

## Fast Facts

### Finland

- Finnish is a notoriously difficult language to learn. It is a member of the Finno-Ugric language group (other members include Estonian and Hungarian).
- Finland hosts the annual Air Guitar World Championships as part of the Oulu Music Video Festival.
- Father Christmas lives in Finland. The Finns say his home is on the mountain of Korvatunturi in Lapland.
- Finland ranks near the top of the OECD's international assessment of student performance, and its tertiary system is ranked number one in the world (World Economic Forum).
- Finland was the first major European country to give women the vote (in 1906).



## TRIPPING

### In the Lap of the gods

Finland is home to thrilling landscapes and natural wonders, writes Marleena Forward

**W**hat do saunas, Sibelius and snow have in common? The answer lies east of Sweden, west of Russia and beneath some 23 million hectares of forest.

As far as European tourist destinations go, Finland flies under the radar for most travellers. For those who venture to this northern nation, however, unique experiences await.

With 69 per cent of its land covered by forest and 10 per cent beneath its 190,000 lakes, Finland is a nature-lover's paradise. Indeed, Finns themselves make regular trips to their forest morkkis (small wooden huts) during the summer months to soak up the country's natural beauty.

In winter, blanket snowcover makes for picturesque sightseeing and ideal cross-country ski conditions. And surely there is no more thrilling experience than ice-skating on the frozen ocean.

Twenty-four-hour sunlight is another natural wonder that can be experienced

in the country's northern Lapland region during summer; conversely, the nation is shrouded in darkness during winter, when temperatures can reach -50C in the north and -35C in the south.

With a population of just over 550,000, Helsinki is by far the country's most populous city. One of Helsinki's main attractions is Helsinki Cathedral in Senate Square. With its green domes and white exterior, this imposing building was constructed from 1830-52 to replace another church.

Other highlights include Suomenlinna (one of the largest maritime fortresses in the world), Temppeliaukio Church, which is carved directly into a rock hill, and Seurasaari Open-Air Museum. This island attraction provides insights into traditional Finnish life.

It may not be the world's premier tourist destination, but that's part of Finland's charm. If you're looking for tranquil beauty, Finland should be top of your list.