



The Lakeland

All of Finland could be described as lakeland, but the prize goes to this sparkling area of the southeast, which seems to have more water than land. Any trip to Finland should take in some of this area, whose glistening lakes leave indelible impressions on any summer visitor.

Much of this region includes the Savo district, the main town of which is Savonlinna, whose majestic castle hosts the Opera Festival, a fantastic, buzzing event: it's one of Finland's most memorable festivals. High culture can also be seen in Kuopio's dance festival and Mikkeli's Classical Music Festival, but there are offbeat events, too, involving mobile-phone throwing and wife-carrying. The people of this area – the *savolaiset* – are among the most outspoken and friendly of Finns. They can laugh at themselves and are often lampooned by Finns from elsewhere due to their distinctive Savo dialect, accent and humour, but perhaps also because they are envied for their beautiful Lakeland.

Needless to say, it's a great place to get outdoors, and whether steamer-cruising or soft-paddling a canoe in search of rare seals, the lakes are the focus of any visit. It's a favoured summering place for Finns, who luxuriate in their cottages, fishing, rowing, taking saunas and generally enjoying what is almost the archetype of Finnish landscape.

The towns in the area also have much to offer. Kuopio offers fantastic lakescapes and the chance to try out a smoke sauna and the delicious things that locals create with *muikku* (whitefish). Jyväskylä is a friendly university town that draws architecture fans from the world over for its associations and buildings of Alvar Aalto, a giant of 20th-century architecture.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Descending on **Savonlinna** (p115) for its awesome castle and bubbly opera festival
- Examining the visionary buildings of Alvar Aalto in the university town of **Jyväskylä** (p129)
- Steaming it up in the **world's largest smoke sauna** (p137) in Kuopio
- Seeking out the rare **Saimaa ringed seal** (p124) from a canoe in the national parks around Savonlinna
- Paddling the **Squirrel Route** (p125) from Juva to Sulkava, an easy two-day canoe trip
- Taking the full-day **ferry trip** (p120 and p140) between Savonlinna and Kuopio, via lakes, lochs and canals
- Spending the night at **Valamo** (p128), Finland's only Orthodox monastery



History

The Lakeland region was settled in the wake of the retreating glaciers of the last Ice Age. Various groups, coming from the east and south, eventually merged to become the Savo people. Over the centuries, the region saw much conflict as a borderland between the powers of Sweden and Russia. Tourism has been important here for well over a century: St Petersburg gentry used to travel here to admire the scenery and take rest cures.

National Parks

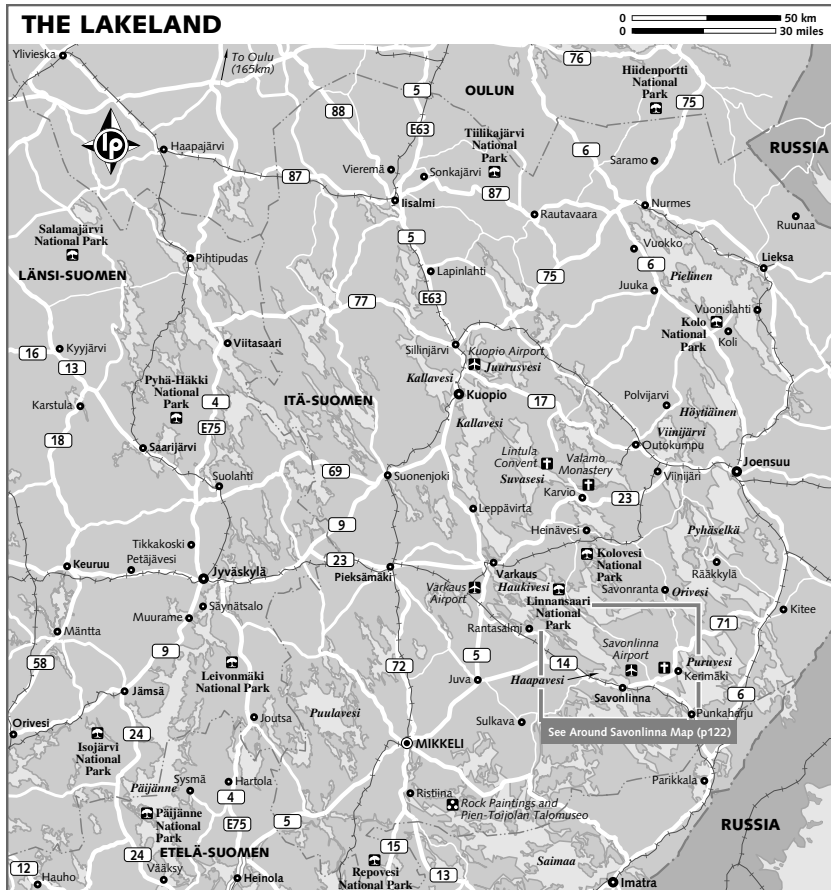
The Lakeland region has two excellent national parks in the Savonlinna area, Kolovesi and Linnansaari, both largely water and habitats to the rare Saimaa

inland seal. These are particularly good areas for exploring by canoe.

Activities

With so many lakes, it's no wonder that the main summer activities involve getting out on them. One of the best ways is to take a day-long lake cruise between Kuopio and Savonlinna; other cruises visit the Orthodox Monastery of Valamo or simply roam around the peaceful waters.

The more active choice is to hire a canoe, whether for a short paddle or a longer trek. In the Savonlinna area are several choices, with two national parks offering great canoeing, as well as a popular two-day route from Juva to Sulkava (p125).



LAND OF LAKES

Lakes are the life force of southeastern Finland, with 10% of Finland consisting of water. Many of its 188,000-odd lakes (of which some 56,000 are larger than a hectare) are linked by rivers, and the towns, villages, factories and hydroelectric plants along these lakes and rivers rely on them for drinking water, and as a means of transportation. Finns cross the lakes by boat in summer and snowmobile (and car) in winter, and build summer cottages and saunas beside them.

Finnish lakes are shallow – only three are deeper than 100m. This means their waters warm quickly in summer, freeze over in winter and also makes them susceptible to pollution.

Throughout Finland you will often hear the words *järvi* (lake), *lampi* (pond), *saari* (island), *ranta* (shore), *niemi* (cape), *lahti* (bay), *koski* (rapids), *virta* (stream) and *joki* (river). All these words form some of the most common Finnish family names, especially Järvinen, Saarinen, Rantanen, Nieminen, Lahtinen, Koskinen, Virtanen and Jokinen.

Jyväskylä is the main base in the area for skiing, with a good centre northwest of town. Kuopio also sees plenty of crowds in winter.

Self-Catering Accommodation

There are numerous lakeside cottages for rent throughout the region; this is the most typically Finnish holiday you can have! See p330 for agencies who deal with rentals in this area. Local tourist offices also have extensive lists.

EASTERN LAKELAND

SAVONLINNA

☎ 015 / pop 27,463

Lorded over by one of Europe's most dramatic castles, Savonlinna is as romantic a place as you'll come by, particularly on a summer's night when its world-famous Opera Festival is in full swing. In the heart of the Lakeland, it's an incredibly rewarding place to visit and a good base for exploring this part of southeastern Finland.

Set on two islands between Lake Haapavesi and Lake Pihlajavesi, Savonlinna offers the prettiest of waterscapes. Perched on a rocky islet of its own, Olavinlinna castle seems to rise improbably out of the water itself. Whether floodlit or sunbeaten, it's a breathtaking sight.

The Opera Festival, despite high prices and crowds, is a great time to be in Savonlinna. There's a real buzz in town, and animated post-show diners and drinkers deconstruct the night's performance well into the wee hours. The performances themselves are memorably staged within the walls of the castle itself.

History

The slow growth of Savonlinna began in 1475 with the building of Olavinlinna Castle, and in 1639 it received a municipal charter at the instigation of Count Per Brahe, the founder of many towns around Finland. Despite appearances, the castle didn't prove particularly defensible, and the Russians finally grabbed the town for good in 1743. It was returned to the Finnish grand duchy in 1812; since independence it has been an important hub of Lakeland steamboat traffic; even today its passenger dock seems busier than the bus station, at least in summer.

Information

As well as the following places, there's also Internet access at the café at Hotel Seurahone.

Café Knut Posse (☎ 576 960; Olavinkatu 44; Internet free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat) Internet café, joined to the bookshop of the same name.

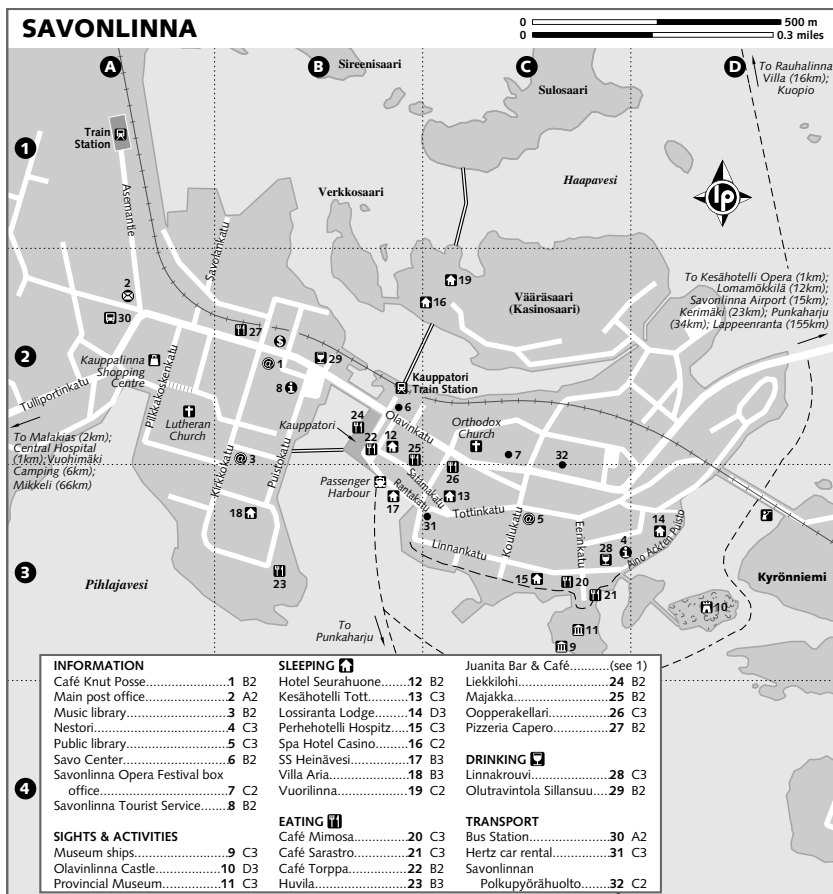
Main post office (Olavinkatu) Near the bus terminal.

