R-kiosk, then buy recharge cards from the same outlets.

## VISAS

A valid passport is required to enter Finland, though citizens of EU countries, Norway and Iceland can travel with only an identity card. Most Western nationals don't need a tourist visa for stays of up to three months; South Africans require a Schengen visa. The **Directorate of Immigration** (☎ 09-476 5500; [www.uvi.fi](http://www.uvi.fi)) handles visas and work permits.

Australian and New Zealand citizens aged between 18 and 30 can apply for a 12-month working holiday visa under a reciprocal agreement – contact the Finnish embassy in your home country.

Russian visas can be obtained from the Russian consulate in Helsinki. You need to leave your passport at the consulate and allow a week to 10 days for processing. Travel agencies in Helsinki can expedite the visa process for a fee.

# TRANSPORT IN FINLAND

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Most major European carriers have flights to and from Helsinki's **Vantaa airport** (☎ 0200-14636; [www.helsinki-vantaa.fi](http://www.helsinki-vantaa.fi)). Finnair is the national carrier, with direct flights to Helsinki from New York, Toronto, Bangkok, Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong and most European capitals. A cheap entry to Finland is with **Ryanair** ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) from London Stansted, Liverpool, Frankfurt Hahn and Riga to Tampere, or with **Blue 1** ([www.blue1.com](http://www.blue1.com)) which offers cheap internet fares between Helsinki and Amsterdam, Brussels, Copenhagen, Oslo, Stockholm and as far as Athens and Barcelona.

Airlines flying to and from Finland:

**Aer Lingus** (airline code EI; ☎ 09-6122 0260; [www.aerlingus.ie](http://www.aerlingus.ie))

**Aeroflot** (airline code SU; ☎ 09-659 655; [www.aeroflot.com](http://www.aeroflot.com))

**Air France** (airline code AF; ☎ 09-8568 0500; [www.airfrance.com](http://www.airfrance.com))

**American Airlines** (airline code AA; ☎ 9800 14620; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com))

**Austrian Airlines** (airline code OS; ☎ 020-386 000; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com))

**Blue 1** (airline code KF; ☎ 020-386 000; [www.blue1.com](http://www.blue1.com))

**British Airways** (airline code BA; ☎ 0800 178 378; [www.britishairways.com](http://www.britishairways.com))

**Finnair** (airline code AY; ☎ 09-81881; [www.finnair.com](http://www.finnair.com))

**Icelandair** (airline code FI; ☎ 09-6126 070; [www.icelandair.com](http://www.icelandair.com))

**KLM Royal Dutch Airlines** (airline code KL; ☎ 020 353 355; [www.klm.com](http://www.klm.com))

**LOT Polish Airlines** (airline code LO; ☎ 09-6937 9036; [www.lot.com](http://www.lot.com))

**Lufthansa** (airline code LH; ☎ 020-386 000; [www.lufthansa.com](http://www.lufthansa.com))

**MALEV Hungarian Airlines** (airline code MA; ☎ 09-622 0922; [www.malev.hu](http://www.malev.hu))

**Ryanair** (airline code FR; [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com))

**SAS Scandinavian Airlines** (airline code SK; ☎ 020-585 6000; [www.sas.fi](http://www.sas.fi))

**Lufthansa** (airline code LH; ☎ 020-386 000; [www.lufthansa.com](http://www.lufthansa.com))

**MALEV Hungarian Airlines** (airline code MA; ☎ 09-622 0922; [www.malev.hu](http://www.malev.hu))

**Ryanair** (airline code FR; [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com))

**SAS Scandinavian Airlines** (airline code SK; ☎ 020-585 6000; [www.sas.fi](http://www.sas.fi))

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no border controls or customs formalities. There are six crossings into Russia along Finland's eastern border (the main route is Helsinki–Vyborg–St Petersburg); you must have a valid Russian visa.

## BUS

### Sweden

The only useful bus route from Finland to Sweden is from the border town of Tornio, where you can get a direct bus to Stockholm (€55, 15 hours) – or just walk across the bridge to Haparanda and you're in Sweden anyway.

### Norway

Buses run between Rovaniemi and the Norwegian border, with some buses continuing on to the first Norwegian town – but check timetables as you may be dropped at the border without a connecting bus, especially outside the June to August high season. The main operator is **Eskelisen Lapin Linjat** (☎ 016-342 2160; www.eskelisen-lapinlinjat.com).

