From Helsinki to the Taiga Forests
(13 Days)

Enjoy Helsinki’s urban delights, see Finland’s best-loved national landscape, and experience the wilds of the Finnish-Russian borderlands. Discover Finland’s history from ancient times to modern events.

Day 1: Helsinki, the Capital of Finland

The Finnish capital Helsinki is a modern city with over half a million residents. Helsinki offers lots to see, do and experience for visitors of all ages.

**Accommodation:** Hotels, campsites and hostels in Helsinki [www.visithelsinki.fi](http://www.visithelsinki.fi)

Day 2: Vallisaari – Fortifications Overlooking the Baltic Sea

The islands of Vallisaari and Kuninkaansaari, near the famous island fortress of Suomenlinna, are enchanting destinations for outings, just 20 minutes by boat from Helsinki’s Market Square. The two islands have served as home and workplace for hundreds of people and military personnel, but are nowaday known as a unique nature paradise. The islands have a wider range of flora and fauna than anywhere else in the metropolitan area, including many bat species, badgers, and lush woodlands teeming with birdlife. A regular waterbus service from the Market Square to Vallisaari runs between May and September.

After your day trip to Vallisaari drive east from Helsinki to the town of Kouvola. On your way, you might stop at Finland’s oldest arboretum at Mustila to admire its famous rhododendrons and a total of 250 tree species.

**Activities:**

**Helsinki Vallisaari island:** The Alexander Tour (3 km) and the Kuninkaansaari Island Tour (2.5 km) take you safely to the islands’ picnic sites and high spots where you can admire magnificent sea views. Guided tours and other thematic activities take visitors back in time to days of old. At the same time you can learn all about the islands’ historical and natural features. [www.nationalparks.fi/vallisaari/services](http://www.nationalparks.fi/vallisaari/services)
Day 3: Adventures in Blue and Green

On your way to the Repovesi National Park you can visit a unique UNESCO World Heritage Site at Verla Groundwood and Board Mill. The mill was established by the Verla Rapids in 1872. To combine nature and art also visit the nearby Vuohijärvi Nature and Culture House. www.verla.fi www.kulttuurivuohijarvi.fi

Experience rugged cliffs, deep forests and sparkling waters in one of the most popular national parks in Southern Finland. Repovesi National Park offers everyone accessible adventures in truly wild settings. When you sit round a campfire listening to the eerie calls of red-throated divers echoing over the lake, the city feels a million miles away.

After visiting Repovesi enjoy the evening in the lively town of Mikkeli.

Local food and saunas near Repovesi NP: Orilampi Cottage and Holiday Center serves traditional Finnish cuisine lovingly prepared from locally grown ingredients. The center also has several kinds of sauna, including a traditional smoke sauna, which you might enjoy after a refreshing cruise on the lakes of the national park. www.orilampi.fi

In the romantic Kirjokivi mansion you can enjoy delicious authentic Finnish cuisine, followed by a steamy session in a lakeside sauna to relax after dinner. Kirjokivi is open by appointment. For reservations: www.woikoskifeeling.fi.

Services and activities: Local firms offer a wide variety of services from natural outdoor meals to rock-climbing trips. Guided tours and equipment are also available.

On the Ketunlenkki Trail (3,5 km) in the national park you can experience Repovesi’s highlights, including Lapinsalmi bridge, the manually operated Fox’s Ferry and breathtaking views over green forests and blue lakes. For a change from hiking you can explore the lakes of Repovesi by canoe or on boat tours. www.nationalparks.fi/repovesi

Accommodation: Hotels, campsites and hostels in Mikkeli www.visitmikkeli.fi

Day 4: In the Heart of Lake Saimaa – Historic Savonlinna

In the heart of the Finnish Lake district lies the lively town of Savonlinna – and the most northerly surviving medieval castle anywhere in the world. Each summer Olavinlinna Castle hosts the world-class Savonlinna Opera Festival. Enjoy local food in atmospheric settings on the market place, stroll along lakeside promenades, and visit Savonlinna’s many small shops and cafes. Boat trips and cruises take visitors out to see beautiful lakeland scenery and with luck also Lake Saimaa’s most famous...
inhabitant: the Saimaa ringed seal. In the evening head on to the charming village of Oravi or to the Järvisydän resort in Rantasalmi, both by the blue Lake Saimaa.

