

# Finland

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Helsinki** Finland's dynamic capital, boasting some of Scandinavia's most sophisticated nightlife (p346)
- **Kuopio** Home of the world's biggest smoke sauna (p359)
- **Rovaniemi** The gateway to Lapland, with the Arctic Circle and Santa's official grotto (p361)
- **Savonlinna** A beautiful Lakeland town with a castle and a month-long opera festival (p358)
- **Best journey** Take the overnight sleeper train from Helsinki (p346) to Rovaniemi (p361); wake up in snow-covered Arctic Lapland
- **Off-the-beaten track** Cycle through the unspoilt archipelago of the Åland Islands (p357)

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 338,000 sq km
- **Capital** Helsinki
- **Famous for** sauna, reindeer, Formula One drivers, Lordi, Nokia
- **Languages** Finnish, Swedish
- **Money** euro (€); A\$1 = €0.50; CA\$1 = €0.68; ¥100 = €0.66; NZ\$1 = €0.51; £1 = €1.47; US\$1 = €0.78
- **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.

## TRAVEL HINTS

Fill up on inexpensive (all-you-can-eat) breakfast and lunchtime buffets. Check the *kauppahalli* (market hall) in every town to see what local foods are on offer. Buy alcohol cheaply at Alko shops, supermarkets or R-kiosks (convenience stores). Internet access is free at libraries.

## ROAMING FINLAND

For a quick tour of Finland, spend a day in Helsinki, take a train to Turku or Tampere, stay overnight in Rovaniemi to sample Lapland and Santa's pad, then head south to Kuopio's smoke sauna and back to Helsinki.

Squeezed between Sweden and Russia, Finland has often been seen as the mysterious, misunderstood corner 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.

Nature reigns supreme here, whether you're cruising on lake ferries, hiking and camping in remote, pristine birch forests, cycling along endless bike paths or skating on frozen lakes. For most Finns, happiness is still a ramshackle summer cottage by a lake and a properly stoked sauna. In Lapland, one of Europe's last great wilderness areas, reindeer herds wander across



falls, 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.

Finland really comes into its own in the surprisingly warm summer months when some of northern Europe's best music festivals and offbeat events spring to life – for an insight into the quirky nature of the Finns, 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.

## HISTORY

Settlement in Finland dates back almost 10,000 years. After arriving on the Baltic coast from Russia, the Finns' ancestors established themselves in the forests and drove the nomadic Sami people north, where some 6500 still live in a region of north Lapland known as Sápmi.

By 1155 the Swedes had moved in and made Finland a province. The Russians were never far away, though, and in the 16th century Peter the Great attacked and occupied much of Finland. In 1809 Sweden ceded Finland to Russia and the capital was moved to Helsinki, but the communist revolution of October 1917 brought the downfall of the Russian tsar and enabled the Finnish senate to declare independence.

Anticommunist violence broke out during the 1930s. Finland sought neutrality, but Soviet deals with Germany led to demands for Finland's eastern Lakeland (Karelia). In 1939 the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland began, in which the massively outnumbered Finns were defeated and Finland was forced to cede territory. Finland accepted assistance from Germany and in 1941 fought the Soviets in the Continuation War, which cost Finland almost 100,000 lives.

Finland eventually signed a new treaty, which allowed it to take an independent stance during the Cold War, and with this new sense of security came the opportunity for Finland to develop its economy and welfare system. Finland recovered from its worst postwar recession between 1990 and 1994, joined the EU in 1995 and adopted the euro in 1999.

A key factor in Finland's economic growth has been the manufacturing industry, particularly in engineering, electronics and telecommunications – with mobile phone giant Nokia (named after a tiny town near Tampere) leading the way. High-tech companies and software developers have set up in places like Helsinki and Oulu and are frequently

beating the Japanese and Americans in the field of new technology. As a result, the World Economic Forum has recently named Finland 'the world's most competitive country'.

## THE CULTURE

Thinly populated Finland has only 17 people per square kilometre. There are around 300,000 Swedish-speaking Finns on the west and south coasts and the Åland Islands. Russians number around 23,000, mainly in the east, and a small number of Roma live in the south.

The indigenous Sami (Lapp) population of 6500 in the north consists of three distinct groups, with the majority living in Inari, Hetta and Utsjoki and most involved in reindeer husbandry.

A capacity for silence and reflection is the trait that best sums up the Finnish character. 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.

## ARTS

Tove Jansson, who died in 2001, is internationally famous for her Moominland children's stories. Another high-profile Finn is the late architect Alvar Aalto, whose design work features in many Finnish public buildings, furniture and the Savoy vase.

Jean Sibelius, one of the most famous late Romantics, was at the forefront of the Finnish nationalist movement. His stirring tone poem *Finlandia* has been raised to the status of a national hymn. Sibelius and the nationalistic painter Akseli Gallen-Kallela fell under the spell of Karelianism, a movement that drew its inspiration from the folk songs collected in the 1830s by Elias Lönnrot to form the national epic the *Kalevala*.

The best-known Finnish film-maker is Aki Kaurismäki, director of the 1989 *Leningrad*

*Cowboys Go America*, while director Renny Harlin has established himself in Hollywood.

Finnish musicians to make a name for themselves include the Darude, Flaming Sideburns, the resurgent Hanoi Rocks and the Rasmus. Finland's biggest recent contribution is in the heavy-metal scene with bands such as Eurovision winners Lordi, Nightwish and HIM.

## ENVIRONMENT

Europe's seventh-biggest country is waterlogged – there are 187,888 lakes in Finland (with 98,050 islands), fed by a network of rivers and rapids. Compared with Sweden and Norway, Finland 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.

Finland boasts more than 120,000 sq km of publicly owned lands and waters in 32 national parks – some of the last great wilderness areas in Europe. For more information, contact **Metsähallitus** (☎ 09-270 5221; www.metsa.fi) at Tikankontti, the parks office in Helsinki.

Elk, brown bears and wolves are native to Finland's forests, although sightings are rare. In Lapland, the Sami keep commercial herds of some 22,000 reindeer.

Finland 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, but has been heavily criticised by environmentalists.

As with elsewhere in Scandinavia, recycling is a serious issue in Finland. It's compulsory to separate household waste into recyclables and people are encouraged to dump bottles at special bins at Alko stores and supermarkets.

### READING UP

*A Brief History of Finland* by Matti Klinge, *Finland at Peace and War* by HM Tillotson and *Finland Today* by Raimo Suikkari are good sources of detailed information about Finland's history and politics. Eino Friberg's *Kalevala Epic of the Finnish People*, a synopsis of the national epic (see p343), provides another angle on the Finnish psyche.

# TRANSPORT

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Most major European carriers have flights to/from Helsinki's **Vantaa airport** (☎ 0200-14636; www.helsinki-vantaa.fi). **Finnair** (☎ 0203-140160; www.finnair.com; Asema-aukio 3, Helsinki; ✈ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) is the national carrier, with direct flights to Helsinki from most European capitals. **Blue 1** (www.blue1.com) offers dirt-cheap internet fares between Helsinki and many European cities including Amsterdam, Brussels, Copenhagen, London, Barcelona, Oslo, Stockholm and Athens. Fly cheaply to Tampere with **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) from London, Liverpool, Riga or Frankfurt (one-way internet fares from €5 plus taxes).

### Boat

There's no better way to cruise into Helsinki than aboard a Baltic ferry. The ships are like floating hotels, nightclubs and shopping malls rolled into one, but fares are kept reasonably low by competition and duty-free shopping.