The main Nordkapp route will take you from Rovaniemi via Inari and Kaamanen up to Karigasniemi and then across the Norwegian border to Karasjok and Lakselv. Many bus services operate services from Ivalo to Karasjok, and in summer (June to August) there is at least one daily bus travelling all the way to Nordkapp (adult/student €85.30, 11 hours from Rovaniemi). Two alternative routes, which are not as well served by bus, go through western Lapland, via Hetta and onto Karasjok; or along highway 21 to Kilpisjärvi and along the coast to Alta. The latter route is also the quickest way to Tromsø and anywhere south in Norway.

### Russia

Daily express buses run from Turku and Helsinki to Vyborg and St Petersburg (Russian visa required) along highway E18, via the Finnish towns of Porvoo, Kotka and Hamina. Check current timetables and book tickets at the bus station or a travel agency; from Helsinki to St Petersburg there are three daily buses (€55.60, 9½ hours). The train is a more romantic and comfortable way to reach Russia. Note that St Petersburg is Pietari in Finnish, and Vyborg is Viipuri.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Vehicles can easily be brought into Finland on the Baltic ferries from Sweden, Estonia and Germany, provided you have registration papers and valid insurance (green card or frontier insurance – check with your local motoring organisation).

See p216 for information about driving in Finland.

## TRAIN

The only international train links with Finland are to/from Moscow and St Petersburg in Russia.

There are three daily trains from Helsinki to Russia, travelling via the Finnish stations of Lahti, Kouvola and Vainikkala. You must have a valid Russian visa but border formalities have been fast-tracked so that passport checks are now carried out on board the moving train.

The Russian *Tolstoi* sleeper departs Helsinki daily at 5.42pm, arriving in Moscow at 8.30am the next day (one way in 2nd/1st class €85.80/128.20) via Vyborg (€47/75) and St Petersburg (€58.40/90); it departs from Moscow daily at 10.50pm. Both 1st- and 2nd-class fares include a sleeper berth. The *Sibelius* (a Finnish train) and *Repin* have daily services between Helsinki and St Petersburg (5½ hours) via Vyborg (3¾ hours). The *Sibelius* departs from Helsinki at 7.42am (2nd-/1st-class seats €51.40/81.90, six hours). The Russian *Repin* departs at 3.42pm and has 2nd-class seats (€51.40) or 1st-class sleeping berths (€91). From St Petersburg, departures are at 4.28pm (*Sibelius*) and 7.28am (*Repin*).

Buy Russian rail tickets in Helsinki at the special ticket counter in the central station. Check timetables at www.vr.fi.

## Sea

There's no better way to arrive in Helsinki than on board a huge Baltic ferry. These passenger ferries are like miniature cruise ships with cabin accommodation, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, karaoke, gaming rooms and shopping malls, but fares are kept reasonably low by competition and onboard duty-free shopping. Although not the boozy cruises they once were, many Scandinavians still use them simply for overnight or weekend cruises. The ferries dock virtually in the centre of Helsinki.

Many ferries offer 50% discounts for holders of ScanRail and InterRail passes – Silja Line and Viking Line services between Sweden and Finland are free to Eurailpass holders.

Fares vary considerably depending on the season, day of the week (Friday to Sunday is more expensive), whether it's day or overnight and, of course, the class of travel (passenger only or sleeping berth), but all ferry companies have websites in English with detailed timetables and fare information. The main players:

**Eckerö Line** (www.eckerolinjen.fi, or www.eckeroline.fi)

Åland (☎ 018-28000); Helsinki (☎ 09-228 8544)

**Finnlines** (☎ 09-251 0200; www.finnlines.fi)

**Linda Line** (☎ 09-668 9700; www.lindaliini.ee)

**Nordic Jet Line** (☎ 0600 01 655; www.njl.fi)

**RG Line** (☎ 06-100 411; www.rgline.com)

**Silja Line** (☎ 0600-174552; www.silja.com)

**Superfast Ferries** (☎ 09-2535 0600; www.superfast.com)

**Tallink** (☎ 0600-15700; www.tallink.fi)

**Viking Line** (☎ 09-12 351; www.vikingline.fi)

## SWEDEN

The Stockholm–Helsinki, Stockholm–Turku and Kapellskär–Mariehamn (Åland) runs are dominated by Silja Line and Viking Line, with daily departures. Viking Line generally has slightly cheaper fares.

On both lines you can buy a passenger-only ticket and sleep in the salons, but it's worth paying extra for a cabin on the Stockholm–Helsinki trip. In the summer high season, overnight crossings (passenger ticket only) from Stockholm start at €36 to Turku (11 to 12 hours) and €47 to Helsinki (16 hours). Cabins start at an additional €42 (€24 in low season).

Eckerö Line sails from Grisslehamn to Eckerö in Åland (€5.50 to €8.90, three hours), and RG Line sails from Vaasa to Umeå (Sweden) one or two times daily from May to end of September (€55, three hours).

