

Oulu, Kainuu & Koillismaa



In between the Lakeland and Lapland, the central strip of Finland is a transitional region comprising the province of Oulu to the west, the wilderness area of Kainuu to the east, and Koillismaa in the northeast. Administratively, the entire region is called Oulu Province.

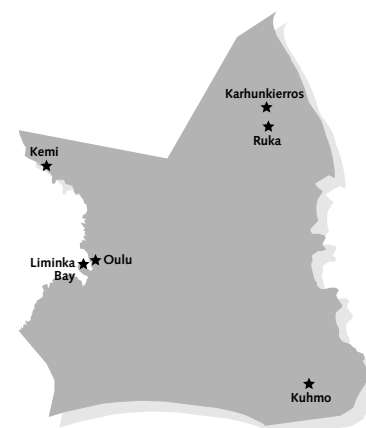
Oulu itself is a vibrant, exciting city with a booming technology industry, lively market square, and, in summer, some memorable terraced bars and cafés. It's the undisputed capital of the region, and a great stop on the way north. Kainuu is a heavily forested wilderness traversed by the famed UKK trekking route close to the border with Russia. Koillismaa, near the Russian border, is the transitional region between the south and Lapland, and includes the rugged Kuusamo area and Oulanka National Park – one of the natural highlights of Finland. It is an area of tumbling rivers, isolated lakes and dense forests.

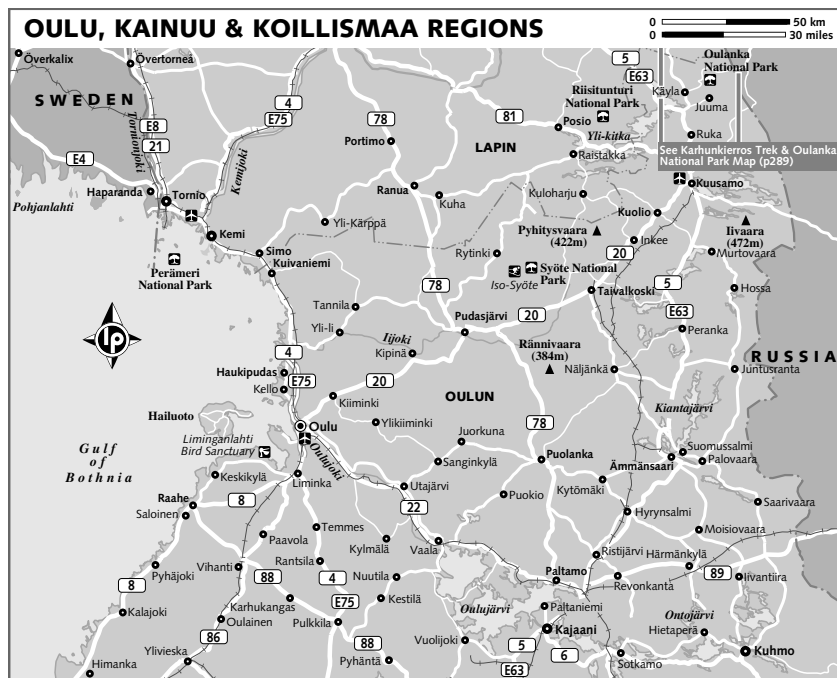
Finns entered the Kainuu region in the 16th century, violating the earlier border treaty between Sweden and Russia. In the late 16th century, the region witnessed fierce frontier wars between Russians and citizens of the Swedish Empire. After these bloody wars, Swedish territory was pushed further east, to where the border stands today.

By the 19th century tar had become the salvation of the economically depressed Kainuu region, but most of the profits were sent downriver to Oulu, along with the barrels of tar. During WWII, bloody battles were fought against the Red Army in the area around Kuhmo, and soon after the war a flood of emigrants escaped poverty-stricken Kainuu for Sweden and elsewhere. The region remains sparsely populated.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cycling on **Oulu's** (p266) bike paths, then enjoying the energetic nightlife in the city's cafés and bars
- Bird-watching in **Liminka Bay** (p273) during the 'great migration' of May, August and September
- Trekking the **Karhunkierros (Bear's Ring) route** (p288) in Oulanka National Park – some of the best wilderness scenery in Finland
- Rafting, sledding, trekking or skiing – in and around **Ruka** (p286), the adventure capital of the region
- Sailing on an icebreaker and exploring the snow castle at **Kemi** (p273)
- Experiencing high culture in remotest Finland at Kuhmo's **Chamber Music Festival** (p282)





Activities

This large province covers a wide swathe of Finnish territory, from the coast to the Russian border, so it's no surprise that the scope for activity is almost endless!

In the east, the Karhunkierros (Bear's Ring) is one of Finland's most rewarding and popular trekking routes, and has a good network of huts and a variety of scenery. The longer UKK route is another memorable hike.

On the waterways, fishing and canoeing are popular, with the Oulankajoki and Kitkajoki particularly suitable for the latter. The Liminganlahti wetlands are great for bird watching, while at Tornio you can play one of the world's northernmost golf courses, which straddles two nations.

The city of Oulu and the surrounding area is a paradise for cyclists, who will seldom see a more comprehensive network of cycle paths and trails! Some hardy Finns even cycle in winter, but you might prefer to try skiing; the province has the high-profile resort of Ruka, and the more family-oriented Syöte.

Last but not least, the region boasts an unbeatable winter experience in a trip on the

icebreaker *Sampo*, a memorable journey that includes a dip in the icy water – thankfully wearing a high-tech thermal suit.

Self-Catering Accommodation

Contact **FinFun** (☎ 020 1334 882; www.finfun.fi; Mannenkatu 1) for a wide selection of holiday cottages for rental. They also have a branch in Kuusamo. Local tourist offices have details of cottages in the region.

OULU REGION

OULU

☎ 08 / pop 127,226

Prosperous Oulu (Swedish: Uleåborg) is one of Finland's most enjoyable cities to visit. In summer the locals, who appreciate daylight when they get it, crowd the terraces around the marketplace, and stalls groan under the weight of Arctic berries and giant pans laden with all manner of delicious food.

The centre is spread across several islands, elegantly connected by pedestrian bridges, and the water never seems far

away. This layout has made it very convenient for cycling, and Oulu's network of bike paths is one of the best in Europe.

Oulu, the largest city north of Tampere and the sixth-biggest in Finland, is also one of the world's foremost technology cities; the university turns out top-notch IT graduates and the corporate science and technology parks on the city's outskirts employ people from all over the globe. The centre of Oulu is even rigged up as a free wireless network, so you can check your emails from the terrace of the local pub.

But never fear, it's not all laptops and cycle lanes; this is Finland after all, and there's a good dollop of weirdness here, particularly in the summer season, when the World Air-Guitar Championships come to town!

History

Oulu was founded by King Karl IX of Sweden in 1605. It wasn't long before industrious and hard-working Swedish pioneers descended upon the Kainuu forests in search of tar, which was floated in barrels to Oulu – the sticky stuff was essential to the building of unsinkable wooden ships. By the late 19th century Oulu boasted the largest fleet in Finland.

In 1822 Oulu burned to the ground and was rebuilt, although very few old buildings now remain.

Orientation

Oulu is situated at the mouth of the Oulujoki, with bridges connecting the riverbanks and several islands. Although the entire city covers a very large area, you can easily walk from the train and bus stations to most places in the compact centre.

Information

Forex (☎ 020-751 2680; www.forex.fi; Kauppuriinkatu 13)

Main post office (Hallituskatu 36; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri) Near the train station.

Pint Netti Baari (per 10 min €1; Rotuaari) Pub with three Internet terminals, free for customers.

Public library (☎ 558 410; Kaarlenväylä; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat, noon-4pm Sun) The impressive library is on the waterfront opposite the Oulu Theatre. It has several Internet terminals.

Tourist office (☎ 5584 1330; www.oulutourism.fi; Torikatu 10; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun

mid-Jun-early Sep, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri early Sep-mid-Jun) Publishes the useful guide *Look at Oulu*.

Sights

KAUPPATORI

Oulu has perhaps the liveliest market square of all Finnish towns, and its position at the waterfront makes it all the more appealing. The square is bordered by several old wooden storehouses that now serve as restaurants, bars and craft shops selling woven pine baskets, carved wooden cups and other typical Finnish souvenirs. Look for the squat *Toripolttiisi* statue, a humorous representation of the local police. At the southern end of the square is the **kauppahalli** (covered market; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat), with fresh produce, souvenirs and food stalls.

OULU CATHEDRAL

The imposing 19th-century **cathedral** (Kirkkokatu 36; ☎ 11am-8pm Jun-Aug, 11am-9pm Jul, noon-1pm Sep-May) has Finland's oldest portrait (dating from 1611) above the door to the vestry, and a fine altarpiece of the Ascension. A much older church, built in 1777, stood here until the great fire of 1822. This version was designed by the German architect CL Engel. It got promoted to cathedral in 1900 when the bishopric moved here from Kuopio.

TIETOMAA

The mammoth **Tietomaa Science Centre** (☎ 5584 1340; www.tietomaa.fi; adult/child €12/10; ☎ 10am-6pm mid-Feb-Aug, 10am-8pm Jul; 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Sep-mid-Feb), in an old factory building, is Scandinavia's oldest and largest science museum. At any given time it's mobbed with hundreds of school children bussed in from all over Finland. It's one of those places you can poke around in for half a day, and the excellent changing interactive exhibits are good for kids. As well as the UFO exhibit, hologram hall, junior science centre, 'world of sport', weather exhibition and display of the human body, you can take a lift up the tower for a view over Oulu.

TAIDEMUSEO

The **Taidemuseo** (Oulu Art Museum; ☎ 5584 7450; Kasarmintie 7; adult/child €3/1, admission free Fri; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a bright gallery opposite Tietomaa. It has excellent temporary exhibitions of

both international and Finnish contemporary art, and a good permanent collection. The café is an exhibit in its own right!

MERIMIEHEN KOTIMUSEO

The **Sailor's Home Museum** (☎ 5584 7185; Pikisaarentie 6; admission €1; ☞ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Jun-Aug) on Pikisaari belonged to a local sailor. Built in 1737, it is the oldest house in Oulu and was transferred here from the town centre in 1983. The wallpaper and extendable bed are typical of 19th-century Finnish homes.

OULUNLINNA

There's not much left of Oulu Castle, although you can clearly see the remaining fort-like structure dominating the small park near the bridge. The observation tower of the castle, rebuilt in 1873, now houses a café, but you can go below and look in the cellar, which has a small interpretative display. The original castle was built in 1590 as a base for the Swedish army moving east towards Russia. The whole thing blew up in 1793 when a lightning strike hit a powder magazine.

PARKS & GARDENS

Oulu University Botanical Gardens (Kaitoväylä 5; ☞ 8am-8pm, greenhouses ☞ 8am-3pm Tue-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun), in Lineman, north of the centre, are pleasantly landscaped with thousands of exotic plants – including hardy 5m-tall cacti. A pair of greenhouses, named **Romeo and Juliet**, house tropical species.

Just north of the town centre and connected by small bridges, **Hupisaaret Island** is a pleasant city park with bike paths, greenhouses, a summer café and the **Ainola Park**. It's a popular place for strolling in summer.

Activities

CYCLING & ROLLERBLADING

One of Oulu's best features is the extensive network of wonderful **bicycle paths** – routinely praised as the best local cycling routes in Finland. Nowhere is the Finns' love of two-wheeled transport more obvious than here in summer. Bike paths cross bridges, waterways and islands and can take you all the way out to surrounding villages. A good easy ride is from the kauppatori (market square), across the bridge to Pikisaari and across another

LET IT ALL OUT

As if an air-guitar festival wasn't enough, Oulu is also home to one of Finland's most unusual musical ensembles, **Mieskuoro Huutajat**. The name, which translates to 'The Shouters Male Choir', says, or rather yells, it all.

Under the steely gaze of conductor and composer Petri Sirttiö, the 30-odd men, dressed in very smart black suits with rubber ties, shout various complex arrangements of well-known songs and anthems. It's actually more musical than it sounds, with softly melodic barks building to stunning crescendos of red-faced bellowing. Some shouters have long cardboard tubes to add an orchestral tone to proceedings. It's a memorable display, added to by their traditionally silent, expressionless entrance and exit.

At times, the shouters have courted controversy, particularly when shouting national anthems; the Finnish embassy in Paris tried, in vain, to prevent them shouting *La Marseillaise* in an art gallery. A documentary film, *Screaming Men*, was even made about their tour to Japan.

Throughout, the deeply ironic Sirttiö has trodden a very Finnish line between the totally serious and the absurdly comic. Critics have raved about the primal forces at play, but be assured the Huutajat do everything with a large dose of Finnish irony. Check their website, www.huutajat.org, for upcoming dates.

bridge to Nallikari where there's a good beach facing the Gulf of Bothnia.

Bikes can be hired from the train station, and bikes and rollerblades can be hired from shop 24 at the kauppatori. Nallikari Camping (p270) rents out bikes but only to guests. An excellent cycling route map is available for free from the tourist office.

Tours

The 'Potnapekka' – a tourist trolley – travels around in summer, from Rotuaari pedestrian street to Hupisaaret island or Nallikari beach. The fare is €4/2 per adult/child to either, or €6/3 for both routes; departures are from Rotuaari every hour on the hour, daily from early June to early August.

From May to October the **MS Alexandra** (☎ 528 2190; cruises 1½hr adult/child €10/5; 4hr adult & child €15) cruises the Oulu archipelago, with daily departures from the kauppatori.