Ferry tickets can be bought at the terminals or from the ferry companies' offices in Helsinki's centre:

**Eckerö Line** (www.eckerolinjen.fi, www.eckeroline.fi)

Åland (☎ 018-28000); Helsinki (☎ 09-228 8544; Mannerheimintie 10; Länsiterminali (West) terminal)

**Finnlines** (☎ 09-251 0200; www.finnlines.fi) Helsinki–Travemünde.

**Linda Line** (☎ 09-668 9700; www.lindaliini.ee; Makasiini terminal) Helsinki–Tallinn.

**Nordic Jet Line** (☎ 0600-01655; www.njl.fi; Kanava terminal) Helsinki–Tallinn.

**RG Line** (☎ 06-100 411; www.rgline.com) Vaasa–Umeå, Sweden.

**Silja Line** (☎ 0600-174 552; www.silja.com; Mannerheimintie 2; Olympia & Makasiini terminals) Helsinki–Stockholm, Turku–Stockholm (via Mariehamn) and Helsinki–Tallinn.

**Superfast Ferries** (☎ 09-2535 0600; www.superfast.com) Hanko–Rostock.

**Tallink** (☎ 0600-15700; www.tallink.fi; Erottajankatu 19; West terminal) Helsinki–Tallinn.

**Viking Line** (☎ 09-12351; www.vikingline.fi; Lönrotinkatu 2; Katajanokka terminal) Helsinki–Stockholm, Turku–Stockholm, Helsinki–Tallinn.

### 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.

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. Linda Line is the cheapest (but smallest) fast boat (one way/return €31/46). Nordic Jet Line is the priciest.

### 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 the end of September (€55, three hours).

### Bus

Going between Finland and Norway, the main Nordkapp route heads from Rovaniemi to Karigasniemi (via Inari) and across the border to Karasjok and Lakselv (€85.30, 11½ hours). The road from the northernmost point of Finland, at Nuorgam, will take you to Tana Bru, with connections to various parts of Finnmark in Norway. Direct buses from Ivalo to Kirkenes (Norway) run in summer only. The main operator is **Eskelisen Lapin Linjat** (☎ 016-342 2160; www.eskelisen-lapinlinjat.com). From Tornio in northern Finland, there are buses direct to Stockholm (€55, 15 hours) and elsewhere in Sweden.

Daily express buses run from Turku and Helsinki to St Petersburg (€55.60, 9½ hours). A Russian visa is required.

### Train

The only international rail service from Finland is to Russia – there are three daily trains from Helsinki. The romantic *Tolstoi* sleeper

departs Helsinki daily at 5.42pm, arriving in Moscow at 8.30am the next day (€128.20/85.80 one way in 1st/2nd class) via St Petersburg (€90/58.40); it departs from Moscow daily at 10.50pm. The *Sibelius* (a Finnish train) departs from Helsinki at 7.42am (€81.90/51.40 in 1st/2nd class, six hours). The Russian *Repin* departs at 3.42pm and has 2nd-class seats (€51.40) or 1st-class sleepers (€91). From St Petersburg, departures are at 4.28pm (*Sibelius*) and 7.28am (*Repin*).

## GETTING AROUND

### Air

Finnair runs a fairly comprehensive domestic service mainly out of Helsinki, but budget carrier **Blue1** (www.blue1.com) offers the cheapest fares for advance internet bookings on certain routes – Helsinki to Kuopio, Oulu, Rovaniemi and Vaasa for as little as €18 plus taxes.

### 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. 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 – check with the local tourist office or try youth hostels or camping grounds. Helmets are advisable but not compulsory.

### Boat

Lake and river ferries operate in summer (June to August). More than mere transport, a cruise is a bona fide Finnish experience. Some of the best routes are Savonlinna–Kuopio, Tampere–Hämeenlinna, Lake Pielinen and the coastal ferries from Turku. Many 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). 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.

**EMERGENCY NUMBERS**

- Police, fire & ambulance ☎ 112

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.

**Train**

Finnish trains are efficient, fast and cheap, with frequent services from Helsinki to Turku (€24.40), Tampere (€24.40), Kuopio (€48.20) and Oulu (€61.20). On longer routes there are top-quality two- and three-bed sleepers (some with their own showers) that are slightly more expensive than normal tickets – the fare for a seat on the overnight train to the northern rail terminus at Rovaniemi is €72.20, while in a three-bed sleeper it's €79.

**VR Ltd Finnish Railways** (☎ 0600-4192; www.vr.fi) in Helsinki has a travel bureau at main train stations where staff can advise on tickets. The 50% student discount is only available to Finnish students or foreigners studying in Finland.

The Finnrail Pass is a one-month pass good for unlimited rail travel for 3/5/10 days; 2nd-class travel costs €122/153/220. There's also a Holiday Pass (valid June to August) which allows three days of travel in one month for €115.

**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.

The capital and nerve centre of Finland, Helsinki doesn't pretend to be a Stockholm or St Petersburg, but it nevertheless lives up to the tag of 'cool'. It's small and intimate compared with other Scandinavian capitals; a low-rise Nordic city of understated Art Nouveau and neoclassical architecture, modern shopping centres, broad boulevards and city

parks. Buzzing summer beer terraces, boutique shopping and cutting-edge nightclubs lend Helsinki a confident, progressive and sophisticated air, but without any pretension. 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.

The area has been settled since 1550. While the Swedes were here in the 1700s they erected a fortress on the nearby island of Suomenlinna. After falling to the tsar in 1808, Helsinki became the seat of the Russian Grand Duchy. The monumental buildings of Senaatintori (Senate Sq) were designed and built by German architect Carl Engel from 1818 to 1840.

**ORIENTATION**

Helsinki occupies a peninsula and is linked by bridge and boat to nearby islands. The city centre surrounds the main harbour, Eteläsatama, and the *kauppatori* (literally 'market square', but often called the fish market); huge international ferry terminals lie either side. The main street axes are the twin shopping avenues of Pohjoisesplanadi and Eteläesplanadi, and Mannerheimintie.

**INFORMATION****Bookshops**

**Akateeminen Kirjakauppa** (Academic Bookshop; ☎ 12141; Pohjoisesplanadi 39; ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat) Finland's biggest bookshop, with a massive range, including maps.

**Discount Cards**

The Helsinki Card is worthwhile if you plan to do a lot of sightseeing. 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. Buy the card at the city tourist office or at hotels, R-kiosks and transport terminals.

**Internet Access**

Internet access at Helsinki's public libraries is free. Several cafés and bars also have free internet access (or wi-fi hotspots) for customers.

**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.

**mbar** (☎ 6124 5420; Mannerheimintie 22-24; per 20 min/hr €2/5; ☎ 9am-midnight Mon & Tue, 9am-2am Wed & Thu, 9am-3am Fri & Sat, noon-midnight 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 ferry terminal have left-luggage counters charging €2 per piece per day.

**Medical Services**

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

**Money**

**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; Mannerheiminaukio 1, 00100 Helsinki; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun) Poste restante office (open 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday) is at the rear of the same building.

**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

**GETTING INTO TOWN**

Bus 615 (€3.60, 40 minutes) shuttles between Vantaa airport (all international and domestic flights) and platform 10 at Rautatientori (Railway Sq), next to the main train station. Finnair buses (€5.20, 30 minutes) depart from the Finnair office at Asemakatu, also next to the main train station, every 20 minutes from 5am to midnight.

If you arrive by ferry from Sweden or Estonia, or by bus or train, you'll be deposited right in the middle of town.

Helsinki office of Metsähallitus, the Finnish Forest and Park Service, has information and maps for national parks and hiking areas.

**Travel Agencies**

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

**Russian Tours Lähialuematkat** (☎ 6689570; www.russiantours.fi; Vuorimiehenkatu 3; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Travel agency specialising in Russian tours and organising Russian visas.

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

**Kiasma** (☎ 1733 6501; www.kiasma.fi; Mannerheiminaukio 2; adult/student €5.50/4; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue, 10am-8.30pm Wed-Sun) is in the curvaceous and quirky metallic building housing Finland's best exhibitions of contemporary and postmodern art from the 1960s to the 1990s.

