



NEWS

How to Plan the Perfect Weekend in Helsinki, Finland

by Maria Cimini

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An ideal destination for a weekend getaway, Helsinki, Finland, is picturesque and walkable, with a welcoming ambience and appealing charm. Surrounded by more than 100 miles of coastline (and more than 300 small islands), this maritime city offers visitors lots of excitement, from its vibrant art scene to extensive shopping, nightlife and outdoor activities.

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Image courtesy of Julia Kivela.

What to Do

Design enthusiasts will find Helsinki lives and breathes artwork. Exploring galleries and museums while admiring Art Nouveau architecture is an inspiring way to enjoy the city's aesthetic treasures. The Design District offers more than 200 stores, so shoppers can easily spend hours or days browsing stylish shops and showrooms featuring furniture, clothing, jewelry, shoes and innovative products by local artisans. Top designer shops include Marimekko for bold and iconic patterns, Minna Parikka for whimsical shoes and Taiga Colors for cool handbags and trendy home products.

Culture is always in the spotlight in Helsinki. In fact, the sheer number of world-class museums may be a bit overwhelming for the first-time or casual visitor, and could pose a challenge if you only have a weekend. The good news? Each museum offers an abundance of thought-provoking displays and exhibits. A few of the major sites are the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, the Design Museum and the National Museum of Finland.



Shopping at Marimekko. Image courtesy of Ari-Pekka Darth.

After a day of shopping and exploring the city's robust art world, take a well-earned break for a leisurely lunch or dinner. As a compact metropolitan area with a great dining and bar scene, Helsinki attracts foodies with seasonal and inventive offerings; standout restaurants include Ask, an intimate restaurant with a daily set organic menu, and the Michelin-starred Olo. The city still boasts traditional haunts that master regional favorites — don't miss Sea Horse, a dining stalwart known for its pike perch, a flaky white fish and a Finnish specialty.

Although Helsinki's museums and shops can easily keep any visitor busy for days, there are many outdoor activities as well, especially in summer. Residents love to walk, even in the winter, so it's not unusual to see locals trekking along the seaside or hiking in parks. Helsinki is a bike-friendly city, making it easy to pedal around as well.

If you're looking for some R&R, try visiting a sauna; it's a rite of passage and decompress like a true Finn. This country has elevated the sauna experience into an art form, so it's no surprise that there are a number of spots around town to experience a sauna like a Helsinki resident — and plenty of locals to share the steam with. In a classic Finnish sauna, you spend as much time as possible in a high-temperature steam room (they're usually single-sex), then, no matter what time of year, you jump into the Baltic Sea or a tranquil inland waterway. It's also OK to take a dip in a nearby hot tub. Popular public saunas include Hermanni, Arla and Kotiharjun.



Image courtesy of SAM KINGSLEY/AFP/Getty Images.

Getting There

In May 2016, [Finnair](#) officially launched a program that allows travelers flying to or from Helsinki to arrange for a stopover from five hours to five days in the country. (Some customers flying from North America can book a stopover in Helsinki in their airfare without paying fee; others may get hit with a fee, depending on the final destination.) Flights should be booked through [stopover.finnair.com](#), and you can even plan your activities in advance or arrange tours through the StopOver Finland project, offered through [Visit Finland](#).



Image courtesy of Niklas Sjoblom.

Where to Stay

Centrally located in the Design District, Hotel Indigo Helsinki – Boulevard, part of the IHG Rewards program, is minimalist and modern. It's at the crossroads of two districts, where the upscale and elegant meet the funky and industrial, and offers a comfortable, high-tech stay with free Wi-Fi, lots of conveniently located in-room power outlets and an adjacent restaurant.

If you're more into the Finnish seashore, try the Hilton Helsinki Kalastajatorppa. Situated a few minutes from the city center via tram, the property offers a great beach location, terrific city views, a lovely terrace, a swimming pool and a sauna.

To the Point

Offering an incredible amount of fun in a compact, cool environment, Helsinki is a city that's made for a stopover (though, optimally, the summer months are the best time of year to visit this lovely destination). With so many options to suit all types of travelers' tastes, visitors are sure to have both an entertaining and relaxing time.

What would you do in Helsinki on a weekend?

Featured image courtesy of Carlos Grury Santos Photography.