

Cocktail competition heats up at the 10th Annual International Finlandia Vodka Cup.



COURTESY OF FINLANDIA

# FUN IN FINLAND

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Finland seems so exotic," said my Swedish friend Hans while escorting me to the terminal in Stockholm where I was to board a ferry to Helsinki. He envied my trip; that he'd never been to his neighboring country seemed remarkable. What I found was a friendly, lively land boasting many reasons to visit again and again.

Traveling aboard the Silja ferry, I found it easy to make friends. Most Swedes and Finns speak English, though some are shy about their command of the language and may not initiate conversation. For dinner, I was seated with another individual traveler, who explained that while she was traveling to visit her sister in Finland, "many people just take the overnight cruise with friends and family to ride back and forth without disembarking. The whole point of their trip is to eat, drink and shop aboard ship."

Whether sailing from Stockholm or Helsinki, I'd allow at least a day to explore the other city, but it's perfectly understandable why some folks don't get off the boat—it's that much fun. The overall mood was festive (especially in the high-energy karaoke bar), the buffet was laden with delicious dishes, and the shops offered a wide selection of goods at some of the best prices I've ever seen in Europe. My cabin was clean, comfortable, plenty spacious and equipped with an invigorating shower.

In Helsinki the next morning, it was an easy walk from the dock to GLO Hotel. The city felt clean and safe. I passed many appealing storefronts that had me wishing for a bag full of Euros to spend on designer goods like Marimekko fabrics, Iittala glassware, Lapponia jewelry and more. I spent hours at Stockmann department store, where the range of products is so diverse that it's possible to buy a live stingray, snowshoes, table



Coffeebread pastries

PASTRIES: MATTI KOLHO; DOG: JEAN NOEL LANTHIEZ

linens, kitschy souvenirs, fresh pastries and designer wares all at once. I couldn't resist an apple tart, which turned out to be the best pastry I've ever tasted outside of Paris.

Many hotels pamper guests with excellent service and quality linens, but GLO Hotel goes a step further with a bed menu offering luxury comforts like sheets that stabilize electric fields of the body, pillows that regulate body temperature, corn fiber-filled comforters, ergonomic visco-elastic pillows and more. And don't worry about drinking the water: Finland water is so clean, it's bottled and exported.

After a couple of days in Helsinki, I flew up to Lapland to watch the 10th Annual International Finlandia Vodka Cup, a bartending competition (Mihaly Handtuch from Hungary ultimately seized first place). The event was held north of the Arctic Circle in Lainio Snow Village. The village boasts a snow hotel, ice bar and nearly 200 miles of snowmobile tracks. I opted to try dogsledding. The dogs bark incessantly in anticipation before taking off on

the run, but en route the only sounds are paws pounding snow and the slip of sled rudders. It's a peaceful, awesome experience with one drawback if you have a sense of smell: You're sitting downwind of the stench of dog sweat. But a fabulous cocktail can later help cleanse the palate *and* nostrils.

One evening, a group headed to Hotelli Levitunturin to verify that what we'd heard was true: Finns love ballroom dancing. After paying an entrance fee of around \$14 per person, we discovered a dance floor packed with twirling couples. The ballroom is open from 8 p.m. until 4 a.m.—every day!

Of course, Finns are known for their love of the sauna, and it's true that most families in Finland have at least one in their home. They commonly socialize and conduct business in them. The cabin in which I lodged had a sauna with a window that offered a spectacular view of snow-covered pines. I relaxed thinking this was an exotic lifestyle to which I might easily adapt. **SP**

## IF YOU GO

### GETTING THERE

For the chance to explore more than one Nordic city on your vacation, consider flying direct to Stockholm, Sweden, on Delta, then sailing to Helsinki, Finland, aboard the Silja ferry line, which offers daily service between the two cities. To explore Lapland, fly Finnair from Helsinki to Kittilä.

### WHEN TO GO

Anytime to shop, dine or sauna in Helsinki or to sail to or from Stockholm. But choose winter if you hope to ski, snowmobile or dogsled in Lapland. Note that, during winter, most businesses in Helsinki are closed on Sundays.

### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

A valid passport is required to enter Finland, which is a member of the European Union and has adopted the Euro as its currency. Purchase a Helsinki Card for access to nearly 50 sights and museums, travel on public transportation and discounts at many events, stores and restaurants. Cards are valid in 24-, 48- or 72-hour increments and start at approximately U.S. \$36 for adults, depending on the exchange rate at time of purchase.

### WHERE TO STAY

#### ■ IN HELSINKI

GLO Hotel  
+358 10 3444 400  
[www.palacekamp.fi/in\\_english/hotels/hotel\\_glo](http://www.palacekamp.fi/in_english/hotels/hotel_glo)

#### ■ IN KITTILÄ AT THE LEVI SKI RESORT

Hotel Hullu Poro (Crazy Reindeer)  
+ 358 (0) 16 6510 100  
<http://hulluporo.fi/poro/esivu.php?alue=Main&kieli=en>

### MORE INFORMATION

#### ■ VISIT FINLAND

+358 10 60 58000  
[www.visitfinland.com](http://www.visitfinland.com)

### WINNING RECIPE

This aperitif recipe helped Hungary's Mihaly Handtuch win the 10th Annual International Finlandia Vodka Cup.

#### PINK PALE SENSATION

2 parts Finlandia Grapefruit Fusion

2 parts Cointreau Citrus

1 part Bols Maracuja

2 parts fresh red grapefruit juice

Shake over ice, strain into a glass, and garnish with a litchi fruit cut into a flower.



Dogsledding's a popular activity in Finland.