Festivals & Events

In a country that wrote the book on odd-ball festivals, Oulu hosts more than its fair share. Take the **World Air Guitar Championships** (www.airguitarworldchampionships.com), which is part of the **Oulu Music Video Festival** (www.omvf.net) in late August. Contestants – with no musical ability required – from all over Finland and overseas take the stage to show what they can do with their imaginary instruments.

There are two unusual winter events, both the largest of their kind anywhere in

the world. The **Oulu Tar Ski Race** (www.arctisetvalot.fi), held in early March, is a 70km skiing race (40km for women) that is entering its 113th year. The **Ice-Angling Marathon** (www.oultourism.fi) is a 48-hour contest held on the open sea in early April (when the ice is still quite thick) and draws more than 400 participants.

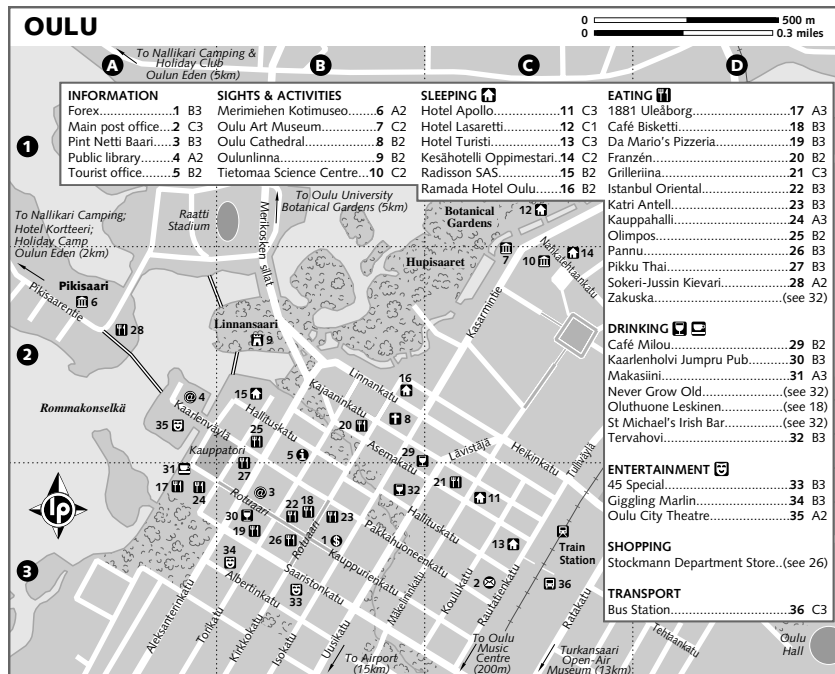
The biggest summer event is **Tar-Burning Week** (www.oultourism.fi), a festival that takes place in late June, around Midsummer. **Elojazz & Blues** (www.elojazz.com) is a two-day music festival in early August.

Garlic Night (www.oultourism.fi) is one of Oulu's strangest but most popular festivals. Held for one day and evening in mid-July, this event draws huge crowds to Rotuaari and the kauppatori. The focus is eating or tasting garlic – everything from garlic potatoes, pizzas and bread to garlic-flavoured beer and ice cream – all enhanced by festivities and live entertainment.

Sleeping

Strangely enough for a provincial capital with reasonable tourist appeal, there's a limited choice of accommodation in Oulu, and little in the budget bracket. Book ahead if you're staying in hotels on a weekday outside summer: business and conference travellers book out hotels months in advance.

Hotel Lasaretti (☎ 884 8300; www.lasaretti.com; Kasarmintie 13; s/d €112/127, weekends €80/96, summer €60/80; P ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒ ☒) Set in a complex on a little island north of the centre, this shiny new place has all the mod cons, with rooms



that are contemporary Nordic – allergy free, with no-nonsense interplay of wood and fabrics. It still has a friendly, personal feel, however, and plenty of greenery nearby; you can stroll into town through the park.

Hotel Turisti (☎ 563 6100; www.hotellituristi.fi; Rautatiekatu 9; s/d €75/90, weekends & summer €50/60; Ⓟ ☒ ☕) Right opposite the train station, with reception doubling as a newsagent, this looks well seedy from outside, but actually has very pleasing rooms; spacious, modern, and bright. It's good value at weekends and summer – and for groups, with rooms sleeping up to five – and rates include sauna and breakfast. Don't leave anything in your car, as break-ins have been known to happen.

Kesähotelli Oppimestari (☎ 884 8527; fax 884 8772; Nahkatehtaankatu 3; s/d €37/55; ☎ early Jun-early Aug; Ⓟ ☒ ☕) This efficient place in the north of town offers some of the cheapest summer beds around. It's a modern, well-equipped facility with spacious student-residence rooms, all equipped with kitchenettes. Disabled facilities are excellent, and a simple breakfast is included.

Nallikari Camping (☎ 5586 1350; www.nallikaricamping.fi; Hietasaari; tent sites €5-8 plus per adult/child €4/1, 2-4-bed camping cabins €32, small cottages €65-93, large cottages €123) This camping ground is a great budget option in a lovely location within easy striking distance of the heart of town. It's on Hietasaari, 5km northwest of the centre – but only 2.5km via the pedestrian bridges. Nearby is the good Nallikari beach. There are child-friendly activities in summer, and a kid-minding service.

Radisson SAS (☎ 887 7666; www.radisson.com/oulu; Hallituskatu 1; standard/superior r €135/160, Sat, Sun & summer €83/92; Ⓟ ☒ ☕) This is the highest-profile business hotel in Oulu, ideally located near the waterfront and kauppori. The standard rooms are spacious and airy, with good bathrooms, and one has its own sauna. The suite with views is also very tempting. There are excellent facilities, and a popular nightclub and restaurant.

Ramada Hotel Oulu (☎ 883 9111; www.ramada.com; Kirkkokatu 3; s/d €141/166, weekend & summer r €82-88; Ⓟ ☒ ☕) With a satisfying location overlooking the cathedral, this is one of Oulu's better choices. There are three grades of room; many with balconies; the 'business comfort' rooms cost some €35 more but come with either their own sauna or Jacuzzi. All the rooms have been recently

renovated, and there's good service and a big breakfast buffet.

Hotel Apollo (☎ 52211; hotel@apollo.inet.fi; Asemakatu 31; s/d from €80/100, Sat, Sun & summer r from €60; Ⓟ ☒ ☕) This hotel is an easy walk from the train station although in a bit of a dull area. It features a variety of rooms, some recently made over, and many with their own sauna (€20 extra in summer). Some of the colour schemes are a bit weird but it's a cosy and welcoming place. It also has a good café and popular karaoke bar that's open to 4am.

Holiday Club Oulan Eden (☎ 884 2000; www.holidayclub.fi; Nallikari; s/d €125/135; Ⓟ ☒ ☕) This is a deluxe spa hotel on Hietasaari, near Nallikari Camping and the beach. Discounts are available for longer stays and there are various holiday packages. Accommodation prices include unlimited use of saunas, water slides and lushly landscaped indoor pools, plus you can call on the services of various massage and hydrotherapy treatments.

Eating

Oulu is the most cosmopolitan city in western Finland, and offers a good variety of restaurants in all price ranges. The best and cheapest snacks and local specialties can be found in the lively kauppori and the classic indoor kauppahalli on the southern side of the square. In summer there are stalls selling fresh salmon, paella and Oulu specialties, such as *rieska* (flat bread), *leipäjuusto* (cheese bread), and *lohikeitto* (salmon soup).

RESTAURANTS

1881 Uleåborg (☎ 881 1188; Aittatori 4; mains €24-28; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat, lunch & dinner Sun & daily in summer) In an old warehouse near the kauppori, this classy spot combines chic Finnish style with a traditional setting. There's a decent wine list and a range of set menus. The à la carte menu is short but high on quality, with daily fish and vegetarian specials, reindeer and grilled veal liver with gooseberry sauce, among others on offer.

Franzen (☎ 311 3224; Kirkkokatu 2; mains €16-35; ☎ 4pm-midnight Mon-Sat) Opposite the cathedral, in a building dating from 1829, this is one of Oulu's finest. The cuisine is French and Finnish, with fish (salmon, trout, perch), reindeer and willow grouse featuring on the menu. The wine list is good and the decoration impeccable, and there's also

a German-style beer cellar (Johanneksen kellari). Book ahead, as they may not open otherwise.

Sokeri-Jussin Kievari (☎ 376 628; Pikisaarentie 2; mains €12-26; ☎ kitchen 11am-10pm) An Oulu classic, this timbered local on Pikisaari was once a sugar warehouse and has outdoor tables that have good views of the centre. Although the renovated interior has lost a bit of the original character, it's still very attractive and a top spot to eat.

Zakuska (☎ 379 369; Hallituskatu 13; mains €11-19; ☎ 4pm-midnight Mon-Sat) This place is one of the best-value restaurants in town and deservedly popular for its tasty Russian cuisine. The décor and music add to the 'east of Finland' atmosphere, the onion steak is good, as are the blini.

Pannu (☎ 815 1600; Kauppurienväylä 12; mains €6.50-19.50; ☎ 10.30am-10pm Mon-Thu, 10.30am-11pm Fri & Sat, noon-9pm Sun) This is an informal grill restaurant, in the basement of Stockmann department store, with a huge range of dishes including snails, ostrich, pan pizzas, and various steaks. It manages to blur the lines between informal, affordable dining and gourmet restaurant, and does it well.

Olimpos (☎ 311 3941; Pakkahuoneenkatu 7; mains €10-22; ☎ lunch & dinner) This newish restaurant has fast become popular with locals for its Greek cuisine, to which a few dishes from other Mediterranean countries are added. There's a big range of lunch options, from a €6 cheapie, to a full €21 set menu that will send you hotel-bound for a siesta.

Other recommendations:

Istanbul Oriental (☎ 311 2922; Kauppurienväylä 11; dishes €12-24; ☎ lunch & dinner) Reasonable Turkish restaurant with stylish décor, and a good range of vegetarian options, including felafels (€11 to €13).

Pikku Thai (☎ 370 889; Pakkahuoneenkatu 8; mains €10-14; ☎ 10.30am-10pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat, noon-9pm Sun) Cosy Thai restaurant with better food than exterior décor and good lunch specials.

Cafés

Café Bisketti (Kirkkokatu 8; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Thu, 8am-1am Fri & Sat, noon-10pm Sun) On the north-south section of Rotuaari is this great spot for lunch. It has filled rolls, croissants, quiche and cakes, and a terrace facing the square. At lunchtime soup, salad, coffee and a pastry are €5.50, and only €7 with a tasty hot dish.

Katri Antell (☎ 311 2182; Kirkkokatu 17; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) Opposite Bisketti, this

place has been an Oulu institution for a very long time; the first Katri Antell was founded in 1880. Come for its freshly baked pastries and cakes and relax on the curious couch.

QUICK EATS

Oulu's hungry student population means there are plenty of cheap kebab and pizza places. Locals say there are more pizza shops per head of population in Oulu than any other city in the world!

Da Mario's Pizzeria (Torikatu 24; pizzas €6-8; ☎ lunch & dinner, till 4.30am Fri & Sat) One of the most popular pizza places, this is comparatively classy, and is handily open late at weekends.

Grillerina (Asemakatu 29; ☎ 11am-5am) There are grillis, and then there's this place, a class above and a step beyond the standard. While it boasts the usual all-possible-permutations menu, it's far tastier than most, and has a spacious, Marimekko-furnished dining room to enjoy the abundant portions in. The opening hours alone inspire respect.

Drinking

There's plenty going on in Oulu at night – the number of bikes lined up outside pubs and bars on summer weekends has to be seen to be believed!

Oluhuone Leskinen (☎ 311 7993; Kirkkokatu 10; ☎ noon-2am Sun-Tue, noon-3am Wed-Sat) This bar on the central pedestrian zone has a good terrace and has an extraordinary range of Finnish and international beers, as well as malt whiskies. There's notably friendly service and a good atmosphere.

Makasiini (Kauppurienväylä; ☎ from 6am Mon-Sat, 8am Sun) This is a classic café set in an old wooden warehouse on the kauppori. It opens extremely early so that stallholders can get their first coffee of the day in, and in summer has a great terrace that sucks all it can get from the evening sun.

Never Grow Old (Hallituskatu 17; ☎ 2pm-2am, 2pm-3am weekends) This enduringly popular bar hits its stride after 10pm, with plenty of dancing, DJs and revelry in the tightly packed interior. The goofy décor includes some seriously comfortable and some really uncomfortable places to sit, and a log-palisade bar that seems designed to get you to wear your drink.

St Michaels (Hallituskatu 13; ☎ 2pm-2am) In the same block as Never Grow Old, St Michaels

is a convivial Irish bar that pours a very acceptable Guinness, and has an excellent selection of whiskies.

Tervahovi (Hallituskatu 15; ☎ noon-1am or later Tue-Sat, noon-10pm Sun, 4pm-midnight Mon) A more typically Finnish place than St Michaels, with leopard-skin and a vaguely French theme; they also do tasty food.

Café Milou (Asemakatu 21; ☎ noon-2am) Named after Tin Tin's hound, this place is away from the main strip but packs in students with its relaxed vibe, bookshelves filled with comics, and service so rude it's almost comical. There's a small terrace.

Kaarenholvi Jumpru Pub (Kauppurienukatu 6; ☎ 11am-2am Mon-Tue, 11am-4am Wed-Sat, noon-2am Sun) This Oulu institution is a great place for meeting locals. It has an enclosed terrace, a perennial favourite, and a warren of cosy rooms inside, as well as a nightclub that opens at 10pm Wednesday to Saturday.

Entertainment

CLUBS

45 Special (☎ 881 1845; Saaristonkatu 12; ☎ 8pm-4am) This grungy club is Oulu's best rock venue, with wall-to-wall patrons. Entry is €4 most nights.

