

European Capital of Smart Tourism Application

28.6.2018

City profile

Q: Good life? A: Helsinki

Welcome to Hel: the most functional and sustainable city in the world, built on social cohesion, famous for its design and high-tech, committed to bringing people together through authentic experiences, interesting spaces and nature explorations. A city of fascinating contrasts; peace and pulse, city and nature, light summers and dark winters. Over 460 years of history, several architectural layers and the impact of different periods make the city attractive and unique.

The secret and strength of Helsinki lies in real encounters with visitors and locals. You won't get lost in any tourist trap, as everything you experience is Helsinki in its purest – even the people you meet at the steps of the cathedral are a mix of locals and tourists.

The nature is all around us: the recreational areas, forests, a national park and the numerous islands (even the one with only one small fishing cabin) make sure you always have clean air to breathe.

Design and art scene in Helsinki is alive and well: the big museums feature internationally well-known artists; smaller galleries are open for up and coming artists. Here's a UNESCO Site, magnificent libraries, unique and world-class events and shops with Finnish design brands and local artisans.

The most Finnish way to experience our living cultural heritage is naked, in one of the many public saunas.

The foodies love Helsinki's culinary scene because of the diversity: there's great indoor and outdoor markets, ambitious local top chefs and events such as Ravintolapäivä, when anyone can open pop-up restaurants around the city. There's even a restaurant that makes delicious food from waste.

Helsinki is compact. The excellent infrastructure makes it nearly impossible to feel frustrated when moving around the city. City biking and walking are recommended, but once it gets cold, you might want to hop in our public transportation. Helsinki is for everyone, and that is why the transportation serves visually and mobility impaired passengers well. You can even experience Helsinki with a help of AI.

My Helsinki.fi site, where local connoisseurs create all content and the city's open data is utilised by highlighting events, shops and restaurants, is one of a kind.

Helsinki can be reached by ferries, trains, cars and by 40 airlines to 145 different destinations.

Helsinki is a year-round destination. In 2017, Helsinki reached a record number of tourists: 4.2 million overnights, of which domestic tourists accounted for 2 million (+15.5%) and foreign for 2.2 million (+17.8%). Also, there were e.g. 480 000 daytime visitors from international cruises.

In Helsinki, a colourful mix of tourists meet; Russians the largest group (+41%), followed by Germans, British, Americans, Swedish, Japanese and Chinese (+30%). 33% of tourists come outside of EU, mostly from Asia. The outlook for 2018 is promising.

There are 77 registered accommodation establishments from campsites to luxury hotels. More than 75% of them are certified as environmentally friendly. The total tourism demand was 4.5 billion EUR in 2015 and employment accounted for 10 400 persons.

Helsinki provides a platform for entrepreneurship and supports tourism businesses to innovate and create new while remaining sustainable. Joint efforts of the city, its citizens and businesses under the Smart&Clean foundation is turning Helsinki into the world's leading test bed for solutions that tackle such mega-problems as climate change. For smart tourism, Helsinki is top-of-the-class. Our unique mix combines functionality, reliability, holistic view on sustainability, arts and culture offerings, hi-tech skills, great use of open data and a comprehensive understanding of human-centric design. All in one compact and happy city!

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12 reasons to fall in love with Helsinki

Accessibility

For years, Helsinki has been building a model for an accessible city. To us it means that the best things our city has to offer need to be available for all. We design our services using user-centric methods that take into consideration the actual needs of the people – something that we are very proud of. One result of this is the new way we offer tourism information. We took information from distinct facilities into the places where tourists have the most questions, such as main attractions. The so-called Helsinki Helpers are young locals that have broad language capabilities and help tourists right at the spot.

Here are some more efforts we have taken to make sure that both tourists and locals can enjoy the city, no matter their age, gender, race, sexuality, mobility or social standing.

Helsinki Airport

Helsinki Airport has succeeded in becoming the principal hub for European travel to Asia and vice versa.

Need to visit any major European cities? Easy. The flights are numerous, frequent – and punctual. Many times awarded airport expects to reach the milestone of 20 million passengers in 2018. Its aim is to keep up the good work with customer satisfaction and experience development, when at the same time it is getting ready to serve over 30 million passengers.

Finavia, the airport operator, has trained its staff to meet customers from different cultures, for example, in the Chinese language, culture and tips for customer encounters. In addition, signage and other services have been designed to keep everyone smiling. Chinese customers can even make payments with AliPay.

The Helsinki Airport App helps you around airport. The elderly and disabled people get free assistance. There are several direct voice connections with an assistant, a dedicated security control lane and disabled parking and toilets. There's also three-dimensional tactile maps.

