

Summer in the City:

Two Days in Helsinki

Helsinki is a sea-town par excellence, a harbour city with half its attention focused outwards to the Baltic. Much of the city seems to be water, and the tortured geography of the complex coastline includes any number of bays and inlets and a speckling of islands. In spring and summer the Finns emerge from the darkness, flocking to green spaces and outdoor tables to get a piece of blessed sun, whirring around on bicycles and kicking the city's nightlife into overdrive. Get out there and join them – now's the perfect time to visit.

SAUSAGES, ART & SELF-FLAGELLATION

Start the day with a strong coffee and breakfast on the terrace at **Café Esplanad** (Pohjoisesplanadi 33; www.esplanad.fi) on the esplanade (where else?) Once fully awake, head down to the harbour and the **kauppatori**. Although heavy with tourists, this famous market is still an important food market for locals and well worth visiting. Fish, seasonal fruit and berries, and *makkara* (sausages) are on sale at the produce stalls, and people sell direct from boats moored at the quay. There are also plenty of stalls selling local handicrafts and souvenirs at (sometimes) inflated prices. Nearby, the ornate indoor **kauppahalli** is a paradise of Finnish food stalls.

Just east of the kauppatori, **Katajanokka Island** is divided from the mainland by a narrow canal and is one of the city's most enjoyable places to stroll. It's a heaven of upmarket Jugendstil residential buildings with extravagant turrets and curious carvings galore. The north side is the more peaceful, with the Engel-designed Foreign Ministry looking out over the impressively functional fleet of icebreakers. At the western end of the island, the **Uspenski cathedral** looks over a

leisure harbour and a series of warehouses attractively converted into enticing restaurants and bars.

Have lunch on the beer terrace of the **Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art** (Mannerheiminaukio; www.kiasma.fi) before heading inside for a couple of hours. Set in a curvaceous chalk-white building designed by Steven Holl, Kiasma exhibits a rapidly growing collection of offbeat Finnish and international modern art from the 1960s to the present.

As the afternoon draws to a close, head north to the Kallo district and the venerable **Kotiharjun Sauna** (Harjutorinkatu 1). Fired by enormous wood furnaces this is a gloriously traditional place, with antique lockers and décor unchanged since it opened in 1928. Get yourself cleaned off by a sturdy old scrubbing-woman, spank yourself with a birch *vihta* and make yourself at home. Afterwards it's the custom to have a beer out on the street terrace – clad only in a towel of course.

For dinner, head back to Katajanokka Island and **Nokka** (Kanavaranta 7; www.royalravintolat.com; ☎ 687 7330). You'll spot it easily – look for a flaming torch and huge ship's propeller backing an unbeatable summer terrace. The food is high in class, and makes use of the finest Finnish food.

Spend the rest of the evening luxuriating on one of the city's many summer beer terraces. Helsinki's biggest terrace is along Mikonkatu, where hundreds of chairs and tables crowd the sidewalk in front of **Eatz, On the Rocks** and **Barfly**. For a totally different vibe, end the night at the **Arctic Icebar** (Yliopistonkatu 5). The bar is literally

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carved out of ice – tables, bar, the lot. You get lent a furry parka to survive the minus-5° temperatures inside.

ISLAND DREAMING

Have breakfast in the middle of Esplanad Park at **Kappeli** (www.ravintolakappeli.com) before heading down to the ferry terminal at the kauppatori. A mere 15-minute ferry ride away is the UNESCO-listed island group of **Suomenlinna** (www.suomenlinna.fi). The so-called ‘fortress of Finland’ was the site of a major event in Finnish history when it was seized by the Russians in 1808, and now contains a number of museums, mainly dealing with military history. The fields around Suomenlinna’s stone ramparts are a favourite picnicking spot for locals (stock up at the kauppatori if you wish to join them). If self-catering isn’t your thing, have a buffet lunch at brewery-restaurant **Suomenlinna Panimoravintola** near the main ferry quay. Three types of beer are brewed here and the enclosed courtyard terrace is a good place to enjoy one.

After lunch, head back to the city. Depending on your mood, you can spend the afternoon at the beach or at Helsinki’s outdoor museum. West of the centre **Hietaranta beach** is a likeable stretch of sand with those Finnish stalwarts – minigolf and a beer terrace – nearby. The nicest way to get here is to stroll from Mechelininkatu through the beautiful **Hietaniemi cemetery**.

West of the centre (take tram No 24 from the train station), **Seurasaari island** is an open-air museum with 18th- and 19th-century traditional houses, manors and outbuildings from around Finland. Guides dressed in traditional costume demonstrate folk dancing, spinning, embroidery and the essential art of troll-making.

A memorable way to cap off your visit is to head out to one of the small islands dotted around the harbour for dinner. There are several island restaurants, which are served by

small boats that ferry diners to and from the quays on the mainland opposite. The most famous is the stylish, spired **Klippan** (☎ 09 633 408), set in a villa on Luoto island; the most convivial is **Boathouse** (Liuskasaari; ☎ 6227 1070), a circular two-deck restaurant on Liuskasaari, reached from a jetty on Merisatamanranta.

Sleeping

Budget:

Hostel Mekka (www.hostelmekka.com; ☎ 630 265) Unbeatably central, homely hostel set back from the street in a courtyard.

Midrange:

Accome Tölö (www.accome.com; ☎ 555 455 99) Upscale apartments furnished in typical Nordic style – it’s like staying in a Finnish home.

Top End:

Hotel Rivoli (www.rivoli.fi; ☎ 681 500) Beautiful boutique hotel decorated in classic French-influenced design.

For more reviews of Helsinki accommodation, check out the Sleep section on www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation.

By Amanda Canning

For the complete guide to Finland, including Helsinki, grab a copy of Lonely Planet’s *Finland* guide, available online at shop.lonelyplanet.com.