Giggling Marlin (Torikatu 21-22; ☎ 10pm-4am Wed-Sat) This is one of a new brand of 'Suomi pop' clubs, featuring two dance floors with contemporary Finnish pop and international music and young Finns dancing on the tables.

CLASSICAL MUSIC & THEATRE

Oulu Music Centre (Madetoja Halli; ☎ 5584 7212; Lintulammentie 1-3) The Oulu Symphony Orchestra – the world's northernmost professional symphony orchestra – holds concerts here most Thursdays.

Oulu City Theatre (☎ 5584 7600; Kaarlenväylä 2) This theatre has classical music, contemporary theatre and the occasional Shakespearean performance, almost all of it in Finnish.

SPORT

Oulu is very proud of their champion ice-hockey team, the Oulun Kärpät (the Oulu Stoats), who won successive Finnish titles in 2004 and 2005. They play their home games in the **Raksila Arena** (club ☎ 815 5700, ticketline ☎ 0600-10800; www.oulunkarpat.fi; tickets €10.50-26) in the Oulu Hall complex east of town.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Oulu airport is one of the busiest in Finland. There are several daily direct flights from Helsinki, operated by Finnair and Blue1, as well as services from Stockholm and from other Finnish cities.

BUS

The bus station, near the train station, has services connecting Oulu with all the main centres. These include Rovaniemi (€32.30, 3½ hours), Tornio (€18.60, 2½ hours); Kajaani (€28.10, 2½ hours) and Helsinki (€77.40, 11½ hours). To reach nearby villages, catch a local bus from the centre.

TRAIN

The train station is just east of the centre. Six to 10 trains a day run from Helsinki to Oulu; the fastest direct train from Helsinki takes only six hours (€68). There are also trains via Kajaani.

Getting Around

The airport is 15km south of the centre. Arriving flights are met by a Finnair bus to Oulu (€4.40). From the bus or train station you can catch local bus 19 to the airport (€2.50, 25 minutes).

There is a good network of local buses. Each ride costs about €2.50, and route maps are displayed at bus stops.

The main roads north and south from Oulu are motorways (freeways) which are off-limits to cyclists – fortunately there are many minor roads and bikeways. Pick up a bike route map at the Oulu tourist office.

AROUND OULU

Hailuoto Island

☎ 08 / pop 986

Hailuoto is the opposite of Atlantis – it rose from the sea about 2000 years ago. This flat island is 200 sq km in size, and growing. These days Hailuoto's main appeal is its sleepy fishing villages, as traffic is regulated by ferries. Grey lichen, used for reindeer food, is the main produce of Hailuoto. Most of the island can be explored only on foot.

The island is 30km long and has just one main road. Hailuoto village has shops and a bank. The **tourist information office** (☎ 810 1133) at the ferry harbour distributes free maps and can help with accommodation.

The open-air **Kniivilä Museum** (admission €1; ☎ 11am-5pm Wed-Sun mid-Jun–mid-Aug), in Hailuoto village, has a collection of old houses. Marjaniemi is the westernmost point of Hailuoto, with a lighthouse and a cluster of old homes.

Ranta-Sumppu Camping (☎ 810 0690; tent sites €10, cottages €35) is at Marjaniemi, 30km west of the ferry pier. There are cottages for rent, camping and a simple lunch restaurant. There is a café at the ferry pier.

Bus 18 from Oulu crosses the 7km strait from the mainland on a free *lossi* (ferry) and continues across Hailuoto island to Marjaniemi. There are two or three buses daily. If you are coming from Oulu by car, take road 816.

Haukipudas

☎ 08 / pop 17,090

Haukipudas is 20km north of Oulu at a scenic spot along the Kiiminkijoki. The buttermilk-coloured **church** is one of the most notable 'picture churches' in Finland, with superb naïve frescoes and a small, wooden *vaivaisukko* (pauper statue) outside.

Virpiniemen Retkeilyhotelli (☎ 561 4200; www.virpiniemenliikuntaopisto.com; Hiihtomajantie 27; dm €13, d €44; ☎ ☒), at the seashore near Kello village, is 6km from the main road and 20km from Oulu. It is an HI-affiliated Finnhostel in a sports complex, with many opportunities for activities. There is a kitchen and sauna. Reception closes at 4pm from September to May, so ring ahead.

Särkyneen Pyörän Karjaitila, next to the church in Haukipudas village, is a 150-year-old cowshed, now wonderfully transformed into a cosy restaurant serving 'country-style' gourmet Finnish food.

To get here take bus 1 to Kello from Oulu or bus 15 or 20 to Haukipudas.

Liminganlahti Bird Sanctuary

The bird sanctuary at Liminka Bay, near the attractive old farming village of Liminka, attracts more avian species than any other similar place in Finland. The wide bay is protected and funded by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

The 'great bird migration' is best seen in May, August and September. Several rare species of birds nest here during summer, and up to 70 species of birds can be seen in a single summer day. Prominent species

include the yellow-breasted bunting, a variety of wader, and the Ural owl. There are several observation towers, boardwalks and a couple of designated camp sites.

Your first stop should be the **Liminka Bay Nature Centre** (☎ 562 0000; www.liminganlahti.net; Rantakurvi 6), about 600m from road 813 between Liminka and Lumijoki, and about 6km from Liminka village. As well as a nature display explaining the birdlife, migrations and flora, there's an observation tower, café and information desk. A guide is in attendance from 9am to 5pm daily from May to August and you can borrow a telescope to use at any of four bird-watching towers – the nearest is just 400m away.

The nature centre also has a new accommodation wing, with comfortable, modern rooms sleeping two to six people, a sauna and a guest kitchen. Cost ranges from €37 to €55.

Several daily Raahe-bound buses make the 30km trip from Oulu to Liminka and on to Lumijoki, and will stop at the turn-off to the Nature Centre.

Turkansaari Open-Air Museum

In summer you can take a boat out to the folksy **Turkansaari Open-Air Museum** (☎ 5586 7191; admission €3; ☎ 10am-7pm late May–mid-Aug, to 5pm mid-Aug–mid-Sep) on Turkansaari, 13km southeast of the city. Originally the island was a trading post for Russians and Swedes and many of the old buildings remain. There are regular displays of tar-burning, log-rolling and folk music and dancing. The MS *Sympaatti* departs from Värto Pier in Oulu (return €17, noon, Tuesday to Sunday, June to August). Otherwise take bus 3 or 4, or drive or cycle along road 22 east in the direction of Muho.

KEMI

☎ 016 / pop 22,907

Kemi is an industrial town and important deepwater harbour. It also has a significant pulp-and-paper production, with the associated smell. Although not a hugely appealing place (in summer only the gem museum by the wide waterfront has any sort of siren song), Kemi is home to two of Finland's blockbuster winter attractions: the authentic Arctic icebreaker ship, *Sampo*, and the Lumilinna (Snow Castle), complete with ice hotel.

Information

Public library (☎ 258 207; Marina Takalon katu 3; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon-Thu, 11am-6pm Fri, 10am-4pm Sat) At the kauppatori, with free Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 259 690; www.kemi.fi; Kauppakatu 29; ☎ 10am-6pm late Jan-mid-Apr & mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri rest of year) In the Gemstone Gallery at the town harbour. There's also a national park information office here. Turn left out of the bus station (right out of the train station), then left down Kauppakatu until you reach the harbour.

Sights

ICEBREAKER SAMPO

The highlight of a visit to Kemi in winter is a trip aboard the *Sampo*, the only Arctic icebreaker in the world that accepts passengers. The four-hour cruise includes ice swimming in special drysuits, as well as a walk on the ice – a remarkable experience. The *Sampo* sails at noon on Thursday, Friday and Saturday from mid-December to mid-April, with several Wednesday departures during busy periods, and costs €162 per person. The best time to go is when the ice is thickest, which is usually in March. Contact **Sampo Tours** (☎ 256 548; www.sampotours.com; Torikatu 2).

Departures are from Ajos Harbour, 15km south of Kemi, where you'll also find the *Sampo* out to pasture in summer, when it operates as a restaurant.

LUMILINNA

Kemi's **Snow Castle** (☎ 259 502; www.snowcastle.net; admission €5; ☎ 10am-8pm Feb-mid-Apr), by the water near the tourist office, is another big winter drawcard. In 1996 the 'World's Largest Snow Castle' – 13,500 sq metres – was built here. It was such a success that the castle is now constructed every year and features a beautiful chapel and an **ice restaurant** (mains €12-26; ☎ lunch & dinner Jan-Mar), with bar, ice tables covered with reindeer fur, and ice sculptures. The restaurant opens from 30 December. It's also possible to stay overnight in the **snow hotel** (d from €117; ☎ Jan-Mar), where heavy-duty Arctic sleeping bags keep you warm in -5°C room temperature!

JALOKIVIGALLERIA

The **Gemstone Gallery** (☎ 259 690; Kauppakatu 29; €5; ☎ 10am-6pm late Jan-mid-Apr & mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri rest of year), in an old seaside customs house, has an internationally notable collection of over 3000 beautiful, rare stones

and jewellery, including a crown made using a design that was meant for the short-lived king of Finland. The crown was made in the 1980s by the gallery's founder, who created the crown of the king of Finland from original drawings. Sheets translated into various languages guide you in an offbeat manner around the exhibits, which include replicas of the world's most famous diamonds, and a solid dose of Finnish humour.

Nearby are a number of craft shops in old wooden buildings near the water's edge.

Festivals & Events

Every May, Kemi hosts **Arctic Comics**, an international comic festival. Check the city website (www.kemi.fi) for details.

Sleeping

The Snow Castle offers the most interesting accommodation (left) until it melts. There are four other hotels in town.

Hotelli Palomestari (☎ 257 117; www.hotelli.palomestari.com; Valtakatu 12; s/d €76/105, weekends & summer €76; ☎ ☒) This is a friendly, worthwhile family hotel close to the bus and train stations (a block south and one west). It has a good sauna, and a convivial bar with a terrace on the street. The rooms are newly renovated with trademark Finnish furniture; some have their own sauna.

Hoteli Yöpuu (☎ 232 034; www.hotellyopuu.com; Eteläntie 227; s/d from €60/68; ☎ ☒) Yöpuu, a little way out of town on road E4, is a pleasant guesthouse-style hotel with comfortable rooms and a good restaurant. There's also a camp site attached.

Eating & Drinking

There are plenty of grills and pizzerias on Valtakatu and around the kauppatori.

Panorama Café (☎ 259 363; Valtakatu 26; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) If you like your morning coffee with a stunning view, and aren't superstitious by nature, this café on the 13th floor of the town hall is the place to be.

Orgidean Kukka (☎ 257 750; Valtakatu 7; mains €8-15; ☎ 10.30am-8pm Mon-Thu, 10.30am-9pm Fri, noon-9pm Sat, noon-8pm Sun) This humble but attractive little place is a Vietnamese restaurant with a lunch buffet and tasty à la carte options.

Sampo (☎ 282 001; mains €15-22; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-mid-Aug) The icebreaker serves as an atmospheric daytime restaurant in summer,

but you'll need your own transport to get to Ajos Harbour, 15km away.

Kemin Panimo (☎ 23502; Keskuspuistokatu; ☎ 2pm-1am or later) This is one of the liveliest pubs in town, brews its own beer, and also has a good range of international nectars. The large terrace doesn't have the greatest of views; it looks over the supermarket car-park, but in Kemi you can't be too picky!

Kemi's Snow Castle also features an ice restaurant (opposite).

Getting There & Away

The Kemi/Tornio airport is 6km north of town, and there are regular flights from Helsinki. A trip in a taxi will cost €10 from Kemi, or €12 from Tornio.

Half-hourly buses from Tornio (less at weekends) will take you to Kemi train station (€5 free with a train pass, 30 to 40 minutes). There are also some departures to Muonio to the north and Oulu to the south.

There are trains from Helsinki (€67, nine hours), Oulu (€14.60, 1¼ hours) and Rovaniemi (€15.70, 1½ hours)

TORNIO

☎ 016 / pop 22,204

Right on the impressive Tornionjoki, the longest free-flowing river in Northern Europe, Tornio (Swedish: Torneå) is joined to its Swedish counterpart Haparanda (Finnish: Haaparanta) by a short bridge. Although the two places bill themselves as 'the Eurocity', they are in reality service towns, not overly attractive or interesting, but useful stops on the way north. They share a tourist office and a famous golf course, where you can tee off into another country and another time zone. Nearby, the rapids at Kukkolankoski are another highlight, as is the cracking Um-pitunneli pub. Tornio is a bigger place, but a couple of the better accommodation options are in Haparanda. Don't forget that Finland is one hour ahead of Sweden!

History

The area along the Tornionjoki has been inhabited since medieval times, when it was the centre for Pirikka tax collectors (who worked for the king of Sweden). The town of Tornio was founded in 1621, and the entire Tornionjoki valley was administered by Sweden until 1809, when it was incorporated into Finland, under Russian suze-

rainty. In 1821, Haparanda was founded as a Swedish trading town to replace the loss of Tornio to Russia.

Information

Green Line Centre (☎ 432 733; www.tornio.fi; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat & Sun Jun-mid-Aug, 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri mid-Aug-May) Near the bridge on the Tornio side of the border, acts as the tourist office for both towns. There's a free Internet terminal.

Public library (☎ 432 433; Torikatu 2; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Thu, 11am-5pm Fri, also 11am-3pm Sat Sep-May) Free Internet access.

Sights & Activities

Tornio church was completed in 1686 and is one of the most beautiful wooden churches in Finland. It is dedicated to the Swedish Queen Eleonora. The unusual 19th-century onion-domed **Orthodox church** in the town centre was built by order of Tsar Alexander I of Russia. Both are open from 9am to 5pm daily in summer, longer during July.

