

Pohjanmaa



This coast is often referred to as Ostrobothnia (Swedish: Österbotten), for it has historically had a strong Swedish presence, and many communities are still largely Swedish-speaking.

Stretching from Pori in the south to Kalajoki in the north, and inland to Seinäjoki, the interplay of the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking cultures is fascinating.

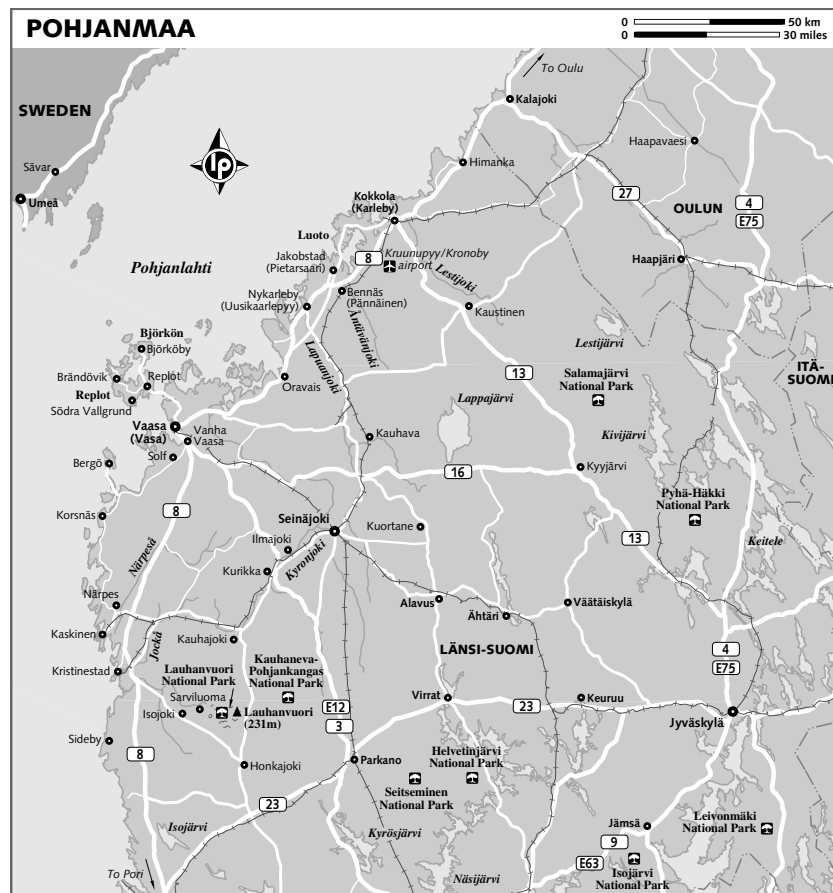
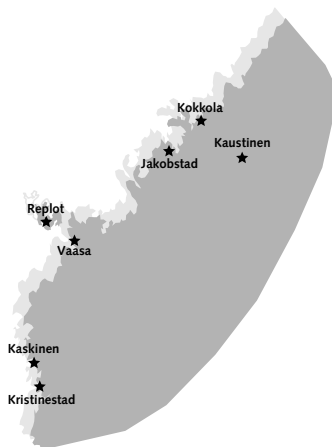
As well as the year-round appeal of the main town, Vaasa, with its waterside location and art galleries, and the beautiful wooden old-towns of Kokkola and Jakobstad, there are a number of events that are among Finland's best. The sunny summers here host the Folk Music Festival at Kaustinen, and two wildly different affairs at Seinäjoki – the major international Provinssirock festival, and a hugely popular fiesta of that curious subculture, Finnish tango.

Swedes first developed trading towns on the west coast in the 17th century to exploit the forests for tar. After this dried up, many Swedes remained and a farming culture emerged. Language is the distinctive feature here; a newsstand in Jakobstad will have a collection of imported Swedish papers that keep locals gossiping about Sweden's TV stars, and the radio station is more likely to be playing Stockholm's 'P3' than a Finnish station. People from Sweden treat this region with curiosity and call it *Parallelsverige*, or 'Parallel Sweden'.

While Pohjanmaa lacks the mystery of Lapland or the beauty of the Lakeland, skipping the coast here would be a mistake for anyone wanting a full picture of Finland. The inland areas, fields splashed with bright yellow canola and dotted with dozens of grey or rust-red hay barns, seem a rural idyll out of a pastoral novel, very quiet apart from the festivals.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Pitching a tent for the **Kaustinen Folk Music Festival** (p264) in July; Finland's answer to Woodstock
- Wandering the picturesque **old town** (p257) of Jakobstad
- Visiting the excellent art collection in Vaasa's **Museum of Ostrobothnia** (p250)
- Cycling around the fishing villages on the island of **Replot** (p254)
- Relaxing in lovely **Kristinestad** (p254) or peaceful **Kaskinen** (p256)
- Marvelling at the natural crystal formations in Kokkola's **Mineral Museum** (p260)



Activities

Pohjanmaa's rolling fields, unchallenging gradients, regularly-spaced towns and beautiful coastal scenery make it an appealing destination for a spot of leisurely cycling. Apart from two-wheeled activities, the water itself is an obvious and popular attraction, with boating, fishing, and swimming all popular and quite easily accessible.

Self-Catering Accommodation

Local tourist offices have details of cottages in the area. An organization that organizes self-catering packages is **FinFun Finwest** (☎ 020 1334 882; www.finfun.fi; Mannenkatu 1, Oulu).

VAASA

☎ 06 / pop 57,030

Located at the slender waist of the Gulf of Bothnia and a bare 45 nautical miles from Sweden, it's no surprise that a cultural duality exists in Vaasa (Swedish: Vasa). A quarter of the population here speak Swedish as their first language, and the city has a feel all of its own. You'll hear conversations between friends and colleagues in restaurants and bars flitting between Finnish and Swedish, often in the same sentence, but, even after centuries, it still feels a little like a border town that is torn between two masters.

We're beyond the 63rd parallel here – in the Southern Hemisphere we'd have reached bits of Antarctica – and in the minds of many southern Finns, this is already 'The North'. Thus, although Vaasa isn't huge, it feels like a metropolis compared to the much smaller settlements around. It has a lively, bustling air, and is a popular family holiday destination in summer, thanks to its waterside location and adventure park. The surrounding countryside and nearby islands are easily accessible; in spring, nesting waterbirds crowd its shorelines, and you feel the wilderness is never that far away.

The town began in the 14th century as a village called Korsholm. In 1606 Swedish King Charles IX created Vasa, named after the royal Swedish Wasa family. The original town was located 7km east of modern Vaasa but, like all respectable Finnish wooden settlements, it burned down in a Great Fire; the new city was begun in the mid-19th century. During the Civil War that followed Finnish independence, Vaasa was the scene of heavy fighting, and an important base of the Whites, monarchists loyal to the existing government fighting against the workers' rebellion.

ORIENTATION

Vaasanpuistikko is the main street through the centre of Vaasa. Vaskiluoto to the west and Palosaari to the north are two islands connected to central Vaasa by bridges.

INFORMATION

Main post office (Hovioikeudenpuistikko 23A;

☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri) Opposite the train station.

Public library (☎ 325 3533; Kirjastonkatu 13) Several free Internet terminals.

Tourist office (☎ 325 1145; www.vaasa.fi; Kaupungintalo; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun Jun–Aug, 10am–4pm Mon–Fri Sep–May; 🚲) In the town hall building, books accommodation and rents bikes.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Pohjanmaan Museo

Vaasa is blessed with an excellent museum. The **Pohjanmaan Museo** (Ostrobothnian Museum; ☎ 325 3800; Museokatu 3; admission €4; ☎ 10am–5pm Tue–Fri, 10am–8pm Wed, noon–5pm Sat & Sun) has two sections, both worthwhile.

The art collection upstairs is extraordinary. Most of it was amassed by local doctor Karl Hedman, with the help of art-

hound Gösta Stenman. There's an excellent range of works from the 'Golden Age' of Finnish painting, with Hugo Simberg, Helene Schjerfbeck and the characteristic expressionist landscapes of Tyko Sallinen particularly well represented. Look out for the latter's famous *Dwarf*, as well as a fine head of Christ by Akseli Gallen-Kallela. More surprisingly, there's also a high-quality selection of European masters, purchased for virtually nothing in the chaos in Russia after the revolution. A Tintoretto, a pair of Luca Giordano, a fine 15th-century Flemish Deposition by Roger van der Weyden, and a round Botticelli Madonna are some of several fine canvases. There's also a good porcelain collection, with Meissen, Delft, and Wedgwood pieces prominent.

