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Aug 8, 2014 Amy Rosen 2



Story is one of the new home-grown cafes in the Food Hall. Photo, Amy Rosen.

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Photo 1 of 5

Walking tour

Rich with green parks, promenades, cobblestone streets and art nouveau buildings, go on a walkabout of Helsinki and take in the main sites and attractions, including the Helsinki Cathedral, the harbour area, the legendary Esplanade Park, as well as the just renovated Food Hall (Kauppa Halli), circa 1888 on the waterfront, a great place to buy unique foods — everything from cloudberry jam to canned bear meat! Make sure to stop by the renowned Temppeliaukion Kirikko, a cutting edge church designed in 1969 by two Finnish architect brothers who blasted the temple out of a rock face. At the time the modernity of it sparked controversy but 45 years on it's one of the city's top five attractions — there's even classical music playing for visitors.

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Klaus K Hotel

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Distinct design

Stay at a great boutique design hotel in the Design District in the city centre (Helsinki was the World Design Capital in 2012, and this compact district boasts over 200 players.) Klaus K Hotel's rooms and spaces were inspired by four emotional themes: mystical, passion, desire and envy, based on an epic Finnish poem. What this amounts to is vibrant colour, texture, and something visually interesting at every turn.

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Photo, Kari Fazer Cafe.

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Take a break

There are coffee and ice cream kiosks absolutely everywhere, which makes a lot more sense when you learn that the Finns are the biggest consumers of ice cream in Europe (who knew?) and that they drink an average of six cups of coffee per day. "Ice cream keeps us happy and the coffee keeps us awake during the long winters" offers Helsinki guide, Raila. Feel free to pop into the historic **Kari Fazer Cafe**, also an incredible chocolate shop and a famous local brand. If you feel like relaxing while working up a sweat, saunas are a way of life here, taken daily by most. Hop on a tram (3 euros) and head to the public **Kotiharjun Sauna**, where about \$15 euros will get you a rented towel, a bouquet of birch branches for swatting your back and appendages (good for circulation), and as long as you want in the steamy, dark, sauna with the monstrous ancient furnace, stoked with local wood. Cool off outside with water or beer, then head back in for another round of heat.



Photo, Amy Rosen.

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Breathtaking views

The new **Finnair SkyWheel** (opened in June) located in the south harbour, offers birds-eye views of the sea and the city. The modern Ferris wheel holds 200 people at a time – and there's even a glass-bottomed VIP Veuve Cliquot Lounge car for sipping bubbly during the 15-minute ride. Afterwards, grab an ice cream (when in Helsinki...) and a bistro chair on the manicured lawns and watch the boats sail by. Speaking of sailing, a sightseeing cruise is another great vantage point, not to mention a relaxing way to spend an hour and a half on the water. Mahel at Helsinki's stunning archipelago aboard the Royal Line's sightseeing cruise, where you can have lunch or sip local wine or beer.

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A signature sapes of herring and beetroot at Restaurant Juuri. Photo: Amy Rosen.

Delicious dinner

Restaurant Gaijin is all big windows, black and concrete interiors; a sophisticated spot to eat Asian fusion by Finnish celebrity chef and restaurateur, Tomi Björk. Work your way through a multicourse izakaya menu, which run from scallops with XO sauce and a sashimi tasting to pan-fried salmon with a truffle-dashi emulsion, and sorrel sorbet for dessert. But perhaps the restaurant that best encapsulates the Helsinki experience is the beautiful Restaurant Juuri, in the Design District. (Juuri means "roots" in Finnish.) Twists on traditional foods, including "sapes", which are small appetizers (aka Finnish tapas), include trout sausage with roe and horseradish, thin slices of organic beef with dill and beets, and a baked porridge with smoked Baltic herring and cucumber. All modern takes on traditional dishes that a Finnish grandmother would recognize, and love.

Go now, while national carrier Finnair offers direct routes from Toronto — you could be there enjoying an ice cream in under 8hrs!

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