**Services and activities:** Guided tours in Olavinlinna castle [www.kansallismuseo.fi](http://www.kansallismuseo.fi), Riihisaari – Lake Saimaa Nature and Culture Centre [www.savonlinna.fi/riihisaari](http://www.savonlinna.fi/riihisaari), steamship cruises [www.visitsavonlinna.fi](http://www.visitsavonlinna.fi)

**Accommodation:** Oravi Village [www.oravivillage.com](http://www.oravivillage.com) and Järvisydän Resort [www.jarvisydan.com](http://www.jarvisydan.com). Accommodation is also available in Savonlinna [www.visitsavonlinna.fi](http://www.visitsavonlinna.fi)

**Day 5: Island Adventures in Lake Saimaa – Linnansaari National Park**

Today’s destination is Linnansaari National Park – an ideal place to spot rare lake seals and majestic ospreys. This part of Lake Saimaa is dotted with lush green islands and rocky islets. At Linnansaari Croft traditional slash-and-burn farming practices are preserved. A boat service takes trippers from Oravi to the main island where you can swim in Lake Saimaa or walk along a trail leading to Linnavuori Hill, to admire the lakeland scenery. You can also join boat trips or fishing excursions organised by local firms. In the evening you can relax in a lakeside sauna and enjoy tasty local food.

**Activities and relaxation:** Boat trip to Linnansaari National Park, Linnansaari nature trail, sauna, organised outings, fishing [www.nationalparks.fi/linnansaari](http://www.nationalparks.fi/linnansaari)

**In Oravi village you can try a Finnish specialty: sauna yoga.** This activity is suitable for everyone and requires no previous yoga training. The gentle heat of the sauna melts away the strains in your back and shoulders, and beneficial effects can be felt immediately after a single session. After the sauna you can enjoy a refreshing swim in the lake.

[www.oravivillage.com](http://www.oravivillage.com)

**Relax in the sweet heat of a sauna** by the lakeshore at the Hotel & Spa Resort Järvisydän. Here you can also discover the Finnish Sauna World, a complex with two Finnish wood stove saunas, a smoke sauna, a steam sauna and a hot tub where you can relax under the blue sky. [www.jarvisydan.com](http://www.jarvisydan.com)

**Accommodation:** Oravi Village [www.oravivillage.com](http://www.oravivillage.com) and Järvisydän Resort [www.jarvisydan.com](http://www.jarvisydan.com). Accommodation is also available in Savonlinna [www.visitsavonlinna.fi](http://www.visitsavonlinna.fi)

**Day 6: Peace of Mind**

The New Valamo Monastery is the most active centre of Orthodox religious life and culture in Finland. Located in the beautiful surroundings of Heinävesi, the monastery welcomes visitors throughout the year. Visitors may freely participate in church services and view holy icons and Orthodox artefacts in the monastery’s museum.

Head on from the monastery to Joensuu – a vibrant and rapidly growing regional centre with a great deal to offer including the distinct Karelian lifestyle and a city center with many services, situated by the broad River Pielisjoki. Urban attractions like rock concerts and quiet rural attractions can be found here in close proximity Joensuu is both a high-tech centre and the traditional marketplace for Eastern Finland’s Karelian borderlands region.