The impressive **Kansallismuseo** (National Museum; ☎ 40501; www.nba.fi; Mannerheimintie 34; adult/child/student €6/free/4; ☎ 11am-8pm Tue & Wed, 11am-6pm Thu-Sun) is Finland's top historical museum, with displays on prehistory and archaeological finds, church relics, Sami history and cultural exhibitions. Check out the *Kalevala* frescoes on the ceiling.

The list of painters at the **Ateneum** (National Gallery; ☎ 1733 6401; www.ateneum.fi; Kaivokatu 2; adult/child/student €6.50/free/4, free 5-8pm Wed; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue & Fri, 9am-8pm Wed & Thu, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) reads like a who's who of Finnish art, with works by Albert Edelfelt, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, the von Wright brothers and Pekka Halonen, among others.

The fascinating **Mannerheim Museum** (☎ 635 443; Kallioliinantie 14; adult/child €7/5; ☎ 11am-4pm Fri-Sun) in Kaivopuisto Park is the preserved home of CGE Mannerheim, former Finnish president, commander-in-chief of the army, Civil War victor and all-round good guy. It's only open three days a week but worth making time for to gain an appreciation of Finland's national psyche.

The massive **Cable Factory** (☎ 4763 8300; www.kaapelitehdas.fi; Tallberginkatu 1; ☎ information 8am-6pm Mon-Fri) is now home to alternative theatre, art exhibitions and dance performances, many of them free.

An entertaining day or half-day boat trip from central Helsinki is to the island fortress of **Suomenlinna** (Sveaborg), where much of Helsinki's early history was shaped. Set on a tight cluster of islands, the World Heritage-listed

# HELSINKI

**INFORMATION**

- Akateeminen Kirjakauppa.....1 E4
- Australian Embassy.....2 C3
- British Embassy.....3 F6
- Canadian Embassy.....4 E4
- Danish Embassy.....5 E4
- Dutch Embassy.....(see 93)
- Estonian Consulate.....6 F5
- Forex.....7 D4
- Forex.....8 E4
- Forex.....(see 49)
- French Embassy.....9 F6
- Helsinki City Tourist Office.....10 E4
- Helsinki University Library.....11 E3
- Irish Embassy.....12 E4
- Japanese Embassy.....13 F4
- Kilroy Travels.....14 E4
- Lasipalatsi Meeting Point.....15 D3
- Main Post Office.....16 D3
- mbar.....17 D3
- Norwegian Embassy.....18 D6
- Police.....19 E4
- Russian Consulate.....20 F5
- Russian Tours Lähialuematkat.....21 F5
- Swedish Embassy.....22 F4
- Tikankontti.....23 E4
- Töölö Hospital.....24 C2
- US Embassy.....25 F6

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

- Ateneum.....26 E3
- Finlandia talo.....27 D3
- Hietaniemi Beach.....28 B3
- Kaivopuisto Park.....29 F6
- Kansallismuseo.....30 D3
- Kauppatori (Fish Market).....31 F4
- Kiasma.....32 D3
- Kotiharjun Sauna.....33 F1
- Mannerheim Museum.....34 F5
- Olympic Stadium.....35 D1
- Parliament House.....36 D3
- Senaatintori.....37 F4
- Sibelius Monument.....38 B2
- Töölönlahti.....39 D2
- Tempelliaukio.....40 C3
- Tuomiokirkko.....41 F3
- Uspensky Cathedral.....42 F4
- Yrjönkadun Uimahalli.....43 D4

**SLEEPING**

- Eurohostel.....44 G4
- Gasthaus Omapohja.....45 E3
- Hostel Academica.....46 C4
- Hostel Erottajapuisto.....47 E4
- Hostel Stadion.....48 C1
- Hotel Booking Centre.....49 E3
- Hotel Linna.....50 D4
- Hotelli Finn.....51 E4
- Matkakoti Margarita.....(see 45)

**EATING**

- Bar Tapasta.....52 E4
- Café Carusel.....53 E6
- Café Engel.....54 F4
- Café Esplanad.....55 E4
- Eatz.....56 E3
- Fazer.....57 E4
- Forum Shopping Centre.....58 D4
- Hakaniemi Market.....59 E2
- Lappi.....60 D4

**DRINKING**

- Arctic Icebar.....67 E4
- Ateljee Bar.....68 D4
- Corona & Café Mokba.....69 D4
- Helsinki Club.....70 E4
- Kappeli.....71 E4
- Kola.....72 F1
- Lost & Found.....73 E5
- Molly Malone's.....74 E3
- Rosegarden.....75 E5
- Roskapankki.....76 F1
- Saunabar.....77 D4
- We Got Beef.....78 E4

**ENTERTAINMENT**

- Club Uniq.....(see 67)
- Tavastia.....79 D4
- Tennispalatsi.....80 D4

**TRANSPORT**

- Airport Buses.....(see 83)
- Boats to Pihlasaari.....81 E6
- Eckerö Line.....82 E4
- Finnair Office.....83 D3
- Greenbice.....84 D5
- Kamppi Bus Terminal.....85 D4
- Kanava Ferry Terminal.....86 F4
- Katajanokka Ferry Terminal.....87 G4
- Länsiterminaal (West Ferry Terminal).....88 C5
- Local Ferries & Cruise Boats.....89 F4
- Makasini Ferry Terminal.....90 F5
- Olympia Ferry Terminal.....91 F5
- Silja Line.....92 E4
- Tallink.....93 E4
- Viking Line.....94 E4

fortress was founded by the Swedes in 1748 to protect the eastern part of the empire against the Russians. At the bridge connecting the two main islands, Iso Mustasaari and Susisaari, is the **Inventary Chamber Visitor Centre** (☎ 684 1880; ☎ 10am-6pm May-Sep), with tourist information, and the **Suomenlinna Museum** (adult/student €5/4), covering the island's history. There are cafés and a great brewery-pub on Suomenlinna, but do as the locals do and bring a picnic and a few beers – at around 5pm you can watch the Baltic ferries sail through the narrow channel.

HKL ferries depart every 20 minutes between 6am and 2am in summer 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.

For a sauna and swim, the 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 local institution. There are separate sessions for men and women; bathing suits are not allowed in the pool or saunas.

**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.

## WALKING TOUR

Helsinki is a very walkable city, and the best way to absorb it is to take to the streets on foot or, in summer, grab one of the free city bikes (p345). Start at the *kauppatori* by the harbour. To the east is the red-brick Orthodox **Uspensky Cathedral**, one of the city's landmarks. One block north of the market is the Russian-inspired **Senaatintori** (Senate Sq) and the stately chalk-white **Tuomiokirkko** (Lutheran Cathedral).

Back at the market, Esplanade Park is a broad boulevard leading west to the main street, **Mannerheimintie**, from where you can wander past **Parliament House**, the Alvar Aalto-designed **Finlandia Talo** (Concert Hall), and north to lake **Töölönlahti**, worth walking or cycling around. Further up Mannerheimintie is the **Olympic Stadium**, home of the 1952 Olympics. There's a sports museum and lookout

tower. Don't miss the rock-cut cave church **Tempelliaukio** at the end of Fredrikinkatu. Head west to Helsinki's most popular beach, **Hietaniemi beach**, then continue north around the shore to the cluster of steel pipes known as the **Sibelius monument**. Back down towards the harbour, it's worth taking a stroll in Helsinki's much-loved **Kaivopuisto** park.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Vappu** (May Day) Celebrated with particular verve in Helsinki. On Vappu Eve (30 April) thousands of students gather around the Havis Amanda fountain near the fish market 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.

**Helsinki Day** Festivities around town and free concerts in Kaivopuisto park on 6 June.

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

## SLEEPING

Book or call in advance for hostels and hotels in summer. 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 can help in a pinch.