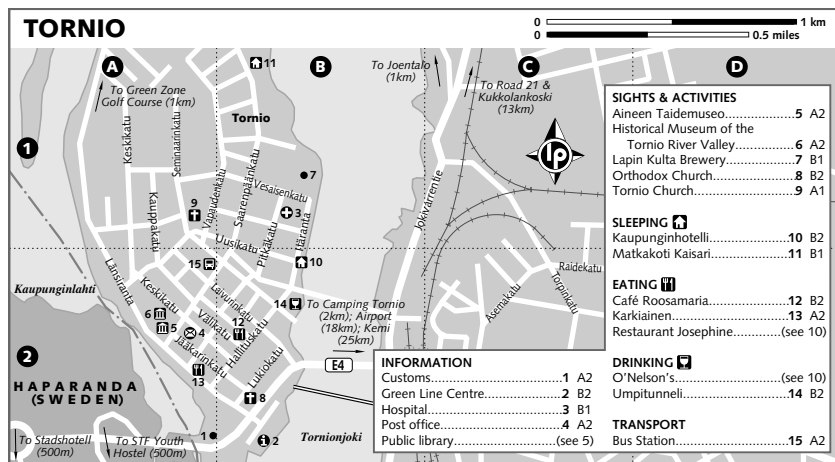
Aineen Taidemuseo (Aine Art Museum; ☎ 432 438; Torikatu 2; admission €2; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Thu, 11am-3pm Fri-Sun) features a private collection of Veli Aine, a local business tycoon. It features Finnish art from the 19th and 20th centuries, temporary exhibitions, and has a good café.

Historical Museum of the Tornio River Valley (☎ 432 451, Keskipolku 22; admission €2; ☎ noon-5pm noon-3pm Sun, closed Sat) has a collection of interesting old artefacts and costumes, although all displays are labelled in Finnish.

Lapin Kultra Brewery (☎ 54021; Lapinkullantie 1), founded in 1873, was the original brewery producing the ubiquitous Lappish lager. Hour-long free tours of the brewery plant begin at the front gate at 2pm on Monday and Thursday from June to August.

River-rafting trips are popular in summer on the Kukkolankoski (p277). Rafting tours are run by **Safaris Unlimited** (☎ 253 405; www.safarisunlimited.fi) and **Nordic Safaris** (☎ 040-755 1858; www.nordicsafaris.com; Koulutie 3, Keminmaa) from around €35 to €60 per person. Various trips use either inflatable rubber rafts or traditional wooden boats. Safaris Unlimited also has kayaking trips, and both companies offer winter excursions such as snowmobile, reindeer and husky safaris. The Tornio tourist office can make bookings for all trips.

The tourist office also handles **fishing** permits; there are several excellent spots along the Tornio River.



Sleeping

The most characterful place to sleep is actually across in Haparanda; the **Stadshotell** (☎ 46 922 614 90; www.haparandastadshotell.se; d €90-140) is a lovely old building with plenty of history. There is also budget accommodation available in summer.

STF Youth Hostel (☎ 46 922 611 71; vandrarhem-haparanda@telia.com; Strandgatan 26; dm €18, s/d with shower €36/52; ☎ reception 7-10am & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9-10am & 4-7pm Sat & Sun; (P) ☒ ☎ ☎) This is a good choice for budget accommodation, also just across the bridge in Sweden. There's a café/restaurant here, and a variety of rooms. There's a very good kitchen and lounge, and proper disabled facilities.

Joentalo (☎ 211 9244; www.ppopisto.fi; Kivirannantie 13-15; s/d €46/57; ☎ early Jun-early Aug, reception 8am-3pm; (P) ☒ ☎ ☎) This HI-affiliated summer hotel is on the other side of the river from town, and 2.5km north; inconvenient with bags, but otherwise a pleasant riverside walk. The rooms are modern, and there are excellent facilities here. There is also a youth hostel on the same site. It was closed for renovations at time of research but due to be open again for the 2006 season.

Other options:

Matkatkoti Kaisari (☎ 480 897; www.kaisari.com; Saarenpäänkatu 39; s/d/tr €40/60/80; (P) ☒ ☎) This newly renovated guesthouse north of the centre is simple in style but attractive and colourful.

Kaupunginhotelli (☎ 43311; www.tornionkaupunginhotelli.fi; Itäranta 4; s/d €99/119, Sat, Sun & summer r €84; (P) ☒ ☎) This is the only hotel in Tornio itself.

It's a huge, ageing place with a decent restaurant and a couple of pubs.

Camping Tornio (☎ 445 945; www.campingtornio.com; Matkailijantie; camp sites €10, cabins €54) This is about 3km from town on the road to Kemi. There are saunas, a tennis court and a beach. You can hire rowboats and bikes here.

Eating & Drinking

There is very little eating choice in Tornio. Haparanda has even less, although the Stadshotell has a quality restaurant.

Umpitunneli (☎ 430 360; www.umpitunneli.fi; Hallituskatu 15; mains €8-21.50; ☎ 11am-1am or later) The Umpitunneli ('dead-end tunnel') is perhaps Tornio's biggest attraction. It's a cavernous pub and restaurant with a huge and convivial beer terrace that's a lot of fun when things are animated. The food is generously portioned and good value; later the *hump* (a fast Finnish dance, between a waltz and a foxtrot) music gets going (€5 cover Wednesday to Saturday nights); there are sometimes live bands. It's one of the best nightspots in the north, and utterly Finnish.

Restaurant Josephine (Itäranta 4; mains €7-18, Lapp dishes €18-24; ☎ 10am-midnight, 10am-1am Thu-Sat) For a quality sit-down meal, Josephine, in the Kaupunginhotelli, is a good choice. The menu is broad and excellent value, with tasty salmon, liver and other Finnish specialities alongside pan pizzas and pastas. There's also a 'Lapp menu', with several reindeer dishes (including boiled tongue) and a couple of set menus (€32).

MIDNIGHT AT THE GREEN ZONE GOLF COURSE

You walk up to the first hole and place your ball on the tee. The sun is hanging low on the horizon. The time is five minutes to midnight, but you know it doesn't really matter how badly you play or how long it takes to get around 18 holes: fading light won't be an issue. You're standing on one of the most unique golf courses in the world – the **Green Zone Golf Course** (☎ 431 711; tornio@golf.inet.fi) at Tornio-Haparanda.

This is the world's northernmost golf club, and playing at this latitude (just south of the Arctic Circle) brings with it a few advantages. For a start, in summer you can play all night. Secondly, the course straddles the border of Finland and Sweden, beautifully laid out on either side of the Tornionjoki, with nine holes in each country.

Of the 18 holes on this remarkable course, four cross the international border. Given the one-hour time difference, this technically means that if you tee off on the par 3 sixth hole, your ball remains in the air for at least an hour before it lands on the green (eight iron required here). If you tee off from the par 4 third hole at 12.30am on Saturday, you'll hit the ball into Friday (driver or 3 wood). Play a short nine-iron from the 18th onto the green at a similar time on a Sunday, and you'll have smacked the ball into next week.

All this may sound a bit trite, but golfers should note that this is a very decent course, with lush fairways and well-maintained, solid greens. How can you deny yourself this story when you're on the 19th back home?

All this golfing novelty can be yours for €33 green fees plus €10 if you need to hire a rather shoddy set of clubs. To play after 10pm (and get the full novelty benefit) you need to book in advance, since the clubhouse closes at 10pm. You'll need a Green Card or a handicap certificate from your home club to play; if you don't have that, there's a driving range and a 9-hole pitch 'n' putt course (€8). It's usually open from mid-May to late August, but snow golf is sometimes available. That's when those bright orange and yellow balls really come into their own!

Karkiainen (Länsiranta 9; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2.30pm Sat) This bakery-café has the best fresh pastries, cakes and doughnuts in town. There's a €6 big breakfast served before midday.

Café Roosamaria (☎ 430 953; Hallituskatu 10; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat) This is a good café on the main street, with stylish crepe-paper lamps banishing the winter gloom.

O'Nelson's (Kaupunginhotelli) Then there's this lively, Irish-style pub at the Kaupunginhotelli. At weekends the €5 entry includes admission to the inaccurately-named but entertaining Paradise, a well-attended disco.

Getting There & Away

The Kemi/Tornio airport is 18km east of town, and there are regular flights to and from Helsinki. A taxi from Tornio to the airport costs around €12.

There are a few daily buses from Rovaniemi (€18.60, two hours) – although there are more connections (bus and train) via Kemi – and north to Muonio (€34.20, 4½ hours). Buses from Kemi (€5, 30 to 40 minutes) run more than hourly. Most continue to Haparanda. There are also frequent shut-

tle buses between Haparanda and Tornio, although the distance is so short you can walk. There are buses direct to Stockholm four times a week (Skr480/€55, 15 hours).

AROUND TORNIO Kukkolanoski

The Kukkolanoski on the Tornionjoki, 16km north of Tornio on road 21, are the longest free-flowing rapids in Finland. The length is 3500m and the fall is just under 14m. Kukkolanoski has been a favoured fishing place since the Middle Ages and locals still catch whitefish using traditional long-handled nets. An annual whitefish festival is celebrated on the last weekend of July.

You can sample grilled *siika* (whitefish) at Café Myllypirtti.

KAINUU REGION

KAJAANI

☎ 08 / pop 35,675

The further north you get, the smaller the 'major' towns. Kajaani is the centre of the Kainuu region, and although a pleasant

enough riverside town, it's no metropolis, being mainly a transport changeover and stopover between the Lakeland and the north. What little there is to see is related to Kajaani's long position as an important station on the Kainuu tar transportation route – until the 19th century this region produced more tar than anywhere else in the world.

One of Kajaani's claims to fame is that Elias Lönnrot, creator of Finland's national epic, the *Kalevala*, worked here for a period in the 19th century, using it as a base for his travels. The long-reigning president Urho Kekkonen also lived here as a student (his house stills stands at Kalliokatu 7). More disturbing, though, has been a publicized trend of racist violence, with Kajaani named the most racist city in Finland by the *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper according to statistics on racially-motivated crime.

Information

Kajaani Info (☎ 6155 2555; www.kajaani.fi; Kauppakatu 21; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri, 9am–2pm Sat early Jun–mid-Aug, 8.30am–4pm Mon–Fri mid-Aug–early Jun) Tourist information and free Internet access.

Public library (☎ 6155 2422; Kauppakatu 35; ☎ 10am–8pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat) Has free Internet access.

Sights & Activities

In town, the beautiful wooden **church** (Pohjolankatu; ☎ 10am–6pm early Jun–late Aug) from 1896 is a rare example of neo-Gothic architecture. It's typically Karelian, with lots of ornate wooden trim and a delicate, slender, Italianate belltower. The Orthodox church is nearby. See p280 for details of the Paltaniemi church, 9km north of town.

On an island in the middle of the Kajaaninjoki near the town centre is what's left of **Kajaani Castle**, built in the 17th century and thoroughly damaged by war, time and some more recent mischief. There's not much to see, admission is free and it's easily viewed from the bridge.

At the Ämmäkoski waterfall, near the castle ruins, is a **tar-boat canal**, a channel built in 1846 to enable the boats laden with tar barrels to pass the rapids. There's a small **museum** (☎ 11am–5pm Tue–Sun; admission free) in the old lock-keeper's cottage, and tar boat shows at 11am on Saturdays in July.

Kainuu Museum (☎ 6155 2407; Asemakatu 4; admission €2; ☎ noon–4pm Mon–Fri, noon–8pm Wed, noon–5pm Sun, closed Sun summer), near the train

station, is a good place to get acquainted with local history, including the *Kalevala* and its author, Elias Lönnrot. There is little information in English.

Facing the small **raatihuoneentori** (town square) is the old **town hall**, designed by German architect CL Engel. Behind it is the former police station, which now serves as the **Kajaani art museum** (Linnankatu 14; admission €2; ☎ 10am–5pm Sun–Fri, 10am–8pm Wed).

Festivals & Events

Kainuun Jazzkivät in late May is a festival of international jazz, blues and rock. Stars have included Dizzy Gillespie, Mick Taylor and the Phil Woods Quintet, and many Finnish performers. For information and tickets contact the Kajaani tourist office.

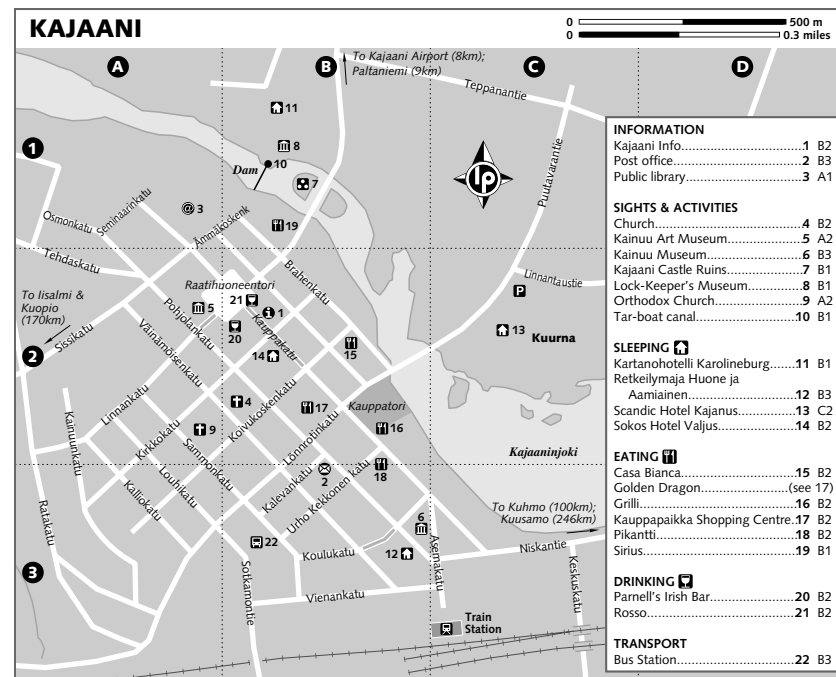
Sleeping

Kartanohotelli Karolineburg (☎ 613 1291; www.karolineburg.com; Karoliinantie 4; s/d €70/80, d with sauna €100, summer s/d €50/60; ☎ ☎) This is easily the most romantic place to stay in Kajaani. It's an elegant 19th-century wooden manor house across the river from the centre, with rooms in the main building and two outbuildings. There are elegantly furnished public areas and spacious grounds.