Downstairs, Terra Nova is devoted to the ecosystem of the local environment. This part of the Gulf of Bothnia is known as the Kvarken; the land is still rising as the crust 'rebounds' after the last Ice Age weighed it down. There's a collection of local butterflies, great photos of seals, and a display of bird and animal life. A spooky 'virtual aquarium' introduces the finny tribes.

Other Sights

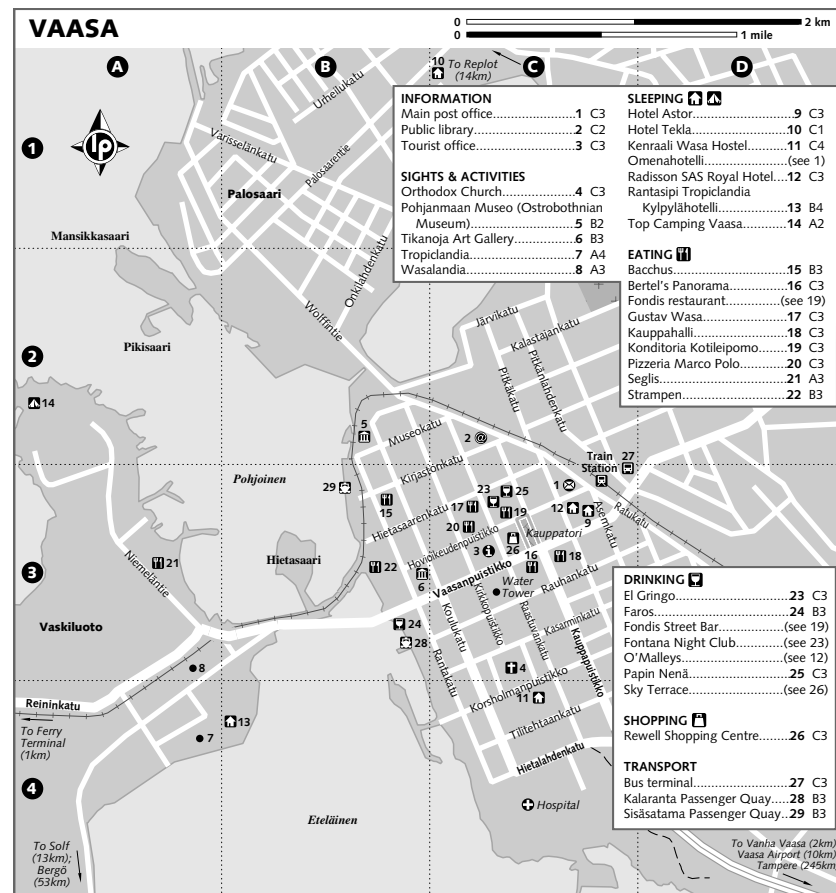
Tikanoja Art Gallery (☎ 325 3916; Hovioikeudenpuistikko 4; admission €5; ☎ 11am–4pm Tue–Sat, noon–5pm Sun) has a good collection of Finnish and international paintings, and regularly puts on high-quality temporary exhibitions.

The **Orthodox Church** at Kasarmintori has some old icons brought from St Petersburg; contact the tourist office to see them.

If you plan on visiting a few museums in the Vaasa region, pick up an **Art City Pass** (€5) from the tourist office. It's valid for one day and includes entry to most regional galleries and museums.

Vaskiluoto

The island of Vaskiluoto is a big holiday destination for Finnish families, with beaches, boating, a popular camping ground and **Wasalandia Amusement Park** (☎ 211 1200; www.wasalandia.fi; adult/child-under-120cm day pass €16/11; ☎ from 11am mid-May–mid-Aug, closing varies 4–7pm), the Finnish answer to Disneyland. There's a good variety of rides, none of them too hair-raising; it will appeal most to kids under 14.



Opposite the amusement park is the excellent water park **Tropicandia** (☎ 211 1300; www.tropicandia.fi; adult/child €16/12; ☎ 7am–9pm Mon–Fri, 10am–9pm Sat, 10am–8pm Sun, closed most of Sep). It's got plenty to keep both kids and adults happy, with slides, Jacuzzis, restaurant and more. There's also a new outdoor section that's open from mid-June to August.

TOURS

The **MS Tiira** (☎ 315 4057; tickets €12) cruises the Vaasa archipelago from Midsummer to mid-August. It departs from the Kalaranta passenger quay at midday and 4pm, picking up passengers at the Top Camping Vaasa camp site shortly thereafter. The cruise

lasts about 3½ hours, about half of which seems to be taken up by a lunch stop (food not included) at a restaurant owned by the same outfit.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Korsholm Music Festival** (☎ 322 2390; www.korsholm.fi/music), an international chamber music festival, is held in late June.

The Vaasa shoreline reverberates to **Rock-perry** (www.rockperry.fi), a major summer music festival at Vaskiluoto in mid-July. It attracts top Finnish and international acts.

Vaasa Rules (www.vaasa.fi) is a big Midsummer party with music and concerts, and at the **Wasa Water Carnival** (www.tophrob.fi/water), in late

July or early August, there is dancing, music, drinking, and plenty of water-based fun.

SLEEPING

Kenraali Wasa Hostel (☎ 0400-668 521; www.kenraali.wasahostel.com; Korsholmanpuistikko 6-8; s/d/tr €37/46/50; (P) (X) (Q)) This great place to stay is housed in part of an old military complex, and beautifully decorated in keeping with the theme. The rooms are cosy and elegant, with cable TV, a small fridge and shared bathroom. There are kitchen facilities, books, free bikes to use and plenty of peace and quiet. There's excellent value for groups sharing a room too.

Hotel Astor (☎ 326 9111; www.astorvaasa.com; Asemakatu 4; r €117, with sauna €138, Sat, Sun & summer €88; (P) (X) (Q)) This stylish, intimate hotel is in a lovely old building with a classy interior. It's more personal and personable than the chain hotels; the nicest rooms are in the old wing of the building, with polished floors and dark-wood furnishings. The pricing is a little strange; as singles are normally the same price as doubles, solo travellers are better off with the latter, which are bigger. Best value are the rooms with their own sauna, which are only a little more expensive.

Radisson SAS Royal Hotel (☎ 020-123 4720; www.radissonsas.com; Hovioikeudenpuistikko 18; r €120, ste €300, s/d Sat, Sun & summer €80/85; (P) (X) (Q) (U)) This is the biggest of Vaasa's business hotels, boasting not only rooms on both sides of the street but a pub, nightclub and two restaurants. The rooms are well-equipped and guests have use of a sauna, pool and the gym next door.

Omenahotelli (www.omenahotelli.fi; Hovioikeudenpuistikko 23; r €55; (X)) This good-value chain of hotels run without reception staff, so you have to book in advance over the Internet (you can also book via a terminal in the lobby). The rooms are good, with a twin bed and a fold-out couch that can accommodate another two people for the same price.

Top Camping Vaasa (☎ 211 1255; www.topcamping.fi/vaasa; Niemeläntie; tent sites €8 plus per person €4, 4-person cabins €50; (X) late Jun–mid-Aug) For happy campers there's a well-kept, family-friendly camping ground about 2km from the town centre, on the grassy tip of Vaskiluoto island. It also rents bicycles and boats, and offers discount coupons for the Tropiclandia spa and free admission to Wasalandia Amusement Park.

Hotel Tekla (☎ 327 6411; www.hoteltekla.com; Palosaarentie 58; s/d €49/69; (P) (X) (Q)) This hotel on Palosaari island in northern Vaasa is kitted out for sports enthusiasts. It's a good base near a lake, and has its own gym, restaurant, sauna and badminton court. Although the corridors are a bit cellblock-like, the rooms are bright, with large windows, cane seats, fridge and a simple shared kitchen. Take bus 1 or 2 from the centre.

Rantasipi Tropiclandia Kylpylähotelli (☎ 283 8000; www.rantasipi.fi; Lemmenpolku 3; s/d €114/135, ste €220; (P) (X) (Q) (U) (V)) This is a large spa hotel attached to Tropiclandia on Vaskiluoto island. Rates include all kinds of spa and resort activities so it's popular with families and anyone wanting a relaxing time out. The spacious, warmly furnished rooms have wireless Internet access.

