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Finland Wants You to Celebrate Its Independence by Going Outside

by **Lilit Marcus** • February 4, 2017



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Hossa National Park is the 40th in Finland's national park system.

How do you get an entire country to enjoy the great outdoors?

This year, Finland celebrates its 100th anniversary as an independent nation. Besides [getting a mountain from Norway as a birthday present](#), the country is celebrating its centennial by inviting locals to go outside and take advantage of nature. Finland's four "[Nature Days](#)" (one per season), are chock full of outdoorsy events that cover a range of options: for example, the winter holiday is all about making snowmen with the kids or going on a few runs at the world's largest ski school (in the town of Ruka in [Lapland](#)), while the spring Nature Day has opportunities to go hiking, birdwatching, or swimming. If for some reason your favorite activity isn't listed, anyone who wants to can set up their own Nature Day event and get it listed on Finland's official tourism site. The dates are February 4, May 20, June 17, and August 26—all Saturdays, so you don't even need to worry about taking a day off.

This is a great excuse to take advantage of national airline [FinnAir's stopover program](#), which enables you to stay in [Helsinki](#) for up to five days on the way to or from a destination in eastern Europe. And it's not just locals who get to take part in the fun: [the country's "FinRelax" program](#) is aimed at travelers, encouraging them to try out popular Finnish outdoor activities like foraging for plants and berries (we recommend lingonberries, which make excellent jam), going on a forest hike, and experiencing a traditional sauna (hitting yourself with tree branches is optional, nudity is not)—say it more like "sow-nah" if you really want to fit in. Most events are free, and you can sort by the language the event is offered in, including English.

And that's not all: Finland's centennial year will also see the official unveiling of [Hossa](#), the country's 40th and biggest national park. Opening in February with a season that lasts through October, this natural area in northeastern Finland near the Russian border is already beloved by locals for its clear lake waters perfect for Scuba diving, and it's also home to the [Värrikallio](#) rock paintings, reddish-brown Stone Age-era drawings that depict scenes from everyday life from the period. It's not clear what's more of a challenge: the four-kilometer (2.5 mile) hike to the rock paintings, or attempting to pronounce the word "Värrikallio."