**Accommodation:** Various accommodation available in Joensuu [www.visitkarelia.fi](http://www.visitkarelia.fi) Valamo Monastery [www.valamo.fi](http://www.valamo.fi)


**Day 7: Finland’s Best Loved National Landscape**

When you take in the marvellous views over Lake Pielinen in Koli National Park from the top of Ukko-Koli hill, it’s easy to see why this spot has attracted so many Finnish artists, photographers and nature-lovers over the centuries. This splendid scene always instills a sense of serenity and wonder in visitors. Take a guided tour from Nature Center Ukko, or explore the many well-marked trails that
lead through the hills of Koli. Live like a local in Koli village, visit the harbor, and spend a luxurious evening in the pools and saunas of Koli Relax Spa.

Local food, Summer Café Tour: Kolin Ryynänen Art and Culture Centre a gateway to the national park for hikers and artists alike. After exploring the park you can stop by at the gastropub to savour local and international drinks, food and artworks. www.nationalparks.fi/kolin/sights/kolinryynanenartandculturecentre

The Summer Café Tour is a unique café-hopping trekking route that runs for 6.8 km through Koli National Park. You can start from any of the cafés along the route, including Kolin Ryynänen Café.

Activities: Sightseeing and scenic viewpoints, well-marked trails, horse riding, boating, canoeing and rowing, cycling, swimming, nature centre, fishing, Koli village, cruises on Lake Pielinen

www.koli.fi
www.nationalparks.fi/koli

Accommodation:
In Koli National Park: Break Sokos Hotel Koli

www.sokoshotels.fi
Hotels, cottages and campsites in the Koli area
www.koli.fi

Day 8: Raging Rapids in Finland’s Eastern Borderlands

The wild white waters of Ruunaa’s rivers can be enjoyed from a traditional wooden boat or an inflatable raft by thrill-seekers, or from a shady riverbank by keen anglers. Guided rafting and paddling excursions are available. A great way to round off a day in the wilds is to grill a freshly hooked fish on your campfire. Fall asleep to the sound of roaring white waters after a relaxing evening in a waterside sauna.

Services and activities: Restaurant and equipment rental at Ruunaa Hiking Centre. Whitewater rafting and restaurant services www.ruunaanmatkailu.fi

A traditional Finnish smoke sauna down by the waterside www.ruunaanmatkailu.fi/smokesauna

Whitewater rafting and canoeing, fishing, well-marked trails (2-km Närelenkki Nature Trail, 31-km Koskikiirros Trail), cycling, swimming, sauna,
Day 9: Ancient Waters and Forests

A two-hour drive through dark, mystical forests and small villages takes you to the town of Kuhmo and Petola Visitor Centre, whose exhibition features Finland’s fantastic wildlife, including bears and wolves. Enjoy traditional, tasty local food in one of Kuhmo’s restaurants or cafés.

After lunch, head on northwards to Lentua Nature Reserve, where you can enjoy a breath of fresh air by the famous Lentuankoski Rapids and the serene Lentua Lake before driving on for three hours to Hossa. This long and winding road leads you through the old spruce forests and hills of Finland’s eastern borderlands.

Here you can explore the newly designated Hossa National Park on foot, by bike or in a canoe. Fishing is also popular here, or you can just relax and enjoy a traditional sauna and a dip in the crystal clear water of Lake Hossanjärvi.

Activities and relaxation: Hiking, biking, canoeing, fishing, swimming, sauna

Accommodation:
- Camping Hossan Lumo
  - [www.hossa.fi](http://www.hossa.fi)
- Camping Karhunkainalo
  - [www.suomussalmi.fi](http://www.suomussalmi.fi)

Tourist information:
- Kuhmo Visitor Centre Petola
  - petola@metsa.fi
- Hossa Visitor Centre hossa@metsa.fi
  - [www.nationalparks.fi](http://www.nationalparks.fi)

Day 10: Colourful History and Wild Predators

You can now set off on a mystical trip back in time! The adventure starts from the café at Lake Julma-Ölkky. After a boat trip to view amazing lakeside cliffs from the water, have a coffee break or lunch here.

Suitably refuelled, you can now set off on a 4-km hike to see the ancient rock paintings on Värikallio Cliffs. These...
mysterious paintings, thought to be 3,500–4,500 years old, depict hunters and fishers. A new footbridge enables visitors to see the paintings up close.