Retkeilymaja Huone ja Aamiainen (☎ /fax 622 254; Pohjolankatu 4; s/d/tr €28/40/54; ☎ ☎) reception 8am–noon, 4–11pm; ☎ ☎) This curious HI-affiliated place offers reasonably comfortable budget accommodation not far from the bus station. There's a mound of information in myriad languages, linen is included, and the owner brings breakfast to your room, as well as selling burgers, beer, toiletries and other thoughtful necessities. It grows on you.

Sokos Hotel Valjus (☎ 615 0200; www.sokoshotels.fi; Kauppakatu 20; s/d from €99/122, weekends & summer €78; ☎ ☎ ☎) This place is very central, situated right on the main street. The rooms are comfortable, service is good, and there's a reasonable restaurant and a popular bar and nightclub on the premises too.

Scandic Hotel Kajanus (☎ 61641; www.scandic-hotels.com; Koskikatu 3; s/d from €85/109, Fri, Sat & summer from €63/73; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Across the river from the centre, this is one of the larger hotels in Northern Finland. It has three grades of rooms, which differ in size and a few extra conveniences; there's also a gym, squash court, large sauna complex and several restaurants.



Eating & Drinking

The **kauppatori**, at the southeast end of Kauppakatu, has stalls selling smoked fish and other goodies and a cheap grilli.

Sirius (☎ 612 2087; mains €14–21; ☎ 11am–3pm Mon–Fri) Located above the rapids, this restaurant is set in a characterful 1940s villa built as a residence for the local paper company. It serves classy meat and fish dishes and has a good lunch buffet for €13. There's a great terrace out the back. It opens in the evenings for group bookings only.

Pikantti (☎ 628 870; Kauppakatu 10; lunch buffet €8.60; ☎ 10am–5pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat) This place offers a typically excellent Finnish lunch buffet until 5pm weekdays. It includes vegetable soup and a main course, salads, bread, milk, dessert and coffee. There's also a nice terrace.

Kauppapaikka Shopping Centre (Kauppakatu 18) This centre has some cheap eating options, including Golden Dragon.

Golden Dragon (☎ 627 776; Kauppakatu 18; mains €6–10; ☎ 11am–9pm, later at weekends) A better-than-average Chinese place serving Cantonese and Szechuan and cheap lunch

specials. The lunch buffet is €7.50. It's in the **kauppatori** shopping centre; enter around the back if the centre is closed.

Casa Bianca (☎ 628 498; Koivukoskenkatu 17D; pizzas €7–9; ☎ 11am–9pm Mon–Sat, noon–9pm Sun) This is a cosy little Italian-style pizzeria tucked away on the street corner facing the river. It's a favourite with local families.

Rosso (☎ 615 0341; Kauppakatu 21; mains from €6.50; ☎ 11am–10pm, later at weekends) On the town hall square is a branch of the Rosso chain, with the usual unremarkable array of pizzas, pastas and steaks. However, this also has a public bar with a very pleasant terrace.

Parnell's Irish Bar (☎ 612 1306; Kauppakatu 30; ☎ 6pm–1am Mon–Thu, to 2am Fri & Sat, noon–11pm Sun) Opposite Rosso, this is another decent place for a drink.

Getting There & Away

Finnair has two to four daily flights from Helsinki to Kajaani. The airport is 8km northwest of town; take bus 4 (€2.50).

Kajaani is the major travel hub in the Kainuu district. There are frequent departures for Kuhmo (€15.20, 1½ hours) and

other towns in the region during the week, but few departures on weekends. The local bus service is useful if you want to visit Paltaniemi (same bus as to the airport).

Kajaani is on the main Helsinki to Oulu line. There are four daily trains from Helsinki (€67, seven hours), via Kouvola and Kuopio.

AROUND KAJAANI Paltaniemi

The village of Paltaniemi 9km from Kajaani, has its own distinctive history. The first church was built here in 1599. In the centuries that followed, Paltaniemi became the regional centre for the Lutheran Church. You'll see some of the most exciting church paintings in Finland here.

The old wooden church (☎ 687 5334; ☞ 10am-6pm late May-mid-Aug) was built in 1726, and its bell tower dates from 1776. The church is known for its wonderful old murals and ceiling paintings (some were altered and repainted in 1940). The Hell scene has been partly covered, apparently to avoid disturbing the locals. An information tape in English is available on request.

Keisarintalli, an old wooden stable, was used as a boarding house for Tsar Alexander I when he toured Finland in 1819. This simple building (moved from Vuolijoki) was actually the best available for the exalted visitor. Ask at the church to be shown around.

Take local bus 4 (the airport bus) from Pohjolankatu in Kajaani to Paltaniemi. There are hourly departures on weekdays, less often on weekends.

KUHMO

☎ 08 / pop 10,449

Kuhmo is a curious place; although not officially part of Karelia, it is sort of the unofficial capital of Vienan Karjala, the Karelian heartland that is now in Russia. This was the region that artists explored in the Karelian movement, such a crucial part of the development of Finnish national identity. Most of their expeditions set off from Kuhmo, as did one of Elias Lönnrot's, when he headed into 'Songland' to record the verses of bards that he later wove into the *Kalevala* epic. There's a fine Kalevala resource centre in town, as well as a less informative theme park.

Kuhmo, once a major tar producer, is still a good jumping-off point for the wilderness;

it makes a natural base for hiking the UKK route, Finland's longest marked trek. The vast taiga run from here right across Siberia and harbours many 'respect' animals like wolves, bears and lynx.

Kuhmo is well known in Finland for its annual chamber music festival, and is small and very pleasant.

Information

Petola Visitor Centre (☎ 0205-646 380; petola@metsa.fi; Lentiirantie 342; ☞ 9am-5pm daily Jul-Aug, 9am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) Near the Kalevala Village theme park, this is a good national park information centre. As well as providing hiking advice, there's a good exhibition on the four major carnivores of Finland.

Kuhmo tourist office (☎ 6155 5292; www.kuhmo.fi; Kainuuntie 82; ☞ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat Jun-Aug; 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) In the town centre, this has extended hours during festival time. Very helpful. Stocks good maps and walking guides to the region. Free Internet access at time of publication.

Public library (☎ 6155 5390; Pajakkakatu 2; ☞ 10am-7pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 2-7pm Thu, plus Sat 9am-3pm Sep-May) The modern library has free Internet access

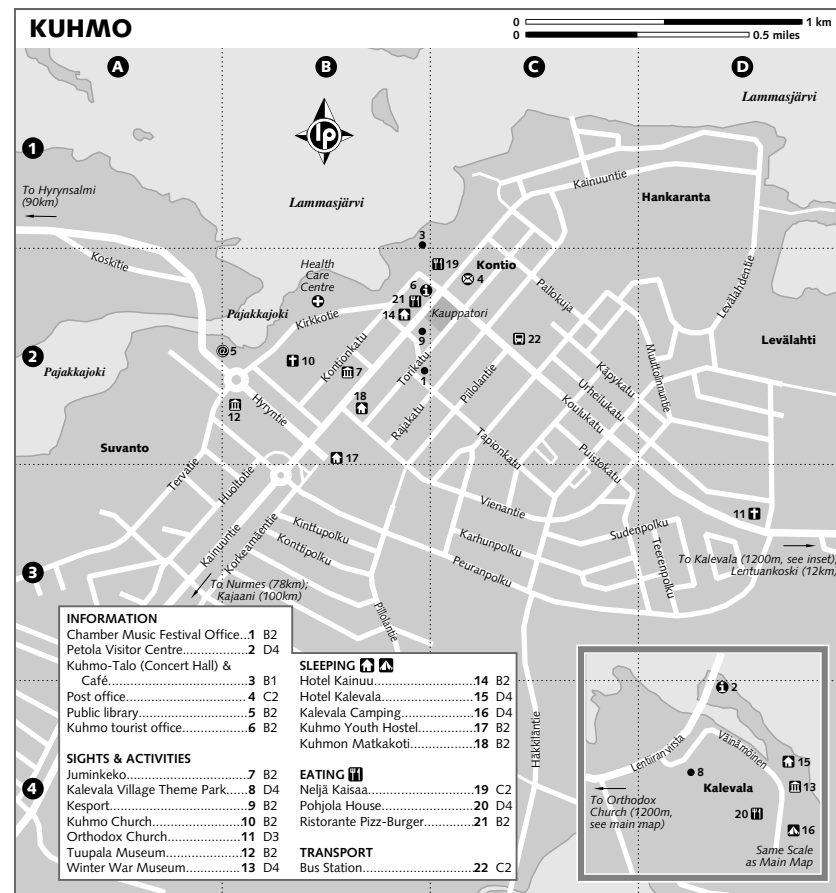
Sights

JUMINKEKO

If you are interested in the *Kalevala* or Karelian culture as a whole, you must pay a visit to the excellent **Juminkeko** (☎ 653 0670; www.juminkeko.fi; Kontionkatu 25; adult/child €4/free; ☞ noon-6pm Sun-Thu), a beautiful building made using traditional methods and modern styling. The fantastic staff can tell you anything about Karelia or the *Kalevala* that you wish to know; there are also three to four detailed exhibitions here every year. The auditorium, whose walls were hand-worked by adze, has three worthwhile audiovisual presentations in English; also on display is Finland's largest collection of *Kalevala* books translated into over 50 languages. With the multimedia programme you can view pictures, and read and listen to extracts from the epic in anything from Japanese to Swahili.

TUUPALA MUSEUM

This charming **Karelian farmhouse** (☎ 655 6283; Tervatie 1; adult/child €3/2; ☞ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Jun, 10am-6pm daily Jul-late Aug) has been, in its past lives, a general store, pharmacy, inn, post office and home to the town's police chief. Fittingly, it now houses the museum of local history.



CHURCHES

The striking 1816 wooden **Kuhmo Church** (☞ noon-6pm summer) in the town centre is a venue for concerts during the chamber music festival. The **Orthodox Church**, 1km from the centre on the road to the theme park, is only 35 years old. It contains several 18th-century icons that were painted in the Valamo Monastery before it was annexed by the Soviet Union, plus a 300-year-old Madonna icon. The church is open on request only; inquire at the tourist office for more details.

KALEVALA VILLAGE

This **theme park** (☎ 652 0114; www.kalevalakyla.fi; adult/child €11/5.50; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat Jun-Aug, also Sun in Jul), 3km east of the centre of town, is a

big drawcard but of debatable value, especially if you're not with children. Despite the name, you won't learn much about the *Kalevala*; it's basically an open-air museum of Karelian folk history and log buildings with cultural exhibitions, artisan displays and costumed staff demonstrating tar-making, woodcarving, fishing and so on. On the marked circuit, you will see a re-creation of the cabin and desk Elias Lönnrot worked at, and Pohjola House, which includes a gallery and café. From mid-December to mid-January, the site opens as a **Christmas Village**.

The adjacent **Winter War Museum** (☎ 655 6368; adult/child €3/2; ☞ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Jun, 10am-6pm daily Jul-late Aug) displays artefacts from that bitter conflict.

Activities

There's plenty to do in and around Kuhmo. The tourist office has a full list of activities.

Whitewater rafting trips to Lentuankoski, 15km north of Kuhmo, can be arranged on weekends in June and daily during July, with a minimum of two persons. Book through the Kuhmo tourist office, but call ahead, as the trips weren't run in 2005 due to low water levels.

Fishing for perch and pike is popular at Pajakkakoski near the town centre and at Lentuankoski north of town. Check with Kainuu Nature Centre or the tourist office about permits. There's a complex series of them depending on which stretches you want to fish (per day €5 to €10, per week €10 to €22).

The tourist office also has brochures and maps describing various easy hikes in the Kuhmo region. See below for the UKK hiking route.

There are bears in the Kuhmo region, and **Wild Brown Bear** (☎ 040-546 9008; www.wildbrownbear.fi) runs excursions to watch them (if you are lucky).

Bicycles can be hired from **Kesport** (Kainuuntie 85) on the kauppatori for €10 a day or €45 for a week.

Festivals & Events

The **Kuhmo Chamber Music Festival** (☎ 652 0936; www.kuhmofestival.fi; Torikatu 39), held over two weeks in late July each year, attracts top musicians from around the world. It's

been going since 1969 and more than 200 musicians participate in over 100 concerts each year. Most of the concerts are held at Kuhmo-Talo (Kuhmo Arts Centre), a spacious, modern concert hall. Tickets are €10 to €25, with most costing around €15. There are also a few free concerts every day. For advance bookings contact the Kuhmo tourist office or the festival office.

Sleeping

Most places charge a premium during the Chamber Music Festival (mid-July) and you'll need to book well ahead for a bed then anyway. There are other options in town at that period, and the tourist office can help find a bed.

