

**What a city! Easily rivals Barcelona as the best European city I have visited. It has everything I want a city to have; beautiful and varied architecture, great restaurants and bars, friendly locals, great weather, an active art scene, wonderful shops, great little cafes, good vinyl shops, oh, and a beach! And what a beach...**

## THE MADEINEARNEST ESSENTIALS

Population **560,000**  
Country **Finland**  
Currency **Euro**  
Official Languages **Finnish, Swedish**  
Time Zone **GMT+2**  
Country Dialing Code **+358**

## HOTEL

### Hotel Glo

A wonderful part of the Palace Kamp empire

## RESTAURANT

### Mai Thai

Simply the best Thai restaurant in Helsinki

## CAFE

### Fazer

A 110-year institution and rightly so

## BAR

### Errottaja Bar

All the better for not trying too hard to be hip

## CLUB

### Redrum

An awesome Funktion One sound system

## MARKET

### Hietalahti flea market

Everything from classic design to useless junk

## SHOP

### Marimekko

Classic Finnish graphic textiles

## DESIGNER/ARCHITECT

### Alvar Aalto

The genius father of modernism

## THE MADEINEARNEST INSIDER

**Eija Taljavaara** Design District Helsinki

## RESTAURANT

**Sea Horse** also known as 'Sikala' (translation: piggery). Sea Horse offers Finnish culture and food at its best and is very popular among artists and cultural power players. If you want something different, with a genuine Finnish atmosphere, great service and the best food you could ever imagine, Sea Horse is for you!

## BAR/PARTY

**Kuudes Linja** has live music at least a couple times a week. Situated out from the city centre, Kuudes Linja isn't the place you just happen upon. During the summer you can bring your own food with you and grill them on the terrace grill!

## EXPERIENCE

**The Sinerbykoff Park**, also known as 'Koff Park'. On a sunny summer afternoon make your pick from local grocery stores, buy some picnic supplies and head to Koff Park. There will be some others enjoying the sunset with you!

## PLACE TO VISIT

**Korjaamo Culture Factory** is a new cultural hub in the heart of Helsinki where you can have a meal or drinks, visit an art gallery, enjoy the theatre or have fun at a club. Visit the old tram pit and enjoy its unique atmosphere!

## DESIGN/SHOPPING

**Design District Helsinki** Print the map at home or pick it up from Design Forum Finland. Design District Helsinki is the area to visit if you want to find small, independent design shops or entrepreneurs. Ever evolving, so come and make your own discoveries.

Walking distance from the city centre, **Hietaranta**, is sheltered by the city with perfectly clean water and is so shallow as to be very child friendly. A must visit in the summer and in the winter when the sea freezes (supposedly). We spent a great afternoon there with only about thirty other people. A real highlight and a surprising treat. It is on the western edge of the city and other highlights nearby include the island **Seurasaari**, which has an open air museum of ancient wooden structures showing how medieval Finns lived. There is also a (hidden) naturist beach on the island.

Seurasaari is connected to the mainland by a footbridge, so you can easily spend a day walking around the parks and beaches and marinas, passing the site of the **1952 Helsinki Olympics regatta** and the **Sibelius monument**, an impressive ten metre high, 30 tonne structure of 600 stainless steel tubes designed by **Eila Hiltunen** to 'capture the essence of the music of Sibelius'. The tubes have been wonderfully welded into a form reminiscent of organ pipes and a birch forest.

Mention of the Olympic Games means you have to visit the modernist masterpiece that is the **Olympic stadium**. I am a fan of modernist architecture, but even if you are not, take a walk through **Kaisaniemi Park** from the central railway station up to the stadium. You pass along the shores of the beautiful **Toolonlahti** (a sea inlet), through a winding path and go via the **Helsinki Winter Garden** up to the **Olympic Park**. Once there, climb the 72 metre high tower to get a truly stunning view of the city and surrounding countryside. It really is worth it. Come back to the city centre along the other shore and you pass the **Finnish National Opera house** and arrive at **Finlandia Hall**, **Alvar Aalto's** famous modernist complex.

Fans of Aalto are in a modernist heaven in Helsinki, with four or five noteworthy buildings all local and within reach. The easiest to visit is the **Academy Bookshop** on the main Esplanade (think of La Ramblas, but without the touristy nastiness and you get an idea of the Esplanade). Alternatively, visit the main **Artek** store opposite to pick up your very own piece of modernism.