EATING

Fondis (☎ 280 0400; Hovioikeudenpuistikko 15; mains €12-20; (X) 11am-11pm Mon-Thu, 11am-midnight Fri & Sat, noon-9pm Sun) This has a restaurant and bar in adjoining doorways and is one of the best places to eat in Vaasa. The restaurant is smartly kitted out with crisp white cloths and bright red chairs; the varied menu includes good Caesar salads, plenty of grilled meat (including very tasty liver with lingonberry sauce) and top service.

Bacchus (☎ 317 3484; Rantakatu 4; mains €22-29; (X) 3pm-1am Mon-Sat, noon-10pm Sun) This up-market restaurant is set in a lovely wooden building near the water, at the museum end of town. The menu is short but long on quality, with delicious dishes such as partridge with lentils and artichoke sauce.

Gustav Wasa (☎ 326 9200; Raastuvankatu 24; mains €17-31; (X) dinner Mon-Sat) Around the corner from the tourist office is a cellar restaurant with a small but gourmet menu of Finnish cuisine including wild duck, rack of lamb and butter-fried sirloin of reindeer; there are also vegetarian options. It's got an upmarket, bygone years sort of a feel and, unusually for a restaurant, there's a sauna in an adjoining building so patrons can cook themselves.

Konditoria Kotileipomo (Hovioikeudenpuistikko 13; (X) 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) This place, on the kauppatori (market square) in the city centre, is a pleasant café with a light, quiet, interior and a small terrace in summer. It serves tasty pastries in particular, and if

you're planning a picnic, you can't beat one of the many types of loaves they bake fresh.

Seglis (☎ 317 2037; Niemeläntie 14; mains €12-16, light meals €6-10; (X) May-Sep) On Vaskiluoto, and part of the local sailing club, this is a stylish but surprisingly reasonably priced restaurant. It has a terrace overlooking the marina and features dishes such as whitefish fillet in lobster sauce, and chicken in cola sauce. There's plenty of value in the steaks, and there's also a decent lunch buffet and plenty of children's choices.

Strampen (☎ 320 0355; Rantakatu 6; Sisäsatama; mains €11-18, lunch buffet €7-9.50; (X) May-Aug) On the opposite side of the harbour to Seglis, this is a summer beer terrace in the waterfront park, with a spacious, pleasant restaurant serving a range of warming meals.

Faros (☎ 312 6411; Kalaranta; meals €9-12) This is a boat restaurant moored in Kalaranta Harbour on the southern side of the bridge. It's a good place for lunch or an evening drink and snack, with decent burgers, pasta and salads.

Pizzeria Marco Polo (☎ 317 5922; Hovioikeudenpuistikko 11; pizzas €6-10; (X) 11am-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm Sun) A traditional little Italian place serving cheap pizzas and pastas. There's a good range, and they'll even whip up a gluten-free pizza for those with dietary requirements.

Bertel's Panorama (Vaasanpuistikko 16; lunch buffet €7.40; (X) 10am-4pm Mon-Fri) This is a great place for lunch with a view over the kauppatori. The daily buffet is not gourmet but is very generous.

There are cheap grillis, pizzerias and hamburger restaurants around the kauppatori and in the Rewell shopping centre. The **kauppahalli** (Kauppapuistikko) or covered market, has stalls selling fresh bakery products and the usual market fare.

DRINKING

Sky Terrace (☎ 212 4115; Sokos Hotel Vaakuna, Kauppatori; (X) from 4pm) With a bird's eye view over the kauppatori and central Vaasa, this 9th floor bar is a great place to relax. With leather couches and two outdoor areas, it's popular but not too pricey. On Friday and Saturday nights, there are DJs and a cover charge.

O'Malley's (Hovioikeudenpuistikko 18) This is an Irish bar popular with visiting business people since it's part of the Radisson Hotel. With international beers and stout on tap,

booth seating and a cosy atmosphere, it's a good place to be in winter. They pour a good Guinness when it's not too busy.

El Gringo (☎ 280 0415; Raastuvankatu) Around the corner from Fondis Street Bar is a basement saloon bar that packs them in with cheap beer (€2.50). When that closes everyone heads upstairs to Fontana Night Club.

Papin Nenä (☎ 361 0557; Hietasaarenkatu 14; (X) disco 10pm-4am Wed-Sat). This large brick building holds both this popular disco that has regular and diverse live acts, and the more sedate Munkhaus bar.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Finnair offers daily flights from Vaasa to Helsinki, Kokkola and Stockholm. The budget operator **Blue1** (www.blue1.com) also has flights to Helsinki and Stockholm

Boat

From late June to early August there are one to two daily ferries (€41, four hours) between Vaasa and the Swedish town of Umeå (Uumaja) with **RG Lines** (☎ 320 0300; www.rgline.com). It also runs once-weekly to Sundsvall (Friday, eight hours). The ferry terminal is on the western side of Vaskiluoto (take bus 10).

Bus

There are daily bus services from the terminal on Vöyrinkatu to all major western and central towns, and there are several express buses a day from Helsinki (€55.60, seven hours) and normal buses from Turku (€43.20, 5½ hours), both via Pori (€29.20, three hours). Buses run up and down the west coast pretty much hourly from Monday to Friday.

Train

Vaasa is off the main train lines, but there is a connecting line to Seinäjoki, where you can connect with trains to mainline destinations and Helsinki (€47.10, four to five hours). Trains to Seinäjoki run up to eight times a day (€8.80, 50 minutes).

GETTING AROUND

The airport is situated 12km southeast of the centre; airport buses depart from the city bus station (one way €3).

Local buses from the kauppatori come in handy if you want to reach areas outside the centre. Take bus 5 or 10 to Vaskiluoto island and bus 1 or 2 to the hostel on Palosaari island. The fare is €2.40. The Lilliputti city train runs between the kauppatori and Wasalandia (€3) daily in summer.

Bicycles can be rented at the tourist office or Top Camping Vaasa for around €3.50 for two hours.

AROUND VAASA

VANHA VAASA

The Old Town of Vaasa developed around a harbour, southeast of the modern centre, but the harbour became unsuitable for large vessels. The medieval church is now in ruins and, although the old fortress area has been protected, not much remains. Probably the most interesting sight is the **Church of Korsholm**, built in 1786. It looks very pompous; it was originally a judges' palace. **Köpmanhuset Wasasferne** (☎ 356 7578; Kauppiaankatu 10; admission €2; ☞ 11am-5pm Thu-Sun mid-May-mid-Aug) is a museum of local history with reconstructions of a 19th-century post office and some furniture salvaged from the blaze.

Bus 7, 9, 12A and 12B travel between Vanha Vaasa and the town centre.

SOLF

One of the most attractive villages in Finland, Solf (Finnish: Sulva) is best known for its **Stundars Handicraft Village** (☎ 344 2200; www.stundars.fi; admission €3.50; ☞ noon-6pm Jul-mid-Aug), an open-air museum and crafts centre boasting 60 traditional wooden buildings, progressively moved here from surrounding villages. The whole place hums with activity in summer, when artisans demonstrate crafts such as wool dyeing and wood carving. The entrance fee includes a guided tour.

Regional buses from Vaasa make the 15km trip south to Solf. There are six daily Monday to Friday, but only one on Saturday, and a late one on Sunday (€4.20, 15 minutes)

REPLOT

Replot (Finnish: Raippaluoto) is a large island that lies just off the Vaasa coast. It's easy to reach and ideal for exploring by bicycle. On the island there are several small

fishing communities in addition to the main village, which is also called Replot.

Södra Vallgrund village is on the southwestern corner of the island, some 10km from the village of Replot. It has a small museum. **Klobbskat** village, at the western end of the island, is in a barren, Lappish-like setting. **Björkön** (Swedish: Björköby) is a fishing village on a smaller, northern island, accessible from Replot by bridge.

In 1997 a 1045m bridge – the longest bridge in Finland – was completed connecting Replot with the mainland.

Bulleräsins Holiday Village (☎ 352 7613; Bulleräsinsvägen 330; tent sites €10, cottages €42-58) in Södra Vallgrund has camping, cottages and a restaurant in a 1920s villa.