## Camping

**Rastila Camping** (☎ 321 6551; rastilacamping@hel.fi; Karavaanikatu 4; camp sites €10 plus €5 per adult, 2-/4-person cabins €45/64, log cottages €120; M Rastila) Although 10km from the city centre, this is a lovely camping ground on Vuosaari; it's easily reached by metro.

## Hostels

**Hostel Stadion** (☎ 477 8480; www.stadionhostel.com; Pohjoinen Stadiontie 3B; dm €16, s/tw/tr with linen €32/44/66; ☎ ) In the Olympic Stadium complex about 1.5km north of the centre, this old school hostel has large dorms, daytime lockout from rooms and a 2am curfew. Still, it has the cheapest beds in town and plentiful facilities. Take tram 7A or 3T to Ooppera and walk five minutes.

**Hostel Academica** (☎ 1311 4334; www.hostelacademica.fi; Hietaniemenkatu 14; dm/s/tw/tr €18/40/60/75, superior s/tw €57/75; ☎ Jun-Aug; ☎ ) In a quiet part of town, this excellent summer hostel is in a student apartment building so each room has private bathroom and kitchenette.

## SPLURGE

**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 castlelike 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.

**Eurohostel** (☎ 622 0470; www.eurohostel.fi; Linnankatu 9; dm/s/d/tr €23.20/38.60/46.40/69.60; ☎ reception 24hr; ☎ ) On Katajanokka island less than 500m from the Viking Line terminal, Eurohostel is a multilevel HI place with lots of pluses, including free morning sauna, a good café and kitchens on each floor. Take tram 4 or 2 from the centre or it's a 15-minute walk.

**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. The vibe is like a guesthouse with dormitories.

## Guesthouses & Hotels

**Gasthaus Omahojja** (☎ 666 211; Itäinen Teatterikuja 3; s/d with shared bathroom €44/65, s/d with private bathroom €64/85; ☎ ) A convenient two-minute walk from the train station, this intimate, theatre-inspired guesthouse is Helsinki's cosiest.

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

**Hotelli Finn** (☎ 684 4360; www.hotellifinn.fi; Kalevankatu 3B; s/d with shared bathroom €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. Rooms with private showers have shared toilets.

## 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 – this is the place for a splurge. As with elsewhere

in Finland, seek out the lunchtime specials – many restaurants (even the fancy ones) have buffet lunch deals for under €10.

## Quick Eats

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.

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, is where you can get filled rolls, cheese, bread, fish and an array of Finnish snacks and delicacies. 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.

## 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 a giant Finnish *pulla* (wheat bun), or enjoy spectacular salads on the terrace.

**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 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.

Helsinki University has several student cafeterias around the city, where lunch costs less than €5. They include **Porthania** (☎ 1311 4298; Hallituskatu 11-13; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) and the huge **Ylioppilasaukio** (☎ 260 9491; Mannerheimintie 3B; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun), tucked away down an alley opposite the train station.

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.

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

**SPLURGE**

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

**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 the night becomes a rock music bar later in the night.

**Eatz** (☎ 687 7240; Kaisaniemenkatu 2; mains €9-23; ☎ noon-midnight Sun-Thu, noon-4am Fri & Sat) The versatile 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.

**Bar Tapasta** (☎ 640 724; Uudenmaankatu 13; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11-2am Fri, 2pm-2am Sat) Intimate Spanish bar with a welcoming atmosphere and great tapas – wash it down with a jug of sangria.

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

**Soul Kitchen** (☎ 773 2233; Fleminginkatu 26-28; ☎ 11am-2am Mon-Fri, 2pm-2am Sat, 2pm-midnight Sun) In Kallio, north of the centre, 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.

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.

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

**DRINKING**

Helsinki has some of Scandinavia's most diverse nightlife. In winter locals gather in cosy bars and a wide range 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. Also check out the pedestrian strip Iso Rooberinkatu for cool 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 (take the metro to Sörnäinen), north of the centre. There's a string of earthy local pubs along Helsinginkatu, such as the grungy **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.

**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 film-makers Aki and Mika Kaurismäki. Corona has cool bar staff and about 20 pool tables. Mokba is a tiny bar with ironic Soviet-era décor, flock wallpaper and almost comically gruff service.

**Saunabar** (☎ 586 5550; Eerikinkatu 27; ☎ 2-9pm 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.

**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 and chilled music make this a popular hangout with students and a young crowd.

**ourpick 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, café and bar that has

been the haunt of Helsinki's artistic elite since 1867. The summer terrace is one of the city's best people-watching spots.

**CLUBBING**

**Helsinki Club** (☎ 43 320; www.helsinkiclub.com; Yliopistonkatu 8; ☎ 10pm-4am) This heaving mainstream dance club is a bit of an institution. If you tire of the dance floor, 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** (☎ 5pm-4am; admission €10) inside the club: don an insulated coat and sip a vodka shot in a balmy -5°C. Minimum age 24.

**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.

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

**ENTERTAINMENT**

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

**Tavastia** (☎ 774 67420; www.tavastiaclub.fi; Urho Kekkonenkatu 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.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY****Air**

**Finnair** (☎ reservations 0203-140160; Asema-aukio 3; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat) flies to 20 Finnish cities, generally at least once a day. **Blue1** (☎ 0600 25831; www.blue1.com) has budget flights to a handful of major Finnish destinations.

**Bus**

Regional and long-distance buses arrive and depart from the huge new underground **Kamppi Bus Terminal** (☎ 24hr, ticket office 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat, 10am-6pm Sun), below the Kamppi Centre off Salomonkatu or Frederinkatu.

**Train**

Helsinki's orderly **train station** (☎ 0600 41902; ☎ 24hr, ticket office 6.30am-9.30pm; M Rautatientori) 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.

**GETTING AROUND**

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). Tourist tickets cost €6/12/18 for 1/3/5 days. The Helsinki Card gives you free travel anywhere within Helsinki. Tram 3T from the *kaupatori* makes a good sightseeing trip. The metro is useful for reaching Kallio (get off at Hakaniemi or Sörnäinen).

In summer, the city provides distinctive green 'City Bikes' at some 26 stands. A deposit of €2 is refundable when you return the bike to its stand. **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).

**AROUND HELSINKI****PORVOO**

☎ 019 / pop 46,000

With its picture-postcard medieval Old Town, rust-coloured timber shore houses lining the river, and quaint cafés and bars, Porvoo (Borgå) makes a perfect day or overnight trip from Helsinki, 50km away.

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; ☎) has plenty of information on local sights and a free internet terminal.

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

Porvoo's most atmospheric cafés, restaurants and bars are in the Old Town and along the riverfront. **Porvoon Paahimo** (☎ 617 040; Mannerheiminkatu 2; ☎ noon-10pm Mon-Thu, noon-2am Fri, 11-2am Sat, noon-10pm Sun) is at the main bridge, with a great little terrace hanging over the water. The atmospheric red-brick former storehouse is part cosy bar, part café – fresh coffee is roasted here.

Frequent buses connect Porvoo and Helsinki (€8.40, one hour), as do ferries in summer. In summer (exact dates vary) the historic steamship **JL Runeberg** (☎ 019-524 3331; www.msjl.runeberg.fi) sails from Helsinki (one way/return €21/31, 3½ hours) at 10am daily, returning at 4pm.

## SOUTHWESTERN FINLAND

Finland's southwestern corner is a convoluted archipelago of islands clustered around the harbour town of Turku and stretching right out to the semi-independent Åland Islands. Turku is the natural base, but if you have time you could explore this coastline by local ferry or even a canoe.

### 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 River, a broad ribbon spilling into the Baltic Sea harbour and lined with river-boat bars and restaurants. Turku is Finland's oldest town, but today it's a modern maritime city, brimming with museums and boasting a robust hours-long 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.