## ESTONIA

Half a dozen ferry companies ply the Gulf of Finland between Helsinki and Tallinn in Estonia. Car ferries cross in 3½ hours, catamarans and hydrofoils in about 1½ hours, although in winter there are fewer departures and the traffic is also slower due to the ice.

Eckerö Line has only one departure daily but is the cheapest with a day cruise (return

fare of €28 (€22 in low season). Tallink, Viking Line and Silja Line have regular daily departures from €20 one-way depending on the company, type of boat, the time of year and the day of the week. Linda Line is the cheapest (but smallest) fast boat (one way/return €31/46). Nordic Jet Line is the priciest.

## GERMANY

Finnlines has a daily year-round service from Helsinki to Travemünde (26 hours) with bus service to Hamburg. One-way high season rates in a four-person cabin begin at €198.

Superfast Ferries sails between Rostock (Germany) and Hango on the south coast of Finland (24 hours, daily). The minimum one-way fare in high season for a seat only is €87 or for a cabin €185.

## GETTING AROUND

Finland is well served by public transport. A great source to find the best way between two points is the online route planner at Journey.fi (www.matka.fi), which gives you bus and train options and even walking distances between stations and town centres.

## Air

Finnair runs a fairly comprehensive domestic service mainly out of Helsinki but also across a few regional centres like Oulu–Rovaniemi. Budget carriers Blue1 and FinnComm Airlines offer the cheapest fares for advance internet bookings.

Full Finnair scheduled fares are not cheap but 'Happy Hour' tickets (book a week in advance, no refunds) are much cheaper and there are summer and weekend specials. Seniors and children aged under 12 receive a 70% discount. If you're aged between 17 and 24 the discount is 50%, but better still you can fly stand-by to anywhere in Finland for €64 or €79 one way, depending on the flight. To qualify you need to arrive at the airport one hour before the flight of your choice and wait to see if there are any seats available.

Blue1 currently flies from Helsinki to Kuopio, Oulu, Rovaniemi and Vaasa for as little as €18 plus taxes (internet booking only).

## AIRLINES IN FINLAND

**Air Åland** (☎ 018-11710; www.airaland.com)

**Blue1** (☎ 020-386 000; www.blue1.com)

**Finnair** (☎ 09-81881; www.finnair.com)

**FinnComm Airlines** (☎ 4243 2000; www.finncomm.fi)

## Bicycle

Finland is flat and as bicycle-friendly as any country you'll find, with miles of bike paths – also used by inline skaters in summer and cross-country skiers in winter. Many Finns use the bicycle as their main form of summer transport around town. The only drawback to an extensive tour is distance, but bikes can be carried on most trains, buses and ferries. The best place for cycling is the Åland islands, where a few days or a week of touring is a breeze.

Daily/weekly hire from €10/50 is possible in most cities, although hiring decent bikes in smaller towns is difficult as there's little demand – check with the local tourist office or try youth hostels or camping grounds. Helmets are advisable but not compulsory. The **Finnish Youth Hostel Association** (SRM; www.srmnet.org) offers a cycling and hostel package that takes in the flat south and lakes for seven/14 days, including bike rental and accommodation (€249/431).

## Boat

Lake and river ferries operate from around June to August (lakes are frozen over in winter). They're more than mere transport; a lake cruise taking you from one town to another via southern Finland's sublime system of waterways is a bona fide Finnish experience. The most popular routes include Tampere–Hämeenlinna, Savonlinna–Kuopio, Lahti–Jyväskylä and Joensuu–Koli–Lieksa on Lake Pielinen.

The main coastal sea routes are Turku–Naantali, Helsinki–Porvoo and the archipelago ferries to the Åland islands. Some of the ferries that run between the islands along the coast are free, especially in Åland.

## Bus

Dozens of bus companies operate throughout Finland but all long-distance and express bus travel comes under the umbrella of **Oy Matkahuolto Ab** (☎ 09-682 701; www.matkahuolto.fi). Private lines operate local services, but all share the same ticketing system. Major operators include **Express Bus** (www.expressbus.com) and **Gold Line** (www.goldline.fi). Buy tickets on board or book at a bus station or travel agency (Monday to Friday only). Limited services operate on weekends and public holidays.

Fares are based on distance; regular/express adult fares for a 100km trip are

€14.20/16.80. Return tickets are about 10% cheaper than two one-way fares. Discounts of 50% (on journeys over 80km) are available for students, but you must have a Matkahuolto student card. Technically you need to be studying in Finland to get one, but travellers have reported getting one with an ISIC card. Children get a discount of 30% (12 to 16 years) or 50% (under 12). On some routes, buses accept train passes.