Music library (Kirkkokatu 12; ☎ 1-7pm Mon-Thu, 10am-4pm Fri) Good collection of CDs, including opera, and a free Internet terminal.

Nestori (☎ 0205-645 929; saimaa@metso.fi; Aino Ackté puistotie 4; ☎ 10am-6pm Jul daily, 11am-5pm Tue-Sun May, Jun, Aug & Sep) The national parks visitor centre for the Saimaa region. Art and nature exhibitions and plenty of information.

Public library (Tottinkatu; ☎ 11am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat) Free Internet terminals.

Savonlinna Tourist Service (☎ 517 510; www.savonlinnatravel.com; Puistokatu 1; ☎ 9am-5pm Jun-Aug, 8am-8pm during Opera Festival, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Sep-May) Provides information about most places in the region, sells festival tickets, reserves accommodation and organizes tours.



Sights

OLAVINLINNA CASTLE

Olavinlinna (☎ 531 164; admission €5; 🕒 10am-5pm Jun-mid-Aug, 10am-3pm mid-Aug-May) is one of the most spectacular castles in northern Europe. These days it is famous as the setting for the month-long Savonlinna Opera Festival. If you visit in June you may be lucky enough to see some of the opera stars rehearsing. The venue seats 2300 in comfort.

Founded in 1475 by Erik Axelsson Tott, governor of Vyborg and the Eastern Provinces, Olavinlinna was named after Olof, an 11th-century Norwegian king and saint. The castle was meant to protect the eastern border of the Swedish empire. However, Russians occupied the castle from 1714 to

1721, and took control of it again from 1743 to the early half of the 20th century. Two exhibition rooms within the castle have exhibits on its history plus displays of Orthodox treasures.

The castle has been heavily restored, after it was gutted by fire, but is still seriously impressive, not least in the way it is built directly on the rock in the middle of the lake. To tour it, including its original towers, bastions and chambers, you have to join one of the excellent guided tours (around 45 minutes). Tours depart on the hour and guides speak English, Spanish, French, German, Japanese and Italian as well as Finnish and Swedish. The guides are quite good at bringing the castle to life

and can furnish you with some interesting stories: the soldiers, for instance, were partly paid in beer – 5L a day and 7L on Sunday, which makes its frequent changes-of-hands more understandable.

PROVINCIAL MUSEUM & MUSEUM SHIPS

The **provincial museum** (☎ 571 4712; Riihisääri; adult/child €4/1; 🕒 11am-5pm Tue-Sun, 11am-5pm daily in Jul), in an old Russian warehouse near the castle, has exhibits related to local history and the importance of water transport. There are plenty of old photographs and models and upstairs is a changing art exhibition.

Moored alongside the museum are the historic ships *Salama*, *Mikko* and *Savonlinna*, all with exhibitions open from May to September during museum hours. The museum and ships can all be seen with a single ticket. The museum won't take your breath away like the castle, but it is worthwhile and several orders of magnitude less touristy.

RAUHALINNA VILLA

This romantic Moorish-style wooden **villa** (☎ 744 3440; Lehtiniemi; 🕒 Jun-Aug) was built in 1900 by Nils Weckman, an officer in the tsar's army, as a wedding-anniversary gift for his wife. It features an intricate wooden lattice trim and has a serene lakeside setting.

These days Rauhalinna warrants a visit for its **café** (🕒 11am-early evening Mon-Sat Jun-Aug) and fine restaurant, complete with banquet hall. For a real treat, try the excellent buffet. Rauhalinna also houses a **summer hotel** (s/d €61/71). The villa is at Lehtiniemi, 16km by road north of Savonlinna. The best way to visit is by boat from Savonlinna passenger harbour (right). Alternatively, there are two to three buses (destination Lehtiniemi, 25 minutes) from the Savonlinna bus terminal to within 500m of the villa from Monday to Saturday.

Activities

The area around Savonlinna, with its quiet country lanes and gently sloping hills, is terrific for **bicycle touring**. Bikes can be carried on board local ferries for a small fee. To rent **canoes and rowing boats**, visit Vuohimäki Camping (p118).

Tours

There are numerous operators running tours that enable you to explore some of this Lake-

land area. The tourist service runs many of them, from half-day to multi-day trips.

LAKE CRUISES

In summer, the Savonlinna passenger harbour is one of the busiest in Finland. There are a number of scenic cruises to choose from, with dozens of daily departures during the high season. These include cruises around the castle, to Rauhalinna villa, or through the archipelago. Most boats have café and/or bar facilities on board. Cruises include the following:

MS Ieva (www.ieva.fi) Five to seven one-hour guided lake cruises (€10) daily.

M/S Lake Star (☎ 0400 200 117; www.lakestar.info) One-hour scenic cruises in the Savonlinna area (€10) with six departures daily from June to the end of August.

SS Heinävesi (www.savonlinnanlaivat.com) To Retretti jetty in Punkaharju at 11am daily mid-June to mid-August (one way/return €19/25).

S/S Punkaharju (☎ 0500 250 075; www.vipcruise.info) Four to five lake cruises (€10) daily from late May to late August.

Festivals & Events

Savonlinna Opera Festival (☎ 476 750; www.operafestival.fi; Olavininkatu 27, 57130 Savonlinna), held throughout July, is perhaps the most famous festival in Finland, with an enviably dramatic setting; the covered courtyard of Olavinlinna Castle. It offers four weeks of high-class opera performances from early July to early August. The atmosphere in town during the festival is reason enough to come; it's buzzing, with restaurants serving post-show midnight feasts, and animated discussions and impromptu arias on all sides.

The first Opera Festival was held at Olavinlinna way back in 1912, the brainchild of Finnish soprano Aino Ackte. It was resurrected again in 1967 and has grown in stature with each passing year. The festival's excellent website details the programme of operas and concerts two years in advance and allows you to book seats in advance on the Internet.

The first three weeks have rotating performances of five operas by the Savonlinna company; the last week has a guest company performing (in 2006 it will be the Bologna Opera). Tickets cost from €31 to €201 for concerts, depending on the seats, with tickets more expensive at weekends.

and fried vendace (tiny lake fish). It's open until 2am during summer – perfect for a very Finnish late-night snack.

Café Mimosa (☎ 532 257; Linnankatu 12; light meals €6-12; ☎ 9am-late) This place near the castle has a fine terrace and bar shaded under the plane trees, and serves salads, cakes and light meals. They also rent boats. It's very lively after the opera performances. Mimosa also offers guesthouse accommodation (p119).

Oopperakellari (☎ 020-744 3445; www.savocenter.fi; Kalmarikatu 10; set meals €45-55) This underground restaurant has lavish pre- and post-opera dinners, with music, and perhaps even some of the stars answering questions or knocking out a few notes. You will need to book in advance, preferably before leaving home, as tickets are usually sent by mail.

Café Sarastro (☎ 514 425; Linnankatu 10; mains €10-17; ☎ 10am-8pm May–mid-Sep) Named for the villainous cleric in Mozart's Magic Flute, Sarastro is also near the castle and is another opera festival favourite. A lovely veranda overlooks the garden, and a range of snacks and more filling fare is on hand.

Pizzeria Capero (Olavinkatu 51; pizza & pasta €6.50-8.50; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is the best place in town for an uncomplicated and tasty feed of pizza. It's just west of the bridge by the kauppatori.

Juanita Bar & Café (☎ 514 531; Olavinkatu 44; mains €7-14; ☎ 4pm-4am Mon-Sat) This place, upstairs in an arcade off Olavinkatu, does reasonably priced burgers, fajitas and Tex-Mex, and is a popular bar later in the night.

The lively market at the lakeside kauppatori is the place to find local pastries such as *omena-lörtsy*, a tasty apple turnover (€1 to €2). Also on the kauppatori, Café Torppa is a popular kiosk for coffee and late-night snacks with a good upstairs terrace.

Drinking

With only a small student population, Savonlinna is quiet most of the year, but very lively in July, when post-opera discussions carry on late into the night.

Huvila (☎ 555 0555; www.savonniemi.com; Puistokatu 4; ☎ until 1am) A good place for a drink is this brewery-pub, with several types of beer brewed on the premises. A pint of the deliciously hoppy Joutsen on the terrace is hard to beat; you look out across the lake to the harbour area. There's regular live music in July.

Olutravintola Sillansuu (☎ 531 451; Verkko-saarekatu 1) This place near the main bridge is a cosy English-style pub with nearly a hundred international bottled beers and a range of whiskeys. There's a downstairs area with a pool table; during the opera festival, impromptu arias are sometimes sung as the beer kegs empty.

Juanita (☎ 514 531; Olavinkatu 44; mains €7-14; ☎ 4pm-4am Mon-Sat) Later in the night, this Tex-Mex restaurant and bar is the place to mix with young Savonlinnans – it's usually jumping until closing time.

Linnakrouvi (☎ 576 9124; Linnankatu 7; ☎ May-Sep) Near the castle, this is an atmospheric restaurant and beer terrace open in summer only in a lovely and stylish wooden house. There's upmarket food available, but you're paying a premium for its proximity to the fort.