### Information

**Forex** (☎ 251 0800; Eerikinkatu 12; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-5pm Sat) Money exchange.

**Hansa Cyber Café** (Hansa Arcade; per min €0.04;

☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-9pm Sat & Sun) Coin-operated terminals.

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

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

**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 the bridges or taking the much-loved free local pedestrian ferry *Föri*. Pick up a walking-tour brochure from the tourist office.

At the western (harbour) end, **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) is a historical highlight, dating from 1280 and boasting dungeons, banquet halls and a medieval museum.

**Forum Marinum** (☎ 282 9511; www.forum-marinum.fi; Linnankatu 72; adult/child €12/7; ☎ 11am-7pm May-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) is a vast maritime museum near the castle. As well as an impressive, nautically-crammed exhibition space devoted to Turku's shipping background, it incorporates three **museum ships** moored on the river: the minelayer *Keihässalmi*, the three-masted barque *Sigyn* and the beautiful 1902 sailing ship *Suomen Joutsen* (Swan of Finland).

Turku's 50-odd museums and galleries cover everything from Sibelius to stuffed animals. They are generally open daily in summer and closed on Monday in winter, and most are free with the Turku Card. 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) is worth a look in summer – it's the only surviving 18th-century area of this medieval town, and includes around 40 restored wooden houses.

Archipelago cruises are popular in summer, with daily departures from Martinsilta bridge. The best is the two-hour cruise to Naantali aboard the steamship **SS Ukkopekka** (☎ 515 3300; www.ukkopekka.fi; one way/return €15/20; ☎ 10am & 2pm Jun-Aug).

### Sleeping

**Ruissalo Camping** (☎ 262 5100; camp sites €12, 2-/4-/5-person r €30/60/80; ☎ Jun-late Aug) A popular camping area on Ruissalo island, 10km west of

the city centre. Take bus 8 from the market square.

**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.

**Interpoint Hostel** (☎ 231 4011; interpoint.hostel@pp.inet.fi; Vähä-Hämeenkatu 12a; dm/d €8.50/21; ☎ 15 Jul-15 Aug) For one month the Turku YMCA 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.

**Bed & Breakfast Tuure** (☎ 233 0230; tuure@netti.fi; Tuureporinkatu 17C; s/d with shared bathroom €37/50; ☎) Tuure is a secure, friendly guesthouse close to the bus station, and the best value in town. The rooms are bright and a good buffet breakfast is served.

### Eating

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.

**Pizzeria Dennis** (☎ 469 1191; Linnankatu 17; dishes €8-15; ☎ 11am-11.30pm Mon-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat, 12.30-11pm Sun) A genuine Italian flavour and cosy dining rooms put this above most Finnish pizza-and-pasta places.

**Café Noir** (☎ 233 2918; Eerikinkatu 8; mains €5-10.50; ☎ 11am-10pm) An unpretentious 1st-floor diner and bar; one of Turku's cheapest places for light meals such as pasta, meatballs and omelettes.

**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; it has a great sidewalk terrace and excellent tapas and light meals.

**Vaakahuoneen Paviljonki** (☎ 515 3300; Linnankatu 38; mains €7-18, fish buffet €9; ☎ 11am-10pm May-Aug) This river-front 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).

### Drinking

In summer the decks of Turku's boat bars, which line the river bank on the southeast side of Auranisilta Bridge, are crammed with drinkers, but the town also has some charmingly eccentric bars: **Puutorin Vessa** (☎ 233 8123; Puutori; ☎ noon-midnight), near the bus station, is a former public toilet; **Uusi Apteeki** (☎ 250 2595; Kaskenkatu 1; ☎ 10-3am) is a wonderful bar in a converted old pharmacy; and **Panimoravintola Koulou** (☎ 274 575; Eerikinkatu 18; lunch buffet €5.50-7.70; mains €10.20-16; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, noon-midnight Sat) is an enormous brewery-restaurant in an old school.

Turku's newest Irish pub, the **Castle** (☎ 230 2886; Eerikinkatu 6; ☎ 11-3am), emphasises fun, live music and an international beer list with Irish stouts on tap.

### Getting There & Away

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.

From the **train station** (Ratapihankatu 37), express trains run 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 30 shuttles between the centre and the train station.

**Silja Line** (☎ 335 255; www.silja.fi) and **Viking Line** (☎ 33 311; www.vikingline.fi) ferries sail between Turku and Stockholm (low/high season from €14/36, 9½ hours) and Mariehamn (low/high season from €14/23 one way, six hours). Both have offices at the harbour and in town.

### TAMPERE

☎ 03 / pop 199,800

Finland's most dynamic city outside the capital, Tampere is an enthralling postindustrial town beautifully wedged between the shores of Näsijärvi and Pyhäjärvi. Long known as the 'Manchester of Finland', this 19th-century manufacturing centre was famous for its powerful textile industry. 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 Finnish sophistication.

## Information

**Internet Madi** (☎ 241 8513; Tuomiokirkonkatu; per hr €3; ☎ 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-10pm Sat & Sun) Excellent internet café offering CD burning, laptop connections and free coffee.

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

**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 & Activities

A walk along the banks of the Tammerkoski Rapids will give you a good feel for Tampere's industrial past – check out the renovated **Finlayson Centre**, which houses restaurants, a cinema and the offbeat **Spy 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).

The **Vapriikki Museum Centre** (☎ 020-716 6966; www.tampere.fi/vapriikki; Veturiaukio 4; adult €5-9, child €1-4 depending on exhibitions; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue & Thu-Sun, 11am-8pm Wed), in the old Tampella mill, is Tampere's premier museum and exhibition space, and includes the **Ice Hockey Museum**.

The tiny **Lenin Museum** (☎ 276 8100; www.lenin.fi; Hämeenpuisto 28; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun) gives a fascinating insight into the life and work of the Russian revolutionary leader. There's a zany gift shop.

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.

Lake cruises are popular in summer; there are 25-minute cruises to **Viikinsaari Island** (adult/child €6/3; ☎ hourly Tue-Sun Jun-Aug).

## Sleeping

Tampere has two HI-affiliated hostels at opposite ends of town.

**Hostel Tampere** (☎ 222 9460; www.hosteltampere.com; Pirkankatu 10-12; dm/s/d €20/38.50/54; ☎ ) Tampere's only year-round hostel is a good choice

for backpackers. There's a small kitchen, a breakfast room and a café-bar on the 1st floor.

**Hostel Tampere YWCA** (☎ 254 4020; Tuomiokirkonkatu 12A; dm €14-16, s/d €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.

**Omena Hotel** (☎ 0200-39000; www.omenahotelli.fi; Hämeenkatu 28; r €55; ☎ ) In a great location on Tampere's main strip, this staff-free hotel is unbeatable value. Book and pay over the internet (same-day bookings possible) and use a code to get in (access after 4pm). The quality rooms can sleep up to four if you use the sofa bed.

## Eating

Cobbled Hämeenkatu is Tampere's broad main street, running east-west from the train station to Hämeenpuisto. It's along here that you'll find most of the city's restaurants, cafés and bars, and the *kauppatori*, where you can sample Tampere's frightening speciality, *mus-tamakkarra* (blood sausage).

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

**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 a decent lunch buffet.

**Vohveli Kahvila** (☎ 214 255; Ojakatu 4; waffles €3-4; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun) This homey café in a quaint stone house specialises in Tampere's best waffles.

## Drinking

**Café Europa** (☎ 223 5526; Aleksanterinkatu 29; ☎ noon-2am Tue-Thu, noon-3am Fri & Sat) Tampere's coolest bar for the décor alone, with old-world couches, candlelight and a good summer terrace. Upstairs is a small but stylish dance club, **Club Apple** (☎ 10pm-3am Wed-Sat), with DJs

playing house, hip-hop and funk. Entry is free before 11pm.