Hotel Kalevala (☎ 655 4100; www.hotellikalevala.fi; Väinämöinen 9; s/d €77/105, Sat, Sun & summer €66/79; ☎ ☒ ☒) About 4km east of the centre, near the Kalevala theme park, this is Kuhmo's top hotel – a modern, upmarket place in a lakeside location. It handles most rental services, including canoes, and can arrange tailored trips; fishing, hiking, snowmobiling, skiing, canoeing, and so on. There's a gym, sunbeds and a swimming pool.

Kalevala Camping (☎ 6155 5295; fax 655 6384; tent sites €11, 2-/4-person cabins from €26/34; ☎ Jun-Aug), on the lake near the theme park, has good facilities including a smoke sauna and boats. There are several different cabin options, some with their own shower, and a simple dormitory building (up to six people €20).

TREKKING THE UKK

Pockets of the now-rare Finnish wilderness still exist – in pristine condition – along the eastern border of Finland. They are best seen and experienced on a trek along the Urho K Kekkonen (UKK) route. This 240km trail is the nation's longest and greatest trekking route. It was named after President Urho K Kekkonen, and it has been in development for decades, with new shelters and boardwalks regularly being constructed.

The trail starts a long way south at Koli Hill in North Karelia and continues along the western side of Lake Pielinen, ending at Iso-Syöte Hill far to the north of Kuhmo.

However, two of the finest sections of the UKK route are easily accessible from Kuhmo: the Kuhmo to Hiidenportti leg and the Kuhmo to Lentiira leg. The trek east from Kuhmo to Lentiira village via Iso-Palonen park takes at least four days and offers superb scenery.

The trail is well maintained in the Kuhmo area, with clear markings, and *laavu* (simple shelters) are spaced every 10km to 20km. Each *laavu* is near water and has an established campfire place, firewood and a pit toilet. Carry a sleeping bag and *plenty* of mosquito repellent to take advantage of this free open-air accommodation.

Pick up route maps at the Kuhmo tourist office or the **Kainuu Nature Centre** (☎ 877 6380; kaapalinn@metasa.fi), also in Kuhmo.

Other options:

Hotel Kainuu (☎ 655 1711; www.hotellikainuu.com; Kainuuntie 84; s/d €57/74, weekends €51/67; ☎ ☒ ☒) Pleasant family-run hotel in the town centre, near the tourist office.

Kuhmo Matkakoti (☎ /fax 655 0271, Vienantie 3; s/d/tr €25/44/60; ☎ ☒ ☒) This is a friendly, good-value guesthouse near the town centre.

Youth hostel (☎ 6155 5369; dm/s/d €12/26/30; ☎ Jul) A simple accommodation choice that's available during the Chamber Music Festival.

Eating

Try a *rönttönen* in the kauppatori; this is a curious open pastry filled with potato and lingonberry.

Hotel Kalevala (☎ 655 4100; mains €13-23; ☎ lunch & dinner) The best restaurant around is out at this hotel, where the à la carte menu features Finnish, Lappish and international dishes.

Ristorante Pizz-Burger (☎ 652 0144; Kainuuntie 84; mains €7-15; ☎ 10am-9pm) Despite the name (get it?), this restaurant actually serves quite a bit more than just pizza (€7 to €9) and the like. There are also decent portions of trout or steak available, as well as pasta and salad. There's a filling lunchtime buffet (10am to 2pm), booth seating and a small terrace.

Neljä Kaisaa (☎ 652 1573; Koulukatu 3; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Around the corner from the tourist office is a pleasant café with a range of lunch specials.

There are also good cafés at the Kuhmo-Talo and Pohjola House at the Kalevala Village.

Getting There & Away

A taxi minibus runs from Kajaani airport to the town of Kuhmo after the arrival of each flight, and there is also a regular service the other way (€27, 1½ hours).

There are numerous daily buses to/from Kajaani (€15.20, 1½ hours), where you can get connections to other towns west and south and less frequent direct buses to Joensuu (€27.10, four hours). For Nurmes, change at Sotkamo. Trains arriving in Kajaani (102km to the west) connect with buses to Kuhmo.

There are buses east on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to the Russian Karelian town of Kostamus run by **Turistiliikenne Kyllönen** (☎ 652 0771).

HOSSA

☎ 08

Hossa, dubbed the 'fisher's paradise', is one of the most carefully maintained fishing areas in Finland. Trekking is also excellent – it's designated as a National Hiking Area – and some of the paths take you to beautiful ridges between lakes. It's very remote, near the Russian border 170km north of Kuhmo and 70km south of Kuusamo.

To visit Hossa you will need to plan in advance where to stay and where to purchase fishing permits. See p51 for more information on permits.

Hossa visitor centre (☎ 0205-646 041; Jatkonsalmentie 6; ☎ 10am-5pm mid-Feb-May, Sep & Oct, 9am-10pm Jun-Aug) on Lake Ollori provides everything for a successful stay. It rents cottages, boats, hiking and fishing gear, sells fishing permits and hiking maps and has a café/restaurant and lakeside sauna. In winter the centre rents out cross-country skis as well.

On the road south from the information centre, **Hossan Lomakeskus** (☎ 732 322; d from €60; ☎ ☒ ☒) is a large hotel with double rooms and many kinds of cottages at the waterfront. Buffet lunch is available.

There are daily buses to Hossa from Kuusamo. You can reach Hossa from Kajaani by changing buses at Ämmänsaari; these buses run only on weekdays.

KOILLISMAA REGION

KUUSAMO

☎ 08 / pop 17,193

Kuusamo is a spread-out frontier town about 200km northeast of Oulu and similar in feel to the towns of Lapland, with reindeer roaming the roads in this area. There is little to see in the town itself, but it's perfectly situated as a base for planning and launching treks or canoeing trips into the surrounding area and it's close to one of Finland's most popular ski resorts. There are good services, including shops with trekking supplies, and many agencies running all manner of activities and tours.

A Lutheran parish for over 300 years, Kuusamo was incorporated as a municipality in 1868. By 1900, its population had grown to 10,000, and it had close relations with nearby Russia. During WWII, the village was a command centre for German troops, who also

supervised the construction of the 'Death Railway' that operated for 242 days. When the Soviet army marched into Kuusamo on 15 September 1944, the Germans burned the town and blew up the railway. The Soviets retreated, after occupying Kuusamo for about two months, and the inhabitants of Kuusamo returned to their shattered town.

Information

Karhuntassa Tourist Centre (☎ 850 2910; www.kuusamo.fi; Torangintaival 2; ☹ 9am-5pm Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-8pm Midsummer-early Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep-May) In the Karhuntassa (Bear's Paw) Tourist Centre on road 5 (the main highway), 2km southwest of the town centre. Excellent information and free Internet terminals. There's also a nature centre here (reduced hours).

Nettilähde (Kitkantie 42; ☹ 11.30am-6pm Mon-Fri) Free Internet access at the local sports centre.

Public library (☎ 850 6031; Kaiterantie 22; ☹ noon-8pm Mon, Wed & Thu, 10am-8pm Tue, 10am-2pm Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Has free Internet access.

Sights

About 500m southeast of the town centre is **Porkkatörmä** (☎ 850 6027; Kitronintie 6; admission free; ☹ noon-6pm mid-Jun-mid-Aug, 9am-3pm Mon-Fri mid-late Aug), the local open-air museum, which brings together a selection of venerable farm buildings from the Kuusamo region. It's not as interesting as some of these museums can be.

The modern **water tower** (Joukamontie 32; ☹ 10am-6pm Tue-Sat Jun-Aug) has an observation platform with a good view, as well as a café. On the other side of the bus terminal, **Kuusamotalo** (☎ 850 6550; Kaarlo Hännisentie 2) is a concert hall and cultural centre – the pride of Kuusamo. Check with the tourist office or call direct for coming performances and exhibitions. The building is a sleek, elegant, Finnish creation designed by Arto Sipinen.

There are quite a few craft shops and studios in Kuusamo, which means you can pick up some good buys. **Bjarmia** (☎ 853 869; Vienantie 1) is a ceramics factory and studio right in the centre. There's a ceramics and textiles 'museum' here (€2) or you can just visit the shop and café.

Kuusamon Uistin (☎ 860 3400), north of the centre on main road 5 to Ruka, sells beautifully crafted fishing lures and sheath knives from its factory. Some of these products are exported throughout the world under the brand name Kuusamo.

Activities & Tours

See p288 for the Karhunkierros trekking route, and p290 for information on canoeing in the Kuusamo area. There are a dozen or more independent tour operators based in the Kuusamo area, offering activities as diverse as ice climbing, river rafting, mountain biking, ice fishing, snowshoe hiking and more. If you're travelling alone or in a small group, it's worth checking with the bigger agencies as they often round up individuals for trips that require a larger group.

Ruka Palvelu (☎ 860 8600; www.rukapalvelu.fi; Rukatunturintie 18, Ruka) has canoeing, whitewater rafting, quad bikes, fishing courses and bird watching. There are regular weekly programs during summer.

On the main highway at the Ruka turnoff is **Stella Polaris** (☎ 852 3122; www.stellapolaris.net; Rukanriutta 11, Ruka). It offers rafting, fishing, walking, climbing, canoeing.

There's also **Green Line Safaris** (☎ 852 3041; www.greenlinesafaris.fi; Kitkantie 38-40, Kuusamo).

Sleeping

There are numerous holiday cottages in the Kuusamo area. Contact the tourist office, or **FinFun** (☎ 0203 70021; www.finfun.fi; Huoparintie 1, Kuusamo), who have a portfolio of hundreds.

Hotelli Kuusanka (☎ 852 2240; hotellikuusanka.kuusamo.co.inet.fi; Ouluntie 2; s/d €52/68; P ☹ ☹) This is a small, friendly, family-run hotel that makes a pleasant place to stop. It's on the main street but there's off-street parking and a good breakfast included. There's also a gym and sauna. The twin rooms are pretty small, but nicely furnished, and there are spacious family rooms available.

Sokos Hotel Kuusamo (☎ 020-1234 693; www.sokoshotels.fi; Kirkkotie 23; s/d Mon-Fri €98/123, weekends & summer r €90; P ☹ ☹ ☹) Close to the centre, this is a long, low, box-like structure topped by a glowing *kota* (Lappish hut). It has good facilities, including free use of the pool and sauna, and is family-friendly. At the back is parkland running down to the lake.

Holiday Club Kuusamon Tropiikki (☎ 859 6000; www.holidayclub.fi; Kylvyläntie; s/d €107/127, summer €68/89; P ☹ ☹) Some 6km north of Kuusamo is a modern hotel and spa complex in a forest setting. Rooms are plain but comfortable (apartments are also available) and you get full use of the spa, sauna, pool and other services (the spa is a plastic tropical wonder-



land with a 45m water slide). Nonguests can use the spa for a modest fee. There are excellent family rates available in summer.

Rantatropiikki Camping (☎ 859 6404; www.holidayclub.fi; Kylvyläntie; tent sites €9; ☹) This camping ground is 6km north of the centre, and is associated with the Holiday Club, you can take advantage of the spa and pool facilities as well as the restaurant and bar. There are also stylish cottages (2-/4-/8-person €86/124/218) with the works. There are several other camp sites in the Kuusamo area.

Kuusamon Kansanopisto (☎ 852 2132; kuusamon.kansanopisto@koillismaa.fi; Kitkantie 35; dm from €10-12, s/d €18/30, with bathroom €30/40; ☹) Midsummer-Aug, reception 8am-3.45pm Mon-Fri; P ☹ ☹) Close to the centre is a rambling summer HI hostel with

INFORMATION

Finfun.....	1	A4
Karhuntassa Tourist Centre.....	2	A4
Nettilähde.....	3	B3
Post office.....	4	B4
Public library.....	5	A3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Bjarmia Ceramics Factory & Café.....	6	B4
Green Line Safaris.....	7	B3
Kuusamon Uistin.....	8	A1
Kuusamotalo Concert Hall.....	9	A3
Porkkatörmä.....	10	B4
Water tower & Torni Café.....	11	A3

SLEEPING

Holiday Club Kuusamon Tropiikki.....	12	A1
Hotel Kuusanka.....	13	B4
Kuusamon Kansanopisto.....	14	B3
Rantatropiikki Camping.....	15	A1
Sokos Hotel Kuusamo.....	16	B4

EATING

Ampan Pizza Bar.....	17	B3
Baari Martai.....	18	A4
Herkkusuu.....	19	B4
Martina.....	20	B4
Supermarkets.....	21	A4
Tori Grilli.....	(see 19)	

DRINKING

Kuukettu.....	22	B4
Parnell's Irish Bar.....	(see 20)	

TRANSPORT

Bus Station.....	23	A3
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a range of rooms. There is a kitchen and a satellite TV in the common room, as well as sauna and laundry facilities. Inconveniently, you must book ahead, and collect the key during reception opening hours.

Eating

Martina (☎ 852 2051; Ouluntie 3; meals €8-22; ☹ lunch & dinner) This is one of those Finnish family restaurants that has a go at everything – pasta, steaks, fish and a salad buffet. It's a comfortable and accommodating place for an informal dinner.

Baari Martai (☎ 851 4199; Airotie; lunch €6-8; ☹ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) This place is in an unattractive industrial area between the town centre and the tourist office, but it's a well-known workers' lunch spot, serving up an excellent spread on weekdays in summer.

Herkkusuu (Ouluntie 1; ☹ 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-3pm Sat) This early-opening café next to the kaupatori bakes excellent bread and pastries.

Ampan Pizza Bar (☎ 853 502; Kitkantie 18; pizzas €6-10; ☹ 11am-10pm) This is popular for its reasonably priced pizzas. Don't expect

any culinary masterpieces; Kuusamo ain't a gourmet town!

Bjarmia (Vienantie 1) This is a quaint little coffee shop above the ceramics factory of the same name.