Public transportation

Helsinki's public transport system is well-ranked in international comparisons. It's modern, reliable, safe and efficient. It's used by everyone – you could even bump into a former President in a tram!

Everything is easy-to-access. Different needs and user groups have been taken into account. The stops are of a high standard, e.g., there are plenty of cotes outside the immediate centre, and the map information and infotainment products are comprehensive. Accessibility has been ensured, meaning the availability of information, low-floor vehicles, elevated stops, lifts, level-crossing equipment at stations, use of materials and colours as well as maintenance of stop areas and the connections to them. Frequent and inexpensive train and bus links are available from the airport and a tram service from the ferry terminals. You only need one ticket for the bus, tram, metro, commuter train and the Suomenlinna ferry. Easy!

For those who prefer freedom to roam, there's a great city bike system. The city's route guide app connects all the public transportation routes and schedules and lets the user choose the public transport method that fits their mobility needs. Did we mention that public transport is free to use when traveling with a baby stroller or in a wheelchair? Increased use of public transport promotes sustainability and contributes to the competitiveness of the city. Constant work is done to make it even more environmentally- and user-friendly with use of service design and the digital user experience. Satisfaction with public transport in the HSL area has increased by 2% in two years.

Unlike any other city in the world, tourist only need one app to cover all their trips within the Helsinki area: Whim. The app was designed in Helsinki and it is the first mobility-as-a-service company based in Helsinki, winning many awards. It gives you the best route, suggestions and enables paying for the trip. You can customize it, too. Let's say you need to go from the airport with a taxi, grab a metro and need a city bike for a day off: you can do it all within the app – beautiful! No wonder a European mobility expert survey ranked Finland as a very advanced country in innovating new digital mobility services in 2018.

The Last Mile Project seeks smart mobility solutions for tourists, residents and commuters. It's the link between tourism destinations, transport and hotel companies. Currently there's experiments with an "Uber boat" in order to make it easier for people to experience the beautiful archipelago. With a sharing economy model! Also: we have the world's first trials of autonomous buses on open streets.

Accessible to all

Helsinki is accessible. Since 2002, there's been a big target to make accessibility improvements across the city. The goals are a part of planning, building and maintenance. There's even a permanent accessibility representative, who works closely with the accessibility board, led by the deputy mayor.

The Helsinki for All project started in 2010. It defined routes and areas with basic or special level of accessibility. For example, an electric wheelchair user can travel easily with the public transportation. Most museums, nature sites and concert venues are easy-to-access. All accessibility services can be found in the City Service Map. Helsinki took the second prize of Access City Award 2015.

Given all of this, it's not that surprising that the World's Most Popular accessible GPS-app, BlindSquare, was developed right here in Helsinki. It describes the environment, tells you about interesting places and street corners on the move. It also helps, for example, Asian tourists who are not familiar with Western characters.

Urban nature? Yes.

Helsinki has urban nature routes that are easy to reach by public transportation. They are open for specialised user groups as well and the content is produced using new digital solutions such as open source code and API. The content is shared via My Helsinki and with other digital nature route platforms. The user pressure is monitored with visitor counter from 2018 onwards.

Is it sustainable? Of course. We love our nature, people and business. --

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HSL area outperformed other Nordic cities in the international BEST survey
Helsinki for All

Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdFxUtpkP-o>

<https://citynature.eu/en/helsinki/>

Sustainability

The new Helsinki Road Map for Tourism aims to make tourism sustainable. It makes sure tourists visit different parts of the city and support different local businesses. It strives to avoid over-tourism and make sure that the locals are satisfied. And it's only getting better: this summer we are crowdsourcing locals and tourism stakeholders for new ideas and suggestions! Helsinki is committed to sustainability with a sustainability plan directing all decision making. We are located in one of the least corrupt countries and have gained fame in the Most Liveable Cities listings.

We have been a business traveling destination for long, but the recent efforts have balanced tourism seasonality through the rising popularity of holiday traveling. Our tourism business is financially in a good place, which can be seen for example in the average occupancy rate of hotel rooms of 70%.

Environmental Sustainability

We want to promote sustainability in everything we do. We have a plan to be carbon neutral by the year 2035. A cornerstone of this goal is a carbon-neutral mobility system, which Helsinki is moving towards by increasing the share of cycling, walking, electric vehicles and rail traffic. The Carbon Neutral Helsinki 2035 Operational Program contains 143 measures that will allow the entire urban area to move towards carbon neutrality. The city will offer tourists the opportunity for sustainable tourism, energy-efficient real estate, functional public transport, clean electricity, cycling and walking. The Smart&Clean foundation, which is a joint-effort between the city, citizens and businesses aims to turn Helsinki into a test bed for technologies that solve such major-problems as climate change.