SOUTH OF VAASA

KRISTINESTAD

☎ 06 / pop 7760

Peaceful little Kristinestad (Finnish: Kristinankaupunki) is a small, idyllic seaside town with a proud seafaring history. Once an important port shipping tar and timber to distant harbours, it's now more or less in retirement (although timber and potatoes still employ plenty of locals), and languishes gracefully on the shores of a bay, whose waters sparkle azure on a sunny summer's day.

Named after Queen Kristina of Sweden, Kristinestad is, like many other towns on this coast, bilingual – some 58% of inhabitants are Swedish-speakers. Founded in the mid 17th century by the maverick count Per Brahe, the town rapidly became an important shipbuilding and trading centre. With the arrival of steamships, Kristinestad's importance declined, and many residents moved to Sweden.

Kristinestad is quite small, with a village feel and everything except the camping ground within a block or two of the market square.

Information

Internet Café (Strandgatan 37; ☞ 5-10pm Mon-Fri; per hr €3) Charming wooden building.

Tourist office (☎ 221 2311; www.krs.fi; Sjöгатan 47; ☞ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Aug-Jun, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sun Jul) Plenty of information and free Internet access. Very helpful.

Sights

The most interesting thing in Kristinestad is the town itself, with its rows of colourful, old, painted wooden houses and its charming small-town feel. In its heyday as a key port, every traveller entering the town had to pay customs duty, collected at the **Old Customs House** (Staketgatan), a smallish rust-wood building dating from 1720, just along from the imposing town hall.

Behind the customs house is the striking red-wood **Old Church** (Ulrika Eleonora Kyrkan; ☞ Tue-Sat mid-May-late Aug) from 1698 which retains much of its original detail. The red-brick **New Church** (Nya Kirka; Parmansgatan; ☞ 9am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), has a high wooden ceiling, the typical church-ship dedicated by mariners, and a large painting of the Crucifixion above the altar.

Sjöfartsmuseum (Maritime Museum; ☎ 221 2859; Salutorget 1; admission €3.50; ☞ noon-4pm Tue-Sun May-mid-Aug) displays marine-related items collected by an old sea captain and portrays Kristinestad's proud maritime history – the whole town seems to have pitched in to help put this place together, and they've done a fine job.

Lebell House (Lebellska Köpmansgården; ☎ 221 2159; Strandgatan 51; admission €4; ☞ 11am-5pm Mon-Fri, 11am-2pm Sat & Sun May-Aug), a block south of the market square, is a home museum that once belonged to a wealthy merchant. Dating from the mid-19th century, it's an excellent representation of upper-class life in old Kristinestad. The original Lebell certainly pulled himself up by his bootlaces; he first arrived in Kristinestad as a Polish prisoner of war before making his fortune in shipping.

About 5km north of town, **Carlsro Museum** (☎ 221 6343; Carlsrovägen 181; admission €4.50; ☞ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-late Aug) is in an old villa (1896) and is quite delightful, with a collection of bric-a-brac and toys from the Tsarist era. It's well worth the trip out there.

Three blocks south of the market square is **Kattpiskargården** (Cat Whipper's Alley). In the 1880s the town employed a cat catcher, whose job was to kill sick cats in order to prevent the spreading of plague – hence the name of the street.

Festivals & Events

The town has three big **market fairs**; one in mid-July, another in winter (Candelmas) and the third in autumn (Michaelmas).

They feature music, dancing and exhibitions as well as the usual market stalls.

Sleeping & Eating

Bed & Breakfast Jylli (☎ 0400-661 434; www.huutokauppa.biz; Östra Långgatan 47; s/d/tr €50/60/80; ☞ ☞ ☞) Run by a hearty auctioneer and his family, these beautiful wooden apartment/cabins are right in the heart of town. They are enchantingly rustic, but also very comfortable, and each one comes with fully-equipped kitchen, TV, phone socket and modern bathroom. One has been designed with wide entries and space to manoeuvre a wheelchair. Some are year-round, while two-level summer cabins have a blessedly dark sleeping area under the wooden roof. Despite the name, there's no breakfast.

Hotel Alma (☎ 221 3455; www.hotelalma.info; Sjöгатan; s/d €69/85, weekends €59/75; ☞ ☞) This is a great place to stay, in a charismatic wooden building just along from the Café Alma, which is the reception for this hotel. The rooms are elegant and different, with some period furniture and elaborate bed canopies. The same people also run a summer hostel across the river about 2km east of the centre (singles/doubles €35/55). Enquire at the café in all cases.

Pukinsaari/Bockholmens Camping (☎ 221 1484; Salavägen 32; tent sites €12, cabins €32-65; ☞ late May-early Sep) This is a pleasant place at a small beach, 1.5km southwest of the town centre. There are bicycles for rent.

Café Alma (☎ 221 3455; Sjöгатan 8; lunch soup & salad €6, full buffet €8.50, Sun €9.50; ☞ lunch 11am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) This fabulous place on the waterfront has a bright atrium dining area at the front and a sizeable terrace. Dominating the interior is a sizeable scale model of the ship *Alma*. There's a fine buffet lunch; the filled rolls and other snacks are also delicious.

Crazy Cat (☎ 221 3100, Östralånggatan 53-55; lunch special €7.50; ☞ 11am-9pm Mon-Fri, noon-9pm Sat & Sun) A small friendly pizzeria just off the market square. As well as the lunch special there is the usual range of pizzas.

Getting There & Away

Kristinestad is on road 662, 100km south of Vaasa. Buses between Pori (€16.20, one hour 20 minutes) and Vaasa (€18.90, 1½ hours) stop at Kristinestad. There are two daily buses from Tampere (€28.10, five hours).

KASKINEN

☎ 06 / pop 1519

Kaskinen (Swedish: Kaskö) is technically Finland's smallest town, and also the westernmost town on the Finnish coast, but in reality it's a relaxing and peaceful island village and a good place to break your journey. Finnish is spoken by the majority of people, many of whom work in the enormous pulp factory at the southern end of the town. There's also an important fish-processing plant.

Although there's not a lot to see, there's a hospitable feel, and opportunities for boating and fishing. Naturally there's a **local museum** (☎ 220 7711; Raatihuoneenkatu 48; admission €2; ☹ Jun-Aug or by appointment) which recreates a wealthy Finnish home from the 19th century, as well as a fisherman's cottage. Also in town is a small **fishing museum** (☎ 220 7711; Sjöboacken; admission €2; ☹ Jun-Aug or by appointment) at the northern end of the island, at the Kalaranta boat dock. Set in the old salting sheds, it demonstrates the pursuit of herring, whitefish, and salmon with a range of authentic fishing objects. The 18th-century **Bladh House**, on Kaskinen Sound, is a restored burgher house and the most important building in Kaskinen. It's a solid, impressive sight with its trapezoid roof characteristic of the period.

Two bridges connect the island town to the mainland. There's a small **tourist office** (☎ 220 7310; info@kaskinen.fi; ☹ Jun-mid-Aug) down at the harbour. The **Fishing Festival** in early July is a good time to be in Kaskinen, with market stalls and plenty of activities for kids.

Sleeping & Eating

Björnträ Vandrarhem (☎ /fax 222 7007; Raatihuoneenkatu 22; r per person €18-23; ☹ Jun-mid-Aug; ☹) This is a very friendly hostel in a low old wooden building, with six rooms almost of hotel standard. It's run by a very helpful and hospitable Swedish-speaking couple. Guests have use of a well-equipped kitchen and TV room and rooms may be available out of season by arrangement.

Hotelli Kaske (☎ 222 7771; Raatihuoneenkatu 41; s/d €61/78; (P) ☹) The only hotel in the village, this is comfy and well-equipped. The rooms have large recessed windows and come with cable TV and telephone. It's right opposite the kauppatori.

Café Kung Gustav (☎ 222 7111; Raatihuoneenkatu 39; ☹ 10am-11pm or later) This place does triple duty as the town's main central café, pub, and restaurant. There's also a restaurant at the Hotelli Kaske, as well as a bakery-café and a pizzeria in town.

Marianranta Camping (☎ 220 7311; tent sites €10, cabins €20-27; ☹ Jun-Aug) This camping ground is small, but very grassy and peaceful, and right by the seaside at the northeastern tip of the island. There are a few cottages and they rent canoes and bicycles.