Shopping

Linnankatu, the quaint back street running up towards the castle, is lined with old wooden houses, some of which are craft shops and studios selling local handicrafts at hefty prices. There's some good quality here though.

The kauppatori has a particularly lively summer market with good handicrafts and souvenirs on sale alongside the fresh berries, baked treats and garden produce.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Finnair flies to Savonlinna from Helsinki, Mikkeli and Varkaus. The airport is 15km from the centre. There are night flights during the opera festival to return punters to Helsinki after the show.

BOAT

In summer there are scheduled ferry services from the Savonlinna passenger harbour to Punkaharju and to Kuopio. The SS *Heinävesi* travels to the Retretti jetty in Punkaharju daily from mid-June to mid-August. It departs from Savonlinna at 11am and from Punkaharju at 3.40pm (adult one way/return €19/25, two hours).

In summer the ferry MS *Puijo* travels to Kuopio on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 9am (one way €75, 10½ hours), returning on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The boat passes through scenic waterways,

canals and locks, and stops along the way at Oravi, Heinävesi, Karvio canal and Palokki, among others. Meals are available.

BUS

There are several express buses a day from Helsinki to Savonlinna (€46.70, five to six hours), and buses run almost hourly from Mikkeli (€18.90, 1½ hours). There are also regular services to Joensuu (€22.90, three hours), Kuopio (€22.90, three hours) and Jyväskylä (€32.30, 3½ hours).

TRAIN

There are trains from Helsinki (€47.90, five hours) via Parikkala – note that you must change to a regional train or connecting bus service at Parikkala, otherwise you'll wind up in Joensuu (€24.90, 2½ hours). For Kuopio, you need to take a bus to Pieksämäki and a train from there. The main train station is a long walk from the centre of Savonlinna; get off at the kauppatori platform instead.

Getting Around

The Savonlinna airport is 15km northeast of the centre. An airport taxi shuttle meets arriving flights during the opera season; in town it picks up at the bus station and hotels on demand (☎ 040-536 9545). The 20-minute trip costs €10 one way. A normal cab to or from the airport is €20 to €25.

The city bus service costs €2.50 per ride within the Savonlinna area.

Several car rental agencies have offices in the centre and at the airport, including **Europcar** (☎ 040-306 2855; airport) and **Hertz** (☎ 020-555 2760; Rantakatu 2).

Several places in town rent bikes, among them **Savonlinnan Polkupyörähuolto** (☎ 533 977; Olavinkatu 19), which charges €10 per day.

AROUND SAVONLINNA

The area around Savonlinna, with its scenic islands, peninsulas, bays and straits, is the most beautiful part of the Lakeland. There are many opportunities for cottage rentals and farmstays; contact the Savonlinna tourist service (www.savonlinnatravel.com).

Punkaharju Region

☎ 015 / pop 4083

Between Savonlinna and Parikkala is Punkaharju, the famous pine-covered sand esker (sand or gravel ridge) that's a popular sum-

mer destination. The ridge itself is very pretty, and great for walking or cycling; there's also an innovative gallery and a forestry museum. It's an easy day-trip from Savonlinna, with good transport connections. The village of Punkaharju has a post office, bank, bus and train stations, and several shops. There's a **tourist office** (☎ 734 1011; www.punkaharju.fi; Kauppatie 20) in the village, and a small information centre in the old *vanha asema* (train station) next to Lusto Museum.

SIGHTS

Punkaharju Ridge

During the Ice Age, formations similar to this 7km-long sand ridge were created all over the country. Because the Punkaharju ridge crosses a large lake, it has always been an important travel route. Just a few hundred metres of the original unsealed road along the top of the ridge remain – this was once part of a route to Russia. To take a stroll on the famous Punkaharju Ridge, get off at the Retretti train station and walk east towards Punkaharju village. It's a spectacular walk on a sunny day, with water on both sides.

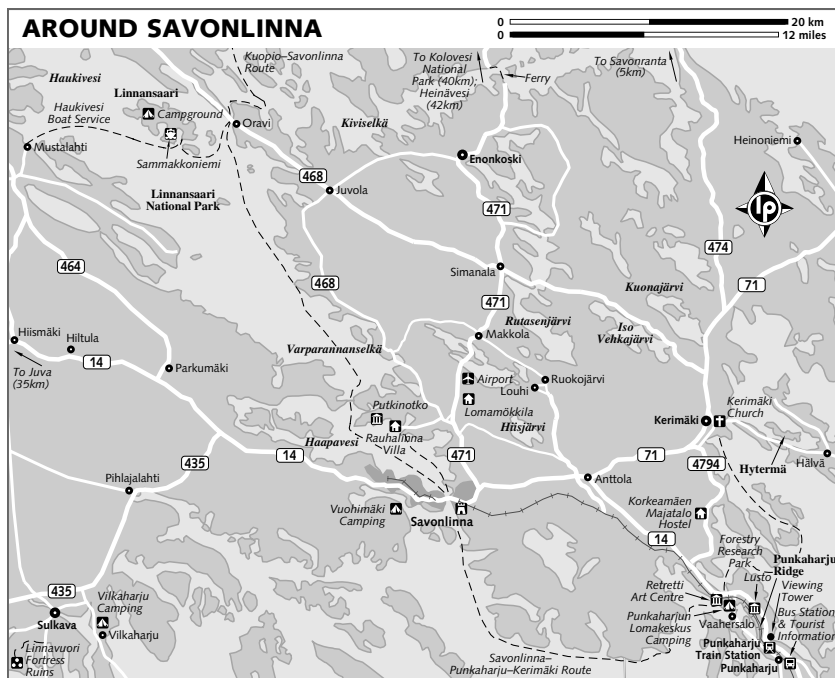
Retretti Art Centre

Retretti (☎ 775 2200; adult/senior/student/child €15/12/9/5; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun & Aug, 10am-7pm Jul) is Finland's most unusual gallery – an art exhibition inside a man-made subterranean cave. This creation features waterfalls, a concert hall and special effects, and uses the natural elements of the cave – the walls, water and the darkness – to good effect. Above the cave (at ground level) is a more conventional exhibition space displaying art exhibitions on loan from elsewhere. The entire exhibition changes each summer. Admission is steep but it's a unique look at Finnish modern art.

About 100m away is the trade-off. Most reasonable children will let you into the gallery if you treat them to the popular **Kesämaa Water Park** (☎ 739 611; admission €12-13; ☎ 10am-7pm Jun–mid-Aug), an excellent place with water slides and pools.

Lusto Forest Museum

Lusto (☎ 345 1030; admission €7; ☎ 10am-7pm Jun-Aug, 10am-5pm daily Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) is devoted to that most Finnish of industries – forestry. It's actually very good and educational, with displays not only about



the industry and resource that has provided Finns with heat, power and income for many years, but also on the forest's habitats. The building itself is an interesting timber structure with the main display hall designed to represent the trunk of a tree.

SLEEPING & EATING

Gasthaus Punkaharju (☎ 441 371; www.naaranlahti.com; Palomäentie 18; s/d €45/65; P ☒ ☒) This guesthouse, in the village about 2km from the bus station, has light and cool, simply furnished rooms. You can use the sauna and pool for an additional fee. The owners also run the excellent farm-estate Naaranlahti, with 12 good apartment-rooms at the same price. This is a place where you can relax and take part in rural activities, including canoeing, fishing or gathering berries in the woods. It's about 15km from Punkaharju but transport is provided from the guesthouse.

Punkaharjun Valtionhotelli (☎ 739 611; www.lomalitto.fi; s/d €80/106, during Savonlinna Opera Festival €97/129; P ☒) This place, on the ridge just west of the Lusto museum, is a romantic hotel dating from 1845, and one of the old-

est in Finland. As well as rooms in the lovely main house, there are two villas built for the wife of the tsar, and there's a fine restaurant attached. Rates are lower in winter.

Punkaharjun Lomakeskus Camping (☎ 739 611; www.lomalitto.fi/punkaharjunlomakeskus; tent sites €15-16, 2-/4-person cabins €35/52, self-contained cottages €85-160) Next to the Kesämaa Water Park, this is one of the largest such complexes in Finland. It has more than 150 lakeside cottages and is very crowded in summer.

Ravintola Finlandia (☎ 644 255; Finlandiantie 98; lunch buffet €12; ☒ lunch & dinner in summer) A few hundred metres from Lusto, is this place in a beautiful house built in 1914 and surrounded by forest. The superb lunch buffet is served from 11am to 6pm daily in summer.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

All trains between Parikkala and Savonlinna stop in the village of Punkaharju, as well as at the Lusto and Retretti train stations. There are also regular buses to/from Savonlinna (€5, 20 minutes). In summer there is a ferry service from Savonlinna; see p120 for more information.

Siikalampi

Three kilometres east of the town of Parikkala, southeast of Savonlinna and accessible on the train, this bay of Simpelejärvi one of the best bird-watching spots in the country. Every summer, there are over 2000 nesting pairs of waterbirds, and it's also a busy stop on the migration routes of geese, terns and more (early May and late August are the best times to see these transients).

You'll see Siikalampi signposted off the road from Parikkala to Kaukola; from the carpark, there's a boardwalk to an observation hide. You can also camp for free here; there's an area for tents and a cooking shelter.

Kerimäki

☎ 015 / pop 5905

Kerimäki is a small farming community, yet it's dominated by the world's largest wooden church (below), which towers over the village. It's a memorable sight, and within easy range of Savonlinna.

The nearby protected island of **Hytermä** celebrates one of the weirdest of human achievements: it has a monument to Romu-Heikki (Junk Heikki), a man who built large structures with millstones. The island is also quite beautiful, and it's easily visited by hiring a rowing boat (around three to four hours €10) through the **tourist office**

(☎ 575 4211; Puruvedentie 59; ☒ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) across from the church. The office is located in a good craft shop.

There are hourly buses along route 71 (€4, 30 minutes) between Savonlinna and Kerimäki, stopping at the bus station behind the tourist office.