## Car & Motorcycle

Finland's road network is good between main towns, although there are only a handful of multilane motorways emanating from major cities. In the forests you'll find many unsurfaced roads and dirt tracks. There are no road tolls. Fuel is expensive in Finland – at the time of writing a litre of unleaded petrol cost more than €1.30.

## HIRE

Car hire in Finland is not cheap, but with a group of three or four it can work out to be reasonably economical, especially if your time is short and you want to get off the main highways. The cheapest way to hire a car is through an internet hire company such as **Web Car Hire** (www.webcarhire.com) which will source a deal from the major rental companies at less than half the standard rates. You can generally pick up a small car with unlimited kilometres for around €30 a day.

Hiring direct from a rental company, expect to pay from €35 per day plus €0.40 per kilometre – from €70 day with unlimited kilometres.

You need only your home driving licence to rent and drive a car in Finland, but most companies require the driver to be at least 21 years old. Major rental companies in Helsinki include:

**Avis** (☎ 09-441 155; www.avis.fi)

**Budget** (☎ 09-686 6500; www.budget.fi)

**Europcar** (☎ 0403-06244; www.europcar.fi)

**Hertz** (☎ 0200-112 233; www.hertz.fi)

**Lacara** (☎ 09-719 062; www.lacara.net)

**Scandia Rent** (☎ 09-2521 2601; www.scandiarent.fi)

## ROAD CONDITIONS & HAZARDS

Beware of elk and reindeer, which don't have much respect for car horns and can dash out onto the road unexpectedly. By

law, you must notify the police if there is an accident involving these animals. Several thousand accidents involving elk are reported in Finland each year – it's ironic that the only time you may get to see an elk in the wild is when it's careering across the road or through your windscreen. Reindeer are very common in Lapland during spring and summer when they'll often wander along the roads in semidomesticated herds. Slow right down if you see one, as there will be more nearby.

Snow and ice on Finland's roads from September to March or April (and as late as June in Lapland) make driving a hazardous activity without snow tyres (chains are not permitted); cars hired in Finland will be properly equipped.

## ROAD RULES

Headlights must be turned on at all times outside built-up areas. Foreign cars must display their nationality and visitors must be fully insured. Wearing seat belts is mandatory for the driver and all passengers. The blood alcohol limit is 0.05%. The speed limit is 50km/h in built-up areas, from 80km/h to 100km/h on highways, and 120km/h on a few motorways. Traffic keeps to the right and, at uncontrolled intersections, give way to traffic approaching from the right.

## Train

Finnish trains are efficient, fast, comfortable and cheaper than in Sweden and Norway. From Helsinki, direct trains fan out to all major centres. Crossing the country from east to west may require a change or two, but with a little route planning you can reach most places as far north as Rovaniemi in Lapland.

**VR Ltd Finnish Railways** (☎ 0600-4192; www.vr.fi) handles rail travel throughout the country. You can search for timetables and fares on its comprehensive website.

## CLASSES

The two main types of trains are regional (2nd class only) and express. Other classes include the faster InterCity (IC) trains, and the Pendolino trains which operate fast services on limited major city routes.

Night trains service the longer routes with comfortable one- two- and three-bed sleepers which are only slightly more expensive than a seat-only ticket. For example, the fare for a seat on the train to Rovaniemi is €72.20 – in a three-bed sleeper it's €79. The additional fare for a sleeper in a three-bed compartment in low/high season is €11/16.

## COSTS & RESERVATIONS

Reservations can be made at the VR counter at any train station or over the internet (major credit cards accepted).

An open return ticket is valid for 15 days and costs the same as two one-way tickets. Students, seniors and children under 17 pay half fare, and children under six travel free (without a seat). The 50% student discount is officially only available to Finnish students or foreigners studying in Finland.

Ticket prices depend on the distance, the class of travel and season. From Helsinki to Turku express/IC/Pendolino costs €23.40/25.60/30.40. Other express fares include: Helsinki to Tampere (€23.40), Kuopio (€48.60) and Oulu (€61.20). Fares listed in this chapter are IC or express.

## TRAIN PASSES

International rail passes accepted in Finland include the Eurailpass, Eurail Flexipass, ScanRail Pass, Euro Domino and InterRail. The Finnrail Pass is a one-month pass good for unlimited travel for 3/5/10 days; 2nd-class travel costs €122/153/220. 1st class is about 50% more. These passes can be bought at VR stations in Finland, or through travel agents. There's also a Holiday Pass (valid June to August) which allows three days of travel in a month for €115.

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