NÄRPES

☎ 06 / pop 9515

Närpes (Finnish: Närpiö), 85km southwest of Vaasa, is the tomato basket of Finland. Take a few from a market stall and eat them with bread and salt, and you'll wonder what those tasteless red things are that you get in your local supermarket! It has one of the highest ratios of Swedish to Finnish speakers in the country – 93% are Swedophone, with a local accent that is hard to understand.

Some 150 *kyrkstallar*, or 'church stables' (though they were designed for the use of people not horses), surround the medieval **Närpes Church**, a few blocks south of where the bus stops. This is the only place in Finland where these temporary shelters have been preserved. In the past, people from outlying districts used these to stay overnight when visiting the church.

NORTH OF VAASA

NYKARLEBY

☎ 06 / pop 7436

Nykarleby (Finnish: Uusikaarlepyy) is a small town 20km south of Jakobstad where 91% of the population speak Swedish. The town was founded in 1620, the very same day as Karleby (Kokkola); despite the identical founding dates, this place got the name Nykarleby which means 'new Kokkola'. Today Nykarleby is a peaceful riverside town and it makes a pleasant stop on the road north from Vaasa. In summer, you can get tourist information and town maps from the **Café Kyrktuppen** (☎ 050-302 5207; Pankkikatu 4).

The yellow **Nykarleby Church** (☹ 9am-6pm summer) on the riverside was built in 1708. Its walls, pulpit and ceiling are covered with 18th-century paintings. **Nykarleby Museum**, to

the north along the main street, has plenty of local flavour. It features bric-a-brac, old costumes and furniture.

Nykarleby is famous to Finns as the town of Zacharias Topelius, a writer of much-loved children's poetry. His home, **Kuddnäs** (☎ 785 6111; 22 Jakobstadsvägen; ☹ May-Aug), is a beautiful old house but doesn't really evoke the man himself.

There are several cafés where you can try the famous local *våfflor* (waffles) with cream and strawberry jam. One of the nicest, Brostugan, is just across the river from the heart of town, opposite the church.

Several daily buses connect the two Nykarleby and Jakobstad, and northbound buses from Vaasa also stop here.

JAKOBSTAD

☎ 06 / pop 19,467

The pretty town of Jakobstad (Finnish: Pietarsaari) is distinctively Swedish (55% of the population speak Swedish), and the most interesting place to stop and sample the curious world of *Parallelsverige*. There is a well-preserved historic Old Town filled with 18th- and 19th-century wooden houses, some off-beat museums and easy access to some interesting coastal area.

Jakobstad was founded in 1652 by Ebba Brahe, wife of war hero Jacob de la Gardie. The surrounding region, Pedersöre, gave the town its Finnish name, which translates as Peter's Island. Russians sacked Jakobstad twice in 1714; despite the repeated drubbings, it became the leading shipping town in Finland during the 18th century.

Information

After Eight (Storgatan; ☹ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) Free Internet terminals at this café and cultural centre.

Public library (☎ 785 1272; Runebergsgatan 12;

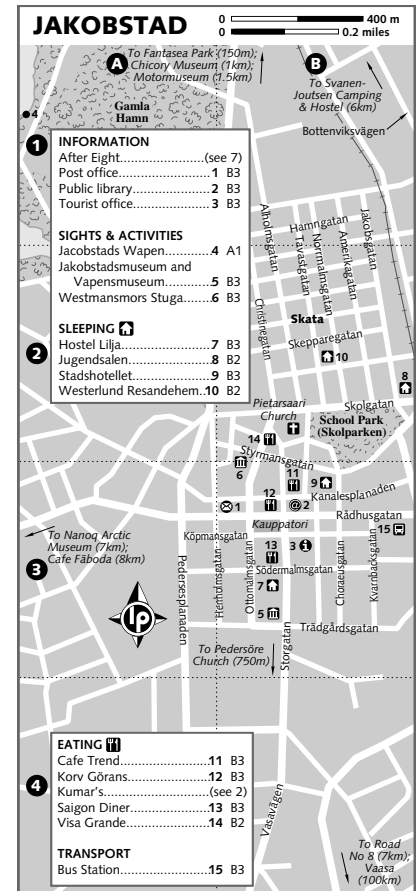
☹ 11am-7pm Mon-Thu, 11am-4pm Fri summer, 11am-8pm Mon-Fri autumn-spring) Has a couple of Internet terminals; maximum 15 minutes unless you book.

Tourist office (☎ 785 1208; www.jakobstad.fi; Köpmansgatan 12; ☹ 8am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat Jun-Aug, 8am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) Very helpful; has information on all parts of Finland.

Sights

SKATA

Stretching for several blocks to the north of the new town, Skata, the old town of Jakobstad, has around 300 **wooden houses** that have



been beautifully preserved and are the highlight of a visit. Most of them were built in the 19th century and were occupied by sailors and workers; the 18th-century houses along Hamngatan are the oldest in town. One of the prettiest streets is **Normalmsgatan**. The area is wholly residential; there are no trendy antique shops or quirky cafés to slake a visitor's thirst! To enter, you pass through an ornamental entranceway, with a (visually) striking clocktower bridging the street.

JAKOBSTADS WAPEN

In Gamla Hamn (the old harbour area) is the pride of Jakobstad, the **Jakobstads Wapen** (admission €4; ☹ mid-May-late Aug), modelled after a 17th-century galleon. There's a small

museum explaining the history of the ship and the building of the replica. Public sailings are given only a couple of times a year; inquire at the tourist office.

MUSEUMS

Jakobstad has an eclectic collection of small private museums.

Jakobstadsmuseum (☎ 758 1111; Storgatan 2; admission €2; ☹ noon-4pm) includes the old main building (Malmska Gården, dating back to 1904) with local-history displays on the shipping industry and town itself, as well as a tobacco museum and several historic houses scattered around the town centre.

Next door is the **Vapenmuseum** (Weapons Museum; ☎ 723 2974; Storgatan 2; admission €4; ☹ noon-5pm Tue-Sun Jun-Jul), a small private collection of Jakobstad resident Bengt Ena. There are more than 300 old guns, hunting rifles, machine guns and military pistols dating back to the 1740s.

The **Motormuseum** (☎ 724 4500; Alholmavägen 71; admission €4; ☹ noon-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun mid-May-mid-Aug), to the north of town, by the harbour, is a private museum with a fascinating collection of over 120 motorcycles – from old Harley Davidsons and Nortons to homemade, motor-powered bicycles.

Nearby, the **Chicory Museum** (☎ 020-416 1113; Alholma; admission free; ☹ noon-5pm Tue-Sat Jun-Aug, noon-6pm Jul) is in the old chicory factory, founded in 1883 and preserved pretty much as it was when it closed in 1960. It was built by local entrepreneur Wilhelm Schauman who saw the market for making chicory into an additive for coffee, which at the time was an expensive commodity.

PEDERSÖRE CHURCH

The beautiful **Pedersöre Church** (Vasavägen 118), on the way into town from the south, was originally built in the 1400s, but the bell tower dates from the 1760s. During the reign of King Gustav III the church was greatly enlarged to become a cross-shaped structure. Thankfully, the architect thumbed his nose at the king's plan to demolish the 85m spire. It's well worth the walk out to see it.

FANTASEA PARK

This **amusement park** (☎ 785 1625; admission €2.50; ☹ 11am-5pm early Jun-early Aug) at Gamla Hamn has water slides, arcade games, pools and a good swimming beach.

Sleeping

Westerlund Resandehem (☎ 723 0440; Norrmalmsgatan 8; s/d/tr €27/41/54; ☎ ☒) Run by a friendly Swedish-speaking family, this is a charming B&B in the heart of Skata, on its most beautiful street. Spotless rooms all have shared bathrooms, but it's only a small place so book ahead.

Jugendsalen (☎ 723 1521; sandlin@multi.fi; Skolgatan 11; s/d €30/50; ☎ ☒). Although in a large modern building opposite the park, this guesthouse manages to feel cosy and intimate, with the rooms nestled around a good central kitchen and lounge area. It's great value, with TV, bedside light and new furniture in the rooms, as well as a sauna, bar and pool table. Breakfast available but not included.

Stadshotellet (☎ 788 8111; www.stadshotellet.multi.fi; Kanalesplanaden 13; s/d €90/110, summer €67/84; ☎ ☒ ☒) On the main pedestrian street, this is Jakobstad's top hotel, with comfortable rooms, two restaurants and a nightclub. It's in a characterful centenary building with a charming façade. On our last visit the welcome was positively icy, but it might have just been a bad day for them!

