



SCANDINAVIA - ULTIMATE FINLAND - 8N/9D



ITINERARY

Day 1 : Helsinki attractions and sightseeing

The harbour is the heart of the city. Watch the giant ferries glide into port – it is a defining memory and an essential Helsinki experience. See the beauty of this stunning Nordic city on a sightseeing tour with live commentary from a knowledgeable guide. The city tour takes in the most interesting parts of Helsinki, such as the historical centre with Senate Square, the Presidential Palace, City Hall, the Parliament building, Finlandia Hall and the Opera House. Marvel at curvaceous and quirky metallic Kiasma – an elegant contemporary building and a symbol of the city's modernization. Learn about traditional Finland at the Seurasaaen Ulkomuseo island museum with a collection of historic traditional houses, manors and outbuildings transferred here from around Finland. Enjoy the art nouveau architecture at Katajanokka, an island that is divided from the mainland by a narrow canal. Relax with a sauna and swim at the Yrjonkadun Uimahalli art deco baths – a fusion of soaring Nordic elegance and Roman tradition. Check out modern Finnish designs at the central design district between Esplanadi and Punavuori.



Day 2 : The Suomenlinna sea fortress and Porvoo

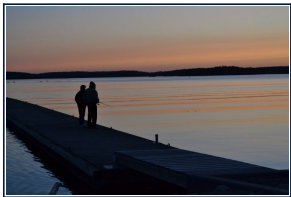
This UNESCO World Heritage listed 'fortress of Finland' dating from the mid 1700' s is just 15 minutes by boat from the kauppatori and is a great half-day out from the city.If it's a sunny summer day pack a picnic, or if you visit in winter, book a table at the restaurant there.Take a 1950's-style train from Helsinki to Porvoo, home of Finland's national poet, J.L. Runeberg. His house, now a museum, is kept as it was when he died in 1877. Porvoo's stone streets and painted wooden houses are a living record of Helsinki's past, preserved for modern times.



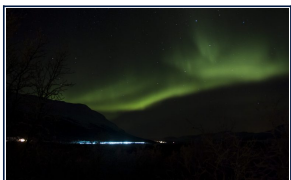


Day 3-6 : Lake Saimaa - day cruise - Finnish Spa -local culture

Spend a few nights in a cottage close to the nature of the idyllic archipelago islands around Lake Saimaa. A cottage break is the most authentic way of seeing this beautiful lake land region, and most cottages come with a rowing boat and a wood-heated sauna beside the lake. The surroundings are perfect for hiking, cycling, boating, fishing, canoeing and horseback riding in the spring and summer, and skating, skiing, snow shoeing and ice fishing in the winter. The landscapes on and around Saimaa are breathtaking. Kayaking is another great way of drifting through the island landscape - there are hardly any waves, so great for even inexperienced paddlers. Or take a cruise from Savonlinna and enjoy the stunning lake scenery of emerald pine, spruce and silver birch forests and for sightings of the famous endangered Saimaa ringed seal. The 10 and a half hour cruise from Savonlinna to Kuopio passes through some of Finland's finest Lakeland scenery, where the blue of the lake seems to wash into the sky. Savonlinna's imposing medieval castle, Olavinlinna, is the setting for the world-class Savonlinna Opera Festival each July. Kuopio is pure Finland. Its market square is the place to sample Kalakukko, a local speciality of lake fish baked in a rye loaf. Refresh both body and soul at a lakeside spa - there are over 14 spas around the lake. Sweating out the stress in a sauna, with regular dips in the lake, is the ultimate way to cleanse and purify. If you visit in winter, tour skating is a great way to get close to nature across the beautiful frozen lake.



Day 6-9 : Lapland - Sami people, husky safari, reindeer safari





Fly from Helsinki to Rovaniemi, the capital of Finnish Lapland and the hometown of Santa Claus. The summer in Lapland is short but the summer days are long. Take a midnight sun safari and admire breathtaking views over Lapland and its taiga forests. Listen to stories about local nature and life in the wilds while barbequing by an open fire. A moose-watching safari is a fascinating nature trip – moose are one of the largest land mammals in Europe. In winter, meet Santa Claus at his hometown village, and post a Christmas Card right from the heart of the village at the Arctic Circle post office – Santa’s elves will be there to help. Learn about the Sami (Lapp) people at the Arctic Research Centre and chill out with them as they lead you to their reindeers, show you a spot of lasso-swinging, and teach you all about their handicraft and Sami cooking. Dog sledding is a thrilling experience and trained huskies will pull you through beautiful snowy landscapes and snowbound forests, across frozen lakes, and wild wildernesses. Glide through the arctic landscape on a reindeer sleigh and chase a sighting of the spectacular dancing light show in the sky – the Northern Lights, or Aurora Borealis. Short rides or longer 3-hour rides into the wilderness leave every day from Rovaniemi.

Things To Do:

Sibelius Park, Helsinki: See the organ-like cluster of steep pipes, a fine steel monument dedicated to the great Finnish composer.

Tuomiokirkko, Helsinki: This chalk-white neoclassical Lutheran cathedral presides over the Senaatintori area of Helsinki.

Kothiharjun Sauna, Helsinki: Get a scrub-down and a massage at this traditional public wood-fired sauna in Kallio, it dates back to 1928.

Olavinlinna Castle, Savonlinna: An impressive fortified castle built in 1475, this castle of St. Olaf was built to protect the strategically important Savo region. Savonlinna Provincial Museum Sailors will enjoy this museum, set on the island of Riihisaari that presents the history of sailing on Lake Saimaa. During the summer the unique steamships moored at the museum are open to visitors.

Take A Nature Cruise Around Lake Saimaa: A leisurely cruise through the archipelago for nature and wildlife watching including a walk ashore along a nature trail, a visit to a sauna, and swimming.

Watch The Northern Lights From Rovaniemi: A good place for seeing the northern lights near the centre of Rovaniemi is on the riverfront right behind the Arktikum museum. Sheltered from the street lamps, this spot is dark enough to allow a good view of the northern sky.

Snowmobiling Around Rovaniemi: Ride behind guides on snowy hillsides and in forests, crossing frozen rivers and swamps. You'll see plenty of nature during this half-day trip in to the wilds.

Meet The Sami And Reindeers: Jump on snowmobiles and drive north from the city to a reindeer farm in the snowy forest. Meet local Sami people, listen to their stories and eat local delicacies. Try some reindeer driving on their track.

Arctic Snow Hotel: Take a sauna at the Arctic Snow Hotel, an entire world of snow that's surrounded by beautiful and picturesque Lappish nature. There are lots of ice and snow structures, and a relaxing restaurant made completely from logs.