SLEEPING & EATING

Gasthaus Kerihovi (☎ 541 225; Puruvedentie 28; s/d €35/60; P) An attractive old wooden house not far from the church (to the right of it as you face the entrance), this friendly guest-house has spotless, comfortable rooms, each with shared bathroom. There's a popular restaurant-bar on-site and breakfast and a sauna is included in the room rate. Discounted rates apply in winter.

Korkeamäen Majatalo (☎ 544 827, 0440-544 827; www.korkeamaenmajatalo.fi; Ruokolahdentie 545; dm from €12.40, s/d €25/32; ☒ Jun-Aug; P ☒) About 8km south of Kerimäki village on the road to Punkaharju is this very friendly HI-affiliated farmhouse and cottages run by a Savonian family. As well as rooms with one to five beds, there are several cabins and cottages available. This road is not well served by public transport (two buses a day to Savonlinna), but if you have a car, this is an excellent option for cheap accommodation during the Opera Festival.

KERIMÄKI CHURCH

Finland has plenty of notable churches, but few are as visually striking as Kerimäki's – the largest **wooden church** (☎ 578 9111; 10am-4pm mid-May-late Aug, 10am-6pm early June-mid-August, 10am-7pm in July) in the world. Built in 1847, it was designed to seat more than 3000 people and to accommodate 5000 churchgoers if all standing room was used.

The oversized church was no mistake, but was deliberately inflated from original plans by overexcited locals. At the time the church was built, the population of Kerimäki parish was around 12,000, and the reverend felt that half of the residents should be attending church on any given Sunday. Worshipers would visit the church from all around the region, crossing the lake in their *kirkkovene* (church longboat).

As stunning as the yellow-and-white church appears from the outside (it dominates tiny Kerimäki), the scale doesn't become apparent until you step inside and survey the massive interior – the height of the nave is 27m. You soon realise it would have been impossible to heat this building. It originally had eight stoves inside (now there are four) but it still wasn't enough and a smaller, 300-seat winter chapel had to be built at the rear. The main church is still used for services in summer. It's very unadorned inside apart from an altarpiece of the resurrected Christ by Aleksandra Sältin.

There's a café and gift shop in the separate bell tower in front of the church (all monies go to the maintenance of the church, an onerous burden for a small parish), and for €1.80 you can climb the bell tower on steep wooden steps for a better view.

Kahvila Kaivopirtti (Halvantie 1; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Sat) This place has a sunny terrace facing the church. They do reasonable coffee and pastries and very good-value grilli fare such as tasty platters of sausages, burgers, or kebabs (€2 to €6).

The Seal Lakes

Linnansaari and Kolovesi, two primarily water-based national parks in the Savonlinna area, offer fabulous lakescapes dotted with islands; it's best explored by hiring a canoe or rowing boat. There are several outfitters that offer these services, and free camping spots dotted along the lakes' shores.

This is the habitat of the Saimaa ringed seal. This endangered species (*Phoca hispida saimensis*) was separated from the Baltic ringed seal at the end of the last ice age, and is a lakebound species. After being in imminent danger of extinction due to hunting and human interference, its population levels have stabilized and are on the increase, although there remain only a precarious 300-odd of the noble silvery-grey beasts.

You are most likely to see seals in late May, when they are moulting and spend much time on rocks.

LINNANSAARI NATIONAL PARK

This scenic park consists of Lake Haukivesi and 130 uninhabited larger islands and hundreds more smaller ones; the main activity centres around the largest island, Linnansaari, which has several short hiking trails. As well as the seal population (50 to 100), rare birds, including osprey, can also be seen and heard in the park.

The best way to see the park is to pack camping gear and food, rent a rowing boat in Rantasalmi or Oravi (on the eastern shore of the lake) and spend a few days exploring. Boats, kayaks and canoes can be hired from **Saimaansydän Oravi** (☎ 647 290; www.saimaaholiday.net/wild; Oravi), who also runs guided four-day canoe trips, or **Saimaan Eräelämys** (☎ 0400-203 138; www.rantasalmi.net/eraelamys; Rantasalmi).

Oskari (☎ 0205-645 916; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug, 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Feb-May & Sep-Nov) in Rantasalmi acts as a visitor information centre for the park and also has environmental displays.

On the island you can stay at the established camping areas for free, or there's a private **camping ground** (☎ 0500 275 458) with

huts, tent sites and sauna. A canteen at Sannakkoniemi harbour sells provisions. Several smaller islands also have designated camping sites.

The main entrance to Linnansaari National Park is Mustalahti quay, but there is no bus stop, only boat connections. There is a boat service to the island of Linnansaari from Oravi (€7.50, 15 minutes), and from Mustalahti quay in Rantasalmi (€10, 25 minutes). If you miss a departure (there are three to four daily in summer), call a water taxi on ☎ 050-563 3257; the one-way fare from Oravi is €10.

There are regular buses to Oravi and Rantasalmi from Savonlinna. From Rantasalmi, it's an extra 3km to Mustalahti quay; you can either hitch, walk or catch a taxi. The Savonlinna-Kuopio ferry stops at Oravi.

KOLOVESI NATIONAL PARK

This fine park to the northeast of Linnansaari was founded in 1990 and covers several islands featuring well-preserved pine forests. There are high hills, rocky cliffs and caves, and even prehistoric rock paintings dating back 5000 years. There are some 30 to 40 Saimaa seals living here.

The Kolovesi park is a paradise for canoeing, the best way to explore the fantastic scenery. Motor-powered boats are prohibited in the park. There are several restricted areas within the park, and access to the islands is prohibited during winter. Check details at the small **information cabin** (☎ 015-479 040) in the village of Enonkoski, 15km south of the park, or at Savonranta (opposite). A free ferry north of Enonkoski crosses the narrows between two lakes on road 471.

There are two marked **walking trails** in the park. The 3.3km Nahkiaissalo nature trail is in the south of the park and accessible without a boat. There's a 3.9km nature trail on the northern island of Mantysalo. Just north of the park, the hill of Vierunvuori has prehistoric **rock paintings** depicting stick figures and elk.

Kolovesi Retkeily (☎ 040-558 9163; www.sealtrail.com) is the best and most experienced tour operator for the park, and specializes in canoe rental, outfitting and journeys. The office is located east of the park at Leipämäki, 15km west of Savonranta and 14km north of Enonkoski on road 471. The website www.norppateam.com lists other operators.

Inside the national park there are three **camping grounds**, one at Lohilahti near the southern access road 471; one at Lapinniemi; and the other on the island of Pitkäsaari.

Kievari Enonhovi (☎ 479431; railii.polonen@kievari-enonhovi.inet.fi; Urheilukentäntie 1; r per person €25-35; ☎ ☒) is an HI-affiliated hostel and hotel-restaurant in Enonkoski village, close to the national park. It's a very pleasant place, with a terrace, parkland leading down to the river and occasional live music in summer. There are two grades of rooms, all simple and likeable. The better ones have their own shower and kitchenette.

SAVONRANTA

An excellent base for exploration of the Kolovesi National Park and a quiet, attractive stop on the way north from Savonlinna, this town is east of the park on the shores of the mighty Orivesi lake.

On the shore, **Kuohu** (☎ 679 170; www.savonranta.fi; Vuokalanatie 214; ☎ ☒ 9am-9pm Sun-Thu, until midnight Fri & Sat Jun-Aug) serves as the information centre, and can also organize fishing trips on the lake. It also serves snacks, has

a pleasant beer terrace and has some backpacker accommodation nearby.

The best place to stay in the Kolovesi area is in Savonranta. **Savonrannan Bed & Breakfast** (☎ 050-341 7204; http://personal.inet.fi/business/elina.gaynor; Yläsuluntie 5; r per person €35-40; ☎ ☒ Jun-Aug; ☎ ☒) is a charming converted village bank. The comfortable rooms are thoughtfully and elegantly decorated, the shared bathrooms have great power showers, and the hosts lay on an excellent breakfast and will help arrange any activity. The setting is fantastic, with a garden by a small lake, the splashing of a millstream, a genuine wood sauna, and a balcony with spectacular sunsets. Guests have free use of the sauna and barbecue.

There are two daily buses from Savonlinna to Savonranta.

Sulkava

☎ 015 / pop 3257

Scenic, sleepy Sulkava, 39km southwest of Savonlinna, is known among Finns for its rowing-boat competitions (which some locals say is as much about the after-race partying as the rowing itself). It's the finishing

CANOEING THE SQUIRREL ROUTE

The 52km Juva to Sulkava canoeing route, known as Oravareitti ('Squirrel') route, is a highlight of this area and the perfect way for travellers to experience the lake region. Starting on Jukajärvi (at Juva Camping, see opposite), it traverses lakes, rivers and rapids on the way to Sulkava. Only one section is impassable – at Kuhakoski rapids, where canoes must be carried 50m past a broken dam. However, they should be carried at two other points along the way. Otherwise the rapids are relatively simple, though the water level drops 25m between Juva and Sulkava. Water levels vary considerably; if it's been abnormally dry, there will be more portage required.

Juva Camping provides everything you need: it rents two-person Canadian canoes (per day €25) or single kayaks (€17), gives you a waterproof map, and can arrange to pick you up (or just the canoe) at Sulkava for an additional fee. The route is signposted with information boards and there are two designated rest stops with fireplaces and toilets, as well as a midway camping area. It's also possible to start or break the route at Toivo, where there's a **hostel** (☎ 015-459 622).

It's 8km from the camping ground across the lake to the first river section, Polvijoki. Along here you must carry your canoe to the right of the dam. Passing through the small lakes, Riemä and Souru, you come to the first rapids, the gentle 200m Voikoski, which is followed by the first rest area to the left of a small island. Continue along the canal, carrying the canoe across the road at the end, before negotiating the Karjoki.