**O'Connell's** (Rautatiekatu 24; ☎ 4pm-2am) This busy, unpretentious Irish pub is a good place to meet travellers, expats and Tampere locals.

**Falls Café & Terrace** (☎ 223 0061; Kehräsaari; ☎ 3pm-3am Mon-Fri, noon-3am Sat, 3pm-midnight Sun) In part of an old brick factory overlooking the Tammerkoski rapids (access from Laukontori), Falls has a great waterfront terrace, a laid-back atmosphere and live music in summer.

**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 is a great place to be in summer.

## Getting There & Away

**Ryanair** (☎ 0200-39000; www.ryanair.com) flies from London Stansted, Liverpool, Frankfurt and Riga to Tampere once daily. The airport is 15km southwest of the centre, but all flights are met by a bus.

The **main bus station** (☎ 0200-4000; Hatanpäänvaltatie 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).

## ÅLAND

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 and country lanes crisscross the islands, linked by bridges or good old-fashioned ferries, passing medieval parish churches, ancient ruins and undisturbed fishing villages along the way.

The autonomous, self-governed islands have their own flag, stamps and culture, which leans more towards Sweden than Finland – several Swedish dialects are spoken, but few Ålanders speak Finnish. This situation goes back to a 1921 League of Nations decision after a dispute over sovereignty.

## Getting There & Around

**Viking Line** (☎ 26011; www.vikingline.fi; Storgatan 2) and **Silja Line** (☎ 16711; www.silja.fi; Torggatan 14) have daily ferries between Turku and Mariehamn (one way low/high season from €14/23, six hours), continuing on to Stockholm – the cruise through the archipelago is awesome.

**Eckerö Line** (☎ 28000; www.eckerolinjen.fi; Torggatan 2) plies the route between Grisslehamn in Sweden and Eckerö in Åland (low/high season from €5.50/8.90, two hours).

There's an island bus service, but a bike is the way to go. **Ro-No Rent** (☎ 018-12 820, 0400-529 315) rents bicycles at Mariehamn and Eckerö harbours for a day/week starting from €7/35. It also rents boats, canoes, scooters and beach goggles.

## 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. It can get crowded with tourists in summer but still manages to retain its small-town flavour. The main ferry terminals are at Västra Hamnen (West Harbour), but the more colourful local marina is at Östra Hamnen (East Harbour).

The **tourist office** (☎ 24000; www.visitaland.com; Storgatan 8; ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May, also 10am-3pm Sat Oct-Apr; ☎ ), on the main east-west esplanade, has free internet access.

## Sights

The **Maritime Museum** (☎ 19930; Hamngatan 2; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 9am-5pm May-Jun & Aug, 9am-7pm Jul, 10am-4pm Sep-mid-Jan, noon-4pm Sat & Sun mid-Jan-Apr) is a wonderfully kitsch museum of fishing and maritime commerce. Outside is the museum ship **Pommern** (admission €4.50), a beautifully preserved four-masted barque built in Glasgow in 1903. A combined ticket to both is €8.

The **Ålands Museum** (☎ 25426; Stadsparken; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 11am-6pm Jun-Aug, 10am-8pm Tue & Thu, 10am-4pm Wed & Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun Sep-May) gives an absorbing account of Åland's history and culture from prehistory to the present.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Gröna Uddens Camping** (☎ 21121; www.gronaudden.com; Osternäsvägen; camp sites €5 plus €5 per person, 2-/4-person cabins from €50/80; ☎ May-Sep) 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 with shared bathroom €41/62; ☒) A good-value guesthouse with basic but spotless, renovated rooms. It's in a quiet street five minutes' walk east of the ferry terminal.

**Café Julius** (Torggatan 10; ☎ 8am-5pm) Open early for breakfast, this is a good place to sample the local speciality, Åland pancakes, made with semolina and served with fruit and whipped cream.

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

## THE ISLANDS

☎ 018 / pop 26,300

There are more than 6500 islands in the Åland archipelago, but even on a bicycle you can explore the main ones in a few days. The central group of islands comprises **Jomala** and **Sund**, north of Mariehamn, and **Eckerö** to the west. Pick up a copy of the *Visit Åland* brochure and the camping guide from the Mariehamn tourist office for details of places to stay.

Åland's most striking attraction is the medieval castle **Kastelholm** (☎ 432 150; adult/child €5/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Jun & Aug, 10am-6pm Jul, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri May & Sep) in Sund, about 25km northeast of Mariehamn. Catch bus 4 from Mariehamn or go by bike.

## SOUTHEASTERN FINLAND

If you're looking for quintessential summer-time Finland, this is it – a romantic, glistening patchwork of lakes, rivers, locks and canals. There's more water here than terra firma and in summer a highlight is canoeing or taking a lake ferry between towns. The area 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 summer, make this the place.

## SAVONLINNA

☎ 015 / pop 27,600

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 atop them. The town is famous throughout Finland for the month-long Opera Festival in July – a cultural extravaganza held within the castle walls.

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

## Sights & Activities

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

The dramatic medieval castle **Olavinlinna** (☎ 531 164; www.olavinlinna.fi; adult/student & child €5/3.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Jun-Aug, 10am-3pm Sep-May) was used by both Swedish and Russian overlords but is now famous as the setting for the opera festival. Excellent guided tours are given hourly.

Dozens of 1½-hour **scenic cruises** (€8 to €12) leave from the harbour near the *kauppatori* daily in summer, including cruises to Linnansaari National Park and Punkaharju.

## Festivals & Events

**Savonlinna Opera Festival** (☎ 476 750; www.operafestival.fi; Olavinkatu 27) Held throughout July, this is Finland's biggest international cultural festival. Tickets (€30 to €130) can be picked up for as little as €20 on some nights. Book over the internet.

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

## Sleeping & Eating

Book accommodation well in advance during the opera festival. 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.

**Vuohimäki Camping** (☎ 537 353; camp sites €12 plus €4/2 per adult/child, cabins €56-82; ☎ Jun-Aug) About 7km west of town, this camping ground on the shores of Pihlajavesi fills up quickly in July.

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

**Liekkilohi** (fish mains €7-10; ☎ closes 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.

**Huvila** (☎ 555 0555; www.panimoravintolahuuvila.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.

## Getting There & Away

From the **bus station** (Tulliportinkatu) on the western side of town there are several daily express buses to Helsinki (€46.30, five hours), Kuopio (€25.70, two hours) and Lappeenranta (€25.70, two hours). Local buses run to Kerimäki (€4.80, 35 minutes).

There are trains to Helsinki (€49.60, five hours) via a change at Parikkala. For Kuopio, you need to take a bus to Pieksämäki and a train from there (three hours, including bus leg). The main train station is a long walk from the centre; get off at the *kauppatori* platform instead.

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

## KUOPIO

☎ 017 / pop 87,800

Home to the world's biggest smoke sauna, Kuopio is a vibrant Lakeland town in a beautiful location, surrounded by forests and lakes

and boasting a view from Puijo Hill – a bump in an otherwise flat land. Visit on Tuesday (or Thursday in summer) when the sauna is cranked up.

The **Kuopio Tourist Office** (☎ 182 584; www.kuopioinfo.fi; Haapaniemenkatu 17; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri Jun-Aug, also 10am-3pm Sat Jul, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) is behind the impressive town hall north of the *kauppatori*.

Don't miss the chance to sweat in the world's largest **smoke sauna** (☎ 030-60830; Jätkänpöytä; adult/child €10/5; ☎ 5-11pm Tue, also 5-11pm Thu Jun–mid-Sep) near the Hotel-Spa Rauhalahti. This 60-person wood-fired sauna is mixed, and guests are given wraps to wear. If you really want to feel Finnish, bring a swimsuit for a dip in the lake afterwards.