Hostel Lilja (☎ 781 6500, 050-516 7301; www.af.teright.fi; Storgatan 6; dm/s/d €22.50/40/45; ☹ reception 9am-4pm Mon-Fri; ☎ ☒ ☒) This is a stylish new HI hostel attached to Musikcafé After Eight in the town centre. Although part of a historic building, the rooms and facilities are brand new: bunk beds meet Nordic pine-floor chic. There's a sauna and bike rental available. Outside of reception hours, phone to make contact.

Svanen/Joutsen Camping (☎ 723 0660; www.multi.fi/svanen; Larsmovägen 50; tent sites €14.50, 2-person cabins €22-28, 4-person cabins €38-65; ☹ Jun-Aug) About 6km north of town in Nissasörn, this is a family camping ground (take a Larsmo- or Kokkola-bound bus from the city bus station) set among the birches and pines. There are plenty of cabins, minigolf and you can hire bikes, boats and canoes.

Eating

Café Trend (☎ 723 1265; Gågatan) Right in the heart of town, this café lives up to its name – Jakobstad's beautiful people crowd the terrace or read magazines over coffee inside. They do sinfully rich cakes and also a pretty good salad buffet (€7.50) at lunch time.

Visa Grande (☎ 723 4150; Storgatan 20; pizza & pasta buffet €7-9, mains €12-22; ☹ food 10.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, bar 10.30am-2am Mon-Sat & 8pm-2am Sun; ☒) The best place in town for a drink, with its large, bright terrace, and extended opening hours. This place also has some decent food, with a pizza and pasta buffet lunch as well as an à la carte menu that's mainly steaks and salmon. They're good, if a touch overpriced; best is the cool underfloor fish tank.

Saigon Diner (☎ 723 0470; Storgatan 8; lunch buffet €6; ☹ 10.30am-8pm Mon-Fri, noon-8pm Sat, noon-7pm Sun) This is an appealing and authentic Vietnamese restaurant, with a bargain lunch special. On the menu is wok-fried reindeer fillet – the Arctic meets the tropics with good results. Lunch specials are served from 11am to 3pm weekdays.

Kumar's (☎ 723 7559; Storgatan 11; mains €8-14; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue-Sun) This popular spot is an interesting restaurant combining Indian and Asian flavours with pizzas and sandwiches. It's reasonably priced and packs the locals in for its lunch buffet.

Korv Görans (Kanalesplanaden 18) On the pedestrian mall is a busy little pizza, fried food and kebab kiosk that has been in business for three decades and is a Jakobstad institution. Most options are under €6, and there are pleasant wooden seats on the mall if the weather permits.

Getting There & Away

There are regular buses to Jakobstad from Vaasa (from €13.70, 1½ to 2½ hours), Kokkola (€6.20, 40 minutes) and other towns along the west coast.

Bennäs (Finnish: Pännäinen), 11km away, is the closest railway station to Jakobstad. A shuttle bus (€3.10, 10 minutes) meets arriving trains.

The Kruunupyy/Kronoby airport (see p261) is 30km from Jakobstad and buses (€5) meet arriving flights.

The **M/S Jenny** (☎ 044-780 9140) sails between Jakobstad and Kokkola (one-way €14) on Thursdays at 5pm, from Midsommer to mid-August, arriving at Kokkola camping at 10.30pm.

AROUND JAKOBSTAD FÄBODA

About 8km west of Jakobstad, Fäboda is a small recreational area facing the Gulf of Bothnia. There are small lovely, sandy

beaches, rocky inlets and forest walks, and this is a favourite spot for swimming, surfing and windsurfing. It's an easy cycle out to Fäboda along a narrow country road and with a good restaurant and intriguing museum, it's a great day out.

While the concept might seem incongruous here (the Arctic Circle is, after all, several hundred kilometres to the north), the **Nanoq Arctic Museum** (☎ 729 3679; Pörkenäsvägen 60; admission €6; ☹ noon-6pm Jun-Aug) is a little museum that is surprisingly good, and worth a detour. Housed in a model of a Greenlandic peat house, the collection is the private achievement of Pentti Kronqvist who has made several expeditions to the Arctic. There are Eskimo tools, fossils, authentic Arctic huts from Greenland and elsewhere, and various other Arctic souvenirs.

Café Fäboda (☎ 729 3510; Lillsandvägen; mains €11-19; ☹ 10am-11pm May-Aug), near the beach, is a wonderful café and restaurant and worth the trip. There's a generous lunch buffet, and international menu, sunny summer deck and children's playground. In the evenings the bar is popular and there's often entertainment in summer.

KOKKOLA

☎ 06 / pop 35,888

Not really known as a tourist town, Kokkola (Swedish: Karleby) is a charming place. It was given its town charter in 1620 to stimulate its growth as a port for the tar trade, which flourished in the 17th century. It's been chasing its port ever since; as the land continues to rise, rebounding after the last Ice Age, the sea gets further and further away. At last glimpse, the harbour was over 2km north of town.

As well as a couple of good museums and an attractive centre, Kokkola preserves a beautiful district of old wooden houses and also has plenty of parkland to stroll through down to the harbour. It makes a good stop on your way north or south; the predominantly Finnish-speaking people are tangibly proud of their town, and it feels more welcoming than Jakobstad, for example.

Orientation & Information

The centre of town is compact. The train and bus station are a couple of blocks south of the centre, while most places of interest are within walking distance of the riverside

kauppatori, at the intersection of Rantakatu and Torikatu.

Public library (☎ 828 9560; Isokatu 3; ☹ Mon-Fri, also Sat winter) Free Internet at this spectacular modern building one block north of the train station.

Tourist office (☎ 828 9402; www.kokkola.fi; Kauppatori; ☹ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat Jun-Aug, 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) Very helpful. On the northern side of the square.

Sights and Activities

NERISTAN

This delightful area of wooden houses is what remains of the working class area of Kokkola (Neristan means 'lower town') where the sailors and fishermen lived. Until relatively recently, the river was wide and navigable up to here, and fishing boats docked to unload their finny cargo and sell it in the kauppatori. It's a pleasure to wander around these streets (one of the most picturesque is **Läntinen kirkkokatu**), which have a range of antique shops as well as a couple of cafés and restaurants. The tourist office publishes a good walking tour of town.

Beyond Neristan, the Suntti stream continues down to the harbour. There is a beach here, **Halkokari**, where a British attack was repelled during the Crimean war. One of the gunboats was captured, and can be seen in the 'English Park' on the river just north of Neristan. The event is commemorated in the town's **festival** in early June, when people dress-up 1854-style, and there's a theatrical re-enactment.

MUSEUMS

On Pitkäsillankatu in the centre of town are a number of **museums** (☎ 828 9474; for 1 museum €2, for all €4; ☹ noon-3pm Tue-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun Sep-May, noon-5pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug, free on Thu in winter) that share opening hours and ticketing.

The best of them is the **Mineraalikoelma** (mineral collection; Pitkäsillankatu 28). While it may not sound thrilling, it's an amazing assembly of natural beauty. The resident geologist will enthusiastically talk you through the exhibits, which include stunning geometrical figures, delicate crystals and fragments of meteorites. In the same building, the **Luontokokoelma Kieppi** (natural history collection) is less compelling, with a collection of stuffed animals, antlers and traps.

Across the courtyard, the **Historiallinen Museo** (historical museum) consists of two proud old wooden buildings; the old school dates from 1696, making it one of the oldest secular buildings *in situ* in the country.

A block up the street, the **Taidemuseo** (Art gallery; Pitkäsillankatu 39) is in a large 19th-century merchants' mansion. It contains the collection of the portly Karl Herman Renlund (1850-1908), a shopworker who made good and left his art collection for the benefit of 'students and the working class'. He tipped the scales at 160kg when he died, but his collection is less heavyweight, although a Victor Westerholm canvas depicting the savage beauty of the Voikkaa rapids is memorable.

ACTIVITIES

The **M/S Jenny** (☎ 044-780 9140) does day-trips to Tankar island (€12, 4½ hours, midday, Friday to Wednesday). On Thursdays, it sails down the coast to Jakobstad and returns. It leaves Kokkola at noon, and returns at 10.30pm. A one-way fare is €14.