There's a camping ground called **Oravanpesä** (☎ 0400 938 076) on the 2km long Kaitjärvi with tent sites and cottages. Next comes a series of rapids including Kissakoski and the strong currents of the Kyrsvanjoki. You continue through the Rasakanjoki and Tikanjoki before coming to the large Halmejärvi, at the end of which is another resting place. The route continues on the western shore of Lohnajärvi to the Lohnankoski, at the end of which the canoes must be carried past the broken concrete dam. From here it's a leisurely paddle down the Kuhajärvi, past a final set of rapids and into Sulkava, where you pull in at the Kulkemus Boat Centre. There's a camping ground and a café here.

point for the two-day Oravareitti canoe route leaving from Juva.

The **tourist office** (☎ 739 1210; www.sulkava.fi; Alanteentie 36; ☹ mid-Jun–mid-Aug) can provide details of some of the numerous cottages for rental in the area.

The **Sulkava Rowing Race** (www.suursoudut.net) attracts big crowds over its four days, ending on the second Sunday in July. Competitors row around Partalansaari over a 65km (one-day) course, or 75km (two-day) course, then get thoroughly hammered. There's also an 'armada race' of 12m boats.

The **Linnavuori Fortress Ruins** is probably the most interesting sight in the Sulkava area. It's well signposted. The view from the top is of idyllic Lakeland scenery and old fortifications. The site was originally a prehistoric settlement.

SLEEPING

Muikkukukko (☎ 471 651; www.muikkukukko.com; Alanteentie 40; s/d from €25/40, (P) ☹) In the centre of town, this is a small motel attached to a popular pizza restaurant and dance floor. Its 10 double rooms are simply decorated and perfectly comfortable; there are also cabins available, popular with fishermen.

Vilkaharju Camping (☎ 471 223; www.lomalitto.fi/sulkava; tent sites €13, cottages €36-54; ☹ early Jun–mid-Aug) This place, in the Vilkaharju area 7km from Sulkava, is on a scenic headland across a pedestrian bridge (road access is possible). It's quite a village, with cottages, rooms and a dance restaurant in summer.

Juva

☎ 015 / pop 7403

The village of Juva, 60km west of Savonlinna and on the highway midway between Mikkeli and Varkaus, is mainly of interest to travellers as the starting point for the two-day Oravareitti canoeing trip. While you're here (or if you're passing through), check out the bizarre **Puutaitonäyttely** (adult/student €7/3.50; ☹ 10am–6pm Jun–Sep) just off the highway junction. It's an exhibition space of more than 500 wooden sculptures made by 40 artists, many using chainsaws. It's Finland timber industry turned fine art.

The Juva village centre is along the main street, Juvantie, where you'll find plenty of services and the **tourist office** (☎ 755 1224; Juvantie 13; ☹ 10am–6pm Mon–Sat, 11am–2pm Sun Jun–Aug, shorter hr in winter) in the town hall building.

There's an interesting museum in the Partala manor area. **Juva Museum & Karelian Museum** (☎ 755 1297; Huttulantie 1; adult/child €2/1; ☹ 11am–5pm Tue–Sun summer) displays local history and items from Soviet Karelia.

Juva Camping (☎ 451 930; www.juvcamping.com; Hotellitie 68; tent sites €12, 2-/4-person cabins from €25/35; ☹ late May–late Aug) Just off the main road, this excellent camping ground is right beside Jukajärvi. There are various cabins available, including large ones with their own sauna (€65).

There are dozens of B&Bs in this area – contact the Juva or Mikkeli tourist offices for information.

MIKKELI & AROUND

☎ 015

Mikkeli is a sizable provincial town on Lake Saimaa and an important transport hub for eastern Lakeland. It was the headquarters of the Finnish army during WWII, and it was from here that CGE Mannerheim directed the Winter War campaign against the Soviets. Museums relating to those years are the main sights in town. It's still an important military base, and soldiers sometimes seem to outnumber civilians in town. It's a friendly place though, and although there's little to see, it often makes a convenient stopover between north and south.

For information on local attractions contact the Mikkeli **tourist office** (☎ 194 3900; Porrassalmenkatu 15; ☹ 9am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–3pm Sat), near the large and lively kauppatori. The office has free Internet access.

Päämajamuseo (Headquarters Museum; ☎ 194 2424; Päämajankatu 1-3; adult/child €4/free; ☹ 10am–5pm Wed–Sun Sep–Apr, 10am–5pm daily May–Aug) was the army's command centre during the war; and **Jalkaväkimuseo** (Infantry Museum; ☎ 369 666; Jääkärinkatu 6-8; adult/child €3.50/1.50) is one of the largest military museums in Finland.

The area around Mikkeli is excellent for **freshwater fishing** – its many lakes teem with perch, salmon and trout, and ice-fishing is popular in winter. The tourist office can help with information, fishing permits, guides and equipment rental.

Mikkeli Music Festival (www.mikkelimusic.net), held here in late June/early July, is a week-long classical music event featuring top Finnish and Russian conductors.

The **rock paintings** of Astuvansalmi (Astuvansalmen Kalliomaalaukset), estimated to be 3000 to 4000 years old, are some of the finest prehistoric rock paintings in Finland. They are on a steep rock cliff, 38km by road southeast of Mikkeli, reached by a walking track from the road. You'll need a vehicle or bicycle to get there.

Close to the rock paintings, the open-air **Pien-Toijolan Talomuseo** (☎ 416 103; ☹ 10am–4pm Thu–Sun) is an estate dating from 1672, and consists of over 20 old houses.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotelli Nuijamies (☎ 321 150; www.hotellinuijamies.com; Porrassalmenkatu 21; s/d €66/94; (P) ☹) On the market square in Mikkeli, this family-run hotel is a good choice, being in the centre and close to the bus and train stations. The rooms are bright, with big windows and good views. There are several nice touches like B&W photos of old Finland and little Persian rugs. Management are friendly and there's a good restaurant and bar downstairs.

Visulahti Camping (☎ 18281; Visuahdenkatu 1; tent sites €13.50, cabins €50-140; ☹ late May–end Aug) This camping ground, next to the Visulahti amusement park, is the closest one to Mikkeli. It's about 5km east of the town centre and has lakeside tent sites and a wide range of cabins.

Café Sole (☎ 212 798; Porrassalmenkatu 19; lunches €7-11; ☹ 8.30am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–4pm Sat, 11am–4pm Sun) Facing the market square in Mikkeli, this is a good option for breakfast or lunch, when there are salads full of nice things as well as filling hot dishes. There's friendly service and a pretty terrace to watch Mikkeli march by.

Getting There & Away

Mikkeli is a transport hub between Helsinki (€32.30, 3½ hours) and eastern Lakeland or Kuopio (€25.60, 2½ to four hours) to the north, so plenty of buses pass through in all directions. The bus station is on the northern side of the kauppatori.

There are up to five trains daily from Helsinki and a similar number of connections from towns in the north. From other directions, change at Pieksämäki or Kouvola.

There are lake cruises between Mikkeli and Ristiina in summer; the Mikkeli tourist office has schedule and fare information.

RISTIINA

☎ 015

Ristiina, 18km south of Mikkeli, is one of the region's historic villages, founded by Count Per Brahe in 1649 and named after Kristina, his wife (subsequently the queen of Sweden). Little remains of the village's glorious past, though there are several places that reflect Per's aspirations.

The **tourist office** (☎ 661 750; Brahentie 53; ☹ 10am–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–2pm Sat & Sun, shorter hr in winter), in the centre of town, 2km east of the main Mikkeli-Lappeenranta road, can provide a map, and you can rent bicycles from Gasthaus Brahe nearby.

There's a distance between the main road and Ristiina's principal attraction, the castle ruins, but most shops and places to stay and eat are on the main street, Brahentie.

Brahelinna is the castle that was built by Per Brahe; its ruin is on a hill 2km from the village. The castle's high crumbling walls and the surrounding forest make for lovely walking. A sign saying 'Dunckerin kivi' points to a stone that was erected to honour a local, Mr Duncker, who fought and died during the 1809 battles against Russia.

The only place to stay in Ristiina itself is the HI affiliated **Gasthaus Brahe** (☎ 661 078; Brahentie 54, Ristiina; beds from €12; (P) ☹). It's on the main street about 100m from the tourist office. It also has a decent restaurant and provides some local nightlife. The rooms are in a separate building, previously used as a school dormitory. There are bicycles, boats and canoes to rent.

VARKAUS

☎ 017 / pop 24,269

The town of Varkaus is a small transport hub in a decent location, surrounded by water and spread over several islands cut by canals. It's this location, though, that led to the arrival of the timber and pulp industry and the smoke-belching factories that blight the town. Much of the population works for the paper and pulp industries. The **tourist office** (☎ 551 555; Kauppatori 6; ☹ 9am–4.30pm Mon–Fri) is in the town centre near the market square.

If you have a vehicle, it's well worth driving the 2km from the town centre to **Mekaanisen Musiikin Museo** (Museum of Mechanical Music; ☎ 558 0643; Pelimanninkatu 8; adult/child €10/5; ☹ Tue–Sun early Mar–mid-Dec). A Finnish-German couple runs this delightful collection of 250 unusual

musical instruments, and admission includes an eccentric tour of the house and its lovingly renovated mechanical instruments from the USA and Europe. Next door is a stylish German-run restaurant, **Zeppelin** (☎ 558 0644; Pelimanninkatu 8; mains €14-20; ☎ 11am-late Tue-Sat).

There are a couple of hotels and a summer hostel in Varkaus.

There are daily flights from Helsinki to Varkaus. Keskusliikenneasema is the central station, which includes train and bus terminals. There are frequent trains to Joensuu (€14.40, 1½ hours), and regular connections to Turku (€46.40, six hours) and Helsinki (€45, 5½ hours), changing in Pieksämäki

HEINÄVESI & AROUND

☎ 017 / pop 4403

The village of Heinävesi lies amid hilly country some way off the main Lakeland routes north of Kolovesi National Park, but some of the most scenic lake routes in Finland pass through here and canals provide a means of local transport. It's not a pretty place, but the nearby monasteries are a major drawcard.