You might next like to visit the Predator Center in Kuusamo where you can safely meet some of Northern Finland’s animal inhabitants: foxes, lynx and bears.

If you want to meet the king of the taiga forest in his realm, sign up for an unforgettable bear-watching trip, where you spend the evening and night in a specially designed safe viewing cabin, watching and photographing wild bears.

If you don’t feel like encountering a bear, Hossa offers plenty of other activities from hiking or biking to canoeing or fishing.

**Services and activities:** [www.wildtaiga.fi](http://www.wildtaiga.fi)  
[www.nationalparks.fi/hossa](http://www.nationalparks.fi/hossa)

Hossa Visitor Centre hossa@metsa.fi

Boat trip, guided tour, ancient rock paintings, Predator Center, bear-watching, photography, canoeing, biking, hiking, fishing etc.

**Accommodation:** Camping Hossan Lumo, Camping Karhunkainalo, Kylmäluoma Camping  
[www.nationalparks.fi/hossa](http://www.nationalparks.fi/hossa)

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**Day 11: Adventures around Ruka**

Head into the town of Kuusamo next, to stock up with local, high quality products and souvenirs, before driving to the start of the famous Pieni Karhunkierros Hiking Trail, in Juuma. This trail takes most of the day to follow, running alongside the River Kitkajoki and over three hanging bridges, passing the magnificent scenic highlights of Oulanka National Park. Enjoy a packed lunch by the powerful Jyrävä Falls or relax by the calmer waters of Harrisuvanto.

Ruka village has plenty of suitable accommodation. In the evening you can explore the area, by feeling the magic of Nightless Night on the top of Konttainen Hill or taking a ski lift up to the top of Ruka Fell and then returning slowly stopping to admire and photograph its amazing scenery. Thrill-seekers should hurtle down the kilometre-long Ruka Sled Track, reaching speeds of up to 60 km/hour!

Those who prefer to relax can try memorable traditional sauna experiences offered by Saunatour. You can choose between different kinds of sauna experience: slow & silent, wild & free, alive & strong – or anything in between.

**Activities and relaxation:** [www.wellbeinginwilderness.fi](http://www.wellbeinginwilderness.fi)

Shopping, hiking, photography, summer sledding run, sauna, relaxation [www.ruka.fi](http://www.ruka.fi)

**Accommodation:**  
In the Ruka area: Iisakki village (Ruka safaris), Hotel Rantasipi Rukahovi, Ruka Suites, Rukatonttu Hotel & Restaurant etc.  
[www.ruka.fi](http://www.ruka.fi)

**Tourist information:** Karhuntassu info@kuusamo.fi  
Rukainfo info@ruka.fi  
Oulanka Visitor Centre oulanka@metsa.fi
Day 12: Oulanka’s Wild Waters

Today you can enjoy the essence of Oulanka by canoeing through the national park. The day starts at Oulanka Visitor Centre with an exhibition about local nature. You will then be transported to the River Oulanka to begin an amazing journey passing ancient forests, lush meadows, steep cliffs and attractive natural sandy beaches.

The 25-km paddling route is also suitable for families and beginners. After your trip, head on to Karhunkierros starting point at Hautajärvi, where you can walk at least the first kilometer.

Finland’s most famous trekking trail: the 82-km Karhunkierros. From Karhunkierros it’s just half an hour’s drive to the village Salla where you can rest and spend the night at the Holiday Club Salla spa.

Activities and relaxation: Canoeing, exhibition, swimming, sauna, spa
Oulanka Visitor Centre oulanka@metsa.fi
www.nationalparks.fi/oulanka
www.ruka.fi
www.visitsalla.fi

Accommodation:
Salla: Holiday Club Salla spa
www.holidayclubresorts.com

Day 13: Back to Kuusamo and on Homeward

For more information:
Oulanka Visitor Centre oulanka@metsa.fi
Koli Nature Centre Ukko ukko@metsa.fi