Kuiske Café at the top of the water tower serves coffee, cakes and light meals with a view. Tori Grilli on the kauppatori is open past midnight.

Adjacent to the tourist office are several giant supermarkets where you can stock up on trekking supplies; there's another (open on Sundays) in the Sokos Centre next to the kauppatori.

Drinking & Entertainment

Parnell's Irish Bar (☎ 852 2051; Ouluntie 5; ☎ 6pm-midnight Sun-Thu, 6pm-2am Fri & Sat) *The* top pub in town, with international brews on tap.

Sokos Hotel Kuusamo (☎ 85920; Kirkkotie 23) This place has a good à la carte restaurant, as well as a nightclub.

Kuukettu (Kitkantie 1; ☎ 6pm-4am Wed-Sat, 6pm-midnight Sun) If you're up for a party, this place kicks on late and has the liveliest dance floor in town. There's a happy hour between 11pm and midnight from Wed to Sat.

Getting There & Away

Finnair flies daily from Helsinki to Kuusamo airport, which is 7km northeast of the town centre. Buses meet incoming flights (€3 to Kuusamo, €5 to Ruka) during the ski season. Local taxis can be called on ☎ 852 2290.

Buses run daily from Kajaani (€34.70, four hours), Oulu (€30.10, three hours) and Rovaniemi (€25.40, three hours). There are frequent services to the ski centre at Ruka (€5, 30 minutes). In summer (early June to mid-August) an excursion bus travels between the Karhuntassu tourist office in Kuusamo and the Oulanka Visitor Centre (€9.30, 1½ hours), stopping at the Kuusamo bus terminal, Tropiikki spa centre, Ruka and Juuma village. It departs at 8.45am from Monday to Friday, and 1.50pm Saturday. At the Juuma road junction (Käylä) you can change buses to get to Ristikallio, Hautajärvi visitor centre and Salla.

RUKA

☎ 08

Finland's major ski resort, Ruka, is just 30km north of Kuusamo, in a beautiful protected nature area, with abundant wildlife. The

centre freezes during the winter, but has plenty to offer in summer, with enough services open and people about that it doesn't feel spooky. There are good deals on accommodation, from single-night stays to longer rentals. The resort itself has the usual ensemble of ugly buildings, but there are some great views westwards over the forest.

Ruka makes a good place to start or finish the Karhunkierros trek because there are good bus connections from Kuusamo. **Valtavaara hill**, adjacent to the Ruka ski slope, is the best place in the region for bird-watching: around 100 species of birds nest here, and an annual **bird-watching competition** is held in the area in June.

Information

The turnoff to Ruka is 26km north of Kuusamo. Two kilometres down this road, you can turn right to the small centre of Itä Ruka (another 3km), or continue up the hill to the main centre of the resort. This is where most of the facilities are. The Kuusamo tourist office can also provide information on Ruka activities and accommodation.

Rukakeskus (☎ 860 0200; www.ruka.fi) is the main information centre at the ski resort. It's in the Rukaklubi building in the main village parking area. In the same area there are ski rental shops, lift ticket outlets, postal services, a supermarket and accommodation booking services.

Skiing

There are 28 downhill ski slopes and 18 lifts on **Ruka fell** (www.ruka.fi). The vertical drop is 201m and the longest run is 1300m – not bad averages at all for Finland, where hills are small and slope gently. Ruka also boasts cross-country trails totalling 250km. There are special areas for snowboarders.

The ski season runs from early November to mid-May, depending on snowfalls. During holiday periods such as Christmas, February and Easter, it seems that almost the entire population of Finland can be seen on Ruka's slopes.

A single ride up on the ski lift costs €4.50, a day/week pass is €30/140. Rates are slightly lower in the shoulder seasons. Alpine skis, including poles and boots, rent for €26.50/112.50 for one/seven days; snowboards for €31/112.50. Ski lessons are available in all disciplines.

Tours

See p284 for details of tour operators in the Kuusamo area.

Sleeping

Ruka is a very busy winter sports centre, and in season it may be difficult to find a bed, especially at reasonable prices. Book accommodation in advance, or stay in Kuusamo. In summer, rooms can be good value, though some of the village services close down completely.

There are numerous apartments available in Ruka itself, and cottages in the surrounding area. These offer great value in summer. Contact the Karhuntassa Tourist Centre (p284) or the FinFun agency (☎ 0203 70021; www.finfun.fi; Huoparintie 1, Kuusamo). For apartments and chalets also try **Ruka-ko** (☎ 866 0088; www.ruka-ko.fi; Postitsoari) at the resort. You can make online accommodation bookings for cabins on www.ruka.fi.

Rukan Omena (☎ 020-390000; www.omena.com; 1-4-person r €55, May-Aug €45; (P) ☎) The first of the Omenahotelli chain, offering good-value accommodation at Itä Ruka. The small, self-contained apartments have four beds at a flat rate. Reservations should be made over the Internet; there's also a reservation machine in the lobby, accessed via credit card.

Hotel Rantasipi Rukahovi (☎ 85910; www.rantasipi.fi; s/d €112/140, high season €135/164, all r €74-79 May-Aug; (P) ☎) At the foot of the Ruka West ski slopes is the largest hotel in Ruka. It has three parts: an old wing, the new wing (built in 2001) and apartments, along with a couple of restaurants, bars, nightclubs and karaoke – in many ways it's the thumping heart of the resort.

Willis's West (☎ 868 1712; www.williswest.com; Rukanriutta 13; s/d/tr €29/39/49; (P) ☎) At the Ruka turnoff on the main road is this friendly motel-style set-up offering excellent value. The rooms are small apartments sleeping up to five, and have spacious bathroom and a small, equipped kitchen. There's not a lot of privacy, but it's a steal at the price. The owner will take groups of walkers to the Karhunkierros trailheads free of charge.

Klubi Apartments (☎ 860 0200; www.ruka.fi; 2-/4-/6-person apt Sep & winter €87/125/199, summer €64/98/148; (P) ☎) These apartments on the main square in Ruka are excellent value in summer. They are very new, with full kitchen, sauna and laundry; just the thing after a heavy trek!

Royal Hotel Ruka (☎ 868 6000; www.royalruka.fi; d €122, r Aug-Oct €90; ☎ Aug-Apr; (P) ☎) Down at the foot of the fell at the turn-off to Rukajärvi is a well-appointed hotel that looks somewhat like a children's fort to be populated with toy soldiers. It has a restaurant, and breakfast and sauna included. It's closed in early summer; if you are arriving in August you should call ahead to book.

Viipus Camping (☎ 868 1213; Kemijärventie; camp sites €10, 2-4-person cabins €25-54; ☎ Jun-mid-Sep) This is a very small rustic camping ground at Viipusjärvi, several kilometres north of Ruka. It's a good spot in summer, with camp sites, a few cabins, a shop, sauna and boats for hire.

There are places for caravans in Itä Ruka, with power points and toilets. It's run by **Rukakeskus** (☎ 860 0200; ☎ May-Sep).

Eating & Drinking

Riipisen Riistakauppa (☎ 868 1219; mains €14-36; ☎ noon-9pm Mon-Sat) At the Kelo ski-lift area, this is a meat-lover's dream and a classic restaurant – popular with Finnish celebrities in winter. It's speciality is pricey game dishes, including sautéed wild boar, reindeer pepper steak, and hare or woodgrouse stew.

Pizzeria Ruka (☎ 868 1445; pizzas €8-10; ☎ 11am-11pm) Nearby, this is the place for Italian-style pizzas in a family-friendly atmosphere. There are attractive special offers for the younger generation.

Piste (☎ 860 0360; mains €10-22; ☎ 10am-midnight) This cavernous wooden hall on the Ruka square has several attractive dining areas and good service. There's a pleasing range of dishes, all generously portioned, and ranging from burgers and fried fish to weightier mixed grills. The house snails are good as a starter.

Zone (☎ 860 8600; ☎ noon-4am) On the main square in the Safaritalo building, this is the liveliest nightlife spot. It's open year-round, and has karaoke, live music, a great terrace and other *après-hike-or-ski* delights.

Getting There & Away

Ruka is 30km north of Kuusamo on main road 5. Most regular bus services to Kuusamo continue further north to Ruka. During ski season (early November to early May) a skibus shuttles between Kuusamo and Ruka, stopping at all of the big hotels. In summer there's an excursion bus (see opposite for details).

KARHUNKIERROS TREK & OULANKA NATIONAL PARK

The 80km Karhunkierros (Bear's Ring), one of the oldest and best-established trekking routes in Finland, offers up some of the country's most breathtaking scenery. It is extremely popular during the *ruska* (autumn colours) period, but it can be walked practically anytime between late May and October.

Despite the name, it's not a circuit, rather a point-to-point walk. Because the trail runs through some isolated areas within Oulanka National Park, getting there – or at least to and from the trailheads – will require some strategic planning. There are four possible starting points: the northern access point is from Hautajärvi visitor centre on the road to Salla; further south on road 950 is the Ristikallio parking area where there's another starting point; in the south you can start the walk at Ruka ski resort; or further northeast at Juuma village. The best section of the trail runs from Ristikallio to Juuma. Also at Juuma there's a short but demanding marked loop trail, the 12km Little Bear's Ring (p291).

Most people choose to walk north to south; cars and luggage can be more easily left at Ruka, and there are plenty of hotels and bars to rest weary legs on arrival.

Information

The 1:50,000 *Rukatunturi-Oulanka* map is useful for treks of any length. The new edition costs €18 and is sold at both of the park's visitor centres and at the Kuusamo tourist office. That said, the trail is so well signposted that you can easily make do with the free map.

Hautajärvi visitor centre (☎ 020-564 6870; hautajarvi@metsa.fi; 🕒 9am-6pm Jun-mid-Aug, shorter hr mid-Aug-May) This helpful office is at the northern trailhead, right on the Arctic Circle on the Kuusamo to Salla road a kilometre north of Hautajärvi village. There's a café and wildlife exhibition here.

Oulanka visitor centre (☎ 020-564 6850; oulanka@metsa.fi; 🕒 10am-8pm Jun-mid-Aug, shorter hr Apr-May & mid-Aug-Oct) The other tourist office, at Kiutaköngäs Rapids in the middle of Oulanka National Park, is accessible by car or by bus along a partly sealed road from Käylä on road 950. The centre has nature exhibits and a slide show, and sells trekking supplies, maps and fishing licences. There's also a café, and easy walking trails take you along the Oulankajoki to the rapids.

Trekking

The track is well marked. If you're just on a day trip, you could do it in light shoes on dry summer days, but for the full route, you'll need proper hiking boots, particularly for the Juuma to Ruka section. Prior to mid-June the ground is too soggy to make hiking enjoyable. Even if you don't intend to walk the whole route, if you have a vehicle it's possible to do relatively short return treks from parking areas. A day walk can take you from Ristikallio to Oulanka Canyon, for example. It's also possible to drive to within 1km of Oulanka Canyon along a signposted dirt road about 12km north of Ristikallio.

DAY ONE

Start your trek at the parking area at the Ristikallio parking area. After 15 minutes you will reach the national park border. You can stop at a camp site at Aventojoiki or proceed further to Ristikallio, which offers some breathtaking scenery. Proceed less than one hour further to reach Puikkokämpä hut at a small lake. Continue another kilometre and a bit past the lake to reach Taivalköngäs (near the wilderness hut of the same name), with two sets of rapids and three suspension bridges.

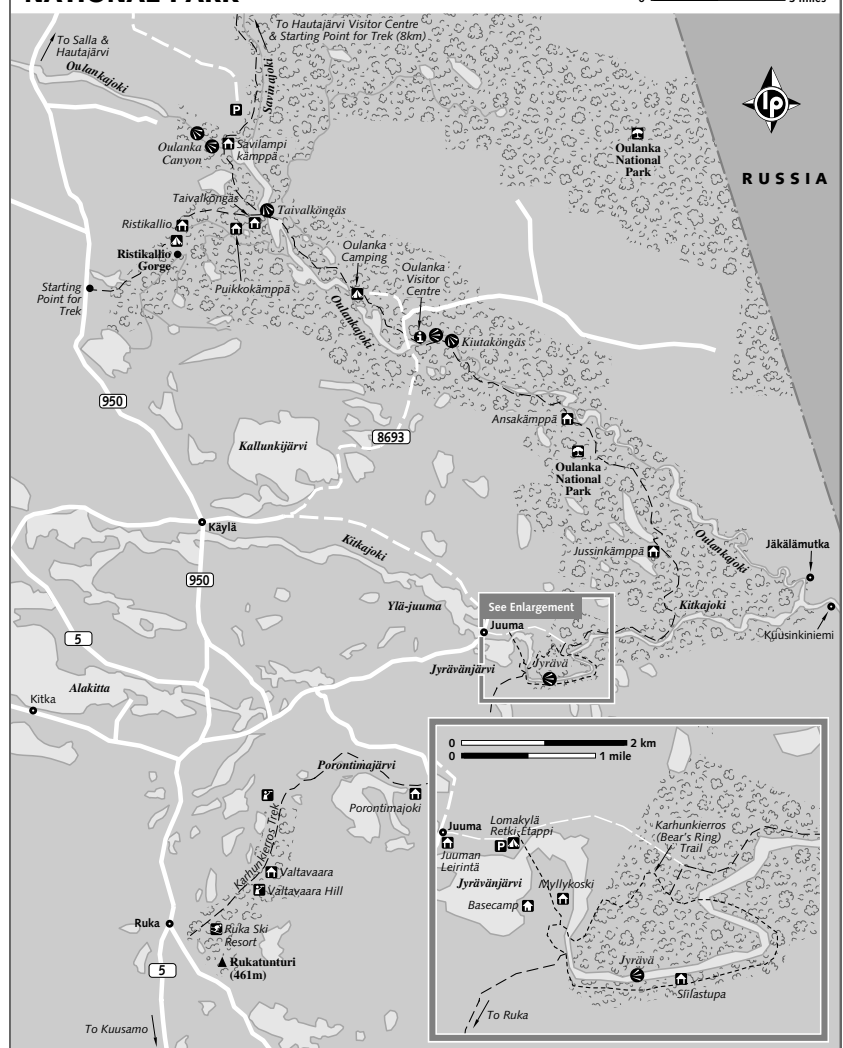
Northern extension

If you really enjoy hiking, begin your trek further north at the Hautajärvi visitor centre – this adds an extra 22km to the hike. The landscape is unimpressive until the path reaches the Savinajoki. The deep Oulanka Canyon is a highlight of this part of the trek. A wilderness hut, Savilampi kämpppä, is at the Oulanka riverfront near Lake Savilampi, 18km south of Hautajärvi. The distance from Lake Savilampi to Taivalköngäs – where you'll join the Ristikallio trail – is 4km.