There's a huge wooden church on a hill at the end of Kirkkokatu. It was built in 1890, seats 2000 people, and offers good views over Kermajärvi from the tower. Nearby is the local museum and a handicrafts centre.

On the northern side of Kermajärvi, 28km by road from Heinävesi, **Karvio** has scenic rapids that are good for fishing, and the canal serves as a jetty for lake ferries. This is a stopover for the Savonlinna-Kuopio ferry and a jump-off point for the Valamo Monastery and Lintula Convent.

Sleeping

There's also accommodation at the Valamo Orthodox Monastery.

Gasthaus-Hotelli Heinävesi (☎ 562 411; Askeltie 2; s/d €55/75; ☎) This place in the village centre opposite the bus terminal is an excellent choice, with characterful rooms that are good value, and all a little different. There's friendly staff and a very good breakfast. There's a pub and restaurant here, which makes it the social heart of town.

Karvio Camping (☎ 563 603; www.lomakarvio.fi; Takunlahdentie 2; tent sites €13, cabins €25-68; ☎ May-mid-Sep) A friendly and well-run place that is beautifully located by the Karvio rapids, you can fish here to your heart's content.

There are two restaurants here, and a choice of simple cabins or upmarket, heated cottages, which are also available in the winter months by arrangement.

Uittotupa (☎ 563 603; Uittontie 1; 4-6-person cabins €60-75) This place is across the road from, and part of, Karvio Camping, but open year-round. There's a wide variety of accommodation in various cabins and cottages. There's a café here renowned for its homemade bread.

Getting There & Around

The easiest way to arrive at Heinävesi is via bus from Varkaus (€8.70, 40 minutes, up to five departures on weekdays), there are also services to Kuopio (€22.90, three hours) and two a week to Savonlinna (€12.70, 1½ hours).

In summer, the passenger ferry MS *Puijo* from Kuopio (€32, 4½ hours, leaves at 9am on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday) or Savonlinna (€39, six hours, leaves 9am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday) calls at the Heinävesi jetty, just below the village. Bikes can be hired at the Heinävesi harbour, and boats and canoes can be hired at the Karvio or Viisalahti camping grounds.

VALAMO ORTHODOX MONASTERY

The **Valamo monastery** (☎ 017-570 111; www.valamo.fi; Valamontie 42, Uusi-Valamo) – Finland's only Orthodox monastery – is one of Savo's most popular attractions. Its history goes back 800 years to the Karelian island of Valamo on Lake Ladoga.

The original Valamo monastery was in the part of Karelia ceded to the Soviet Union after the Winter War. Its icons and treasures were packed up and brought to Finland; many of them are here.

In summer, the monastery can feel quite commercialised, with crowds flocking to buy souvenir beeswax candles, icons and CDs at the gift shop. Like any good monks, the clergy also make their own berry wine.

The two churches at the monastery contain a number of fine icons. Down at the riverside, the small chapel of St Nicholas is also worth a look. There's a museum (☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Aug) inside the cultural centre. Guided tours are conducted regularly (€3.50), although for tours in English you may have to contact the monastery in advance for times. Services are open to

the public and are given at 6am and 6pm Monday to Friday, 9am and 6pm Sunday and also at 1pm from June to August.

A good way to appreciate the monastery is to stay overnight. You can stay in the simple **Valamo Guesthouse** (dm €22, s €25; ☎ ☎ ☎) or the more comfortable **Valamo Hotel** (s/d €40/60, weekends €50/68; ☎ ☎ ☎). Also in the complex is **Trapesa**, the monastery café/restaurant. There's a lunch and dinner buffet for €11, a Russian-style 'high tea' in the evenings (€6.50, bookings required) and the usual sandwiches, coffee and monastery wine.

See below for transport information.

LINTULA ORTHODOX CONVENT

The only Orthodox convent in Finland, **Lintula** (☎ 017-563 106, ☎ 9am-6pm Jun-Aug) is much quieter than the popular Valamo monastery. It's a serene contrast that is well worth the short detour, and it's open outside the season by appointment.

Lintula was founded in Karelia in 1895 and transferred during WWII to Savo and then Häme. The nuns founded a convent at the present location in 1946. A souvenir shop on the premises sells wool and candles manufactured at the convent, and there's a pleasant coffee shop open from 10am to 6pm. The highlight is the lovely grounds, perfect for strolling. In the garden is a beautifully simple log chapel, whose icons glint in the light from the homemade candles.

Lintulan Vierasmaja (☎ 017-563 225; s/d €18/28; ☎ ☎) is a small red house at the back of the convent. There are simple but clean rooms, with separate bathroom, and it's open to men and women.

Getting There & Away

There are buses direct to Valamo from Joensuu and Mikkeli, but the services aren't frequent. From Heinävesi you need to change at Karvio. For Lintula, daily buses from Kuopio stop in the nearby village of Palokki, but if you're coming from the south, the nearest bus stop is on the highway 9km away.

The most pleasant way to get to either place in summer is on a **Monastery Cruise** (adult/child €60/30) from Kuopio. The cruise uses a combination of the regular Kuopio to Savonlinna ferry and car or bus transport. The ferry departs Kuopio at 9am Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, then there's car

transport from Palokki to Lintula and Valamo, then a bus back to Kuopio. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and Sunday transport is reversed with a bus to Valamo at noon and a ferry back from Palokki.

There are also canal cruises on the **MS Sergei** (☎ 570 111; tickets €8-15) from Valamo to Palokki and on Joujärvi.

CENTRAL LAKELAND

JYVÄSKYLÄ

☎ 014 / pop 83,582

This bustling provincial capital of central Lakeland is a Mecca for architecture lovers around the world for its large collection of Alvar Aalto buildings, particularly the university campus. Jyväskylä (pronounced *yoo-vah-skoo-lah*) was founded in 1837 and its reputation as a nationalistic town goes back to the earliest days, when the first Finnish-language schools were established here. In 1966 the university was inaugurated, and Jyväskylä was to become renowned for its modern architecture. Aside from all the Aalto connections and its lakeside location, it's an enjoyable provincial city whose youthful student population and lively academic scene gives it plenty of energy and nightlife. It's also popular as a winter sports centre with some frightening ski jumps near town, and you can arrive in style by lake ferry from Lahti.

Information

Avatar (☎ 214 811; Puistokatu 1A; per hr €3; ☎ 10am-10pm) Internet café with top-notch gear and helpful staff.

Main post office (Vapaudenkatu 60; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri) In the Kauppakulma shopping centre.

Public library (☎ 624 440; Vapaudenkatu 39-41; ☎ 11am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-3pm Sat) Has several free Internet terminals on the 3rd floor.

Tourist office (☎ 624 903; www.jyvaskyla.fi; Asemakatu 6; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat Aug-May) This office publishes an excellent free guide to events and activities in the region, sells tickets and has a free Internet terminal.

Sights

THE ALVAR AALTO PORTFOLIO

The main reason most people visit Jyväskylä is for its modern architecture; at times the whole city centre is full of folk curiously pointing wide-angled lenses at every Aalto

free). The best time to visit Jyväskylä is from Tuesday to Friday, as many buildings are closed on weekends and the Aalto Museum is closed on Monday.

Alvar Aalto (see opposite) was a giant of 20th century architecture. He was schooled here, opened his first offices here and spent his summers in nearby Muuratsalo.

The city has dozens of Aalto buildings, but your first stop should be at one of his last creations, the **Alvar Aalto Museum** (☎ 624 809; www.alvaraalto.fi; Alvar Aallon katu 7; adult/student/child €6/2/free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun; ♿), near the university to the west of the centre. It chronicles his life and work, and has a focus on a couple of dozen of his major buildings, as well as a section on his furniture and glassware designs. It's very engaging, and you get a real feel for the man and his philosophy.

Here you can buy the *Architectural Map Guide* brochure (€2), which plots well over a hundred buildings in and around Jyväskylä designed by Aalto and other notable figures. Aalto's list includes the university's main buildings and the **city theatre** (Vapaudenkatu 36). On the corner of Kauppakatu and

Väinönkatu is the old Workers' Club building, designed by him in 1925.

Aalto fans won't want to miss Säynätälö Town Hall (p134), where you can even sleep in a room that the man himself slept in, or his experimental summer cottage at Muuratsalo.

MUSEUMS

Jyväskylä's other museums are all free on Fridays and closed on Mondays.

Keski-Suomen Museo

The **Museum of Central Finland** (☎ 624 930; Alvar Aallon katu 7; adult/child €4/free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun; ♿) is adjacent to the Alvar Aalto Museum and designed by him, but sees a fraction of the visitors. A pity, for it's a well-presented display. The main exhibition is an attractive overview of rural life in Central Finland from prehistoric times onwards. There's an ancient sledge-runner dated to 4000BC, and displays on hunting, fishing and logging, with English translations. It gives a good feel for traditional Finnish life and finishes in a typical old grocery store. Up-

ALVAR AALTO

Pushing Sibelius and assorted racing drivers as most famous Finn, Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) was one of the most significant architects of the 20th century. Churches, town halls, museums and concert halls designed by Aalto can be seen across Finland from Helsinki to Rovaniemi. Aalto's buildings tread the line between the unadorned functionalism of the International Style and the people and materials orientation of the Organic Style. His designs emphasise the qualities of wood, brick and glass, the role of the building and its relationship to the people using it. It's a quintessentially democratic architecture: in previous centuries architects largely designed buildings for the wealthy few, but Aalto saw his task as 'a question of making architecture serve the well-being and prosperity of millions of citizens'.

Aalto was born in 1898 just outside Seinäjoki in the town of Kuortane. He practised in Jyväskylä, Turku and Helsinki (undoubtedly benefiting from being the first listing in the *Yellow Pages*) until gaining an international reputation for his pavilions at the World Fairs of 1937 (Paris) and 1939 (New York).

