

Why Wait When It's Time for a Procrastination Vacation?

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► [Airbus A 350 lands in Helsinki](#) (Photo by Antti Lehto courtesy Finnair)

Finnair announced this week travelers on its airline could enjoy free city stopovers in Helsinki starting this spring. In reviving and enhancing a program it first tried in 2015, Finnair joins a number of international airlines working to put a positive spin on what is otherwise considered a negative; changing planes en

route to one's final destination. Think of a stop in Helsinki as a chance to get a taste of Finland, the campaign seems to say.



► *Tourism officials near Narita Airport are prepared for visitors* (Photo by Christine Negroni)

These programs are largely used by airlines with dominant status in their home airport including Icelandair, Hawaiian, Singapore, Panama's Copa Airlines, Ethiad and Emirates in the United Arab Emirates. Some cities are particularly well-suited to short visits because of to their proximity to the airport and easy access to places of interest on public transport. Among those are Tokyo, Dubai, Honolulu and Helsinki.

The industry trade group, International Air Transport Association, reports international

air travel continues to grow in 2016. That, combined with an increase in younger travelers, has convinced these airlines they can woo customers from the competition by offering them a chance to see someplace new along the way.



► *The Dubai Museum and Al Fahidi Fort* (Photo by Christine Negroni)

Emirates in Dubai has over the last three decades transformed from a desert outpost to a global aviation hub as well as a luxury-oriented destination in its own right. Dubai International Airport saw nearly 78 million passengers pass through in 2015 and a large percent of them are on their way to somewhere else. For those with

time and curiosity this glittering, multi-cultural city in the sand is worth a visit and is easily accessible via the elevated rapid transit train.

This stopover can be a true bargain in Dubai's off season when temperatures soar and hotel room rates plummet. Don't worry, everything is air conditioned in Dubai, including the bus stops.



▶ *Hawaiian connects the USA to many Pacific destinations* (Photo courtesy Hawaiian)

Hawaiian Airlines in Honolulu, has been around for nearly ninety years but people on the east coast of the United States weren't too familiar with the carrier which flew into airports in California. When it began flying into New York in 2013, it was a new opportunity for many Americans to travel to popular Pacific destinations like

New Zealand, Australia and Japan with a change of planes in Honolulu, breaking a long journey into two, nearly equal-length segments with a **nice break in between**, what one airline spokeswoman called a "procrastination vacation."

"Our raison d'être is to sell Hawaii as a destination," airline chief Mark Dunkerely said at the time, adding, "we have the most elegant connections between Oceania and parts of southeast Asia to the North American continent."

If a 11-hour flight to Honolulu followed by 10-hour flight to Sydney seems like a lot of time in the air, a few days on the beach in Waikiki provides a sunny respite.



► *Sunset over the Gulf of Finland from Kaivopuisto Park (Photo by Christine Negroni)*

remains the same even if passengers book a stay of one to seven days.

Short city visits are easily accomplished on your own as the airport is connected to downtown Helsinki via train. There's a lot to see and do including museums, parks, sauna and ice swimming and shopping within walking distance of the city center. Guided tour packages are also available on the [Finland Tours website](#) and range from short stays nearby for \$100 to longer length excursions to Lapland at upwards of \$1,000.



► *View of downtown Reykjavic (Photo by Christine Negroni)*

curious about this volcanic island with otherworldly features and a small-but-sophisticated urban center—even if its beaches cannot compete with Waikiki.

Finnair in Helsinki is actively pushing [its stopover program](#) this spring, now that it has partnered with the travel company Finland Tours/Primera. Unlike the airline's previous effort, the stopover option is now easy-to-find and book online. The ticket price

Icelandair in Reykjavik has been offering [free stopovers in Iceland](#) for decades. I remember booking one in the eighties. Then it was a small carrier. But over the past 10 years, Icelandair has grown into a formidable player among airlines operating trans-Atlantic service. With tourism a big part of the Icelandic economy, up to seven-day stopovers appeal to those

“People are not coming to Iceland because of the weather,” Birgir Holm Gudnason, the airline’s CEO told me. “They are coming for the culture, the food, the music and the artists and all that.”

This spring, the airline enhanced the allure of its stopover program with a benefit no other airline is offering; a travel companion. When booking a stopover, travelers can also ask to see the city with a local and spend time **in the company of an Icelandair employee** who has volunteered to be “a stopover buddy.”



► Some of the airline's "Stopover Buddies" (Photo courtesy Icelandair)

More than 700 travelers have expressed interest in the program since it began, according to airline spokesman Michael Raucheisen and between February and April of this year, more than 100 matches were made, giving new meaning to “friendly skies.” **P**