Sleeping

Kaupunkikartano Lumitähti (☎ 0500-162 302; jorma.aspegren@kolumbus.fi; r €68; ☹) The most characterful place to stay in town is this achingly lovely 19th-century wooden house in the heart of the old town, Neristan. There are just five rooms, so it's worth booking ahead. Breakfast is €2 per head extra, and you can rent bikes.

Hotel Kokkola (☎ 824 1000; www.hotelkokkola.com; Rantakatu 14; s/d €88/108, r Jun-Aug & weekends €68; ☹) This offers the best value for money of the three major hotels that overlook the kauppatori in the heart of town. The rooms are spacious and airy, with trouser-press, movie channel, and small minibar. There are large windows and new, comfortable beds. Breakfast and sauna included.

Camping Suntinsuu (☎ 831 4006; www.kokkolacamping.com; Pikiruukki; camping per person/tent sites €5.50/12, cottages €44-68; ☹ Jun-late Aug) This is a riverside camping ground a pleasant 2km northwest of the centre; follow the river downstream from the kauppatori. There are good cabins and facilities, as well as dormitory accommodation (€18) in an HI-affiliated hostel. You can rent canoes here, and the bar gets pretty lively in summer.

EATING & DRINKING

Vanhankauppin Ravintola (☎ 834 9030; Isokatu 28; mains €13-22; ☹ dinner Tue-Sat) This smart place is in the heart of the old town and appropriately decorated. It's a great place to eat, elegantly formal and offering well-prepared fish dishes – the grilled Arctic char (*rautu*) is delicious – and, more unusually, a starter of garlic cappuccino!

Wanha Lyhty & Kellari (☎ 868 0188; Pitkäsillankatu 24; mains €12-24) This is a café, smart restaurant (open for dinner), and beer cellar cheerfully decorated in the spirit of the Old Town. The beer cellar offers live music on weekends.

Kokkolinna (☎ 825 2025; Isokatu 1; ☹ café 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat) Just across the road from the station, this beautiful café has been decorated in faithful Art Nouveau style. There's a selection of salads (which can be taken away), good rolls and a terrace, as well as an adjoining restaurant (run by a highly-regarded restaurant school).

Krunni (☎ 040-516 2311; Kauppatori; ☹ May-Sep). The best spot for a drink in town is the deck of this old Danish fishing boat around and dominating the market square. There's also a terrace and indoor seating where snacks are served.

Getting There & Away

The Kruunupyy/Kronoby airport is 22km southeast of Kokkola and served by a regional bus service. Buses meet arriving flights and go to Kokkola (€6) and Jakobstad/Pietarsaari (€5). There are several flights a day to/from Helsinki, run by Finnair subsidiaries.

Regular buses run to/from all coastal towns, especially Vaasa (€21.30, three hours) and Jakobstad (€6.20, 40 minutes). The bus station is one block northwest of the train station.

There is a major train station in Kokkola and all trains using the main western line stop here. The daytime journey from Helsinki (€50.30, seven daily) takes under five hours; there are also several night trains.

If you're driving to or from Jakobstad, a scenic (and quicker) alternative to the main highway is to take road 749, which crosses the island of Luoto.

KALAJOKI

☎ 08 / pop 9152

Most Finns know Kalajoki for its long, wide, sandy beaches; it's a name that con-

pires up the phrase 'seaside holiday'. The local tourist industry had to really get its backside into gear once it became cheaper to get a charter flight to Malaga than the train up here, and now there are some excellent specials offered for family holidays. There's a plethora of cottages to rent, and many services for tourists, including a huge spa and amusement park, resort-style hotels, and a new 18-hole golf course.

Things don't close down completely in winter – there are plenty of cross-country skiing trails and many of the cottages are available for rent.

Orientation & Information

The bus terminal, supermarkets, banks, a post office and a large travel and booking agency are all in Kalajoki village, on the banks of the Kalajoki just off the highway. The resort area, with the beach, airfield, and most of the accommodation, is 6km south of the village along Hwy 8.

The **Tourist office** (☎ 469 4449; www.kalajoki.fi; ☹ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May, 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug) is on the highway at the turn-off to the beach. Both the office and the website have a list of all the rental cottages hereabouts.

Activities

Kalajoki Särkät (Kalajoki Beach) is one of the country's most popular holiday spots for Finns. It has a lot to offer: **Jukujukumaa Amusement Park** (admission €12-14; ☹ 11am-6pm early Jun-early Aug), spa, golf course, holiday villas, beaches, restaurants and cafés, hotels and discos. It's billed as a 'Mediterranean-style holiday experience at a latitude of 64°', but it's all very Finnish – saunas, summer cottages and *hump* music.

Sleeping & Eating

The beach, 6km south of the village, is the place to look for accommodation. Dozens of sturdy summer cottages dot the forest behind the beach, and range from the simple (a couple are on islands with no power) to the luxurious. Nearly all are also available by the day. The best place to book is through the tourist office. Look out for specials that throw in amusement park entry or a round of golf.

Tapion Tupa (☎ 466 622; www.tapiontupa.com; Hiekkasärkät; s/d €20/40, 2-/4-person apt €79/105;

(P) (X) (E) Near the main road and close to the beach, this large complex has a range of accommodation including an HI-associated hostel, log cabins and self-contained holiday apartments.

Hotelli Rantakalla (☎ 466 642; s/d €74/103; (P) (X) (E)) This is one of many hotels at the beach. It has everything you need for a super-Finnish summer holiday; minigolf, saunas and a terrace to drink beers in the sun. Rates drop considerably outside the summer high season.

Ravintola Lokkilinna (☎ 469 6700; lunch buffet €9; (X) lunch & dinner) This place has a fine summer terrace overlooking the beach, a big lunch buffet and a casual bar-restaurant with ocean views.

Top Camping (☎ 469 2400; www.hiekkasarkat.fi; tent sites €8-9 plus per person €4-5, cabins €30-85; (X) Jun-Aug) This is a huge and very busy place fronting the beach and adjacent to the amusement park.

Getting There & Away

Several daily buses running between Oulu (€22.10, two hours) and Kokkola (€13.20, one hour) stop at Kalajoki and the beach. The easiest way to reach Kalajoki by train is to get off at Kokkola and catch a bus from there.

AROUND KALAJOKI Maakalla & Ukokalla Islets

An isolated islet that has only existed since the 15th century, Maakalla has managed to retain a genuine fishing-village feel. There are no roads, shops or electricity – in fact, there are no permanent humans – but you will find an interesting wooden church, abundant plant and birdlife and some old fishing huts. The owners of the huts hold regular meetings and vote to keep the islet exactly as it is.

For what is probably the most isolated accommodation in Finland, contact **Fememare** (☎ 040-569 5896; www.fememare.fi) which has recently renovated the lighthouse keeper's house on the rocky islet of Ukolalla and offers accommodation and board. There's no power, but fresh water for the sauna stove is brought from the mainland!

In summer (mid-June to early August) there are three-hour cruises (return €15) to Maakalla from the pier at Kalajoki.

CENTRAL POHJANMAA

SEINÄJOKI

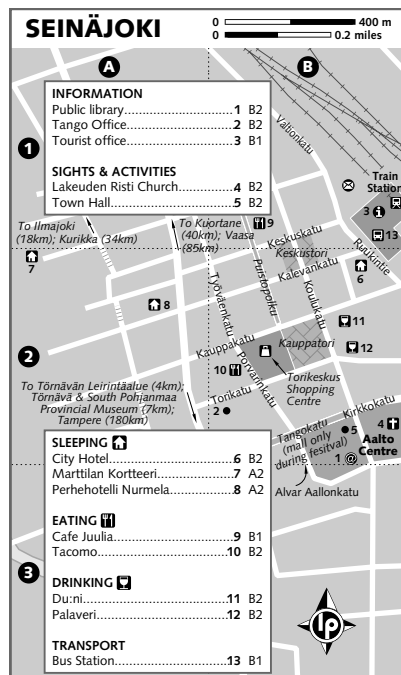
☎ 06 / pop 35, 918

Seinäjoki, the commercial centre of the region, is a supply and service centre for the surrounding agricultural region and a low-key conference centre. For most travellers, it is little more than a train junction. However, it hosts two of Finland's major summer festivals – the Tango Fair and Provinssirock, perhaps as far apart in the music spectrum as you can get. The town is also known for its modern centre designed by Alvar Aalto, and there's a large open-air museum area a few kilometres to the south of the centre.