His most famous work is probably Helsinki's Finlandia Hall (1962–71), but the House of Culture (1952–58), with its convex wall of wedge-shaped bricks, and the Helsinki University of Technology in Espoo (1953–66) are also fine examples of his work. Jyväskylä is chock-a-block with Aalto-designed buildings including the Workers' Club (1952) and the Alvar Aalto Museum (1971–73). A comparison of the Civic Centre in Seinäjoki with the Church of the Three Crosses (1955–58) in Imatra highlights the range of Aalto's work. His characteristic use of rod-shaped ceramic tiles, undulated wood, woven cane, brick and marble is distinctive. Aalto's work was seminal and hugely influential; you'd guess that many of his buildings were built a couple of decades later than they were.

Aalto also achieved a reputation as an abstract painter, sculptor and furniture designer. In 1925 he married Aino Marsio, with whom he formed a dynamic team, collaborating on much of his work and on Artek furniture designs. Their work on bending and laminating wood revolutionised furniture design. The classic Aalto furniture is still a Finnish design staple.

Charmingly, the project Aalto himself loved the most was his own wooden boat, which he designed and built with great love, but little skill. It was barely seaworthy at the best of times, and regularly capsized and sank!

stairs is a history of Jyväskylä itself, with a couple of great scale models; the top floor is devoted to temporary art exhibitions, often associated with the Jyväskylä Arts Festival.

Jyväskylän Taidemuseo

Opened in 1998, the **Jyväskylä Art Museum** (☎ 626 855; Kauppakatu 23; adult/child €5/free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun; ♿) houses exhibitions of modern art and sculpture, often arranged by the active and excellent local artists' association. This, the main gallery, is complemented by two other exhibition spaces nearby, all entered on the same ticket.

Suomen Käsitöiden Museo

The permanent collection at the **Craft Museum of Finland** (☎ 624 946; www.craftmuseum.fi; Kauppakatu 25; adult/child €5/free; ☎ 11am-6pm Tue-Sun) is all about Finnish handicrafts and their history. Also incorporated is the National Costume Centre, which displays regional dress from

around Finland. There is a small permanent collection plus temporary exhibitions. It's an enjoyable insight into activities which, partly due to the long Finnish winters, have always been an important part of life here. There's also a good shop attached.

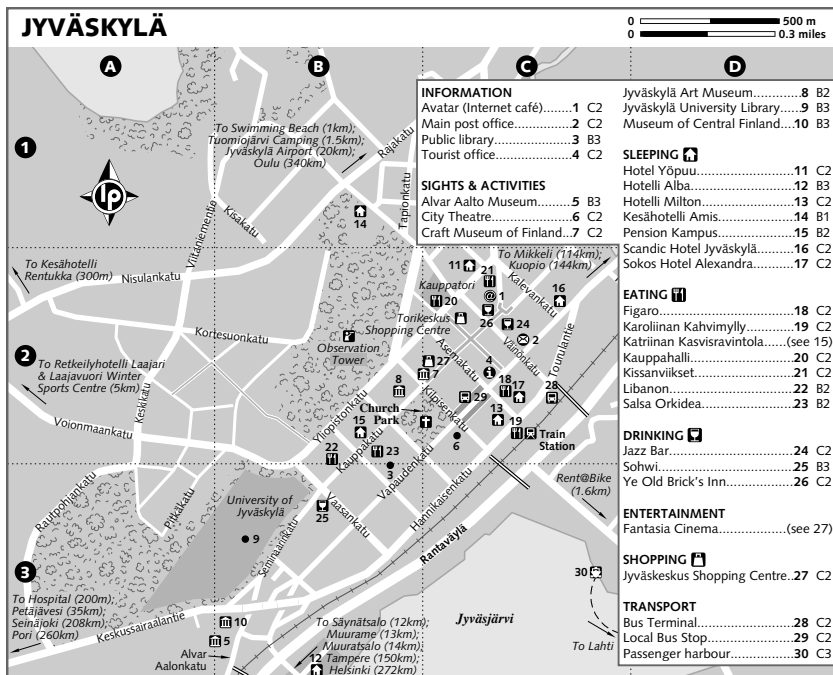
Activities

SKIING

Northwest of the city centre, **Laajavuori Winter Sports Centre** (☎ 624 885; www.laajavuori.com; laajavuorentie) has six modestly sloped ski runs, 62km of cross country trails (of which 10km is illuminated) and a number of very scary ski jumps (for which it is famous). There is a good ski area for children and the resort is popular with families. Catch bus 25 from the centre; it's 6km from town.

LAKE CRUISES

Jyväskylä is a popular cruise centre in summer because of the Keitele canal route north



of town. There are day-long excursions to Suolahti (single/return €23.50/35) on Saturdays in July; another route goes to Viitasaari via Suolahti on Thursdays (11 hours, one way/return €36/54), returning the next day.

Short cruises on northern Lake Päijänne are also available from early June to early August, with daily departures. Some of these are evening cruises with dinner and dancing. Try to catch the SS *Suomi*, one of the oldest steamers still plying the Finnish lakes, which goes at 3pm Tuesday to Sunday, and 7pm Tuesday to Saturday (€14 to €15, three to four hours).

Tickets can be purchased at the **Jyväskylä passenger harbour** (☎ 218 024; Siltakatu 4). Take buses 18, 19 or 20 from the centre.

For information about the Jyväskylä to Lahti route see p134.

Festivals & Events

In mid-July, **Jyväskylän Kesä** (Jyväskylä Arts Festival; ☎ 624 378; kesa@jkl.fi) has an international programme of concerts, exhibitions, theatre and dance. It has a strong liberal and radical tradition, having been going for over 50 years, and is one of Finland's most important arts festivals.

In early August, Jyväskylä is the centre of what many Finns regard as the most important event of the summer calendar, the **Neste Rally Finland** (www.nesterallyfinland.fi). Formerly called the Thousand Lakes Rally, this is the Finnish leg of the World Rally Championship, which Finns follow closely and have been very successful at. Head into the Torikeskus shopping centre to see the hand-and footprints of all the Finnish winners of the event, most recently Marcus Grönholm. The event goes for four days, with a big concert/party on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. You can book tickets over the Internet from March onwards. To get accommodation in Jyväskylä at this time, you need to have booked well in advance (the accommodation hotline ☎ 339 8382 may be able to help place you).

Sleeping

Hotelli Yöpuu (☎ 333 900; www.hotelliyopuu.fi; Yliopistonkatu 23; s/d from €87/140, ste €170, weekends r €85; ☎ ☒ ☑) This exquisite boutique hotel is the pick of Jyväskylä's accommodation by several lengths. The rooms are lavishly decorated and all in markedly different styles (you

must at least see the Africa room!); there are also a couple of excellent-value suites, two fine restaurants and a little flowery terrace to enjoy a glass of wine in peace and comfort.

Hotelli Milton (☎ 337 7900; www.hotellimilton.com; Hannikaisenkatu 29; s/d €65/85, weekends €55/70; ☎ ☒ ☑) This family-run hotel in the heart of town has a likeably old-fashioned feel with cheery bedspreads, wooden floors and a comfy guest lounge. There's a free sauna included in the price, and it's very handy for the bus and train stations. There are no rooms for smokers.

Sokos Hotel Alexandra (☎ 123 4642; www.soko.shotels.fi; Hannikaisenkatu 35; s €102-135, d €135-156, s/d weekends & summer from €65/82; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☒) One of two Sokos hotels in the centre of town, this is directly across from the train and bus stations and has two separate sections with excellent modern facilities and recently refurbished rooms. There's a choice of prices based on the conveniences contained.

Scandic Hotel Jyväskylä (☎ 330 3000; www.scandic-hotels.com; Vapaudenkatu 73; s/d €123/147, weekends from €71/81; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☒ ☒) The striking modern façade of this business hotel conceals a well-equipped interior, with large, light rooms that will satisfy rather than enchant. There's a small pool, saunas and use of a gymnasium as well as the expected facilities.

Retkeilyhotelli Laajari (☎ 624 885; www.laajavuori.com; Laajavuorentie 15; dm from €17-21, s/d €35/56; ☎ ☒ ☑) Set in the Laajavuori winter-sports complex 4km from town (bus 25), this HI-affiliated hostel is popular with winter skiing groups for its open fires, modern no-nonsense dorms, sauna and café facilities. Prices come down at weekends. It's shut on Sundays outside the summer and winter seasons.

Kesähotelli Rentukka (☎ 607 237; rentukka@co.jyu.fi; Taitoniekantie 9; s/d/tr €39/52/60; ☎ mid-May-Aug; ☎ ☒ ☑) In student accommodation 2.5km northwest of town (bus 18), these are light, no-frills rooms in a self-contained campus with restaurant, shops and bar. Rooms have bathroom and kitchen facilities but no utensils. Good for families. Breakfast included.

Tuomiojärvi Camping (☎ 624 895; Taulumäentie 47; tent sites €20, cottages €45-55; ☎ Jun-Aug) A pleasant place 2km north of town, with several four- and six-bed cottages scattered in the lakeside woods. You can rent canoes to take out on the lake, and there's a café and sauna. Take bus 8 from the centre.

Other recommendations:

Hotelli Alba (☎ 636 311; www.hotellialba.fi; Ahlmaninkatu 4; s/d €74/98, weekends & summer €57/78; ☎ ☒ ☑) Right on the lake, and handy for the Aalto museum and university. Friendly staff.

Kesähotelli Amis (☎ 443 0100; www.hotelliamis.com; Sepänkatu 3; s/d/tr €46/60/69; ☎ Jun-mid-Aug; ☎ ☒ ☑ ☒) Backing onto parkland, offers new, tidy, student-style rooms with private facilities and kitchenette.

Pension Kampus (☎ 338 1400; pensionkampus@kolumbus.fi; Kauppakatu 11; s/d €55/70, Sat, Sun & summer s €45-50 d €60; ☎ ☒ ☑) Central and spotless 3rd-floor option with kitchen facilities. Good value if you are self-catering.

Eating

As well as the places listed, both restaurants at the Hotelli Yöpuu are worthwhile.

