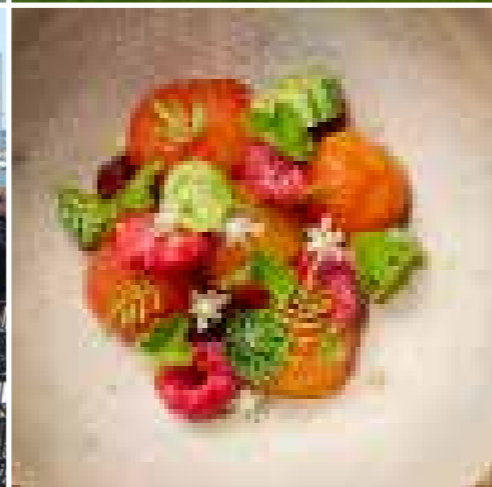
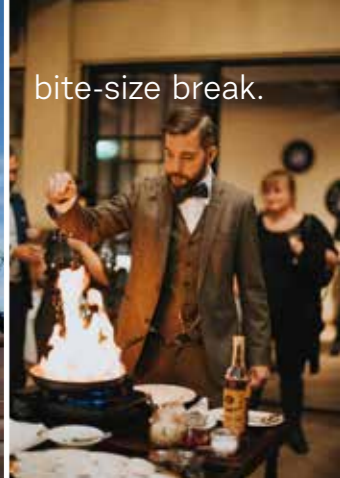




STYLE by the sea

Finland's capital Helsinki regularly tops surveys of the world's best cities – and it's easy to see why. Fringed with harbours and Baltic inlets, it's stuffed with glorious architecture and home to world renowned design. As Norman Miller discovers, the food is elegantly put together too



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Futuristic Löyly – sauna with a sea view; Junky Vegan’s street food; modernist architecture at the Museum of Contemporary Art; upmarket vegan food at Magu; Helsinki cathedral looms over the centre of town; old-time charm at Sekel; cool newcomer Luovuus Kukkii Kaaoksesta; Art Nouveau exterior of Wellamo; tomato, raspberry and chilli innovation at Nolla; seafront cafés abound in Helsinki

COFFEE AND COCKTAILS

Finns are world leaders in coffee consumption, so make it your fuel for exploring. Helsinki’s cafés offer more than a flat white and cinnamon buns... Vegan cake hangout **Andante** (facebook.com/AndanteHelsinki) doubles as a florist, while a laundrette whirrs within **Café Tin Tin Tango** (facebook.com/tintintango). Or browse the fashions at fleamarket-with-caffeine **Relove** (relove.fi).

For a craft beer, the no-frills **One Pint Pub** (onepintpub.com) has well kept Finnish brews – sip them outside looking over the Ruoholahti canal. Cocktails are big here too: **Chihuahua Julep** (chihuahuaulep.fi) – voted 2023 Best Bar in Finland – is a gorgeous speakeasy (ring the bell for entry) championing mezcal and tequila.

SUSTAINABLE STARS AND A SIDE ORDER OF HISTORY

The Nordic region’s first zero-waste restaurant, the outstanding **Nolla** (restaurantnolla.com) cooks with spent grains from local

“For a Finnish sauna, you can choose no-frills old-school-style or 21st century glam”

breweries and turns unwanted male sturgeon from the caviar trade into delicious *escabeche*. Opened in March by wild food pioneer Jyrki Tsutsunen, **Skutta** (skuttaan.fi) champions foraging and fermenting in brilliant dishes like spruce-marinated mussels and wild herb-fried sand flounder.

Finnish heritage underpins some great dining establishments. The most elevated – literally, with its high-rise spot above Esplanadi gardens – is **Savoy** (savoyhelsinki.fi). Its 1930s wood interior was designed by the famed Alvar and Aino Aalto, while its *vorschmack* (ground meat, anchovies, herring and onion, topped with beetroot, pickles and sour cream) is an icon of Finnish culinary history.

Sekel (restaurantsekel.com) is a critically acclaimed newcomer whose menus create ‘a vision of a luxurious evening out a century ago’. The **Sea Horse** (seahorse.fi)

could be a set from a film by famed Finnish director Kaurismäki, and is nicknamed Sikala – the Piggery – by locals scoffing exemplary crispy-fried Baltic herrings or steak with onions beneath its 1930s sea horse mural.

VIBRANT VEGAN AND FUTURE FINNISH

Cherishing nature is as Finnish as droll humour, and that extends to fine vegan vittles. **Junky Vegan** (junkyvegan.fi) arrived during lockdown as the first in a planned chain of vegan street food diners with drinks from small local producers, such as 8-Bit Brewing beers. At haute-vegan beacon **Magu** (maguhelsinki.fi), tempura seaweed, truffle pearl and unagi sauce or 3D printed ‘lamb’, shiitake and radish indicate the intriguing pan-global bent.

A new wave of restaurants blend Finland’s love of the artfully

crafted and contemporary. Bold food pairings underpin seasonal menus at **Wellamo** (wellamo.fi), where dishes like tomato, shiitake and lovage, preserved currants with thyme, or fish of the day with marinated black kale are served in a charming Art Nouveau building. A current darling newcomer is **Luovuus Kukkii Kaaoksesta** (luovuuskukkii kaaoksesta.fi). It showcases raw ingredients – zingingly fresh seafood to the fore – in a cosily central, mural-decorated space.

THE MARKET HALL CALLS

The 1880s **Vanha Market Hall** (Mon-Sat) by the main harbour is the place for classic Finnish produce – buy bottled blueberry sauce and Arctic honey at the **Arctic Delice** stall. Curious carnivores can splash €30 for tinned *björnkött* – bear meat – with a clear conscience, as it’s sourced only from animals culled to protect reindeer herds. Grab a bargain lunch while you’re there, such as fish soup at **Soppakeittio**.

Vintage fans can scour Hietelahti’s weekend antiques market, then refuel at the global food stalls – from sourdough pizza to pho or ramen, inside **Kauppahalli** (hietalahdenkauppahalli.fi). Stock up for a picnic at **Food Market Herkku** (foodmarket herkku.fi), inside Stockmann department store – say, pork-filled cabbage rolls and myriad pickles – to take to seafront Kaivopuisto park.

WHEN YOU’RE NOT EATING...

Central Helsinki’s cool design shops sit amid Neoclassical grandeur, Jugendstil façades and Art Deco beauty. Take the ferry to **Suomenlinna** – a UNESCO-listed 18th century fortress island now a warren of shops and museums. Check out **Merikortteli** – a former dockside industrial area now buzzing with creative businesses. For a Finnish sauna, go old-school at **Kotiharjun** (kotiharjunsuuna.fi) – or 21st century glam at **Löyly** (loylyhelsinki.fi), a futuristic seafront building a 10-minute cab ride from the centre. @

WHERE TO STAY

- **Sokos Vaakuna** is a lovingly restored shrine to 1950s style by the Central Station, originally built for the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. Doubles from £166 b&b. sokoshotels.fi
- **Marski** offers contemporary style on Mannerheimintie, Helsinki’s bustling main boulevard. Doubles from £127 excluding breakfast. scandichotels.com

GETTING THERE

Norwegian, Finnair and BA fly direct to Helsinki from London, Manchester and Edinburgh, with return flights from £250. Trains to the city centre take 35 minutes and cost £9-10. Buses take 45 minutes and cost £5-6.

NEXT MONTH
A visit to Aberdeenshire in Scotland