Kuopio has a handful of museums, which can all be visited with the **Kuopio Card** (adult/child €12/6) available from the tourist office.

## Sleeping

**Camping Rauhalahti** (☎ 473 000; Kiviniementie; camping per site/person €7/4, 2-/4-person cabins from €30/55; ☎ mid-May–Sep) Adjacent to the Rauhalahti spa complex, this upmarket camping ground has a beautiful lakeside location and a truckload of activities.

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

**Hermannin Salit** (☎ 364 4961; www.hermanninsalit.com; Hermanninaukio 3A; dm/s/d from €20/40/50) About 1.5km south of the market square, this is a simple, friendly hostel with kitchen, lounge and free laundry.

## Eating & Drinking

There are indoor and outdoor markets in the main square, where you can try *kalakukko*, fish baked inside a rye loaf (eaten hot or cold).

**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.

**Vapaatamoa 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).

Most of Kuopio's nightlife is along Kaupakatu, running east from the *kauppatori* to the harbour. In an historic harbour building, **Wanha Satama** (☎ 197 304; 🕒 4-10pm Mon-Fri, 11am-10pm Sat, noon-5pm Sun May-Sep) is a lively pub that's the place to be on a summer's evening, with a sprawling terrace and occasional live music. Around the corner, **Henry's Pub** (☎ 262 2002; Käsityökatu 17; 🕒 7pm-4am) 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.

### Getting There & Away

Kuopio is a transport hub for buses in the southeast region, with regular express services to Helsinki (€50.90, 6½ hours) and Savonlinna (€25.70, two hours). The train station is about 300m north of the centre on Asemakatu. There are direct services to Helsinki (€51, 5¼ hours).

Kuopio is a good base to experience lake travel: from mid-June to mid-August, the lake ferry **MS Puijo** (☎ 266 2466) travels to Savonlinna (see p359).

## NORTHERN FINLAND

Northern Finland includes the provinces of Oulu, Kainuu and Lapland. This is Finland's true wilderness and a place of extremes: continuous daylight in summer and continuous night in winter. October, February and March are ideal times to see the stunning aurora borealis. September brings exceptional autumn colours, and in the far north *kaamos*, the season of eerie bluish light, begins in late October. The region includes ski resorts; pristine national parks, a bizarre golf course at Tornio that's half in Finland and half in Sweden; and an Arctic icebreaker ship and winter ice castle at Kemi.

### 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, about 80km north of Kuopio, on the map. The race is held over a 253.5m obstacle course that includes water hazards, hurdles and hills. Under the competition's 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.

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

Finnish Lapland is a mysterious land of clear Arctic air, and is home to some 6500 indigenous Sami people – along with about 200,000 reindeer.

### OULU

☎ 08 / pop 124,600

The lively, fast-growing university town of Oulu looks out on the Gulf of Bothnia and a string of interconnected islands. Hi-tech companies such as Nokia have set up shop here in recent years, 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.

The **Oulu Tourist Office** (☎ 5584 1330; www.oulu.tourism.fi; Uusikatu 26; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun mid-Jun-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-mid-Jun) is about 200m southeast of the *kauppatori*.

### Sleeping

**Nallikari Camping** (☎ 5586 1350; www.nallikaricamping.fi; Hietasaari; camp sites €12 plus €4 per adult, cabins €30, 2-/5-/7-person cottages €62/85/115) This lovely site is Oulu's saviour for budget travellers. It's on Hietasaari island, 5km northwest of the city centre by road, but only 3km by foot or bicycle via the pedestrian bridges.

**Kesähotelli Oppimestari** (☎ 884 8527; Nahkatehtaankatu 3; s/d €40/58; 🕒 early Jun-early Aug; ☒) This clean and efficient summer hotel is in vacated student accommodation and offers the cheapest rooms in central Oulu.

### Eating & Drinking

Local specialities can be found in the lively *kauppatori*, which is bordered by timber restaurants and summer beer terraces, 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. Rotuaari is the main pedestrian strip between the *kauppatori* and Isokatu, and along here are plenty of bars and cafés.

**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.

**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 traditional Finnish pub-restaurant is in a beautiful old wooden storehouse just over the bridge on Pikisaari island.

**Oluhuone Leskinen** (☎ 311 7993; Kirkkokatu 10; 🕒 11-2am Sun-Tue, noon-3am Wed-Fri, 11am-3am Sat) This friendly pub has a huge range of Finnish and international beers and is a favoured haunt of expats. Try the burnt-flavoured local speciality, tar schnapps – distilled from tar.

### Getting There & Away

Trains and buses connect Oulu with all main centres; eight to 10 direct trains a day go to Helsinki (€63.60, seven to 10 hours) and Rovaniemi (€27.70, 2½ hours).

## ROVANIEMI

☎ 016 / pop 35,400

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.

The town was completely rebuilt in 1946 after being razed by the retreating 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. There's a lot to be said for this latitude: in summer, the midnight sun really does shine, and in winter this is a convenient base for dog- or reindeer-sledding, skiing or snowmobile safaris, and a chance to see the northern lights.

The **Santa Claus Tourist Centre** (☎ 346 270; www.rovaniemi.fi; Rovakatu 21; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Jun-late Aug, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri late Aug-May; ☒) is an excellent source of information for all of Lapland.

The Alvar Aalto-designed **regional library** (☎ 322 2463; Jorma Eton tie 6; 🕒 11am-8pm Mon-Thu,

11am-5pm Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & Sun) has free internet access.

### Sights & Activities

**Arktikum** (☎ 322 3260; www.arktikum.fi; Pohjoisranta 4; adult/child/student €11/5/8.50; 🕒 9am-7pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 10am-6pm early Jun & late Aug, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Sep-May), with its beautifully designed glass tunnel, is one of Finland's premier museums. Exhibits include Arctic flora and fauna, Sami culture and an aurora borealis show.

The official **Arctic Circle marker** (Napapiiri) is 8km north of Rovaniemi. This is home to the 'official' **Santa Claus Village** (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. As tacky as it sounds, it's all good fun. You can send a postcard home with an official Santa stamp (to be delivered at Christmas) and have your picture taken with St Nick (€19). There are souvenir shops, cafés, a small husky farm and activities for kids. To get there, take bus 8 (return trip €5.20) from the Rovaniemi train station.

### Sleeping

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

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

**Guesthouse Borealis** (☎ 342 0130; www.guesthouseborealis.com; Asemieskatu 1; s/d/tr from €45/55/77, apt €185; ☒ ☒) 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.

### Eating & Drinking

Koskikatu has many inexpensive and mid-range restaurants, including branches of Rosso and Golden Rax Pizza Buffet. You'll also find the world's northernmost McDonald's here. Rovaniemi has loads of bars and nightclubs in the town centre.

**Kahvila Kauppahytiö** (Valtakatu 24; 🕒 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) Rovaniemi's coolest café is

a retro gallery of classic old stuff. Relax with coffee or a light meal on the loungy couches, or use the free internet.

**Zoomit** (☎ 321 321; Koskikatu; 🕒 10am-midnight Mon-Thu, 10am-2pm Fri & Sat, 11am-11pm Sun) 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).

**Oluthuone** (Koskikatu) In summer, kick back under the midnight sun in the open beer terrace here.

**Pub Yliytö** (Overtime Bar; Koskikatu 5) 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** (Koskikatu; 4-11pm Tue-Sun Dec-Mar) Finland has a few 'ice bars', but this one is a true igloo with hot liqueurs on offer along with the flavoured vodka shots.

### Getting There & Away

**Blue1** (www.blue1.com) has the cheapest flights from Helsinki – as low as €18 for the 1½-hour flight when booked online.

