

READING EAGLE



Travels with Charlie

CHARLES J. ADAMS III

In airport lingo, it is possible to leave HVN and land in HEL

SOMEWHERE I heard that the people of Finland are among the happiest people in the world.

Why, then, are they telling everyone else to go to HEL?

Don't be shocked. HEL is to Helsinki what PHL is to Philadelphia. It is the international three-letter designation for Helsinki Airport.

About 11 miles north of the capital of Finland and only 90 miles west of St. Petersburg, Russia, HEL is the hub of the FinnAir airline, one of the busiest transfer airports in northern Europe, and is poised to become even bigger and busier after several imminent improvements are completed.

The airport was built in 1952 to handle international passengers arriving for the Helsinki Summer Olympics. It has seen steady growth since then, and Finavia, the state-owned authority that operates the airport, has announced an improvement plan for the airport that consistently has been ranked among the best in the world.

Some of the improvements will benefit locals, but others will facilitate travel into Helsinki and onto other destinations.

The runways will be improved, about 3,000 parking spaces will be added, and an array of shopping and dining options will be added to the airport's two terminals.

Those new businesses will include the Arctic Bar, Pier Zero, the Nordic Kitchen and the Wine and View Bar.

New shops will feature Nordic and specifically Finnish goods at Marimekko (apparel) and Finn-gold (jewelry).

As you read this, some people in Finland are trying to convince authorities to rename the airport "Sibelius Airport," after Jean Sibelius, the renowned Finnish composer.

Even if the pro-Sibelius faction wins, the three-letter designation for the airport will be HEL.

And all of this sparked my imagination.

Let's say you live in a city in central Connecticut and you decide to spend your vacation in Scandinavia.

You do some research and find that the most convenient airport over there is Helsinki. And, you depart from the Tweed New Haven Airport.

Your ticket will be punched from HVN to HEL.

•••

MasterCard has released its Global Destination Cities Index, and at the top of the list of the 20 most visited cities in the world is — as it has been for several surveys — London.

According to the tally, more than 18.8 million international travelers visited London last year, just ahead of the second-place city, Bangkok, Thailand. (18.2 million).

Paris and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates repeated in third and fourth places, respectively.

Istanbul, Turkey, jumped from seventh to fifth place; New York City dropped from fifth to sixth; and Singapore went down from sixth to seventh place.

Other cities in the MasterCard survey include, in order: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Seoul, South Korea; Hong Kong; Tokyo; Barcelona, Spain; Amsterdam; Rome; Milan; Taipei, Taiwan; Shanghai; Vienna; Prague; and Los Angeles.

Contact Charles J. Adams III: life@readingeagle.com.