Helsinki adapts to climate change. It has identified weather and climate risks. The most recent ones have been completed in the Helsinki Adaptation Guidelines 2017-2025, the renewed Helsinki Storm Water Programme and the Weather and the Risks of Climate Change in Helsinki report. It states, among other things, that "Travel to Helsinki may increase, because Finland has been identified as a country whose attractiveness as a tourist destination may grow as climate changes or the security situation deteriorates elsewhere."

Fact: 34% of Helsinki is covered in trees. Although the increasing population puts pressure on the infrastructure needs, nature is secured – Helsinki monitors its natural areas with a biodiversity protection action plan.

The Port of Helsinki became the most vivid port in the world in 2017 with 12.3 million passengers. Its goal is for all ship-generated wastewater to be discharged at port, being the only Baltic port to do this. There's a range of ways to increase the number of ships that discharge their wastewater at port such as free wastewater discharging. Vessels can get a discount up to three per cent if they are sustainable and environmental enough. The port carries out environmental cooperation locally, nationally and internationally. Why do we do all this? The Baltic Sea is a delicate environment and we want it to be enjoyed by tourists and locals of today and tomorrow.

Sustainable Hotels and Attractions

More than 75% of hotel rooms in Helsinki are certified as environmentally friendly, and more are in a process. Many of the ones who do not have an official eco-certificate do have an environmental plan regarding food, water, cleaning, laundry, waste management and energy consumption. Not only because it is the right thing to do, but because modern tourists seek for sustainable experiences. Some hotels offer digital carbon footprint calculators, too! The main attractions are sustainable: for example the Linnanmäki amusement park (opened in 1950) donates millions (last year 4.5 million euros) to Finnish child welfare work every year. In 2017, the tourist information officers and tourism customer service officers were trained with the theme responsible tourism.

Sustainable Events

Helsinki was one of the pioneers in developing and measuring its performance with the GDS-Index. It means that events, destinations, conventions etc. are becoming more sustainable. The index measures the environmental, social, supplier and convention bureau performances. On the last measure, Helsinki was in 6th place globally.

In 2015, the city introduced EcoCompass – an environmental certificate – to be applied to events organised in the city. It's on the Nordic environmental management systems and on international environmental management standards.

Concrete benefits:

- 1000 lower Fuel Consumption by Night Small Aggregates at the World Village Festival
- 56% increased the use of eco-labelled chemicals at the Malaya events
- 46% increased use of durable containers in indoor events organized by Malja

Events can receive a 30% discount on the rental of a space if it has built an EcoCompass or similar system. On a European scale, according to our data, this is a rare decision. It won the first ever GDS Innovation Award in 2016.

Slush, one of the leading start-up and technology events in the world, gathered 20 000 visitors in 2017. The main event is at the Fair Centre, but there's hundreds of different events during the week, all around the city. Slush gives out travel cards for free and guides to use public transportation. Slush is eco-certified: there's only tap water, biodegradable disposables and green electricity. It promotes diversity and equality.

Slush aims to leave the world better than it found it – in everything it does. It brings visitors to Helsinki during the low season, which is November. As the famed Slush poster said a few years back: no one in their right mind would come to Helsinki in November, except you. You badass

Another staple in the events calendar is Flow Festival, which boasts more than 75 000 visitors and has gained fame in global media. Being top of the line when it comes to music festivals, Flow has also pledged to use renewable energy, recycling, serves environmentally friendly food, promotes local businesses and public transport, compensates emissions, supports the protection of the Baltic Sea, is an EcoCompass event and pledges to be a home to equality. The city couldn't be prouder to be known for a festival like this.

Upload files

UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Voluntary National Review 2016
Sustainability_HELSINKICLIMATESTREETInnovationawardapplication2017.pdf
Port of Helsinki

Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgJ0x1nsya0>

Digitalisation

Digitalisation opens up new, unique and spontaneous ways to explore tourist destinations. Helsinki and - generally Finland as a technologically advanced society - has been driving tourism to more digital frontiers for years. Tourism innovations have been systematically supported and promoted by various programmes and organisations. Today companies look for great and unique ways to reach buyers, tailor offerings and make experiences even more memorable for example by using APIs, third-party data and VR. In addition there's a splash of genius in the way the administrative burden of companies has been lightened, for example there's direct data transmissions between businesses, the Tax Administration and other agencies. There's a lot of great work done in innovation, entrepreneurship and all things digital. It has been noticed: Digital Tourism Think Tank (#DTTT) is taking their #DTTTGlobal to Helsinki in 2018.