Frequent buses travel north to Inari (€46.30, five to six hours), continuing on to Norway. One bus a day goes all the way to Nordkapp (North Cape; €85.30, 11½ hours).

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).

### INARI

The tiny village of Inari is the main Sami community and a centre of Sami Duodji, the official Sami handicrafts label. It may seem unprepossessing at first, but Inari has a beautiful setting on the Inarijärvi shoreline and a brilliant museum of Sami culture. **Siida** (☎ 665 212; www.samimuseum.fi; adult/child/student & pensioner €7/3/6; 🕒 9am-8pm Jun-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) successfully brings to life Sami origins, culture, lifestyle and present-day struggles, with indoor and open-air displays.

The HI **Hostel Jokitörmä** (☎ 672 725; www.jokitorma.com; camp sites €13, dm €16-19, s/d/tr €30/38/55, cottages €28-88; 🗺️) is 27km north of Inari, with cosy rooms, camping and a separate set of cottages – all buses will stop here on request.

**Hotel Inari** (☎ 671 026; www.hotellinari.fi; s/d/tr €42/62/90; 🗺️) has clean rooms, a restaurant

serving cheap pizzas and Lappish dishes, and the slightly raucous village pub.

The Arctic Hwy runs through Inari and buses from Rovaniemi ply the route right through to Nordkapp (Norway) in summer. Buses stop outside **Inari info** (☎ 661 666; www.inari.lapland.org; 🕒 9am-7pm Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May). Gold Line buses run daily to/from Ivalo (€6.40, 40 minutes), with connections south to Rovaniemi (€46.30, five to six hours).

## FINLAND DIRECTORY

### ACCOMMODATION

Camping is the cheapest way to travel around Finland. Most sites are open only from June to August, and popular spots are crowded during July and the midsummer weekend (the third weekend in June). Contact the **Finnish Camping Association** (☎ 09-4774 0740; www.camping.fi) for more information.

The **Finnish Youth Hostel Association** (SRM; ☎ 09-640377; www.srmnet.org) operates 84 hostels. About half are open all year, and the rest are summer only (June to August) and are usually student accommodation buildings vacated for school holidays. Hostel prices quoted in this chapter are without the €2.50 discount given to holders of a valid HI card.

There's little seasonal variation in the budget range: camping sites cost from €8 to €18 and hostel dorm beds from €12 to €25.

### ACTIVITIES

Finland is all about nature and the great outdoors. Hiking or trekking is best from June to September, although in July mosquitoes and other insects can be a problem in Lapland. Wilderness huts line the northern trails (they are free and must be shared), and you're generally allowed to hike in any forested or wilderness area and camp for a night anywhere outside inhabited, privately owned areas.

Canoes and kayaks can be hired in most towns near a lake, often from camping grounds.

Nordic and downhill skiing is popular and the season runs from October to April. Other winter activities include reindeer-sledding, dogsledding and snowmobiling, best organised through tour companies, such as those in Rovaniemi, which include the following: **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)

Most towns have an indoor swimming pool (*uimihalli*) with saunas and spas.

### BUSINESS HOURS

Usual business hours in Finland:

**Banks** 🕒 9.15am-4.15pm Mon-Fri

**Cafés** 🕒 9am or 10am-6pm – later if they're licensed.

**Nightclubs** 🕒 Stay open as late as 4am.

**Pubs** 🕒 11am-10pm (1am or later on Fri & Sat)

**Restaurants** 🕒 11am-10pm, lunch 11am-3pm

**Shops** 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat

### EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

#### Embassies & Consulates in Finland

The following 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 25B)

**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; Erottajankatu 7A)

**Japan** (☎ 686 0200; www.fi.emb-japan.go.jp; Eteläranta 8)

**Netherlands** (☎ 228 920; www.netherlands.fi; Erottajankatu 19B)

**Norway** (☎ 686 0180; www.norja.fi; Rehbinderintie 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)

### Finnish 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, Ste 850, Ottawa K1P 6L5)

**Denmark** (☎ 33 13 42 14; www.finamb.dk; Sankt

Annæ Plads 24, 1250 Copenhagen K)

**France** (☎ 01 44 18 19 20; www.amb-finlande.fr; 1 Place de Finlande, 57007 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 030-50 50 30; www.finnland.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 97 54; 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** (☎ 22 12 49 00; 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** (☎ 0867-66700; www.finland.se; Jakobsgatan 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)

### 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.

**World Wife-Carrying Championships** (Sonkajärvi, early July; p360)

**Iloaarrock** (Joensuu, July)

**Pori Jazz Festival** (Pori, July)

**Ruisrock** (Turku, early July)

**Savonlinna Opera Festival** (Savonlinna, throughout July)

**Helsinki Festival** (Helsinki, August)

**Air Guitar World Championships** (Oulu, late August)

### FOOD & DRINK

Typical Finnish food is heavy on fish, potatoes, dark rye bread, hearty soups and stews. In Lapland or Lappish restaurants reindeer is commonly served. Most restaurants offer special lunch menus for under €10, which include a buffet of salad, bread, juice, coffee and dessert, plus big helpings of fish, meat or pasta. Fill up between 11am and 2pm or 3pm!

Most towns have an outdoor marketplace (*kauppatori*) and a covered market hall (*kauppahalli*) where you can buy fresh produce and cheap sandwiches and snacks.

Inexpensive pizzerias are everywhere – Golden Rax Pizza Buffet has all-you-can-eat pizzas, pasta, chicken wings, salad, ice cream, coffee and soft drinks for under €8.

Finns are among the world's biggest per capita coffee drinkers, but outside of Helsinki don't expect anything more than a pot of percolated coffee on a warmer. Every café, restaurant and service station has one, where you can get a coffee (often with a free refill) for €2. A large beer in a bar costs around €5. To drink cheaply, visit the state-run Alko shops, which sell all kinds of beer, wine and spirits; for beer and cider under 5% alcohol volume, go to any supermarket, R-kiosk or petrol station.

## 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. Vappu is a big day for Finns – students dress in white caps and coloured overalls, people take to the streets and parks, and everyone proceeds to get blind drunk. National public holidays:

**New Year's Day** 1 January

**Epiphany** 6 January

**Easter** (Good Friday to Easter Monday) March/April

**Vappu** (May Day Eve and May Day) 30 April to 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 RESOURCES

**Aktivist** ([www.aktivist.fi/english](http://www.aktivist.fi/english)) A to Z coverage from Alvar Aalto to Vappu with offbeat cultural observations.

**Virtual Finland** ([virtual.finland.fi](http://virtual.finland.fi)) Excellent site covering all aspects of Finland in five languages.

## MONEY

Finland uses the euro. In cities, independent exchangers such as Forex are a better alternative to banks for exchanging cash and travellers cheques (€2 flat fee).

Undoubtedly the best way to get by in Finland is with plastic – a debit or credit card, or both. Finnish ATMs, called 'Otto', are everywhere, and all are linked to international

networks such as Cirrus, EC, Eurocard, Visa, Plus and MasterCard. Credit cards are widely accepted.

## 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. International parcel post is relatively expensive – from €20 to €40 for up to 5kg depending on the destination. See [www.posti.fi](http://www.posti.fi) for more information. Poste restante is offered at the main post offices in cities.

## TELEPHONE

Most public telephones only accept Telecards, and international calls are cheapest with a prepaid calling card from any R-kiosk. The off-peak period is between 10pm and 8am on weekdays and all day on weekends. Finland's country code is ☎ 358 and its international code is ☎ 00. For national directory assistance, dial ☎ 020 202; for international help, dial ☎ 020 208.

Finns love mobile phones and it's easy to get hooked up to the network for a limited period. If you bring your own phone, buy a SIM card (around €15) from an R-kiosk or phone shop and use the Sonera or DNA prepaid network.

## 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.

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