DAY TWO

The first leg is an 8km trek from Taivalköngäs through some ordinary scenery although there are a few beautiful lakes. After 4.2km, you can camp at Lake Runsulampi; there's dry wood available. About 4km further east, you can stay overnight at Oulanka Camping, or continue to the Oulanka visitor centre. The Kiutaköngäs, just 800m from the visitor centre, are noted for the rugged cliffs nearby. It's possible to reach Ansakämpä cabin by early evening

KARHUNKIERROS TREK & OULANKA NATIONAL PARK



from here, or even Jussinkämpä wilderness hut on Kulmakkajärvi.

DAY THREE

This is tougher than the preceding days. A hike through ridges and forests (and boardwalks across wetlands) takes you to the Kitkajoki in another deep gorge. After

following the river, you can choose between several routes, either walking directly to Juuma or crossing the river at Myllykoski to see the mighty Jyrävä waterfall (3km from Juuma) that has an elevation of 12m. There's the Siilastupa hut at Jyrävä, and Basecamp lodge on the trail just outside Juuma.

Ruka extension

Juuma is a convenient end to the trek, but you can also walk 24km further to Ruka, which has an great choice of accommodation and better road connections to Kuusamo. This is much more strenuous than the previous three days, with many ascents and descents. There is one wilderness hut, Porontimajoki (often full), and several lean-to shelters.

Sleeping

WILDERNESS HUTS

There is a good network of wilderness huts along the Karhunkierros route. They are all pretty similar and tend to be crowded in the high season. Although the theory goes that there's always room for the last to arrive, it's handy to have a tent, as someone often ends up sleeping outside. Dry firewood is generally available, but you'll need to carry a light-weight mattress for sleeping. From north to south, your options are as follows:

Ristikallio 5km east of the main road, has a nice lakeside location. It accommodates 10 people and has dry firewood.

Puikkokämpä 2.5km further east, is a basic lakeside hut that sleeps 10 people.

Taivalköngäs 1.3km further east, accommodates 15 people on two floors. You can cook on the gas stove or at the campfire.

Ansakämpä 8.5km east from the visitor centre, accommodates at least 10 people.

Jussinkämpä 9km further on, sleeps 20 people.

Myllykoski 2km from Juuma, is an old mill building with few facilities but it accommodates at least 10 people. The mill is in working condition; there are sometimes demonstrations; but the stream can make for noisy sleeping.

Siilastupa 4km from Juuma just opposite the Jyrävä waterfall, sleeps 12 people. Often full.

Porontimajoki – 8km south of Juuma, accommodates four people. This is a popular last- or first-night stop, and is often full.

CAMPING

Oulanka Camping (☎ 020-564 6855; abctt1@surfeu.fi; Liikasenvaarentie 137; tent sites €10, 4-person cabins €37; ☽ Jun-Aug) The Bear's Trail runs right through this place, 500m from the park visitor centre. It rents out canoes and rowing boats, and has a café and sauna.

There are a few camping grounds in Juuma; see opposite.

LODGE

Basecamp Oulanka (☎ 0400 509 741; www.basecampoulanka.fi; Jyräväntie 15; s/d €79/98, low season €50/70;

☎ ☒) This new wilderness lodge is just the place to rest your weary legs. It's about a kilometre from Juuma, and right on the trail itself near Myllykoski (but 4.5km by car). The snug rustic rooms smell of new pine, have a roof-space that can sleep extra bodies, and a charming balcony looking over the forest. There's a convivial bar and restaurant (lunch always on, dinner by arrangement), a sauna and even a Jacuzzi. The friendly staff organize all sorts of daily activities; rafting, fishing, husky rides and snowshoe walking among others. Off season, it's worth asking if any discounted rates are available.

Getting There & Away

There are one to three buses daily (except Sunday) along the main road between Salla and Kuusamo, departing from either town and stopping at both the Ristikallio starting point and the Hautajärvi visitor centre. In summer there is an excursion bus Monday to Saturday from Kuusamo to the Oulanka visitor centre, Oulanka Camping and Kiutaköngäs. It also goes to Juuma – see p286 for details. In winter, take the daily school bus. A **taxi** (☎ 868 1222) from Ruka can be a good option if shared between three or four people; it costs €30 to Juuma, and about €55 to Hautajärvi.

PADDLING THE KITKAJOKI

The rugged Kitkajoki offers some of the most challenging canoeing and kayaking in Finland. There are plenty of tricky rapids, including the class IV, 900m Aalokkokeski.

The village of **Käylä**, on the Kuusamo to Salla road, is a starting point for whitewater rafting along the Kitkajoki. There is a shop, a fuel station and a post office. You can also start the trip from Juuma, where it's about a 20km trip to the exit point near the Russian border. You can do this trip as an organized whitewater adventure, or hire canoes or kayaks from the operators, who will also arrange transport at either end. Most of the operators are based in Kuusamo or Ruka (p284). **Kitkan Safarit** (☎ 0400 280 569; www.kitkan safarit.fi; Juumantie 134) in Juuma also arranges trips.

Käylä to Juuma

The first 14km leg of the journey is definitely the easier of the two, suitable for families with children, and does not involve any carrying at all. You start at the Käylänkoski, and

continue 3km to the easy Kiehtäjänniva, and a further kilometre to the Vähä-Käylänkoski. These are both class I rapids. After a bit more than 1km, there are three class II rapids spaced every 400m or so. A kilometre further, there's the trickiest one, the class III Harjakoski, which is 300m long. The rest of the journey, almost 7km, is mostly lakes. The road bridge between the lakes Ylä and Ala-Juumajärvi marks the end of the trip. It is 1km to Juuma from the bridge.

Juuma to the Russian Border

This 20km journey is the most dangerous river route in Finland. You should be an expert paddler, and you *must* carry your canoe at least once – around the 12m, class VI Jyrävä waterfall. Inspect the tricky rapids before you let go and ask for local advice in case the water level is unfavourable. There's a minimum age of 18 to canoe this route.

The thrill starts just 300m after Juuma, with the class II Niskakoski. From here on, there is only 1km of quiet water. Myllykoski, with a water-mill, is a tricky class IV waterfall. Right after Myllykoski, the 900m Aalokkokeski Rapids mean quick paddling for quite some time. The Jyrävä waterfall comes right after this long section. Pull aside before Jyrävä, and carry your canoe. You might want to carry it from Myllykoski to well beyond the Jyrävä waterfall, skipping the Aalokkokeski Rapids.

After Jyrävä things cool down considerably, although there are some class III rapids. After about 6km, there is a wilderness hut, the Päähkänäkallio. When you meet the Oulankajoki, 7km downriver from the hut, paddle upriver to Jäkälämütka or downriver to Kuusinkiniemi, 100m from the Russian border. At either spot you can access a 4WD forest road that will take you back to civilization. You must arrange return transport from this point in advance, as traffic is nonexistent.

PADDLING THE OULANKAJOKI

Equally impressive, and demanding, among the great Kuusamo river routes, the Oulankajoki gives you a chance to see mighty canyons from a canoe or kayak. You *must* carry your canoe at least four times – past parts of the Oulanka Canyon, and waterfalls at Taivalköngäs and Kiutaköngäs. Study a river map before starting out.

The first leg, an 18km trip, starts from road 5, north of Ristikallio. The first 7km or so is relatively calm paddling, until you reach the impressive Oulanka Canyon. The safe section extends for about 1km, after which you should pull aside and carry your canoe past the dangerous rapids. You can overnight at Savilampi hut.

Some 3km after Savilampi are the Taivalköngäs. You'll need to carry your canoe, and there's a hut here too. The next 6km are quiet until Kiutaköngäs, where you'll need to carry your canoe. The park visitor centre and camping sites are nearby.

The second leg of the journey, a full 20km long, starts on the other side of Kiutaköngäs. You pass through 500m of quiet waters, then there's another waterfall, and it's carrying-time again!

On the final leg, the river becomes smooth and there is little to worry about as far as rapids go. This leg is suitable for families with children.

JUUMA

☎ 08

The village of Juuma is a popular base for treks along the Karhunkierros route. It's a convenient place to stock up on supplies, has several accommodation options, and there's daily transport from Kuusamo.

If you have a little time for trekking, take the **Little Bear's Ring**, a 12km loop trail, to Myllykoski Rapids and Jyrävänjärvi. The trail (leaving from by the Lomakylä café) crosses varying terrain, and has several interesting sights, including the 12m Jyrävä waterfall. The walk can be done in five to six hours and takes in some of the best of the entire Bear's Ring. There are two wilderness huts on this trail – Myllykoski and Siilastupa (see opposite) – and a couple of swing bridges. It's well signposted, and fairly busy.

Kitkan Safarit (☎ 0400 280 569; www.kitkan safarit.fi; Juumantie 134), near the car park, arranges whitewater rafting along the Kitkajoki and Oulankajoki, and rents out canoes and kayaks. A short 'family' paddle costs €25 per person, the two-hour 'wild route' is €50, the four-hour complete route is €70, and canoeing on the Oulankajoki is €40.

Sleeping & Eating

There are several accommodation choices in Juuma from June to August, and some

places stay open throughout September. The best accommodation and eating option is the Basecamp lodge (see p290). Cottages can be rented year-round; contact the Kuusamo tourist office or the FinFun (☎ 0203 70021; www.finfun.fi; Huoparintie 1, Kuusamo) agency.

Lomakylä Retki-Etappi (☎ 863 218; Juumantie 134; tent sites €10, 4-person cabins €25; ☔ Jun-Sep) This place, on the Karhunkierros trail and at the start of the Little Bear's Ring, is the most convenient place to stay. The café serves snacks and meals. It also has a sauna and rents out rowing boats and bicycles.

Juuman Leirintä (☎ 863 212; Riekamontie 1; tent sites €8, cabins €22, cottages €60) This place has a lakeside location, a sauna, laundry and a café-restaurant that's open until 9pm. It's just north of the centre of Juuma, on the Käylä road.

Getting There & Away

In summer, the **excursion bus** (☎ 851 1052; www.pohjolanturistiauto.fi) makes the 50km trip from Kuusamo to Juuma, via Ruka, once daily (except Sunday). A **taxi** (☎ 868 1222) from Ruka to Juuma costs €30 for up to four people, from Kuusamo to Juuma €50.

ISO-SYÖTE & PIKKU-SYÖTE

☎ 08

Just two decades ago, Syöte, the southernmost fell in Finland, was covered by virgin forest. Not any more. Syöte's twin peaks, Iso-Syöte and Pikku-Syöte ('Big Syöte' and 'Little Syöte', respectively), are now dotted with ski lifts, ski tracks, hotels and restaurants. The proximity to Oulu, about two hours by car, makes this a popular winter ski destination.

In addition to its winter sports facilities, the Syöte area offers the visitor access to the National Park north and southwest of Iso-Syöte, with a network of walking tracks and wilderness huts.

Pudasjärven Matkailu Oy (☎ 823 400; fax 823 421, Varsitie 7; ☔ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri), in Pudasjärvi, is a travel agency that provides tourist information and assistance for the Syöte region. For

online accommodation bookings and detailed information go to **Syöte** (www.syote.net).

Activities

At Iso-Syöte, there are 21 downhill slopes and 11 lifts. The vertical drop is 192m and the longest run is 1200m. There are some 110km of cross-country trails, all clearly marked. You can rent skiing equipment and purchase lift passes at Romekievari station.

Relatively few trekkers take advantage of the excellent walking tracks and free wilderness huts around Syöte. The majority of trekkers use the Ahmatupa hut as a base, and do a loop around the northern part of the trekking area. Another route, indicated by yellow markings on trees, makes a loop around Iso-Syöte hill. Additionally, the UKK route crosses through Syöte; see p282.

Sleeping & Eating

Practically all accommodation in the Syöte region can and should be arranged through Pudasjärven Matkailu Oy. Daily, weekly and weekend rates are available and in summer the places that remain open offer bargain rates, from around €200 a week.

Hostel Syöte (☎ 838 172; www.syotekeskus.fi; dm €14) This is a five-bed HI Hostel and easily the cheapest accommodation in the region. It's in the village centre near Pikku-Syöte and has a café.

There are dozens of *kelo* (pine) log cabins on top of Syöte Hill, and the most luxurious are equipped with kitchenettes and TVs. In the spring high season (the weeks surrounding Easter), these cabins cost from €100/500 per night/week and accommodate six people.

There are three wilderness huts and several *kota* or *laavu* shelters around the Syöte area, all of which are free of charge.

Getting There & Away

There is a bus service from Oulu to Syöte (€18.60, 2½ hours) each weekday afternoon. The bus back to Oulu departs each weekday morning.

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