Helsinki isn't all about modernism though, far from it. The city was planned by **Carl Ludvig Engel** and is dominated by the huge 19th-century **Lutheran Cathedral**. Sitting above **Market Square** at the top of the harbour (we arrived by ferry from Tallinn) the cathedral is a great sight to welcome the traveller. It's five green domes sit atop a white building above a huge flight of steps. A truly impressive sight, even more so when you venture inside and are met by a very calm pastel blue and white interior, devoid of any florid touches. The gilt altar stands out impressively. For an immediate contrast in style head to the **Russian Uspenski Cathedral** which is as ornate as the Lutheran Cathedral is plain. Adorned with murals, lamps, velvet banners and religious icons, the difference between the two main churches of Helsinki is startling.

Neither of them, however, is the most striking piece of religious architecture in the city. That honour goes to the truly amazing **Tempelisaatio** (the Church in the Rock). We were told it is the most visited sight in Helsinki and you can see why. The church was hewn from a huge chunk of granite, the walls left as jagged bedrock, into which a concrete altar was poured. The roof seems to float above the church as the light comes from a circular window onto which the roof sits. It is a proper 'wow' moment, especially as we arrived about twenty minutes before it closed. It was empty and the sun was setting. The colours, the light, the stillness and the quiet, in the middle of the city, were simply extraordinary.

But there is so much more to add and see in Helsinki, all of it good; for example, the beautiful and serene **Kaivopuisto Park** (which is surrounded by grand buildings and embassies), the gorgeous **Ursula Cafe** (that overlooks the Gulf of Finland), the beautifully kept **Hietaniemi Cemetery** (with wide avenues and manicured final resting places), the cleanliness of the city (not in a sterile way, just a well-maintained, obviously natural way - it seems part of the Finnish psyche to look after your environment and the city is all the nicer for it) and, of course, **KIASMA Museum of Contemporary Art**.

Designed by American architect Steven Holl and opened in 1998, the museum is well worth a visit with a large and impressive collection, a theatre and a very nice cafe. The architecture is fantastic. Other museums which are very good include the **Design Museum** and the **Finnish architecture Museum**. Backing onto each other they can be taken as one to give a rich view of the brilliance and creativity of the Finns over the years. We saw an exhibition in the Design Museum by a ceramic artist called **Rut Bryk** which was just fantastic. Both the **Sinebrychoff Museum of Foreign Art** (on the elegant Bulevardi) and **The Finnish National Gallery** should also be on the 'must-do' list.

Good design is everywhere in Helsinki and there is even a **Design District**. An area of 20 odd streets, incorporating 150 shops, it caters for everything and everyone; interiors, clothing, art, antiques, restaurants, galleries, museums and more. Every participating shop also has a free Design District map which details every other store and what they specialise in. A great idea.

At the bottom end of this area is the famous 'five corners' from where the Helsinki jazz band the **Five Corners Quintet** get their name. It is also home to the record stores and the (closed when we visited) **UMO Jazz House**. Check out **Digelius** (a great shop for either jazz or classical), **Eronen** (which was full of Blue Note originals and reggae but was not cheap, but then very little in Helsinki is) and the third store on the junction, **LifeSaver** (which has soul, jazz, funk, disco, house, techno - the lot). The stock in LifeSaver seemed to sum up quite nicely the **Flow Festival**, seeing as the bill for the festival included Terry Callier, Carl Craig, the Five Corners Quintet, Nicole Willis, CoceRosie, Bebel Gilberto and Gilles Peterson amongst others.

A month long arts festival, which incorporates music, theatre, dance, cinema and not only includes the Flow Festival but also two other separate jazz festivals called **Viapori Jazz** and the **UMO Jazz Fest**. The festival was held on the eastern edge of the city in a renovated power plant and is part of a much larger **Helsinki Festival**. Because of all this the city is a real buzz in late August, early September and we happened upon two free live gigs as well as turning a corner and being met by the runners of the **Helsinki marathon!** So we sat down in the sun, had the ubiquitous coffee and cake and watched the world walk, run and stagger by as we nursed the hangover from the Friday Flow and a late night visit to **Club Wahoo!**

The city and the festival are great fun and highly recommended. The food was fantastic, especially at the unexpectedly and unbelievably good **Mai Thai**. We will be back, maybe to see what the city looks like in a blanket of snow...

Andrew Sidford/MadInEarnest 2008