Open Innovation

The complex challenges, like climate change, that we as human kind face today are solved by innovations. However, no city, a company, a university nor an NGO, no matter how big or capable, can do it alone. Useful knowledge, skills and understanding are widely distributed. We need to enable open innovation, co-creation and agile development for new solutions. In 2013, the Helsinki City Council set an ambitious target: Helsinki will be the world's leading testbed for innovation. Ever since, everything has been about innovation: the city infrastructure, services and data, development of tools.

In practice it means that basically everything that happens in the city are agile experiments and collaboration models. They are invites to open innovation. We develop digital services to real needs together with the users and businesses. Maria 01 – the largest start-up community in the Nordics – is a result of this.

Helsinki is for everyone. So is its data. Since 2009, Helsinki has provided public city data for anyone to use freely. Why, you might ask. Because the open data gives software developers possibilities to come up with new and innovative stuff – especially for the tourists (because it's all Helsinki data).

We offer over 600 datasets that include information about events, services... even the air quality! The hit among people has been the materials of the City Museum, which include historical images.

Helsinki is the first – and only – city in the world to have the both 3D City Models (CityGML Urban Model and the Reality Mesh Urban Model) available and open. The models have been used, for instance, in experiments in urban planning, but they also can be used to explore destinations, archipelago and other places that may not be otherwise accessible.

My Helsinki

The new My Helsinki service is targeted not only at visitors, but also locals and talent interested in moving to Helsinki. All of the content is compiled by locals. It's simple, it's mobile, it's inspiring. There's authentic recommendations and no ads of any kind.

You can make lists and create a visual map of your favourite places. You can also find up-to-date events and services, which the service providers can themselves update (if needed).

The MyHelsinki Open API allows other commercial players to utilise standardized and curated open data, which currently consists of about 5000 locations, event and activity records in several languages (Finnish, Swedish, English, Chinese).

Helsinki aims to be the most digitalised city in the world, and it's off to a good start: The Internet service giant Tencent launched WeChat Helsinki Mini Program in February 2018 – together with the city of Helsinki.

It offers Helsinki tourist information in Chinese to one billion users. Integration between WeChat Helsinki and Whim also offers a brand new possibility to pay all your public transports in one place. This totally unique service is the world's first. Payment functions will be added to the WeChat Helsinki Mini Program later this year.

It's been designed to reflect the brand of Helsinki while making sure to fit Chinese habits.

The results will be used further for the benefit of the Plug-in Helsinki project, where knowledge on stakeholder requirements regarding open data, innovative customer paths for new API developments and international contacts for collaboration are gathered and be used for sparring newer companies and start-ups in the API economy and understanding the international standards of data management.

The curated data provided by Helsinki and used by Tencent can provide a new kind of visibility for Finnish service providers and work as a bridge for international collaboration while raising awareness on the benefits of open data.

Helsinki in Virtual Reality

Helsinki is already a globally remarkable innovator in digital tourism services, and it only gets better. One concrete example of this is the government driven Blue project. Helsinki Urban Nature archipelago is one key area that the project wants to develop from the perspective of tourism. The Blue project aims to create from 6 to 12 new tourism supporting concepts by combining the open data with AR and VR technologies.

Another example, the Helsinki2020 model, is a VR experience, where you can visit Helsinki in the present, past and future. Want to see how the Senate Square looked like in the 19th century? Or see how people in Helsinki live in the future? It's possible. And you can experience it all in a coffee shop!

You can also incorporate data in your experience, if that's what you're interested in.

At the National Museum of Finland, VR allows you to step into a painting "The opening of the Diet of 1863 by Alexander II" and speak with the Emperor and representatives of the different social classes. You can also experience the Hall of Mirrors of the former Imperial Palace, or current Presidential Palace. It's the missing link between the authentic museum artefacts and a world, that makes you really feel that you were there when it all happened.

Uploads

Helsinki Region Infoshare

Links

<http://zoan.io/nationalmuseum/>

<https://www.myhelsinki.fi/en>

<https://kartta.hel.fi/3d/mesh/>

Cultural Heritage & Creativity

According to recent surveys, visitors love the authenticity of Helsinki. They value the local experiences, which we ourselves also take pride in. How do we do this?

