

Short but Rather Sweet

Story and Pictures by Jeerawan Duangnam

In Finland, the sun works hard in the summer months to create a permanent daylight that never fails to energise.

Flying with Finnair, I arrived at stylish Helsinki International Airport and bought my Helsinki Card, which allows the holder to travel freely and limitlessly on public transport (that's bus, tram, metro and even ferry) to, from, and around Helsinki. Short but sweet, my 24-hour transit trip began at once.

Helsinki is a mini-metropolis and easily enjoyed on foot. From the central railway station, I found my way to famous shopping roads Aleksanterinkatu and Esplanade, where Finnish treasures abound, like glassware from Iittala and textile items from Marimekko. Nearby, is the summer flea market at Hietalahti, a shopping bonanza of local products, from sweet buns to reindeer-skin clogs.

In 1917, the young state of Finland gained independence from Russia, but today, the historical connection remains evident, especially in the city's architecture. The monumental neo-classical monument in Senate Square, the Uspensky Cathedral, provokes attention with its onion-like cupolas cutting a distinct profile among other European-style buildings. Not far from here is Market Square, which is packed with restaurants, markets, dinner cruises and a ferry port for trips to Suomenlinna, a Unesco World Heritage Site and the home of the world's largest sea fortress, Viapori. The fortress is remarkably well preserved, though truth be told it rarely saw action. Give yourself at least two hours to travel to and explore the island.

To make the most of my Helsinki Card, I took a tram around the city and checked out the Tempelisaukio Church, which is carved from rock. You will be asked to keep silent here, in order to listen to your own breath and footsteps magnified by the building's excellent acoustics, which make it a popular venue for concerts.

After dinner, I looked at my watch. It was nearly 10pm, and the sun was still shining, warming the city. Nevertheless, I gave up fighting the light and crashed out, pondering the phrase *carpe diem* and its implications in round-the-clock sunlight of a Helsinki summer. 🌞

Finnair's route network, depending on the timetable period, covers over 50 international destinations, including Bangkok (seven to 14 times weekly, double-daily from Dec), Tokyo (twice weekly), Osaka (five times weekly), Beijing (five to seven times weekly), Shanghai (daily), Guangzhou & Hong Kong (three to four times weekly) and Singapore (four to seven times weekly). Thrice-weekly Nagoya & Delhi flights began this summer. From May '07, a Kuala Lumpur flight will commence, via Bangkok. Visit finnair.com. Vantaa Airport's site is at helsinki-vantaa.fi.



Rock Church (top) and reindeer-skin clogs (bottom).