Information

Public library (☎ 416 2318; Koulukatu 21; (X) 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat, closed Sat Jun-Aug) The library has three Internet terminals.

Tourist office (☎ 420 9090; matkailu@epmatkailu.fi; (X) 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) In the bus and train station complex. This is the place to book accommodation in private homes during the festivals.



Sights

AALTO CENTRE

The monumental Aalto Centre (1960) is a complex consisting of several buildings covering two large city blocks. It's one of the most important works of architect Alvar Aalto (see p131), who was born in nearby Kuortane in 1898. The stark white buildings are softened in places by ridged ceramic tiles; you can see the massive influence Aalto has had and how modern his designs must have looked in the early 1960s. The complex buildings include the **town hall** and **public library**. The massive **church** ((X) noon-6pm), with its oddly secular steeple-clock tower, is the most recognizable building. Take a lift (€1) to the top for a view of the region.

ETELÄ-POHJANMAAN MAAKUNTAMUSEO

Seven kilometres south of town, the **South Pohjanmaa Provincial Museum** (☎ 416 2642; admission €2; (X) noon-6pm Wed, noon-4pm Thu, Fri & Sun, ring for other times) is an open-air museum in the leafy suburb of Törnävä. The wealthy Wasastjerna family first settled this area in 1806 and built a mansion that still stands. On the grounds are other wooden buildings, mostly transferred from elsewhere.

On your right, when coming from the town centre, is the **Agriculture Museum** and the **Mill Museum**. On your left in the old yellow building is the **Gunpowder Museum**. Behind is a smoke house and a smith's house from the 17th century.

Local bus 1 runs from Seinäjoki bus station to Törnävä.

Festivals & Events

Seinäjoki's two major summer festivals are both are enormously popular, so book accommodation in advance.

TANGO

Seinäjoki is the undisputed tango capital of a country that is certifiably tango-mad. In the rest of the world the tango craze was swept away by Elvis, but in Finland it never died.

Argentinean musicians and dancers brought tango to Europe around 1910. A Finnish version of tango developed soon after, championed by the composer Unto Mononen and Olavi Virta, the Finnish king of tango dancing.

No other music could epitomise the melancholic Finn better. If Finns lack the electrifying tension that Latin Americans bring to the tango, they lack none of the enthusiasm. Finnish tango music is usually performed with a live band and the lyrics deal with loneliness, unrequited love and desperation. It's fair to say that it's not as popular with the younger generations.

Provinssirock (☎ 421 2700; www.provinssirock.fi) is a classic, open-air international rock concert held mainly 4km south of town, near Törnävä, over three days in mid-June. Day passes cost €40 to €55, a three-day pass is €77. The acts are of the highest international profile, and include many of the top Finnish groups, many from the darker end of the rock/metal spectrum. The 2005 program included Marilyn Manson, Nine Inch Nails, Nightwish, Slipknot and the 69 Eyes; a heavyweight line-up indeed. There are five stages and connecting buses both from Seinäjoki itself and also from Helsinki.

Tangomarkkinat (☎ 420 1123; Torikatu; www.tangomarkkinat.fi) appeals to a generally older and almost exclusively Finnish crowd but, in terms of audience, it's one of Finland's biggest festivals. Held in early July, it opens with a huge open-air dance and party in 'Tango Street' and continues over four days with dance competitions, tango classes, and other festivities, culminating with the awarding of the 'Tango King & Queen', the best singers of the festival. Needless to say, the standard of dancing is pretty high, although perhaps not recognizable in a bar in Buenos Aires.

Sleeping

There are several chain hotels in Seinäjoki (including Sokos and Cumulus), but little reason to stay outside festival time.

Perhehotelli Nurmela (☎ 414 1771; Kalevankatu 29; s/d from €35/55; (P) (X)) This is a cosy, family-run guesthouse on a quiet street just west of the centre. Some rooms have private bathroom, and all rates include breakfast.

City Hotel (☎ 215 9111; www.sdr.fi; Kalevankatu 2; s/d €88/106, Sat, Sun & summer €68/76; (P) (X) (E) (A)) The homeliest of the town's hotels, this is handily situated right opposite the bus and train stations. Most of the rooms are a little on

the small side (although there are some bigger ones, so ask for one of those), but have wireless Internet, fan and minibar. There's a good restaurant, nightclub, and café. The pool needs to be booked (and paid for).

Marttilan Kortteeri (☎ 420 4800; Puskantie 38; s/d €45/65; ☞ Jun-early Aug; ☑ ☒) A few blocks west of the action of central Seinäjoki, this complex is set in a quiet pine-clad residential district. The accommodation is comfortable hostel-type; there's a good café-restaurant, and rates include breakfast. You'll need to book well ahead during the festivals but at other times it's virtually empty.

Törnävän Leirintäalue (☎ 412 0784, 414 6585; Törnäväntie 29; tent sites €10, cabins €35-50; ☞ Jun-Aug) This camping ground is south of the centre. There is also a temporary camping area set up near the festival during Provinssirock. To pitch a tent there costs €15 per person for the weekend or €7 for one night.

Eating & Drinking

Seinäjoki isn't the gourmet capital of Finland. The hotel restaurants are the best bet for a square meal, while there are fast food stalls in the kauppari.

Cafe Juulia (☎ 414 4544; Puistopolku 15; lunch specials €5-8; ☞ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Utterly unpretentious, this likeable little lunch spot has cane chairs, and the mustard and ketchup already in place. They do four or five daily specials which are filling and tasty.

Tacomo (☎ 414 4800; Alvar Aallonkatu 3; mains from €6; ☞ 11am-8pm Mon-Thu, 11am-10pm Fri & Sat, 1-8pm Sun). This trendy modern restaurant has bare, cool décor and caters to Finland's enduring love of Mexican food. There's a good range of prices, with simple tortilla or taco dishes going for as little as €5.95.

Du:ni (cnr Kauppakatu & Koulukatu) This is a lounge café-bar with a great terrace, free Internet access and a popular club downstairs. On the same block, Palaveri is another popular bar that kicks during Provinssirock. Both are open late, do tasty rolls and snacks, and have a wooden terrace.

Getting There & Away

The bus station and train station are adjacent and very central. There are buses to towns and villages throughout western Finland.

Seinäjoki is a rail hub and the fastest trains from Helsinki cover the 346km in under three hours (€46.80). There are regu-

lar connections to Vaasa (€8.80, 50 minutes), Jyväskylä and cities further north.

There are four or five commuter flights Monday to Friday from Helsinki to Seinäjoki (return from €127 to €220) and one on Sunday, run by subsidiaries of Finnair.

KAUSTINEN

☎ 06 / pop 4393

Kaustinen is a small village 47km southeast of Kokkola. There isn't much to see in the village itself, so plan your visit around the superb Kaustinen Folk Music Festival in July. Such is the renown of this festival, the Peanuts cartoon character 'Woodstock' is called 'Kaustinen' in the Finnish translation.

The small **tourist information office** (Kaustentie 1) is easy to find in the centre. Nearby is the festival office, which handles accommodation during the event. The bus station, shops and services are all easily reached on foot.

The **Kaustinen Folk Music Festival** (☎ 860 4111; www.kaustinen.net; PL 11, 69601 Kaustinen) is one of the most beloved of summer festivals in Finland, attracting huge crowds. It's the place to be if you're interested in Finnish folk music and dance, since some 300 Finnish bands (and many international acts) perform more than 250 concerts during the week in mid-July. At any time between 10am and 3am there are several official concerts and half a dozen impromptu jam sessions going on. Folk dance performances are also an integral part of the festival, with everything from Celtic and Latin dancing alongside Finnish dance.

Sleeping

The festival office organizes accommodation during the busy periods. Camping and dormitory beds cost around €10, accommodation in private homes is around €30 per person. Call ahead to see what's available.

Koskelan Lomatalo (☎ 861 1338; www.koskelanomatalo.kaustinen.fi; Känväläntie 123; per person €25) This HI-affiliated place, about 5km north of Kaustinen, offers kitchen, sauna and laundry facilities and has a café.

Getting There & Away

There are several buses daily from Kokkola (€7.80, 45 minutes), which has a railway station. There are express buses from other cities during the festival season; check the festival website.

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