Helsinki design

In Finland, design has always belonged to everyone and you can really see and feel it here in Helsinki. In this corner of the world, designers have always worked towards meeting the everyday needs of ordinary citizens. Right now, those needs call for better solutions, not just beautiful and functional things. We value our roots in design, but boldly look towards the future as well.

Our efforts have not gone unnoticed: in 2012 Helsinki was nominated the World Design Capital with the theme Open Helsinki- embedding design in life. In 2014, Helsinki became the UNESCO City of Design and in 2016 it appointed a Chief Design Officer in its own organisation, being the first capital in the world to do so. Design is very important to Helsinki for simple reasons: it strengthens the strategic development, makes the city better and more functional, more attractive to visitors - and we love it.

Helsinki Design Week is the largest design festival in the Nordics. It contains around 250 fashion, architecture and urban culture events around the city, from museums to markets and from seminar halls to secret shops. We don't stop there: The message of design is spread throughout the world through the World Design Weeks network in which Helsinki is one of the founding members.

Helsinki design is not just something you see — it is something you feel. It begins the moment you step off the plane, follows you everywhere and stays with you after you have gone. Helsinki design is more than just a pretty object – it is a way of living. When you go to a café, you will drink from Iittala glasses, sit on Alvar Aalto stools and see people walking by in Marimekko dresses. Great design can be found and felt throughout the city.

Finding great design in Helsinki has been made easy: there's a Design District, which is a vibrant hub of creativity of 200 trendy boutiques, design shops, galleries, workshops, museums, restaurants, hotels and design agencies, all in the city centre. Or Iittala & Arabia Design Centre, where the history of the brands have been made for more than 130 years and they continue to be developed.

An online service built around Finland's most international architect Alvar Aalto was launched in 2018. It offers a fascinating selection of Aalto's architectural sites, eight in Helsinki, and high quality local tourism services. A smart way to find great functionalist design.

Sauna Culture

Get in the nude (do it like the locals), hop in a steaming hot room with strangers and feel what it truly is to be Finnish. Sauna bathing is an essential part of Finnish culture and national identity, as well a part of new urban culture with brand new public saunas opening around the city.

Two new saunas became instantly popular among locals and tourists. Löyly is a sauna on the seashore, built from wood from responsibly managed forests and its electricity produced with water and wind power. It serves organic food and sustainably caught fish. It's an easy stop for visitors to experience the real Finnish sauna culture.

Allas Sea Pool is next to the Market Square in front of Presidential Palace. It's built from sustainable wood, steel and concrete materials. Solutions include solar collectors for heating the pools and smart lighting. Pools are heated with water from the public water supply and filtered seawater. The activities on the pool are developed together with the locals, so you know you're in for the real deal.

Helsinki City Museum

The Helsinki City Museum was opened in 2016. Over 770,000 residents and tourists have visited it since. It's an extensive experience of the everyday city life in Helsinki not only in the exhibitions, but also the lobby, meeting rooms, shop and toilets. This year it got a Special Commendation in the European Museum of the Year competition. It's warm and easily approachable with cooperation from the citizens of Helsinki. And there is technology inducted in many innovative ways!

Suomenlinna UNESCO Site

One of the most popular attractions and a recreation area for locals, was inscribed into the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1991 as an example of 18th century fortress architecture. More than a million annual visitors makes it necessary to reconcile tourism with the cultural values of the site and the well-being of the local community. Suomenlinna has compiled a Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for 2015-2020. The public investment is paid back many times over in its local economic impact. The site has also been the cause of pride in a resident survey. UNESCO World Heritage Europe Today 2016 selected the strategy as an example of good practices from the day-to-day work of site managers.

Newcomers

A new type of museum, Amos Rex Museum, is a space dedicated to art. It's easy to reach and a cool place to hang out, open to experimentation and new forms of collaboration. It opens in August 2018.

The building is a combination of old and new – with a protected building creating the surroundings for bold architecture to rise in the courtyard. The project is a joint-effort between the Amos Anderson Foundation and the city.

Where the global trend in the world is to close libraries, we are building a grand Oodi library into the city center, directly opposite of the parliament and rethinking what a library can offer to the people. The 100,000 titles make sure that you won't get bored. There's also meeting rooms with smart glass walls, game rooms with VR, a cinema and makerspace. Already Oodi (opening in December) has been noticed in the international architectural media and for example in The Guardian. We believe in building a city where the local life can be experienced by tourists in real spaces used in novel ways, every day.

Upload Files

Suomenlinna Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Action Plan

Amos Rex

Oodi

Link

<https://designdistrict.fi/en/>