Karoliinan Kahvimyly (☎ 0500 627 280; Hannikaisenkatu 14; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat) Near the station, this charming spot is part-antique furniture shop and part-café. There's an array of the most delicious quiches and cheesecakes imaginable (€3 to €4), ice-cream, and a great atmosphere.

Katriinan Kasvisravintola (☎ 449 8880; Kauppakatu 11; mains €7; ☎ 11am-2.30pm Mon-Sat) This is a likeable, comfortable, and cool vegetarian lunch restaurant next to Pension Kampus, with veggie pasta, curries and ratatouille. For €9 you get the dish of the day and access to the scrumptious salad bar.

Figaro (☎ 212 255; Asemakatu 4; mains €13-22; ☎ 10.30am-midnight Mon-Sat, 1-10pm Sun) This is an upmarket and intimate restaurant with a smart, drawing-room feel. The dishes are rich, with plenty of creamy sauces. There are plenty of dishes featuring local lake and sea fish, while a reindeer pasta is a more unusual choice. There are three good vegetarian mains, but what they do best are steaks; the house special comes with a mountain of fried onion.

Libanon (☎ 620 315; Kauppakatu 5; dishes €6-15; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Sat, 1-8pm Sun). This small, simple, Lebanese restaurant west of the centre is a good choice. It's got only five tables, and the menu centres on kebabs for the popular vote. It's authentic and you can enjoy quality baba ganoush and tasty *foul* (broad beans stewed in oil and garlic), accompanied by belly dancing on the big screen.

Kissanviikset (☎ 618 451; Puistokatu 3; mains €13-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) The 'cat's whiskers' is a friendly spot just off the pedestrian street.

There are two dining areas; the cellar is more atmospheric and boasts a long menu with a wide range of (particularly) meat dishes; they do a good pepper steak, and reindeer makes its customary appearance.

Salsa Orkidea (☎ 611 557; Kauppakatu 10; mains €6-14; ☎ lunch & dinner) For big servings of pasta, salads, tortilla and kebabs, it's hard to beat this place. There's a €6 lunch buffet and most mains are under €10.

Drinking & Entertainment

Jyväskylä has the sort of animated nightlife you only find in a busy university town, and the compact nature of the centre emphasises this. Kauppakatu, the main pedestrian strip, is a great place for bar-hopping, and in summer terraces spill out along here.

Ye Old Brick's Inn (☎ 616 233; Kauppakatu 57; ☎ 11am-2am or 3am) Right in the liveliest part of the pedestrian zone, this warm and welcoming pub has several excellent beers on tap, a cosy interior and rosy outdoor chairs and tables; the place to be on a summer evening. They also do good meals.

Sohwi (☎ 615 564; Vaasankatu 21; ☎ noon-1am Mon-Thu, noon-3am Fri & Sat, 2-10pm Sun) A short walk from the town centre is an excellent bar with a spacious wooden terrace, a good menu of snacks and bar meals, and plenty of lively student and academic discussion lubricated by a range of good bottled and draught beers. A great place.

Jazz Bar (☎ 621 398; Puistonkatu 2; ☎ 3pm-late) This is the place for relaxing live music, with regular jazz slots and jam sessions during the week. There are long weekend happy hours and a small terrace.

Fantasia (Jyväskeskus Shopping Centre, Kauppakatu 29) This cinema is central, in the pedestrian zone, and has six screens showing major releases.

Getting Around BUS

For reaching areas like Aalto's summer home, the camp site or the ski centre, you'll find the network of local buses useful. Unlike intercity buses, which use the bus station, local buses all leave from Vapaudenkatu, near the tourist office. Tickets cost €2.50 to €3.60 depending on distance; a day pass is €6.50 and cheaper than a return to Säynätsalo, for example. You can buy the pass in the tourist office.

BICYCLE

Jyväskylä is a good spot to explore by bike, particularly if you plan on investigating some of the further-flung Aalto buildings. You can rent one at **Rent@Bike** (☎ 050-443 3820; Humpakkuja 2; per day/week €15/50), among other places.

Getting There & Away**AIR**

There are several flights from Helsinki to Jyväskylä each weekday and fewer on weekends. The Jyväskylä airport is 21km north of the town centre; Finnair buses (€6, 20 minutes) meet each arriving flight. In the centre, catch the airport bus at the bus station, where it leaves 50 minutes prior to each departure, or on Vapaudenkatu.

BOAT

There is a regular ferry service on Lake Päijänne between Jyväskylä and Lahti, operated by **Päijänne Risteilyt Hildén Oy** (☎ 783 2515; www.paijanne-risteilytilden.fi). Boats leave Lahti at 10am on Tuesday and Thursday (€45, 10½ hours) from early June to early August. The service to Lahti leaves Jyväskylä at 10am on Wednesday and Friday.

BUS

The **bus terminal** shares a building with the train station and serves the entire southern half of Finland, with many daily express buses connecting Jyväskylä to the big cities, including hourly departures to Helsinki (€36.90, four to six hours), some requiring a change.

TRAIN

The train station is between the town and the harbour, in the same building as the bus station. There are regular trains from Helsinki (€39, 5½ hours) via Tampere, and some quicker direct trains.

AROUND JYVÄSKYLÄ
Säynätsalo

The large **Säynätsalo Town Hall** (Säynätsalon Kunnantalo; ☎ 623 801; admission weekdays free, weekends €2; ☎ 8.30am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, also 1-4pm Sat & Sun Jun-Aug) is on an island 10km southeast of Jyväskylä. It's one of Aalto's most famous works, the architect winning an international competition in 1949 to design it. The building was completed in 1952. There are

two rooms (☎ 623 815; r€25-30) available to stay in here; they are furnished with Aalto chairs and stools and named after the man and his second wife, who often slept here while supervising the building's construction. The two rooms are singles (although extra beds can be put in) and share a bathroom. They have simple kitchen facilities and are very good value.

Säynätsalo can be reached from central Jyväskylä on bus 16 (€3.60, 30 minutes).

Muuratsalo

This peaceful wooded islet is connected to Säynätsalo by bridges and was Aalto's summer retreat from the early 1950s onwards. On the shores of lake Päijänne he built **Koetalo** (☎ 624 809; www.alvaraalto.fi; adult/student €15/5; ☎ 1.30-3.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri Jun-mid-Sep), a must-see for Aalto lovers, but fairly pricey if you're not. Entrance is by guided tour, and must be pre-arranged by phone or email (the Aalto Museum or tourist office can do this). The tour takes you first to see his beloved boat, named *Nemo Propheta in Patria* ('nobody is a prophet in their own land') on dry land, never having been particularly seaworthy. Then to the lakeside sauna and the house itself. It's often called the 'experimental house', because Aalto used the charming patio to try out various types and patterns of bricks and tiles to see how they looked in different seasons and how they weathered.

The interior is surprisingly small; it's cool and colourful, but doesn't particularly evoke the man's spirit. A guest wing is perched on timber and stones (another experiment), but is deemed too precarious to enter.

The setting is very Finnish, and you can well imagine Aalto looking out over the beautiful lake and pondering his designs. It's a quiet, peaceful place, but take mosquito repellent!

To get to Muuratsalo, take bus 16 from central Jyväskylä and ride it to the end, where there's a small café. The house is 500m further along this road; it's on the right, opposite a parking area. To reach the house for the 1.30pm tour, you'll need to get the bus at 12.15, as they only run every hour (€3.60, 40 minutes).

Muurame

Along the main Tampere road, about 10km south of Jyväskylä, Muurame is home to

the **Sauna Village** (Saunakylä; ☎ 373 2670; Virastotie 8; admission €4; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug), a very Finnish attraction. This open-air museum has a variety of old saunas with different regional styles, plus smoke saunas you can hire for private use (from €85 for at least two hours). On Wednesday evenings (6pm to 8pm) you can take a sauna for €5 – it's a pity this is only available once a week!

The white **church** (☎ 10am-6pm Jun-early Aug) was designed by Alvar Aalto during the 1920s.

Take bus 14 from Jyväskylä to Muurame (€3.60, 30 minutes).

Petäjävesi

If you're heading west from Jyväskylä, it's worth pausing at the tiny village of Petäjävesi, 35km away, to see the Unesco World Heritage-listed, cross-shaped wooden church. Built in 1765, **Petäjävesi church** (admission €4; ☎ 10am-6pm Jun-Aug) is probably the most notable example of 18th-century rustic architecture in Finland. Prior to its construction, there had been some debate about whether this village should get a church at all. While a reply to applications (sent to Stockholm for approval) was delayed, Jaakko Leppänen started the job minus permission and properly drawn instructions. The result was a marvellous, though awkward, wooden building.

Buses from Jyväskylä to Keuruu stop in Petäjävesi.

NORTHERN LAKELAND**KUOPIO**

☎ 017 / pop 90,518

One of the most likeable towns in Finland, Kuopio is a very satisfying place that seems to combine several Suomi essentials – ski-jumps, forest, lakes, saunas, – in one neat package. It's a vibrant place with lots to see and do and enjoys a beautiful location, which can be surveyed from atop the famous Puijo tower. The ferry trip between Savonlinna and Kuopio also makes this a prime destination in summer. Time your visit so you can steam it up in the world's biggest smoke sauna, Jätkänpöytä!

Although not a huge place, Kuopio sprawls over a large area and manages to exude the atmosphere of a city while retaining the

charm of a lake town. The university keeps things lively on the intellectual and nightlife fronts, while the annual international dance festival adds to Kuopio's sophistication.

The first Savonian people entered the area at the end of the 15th century, and in 1552 the first church was built. In 1652 Count Per Brahe founded the 'church village' of Kuopio, which had little significance until 1775, when Gustav III of Sweden incorporated Kuopio as a provincial capital. A few important figures of the National Romantic era lived here from the 1850s, but the main growth of Kuopio was in the 20th century.

Orientation

Kuopio's centre is a grid of parallel streets around the kaupattori and church. The harbour is 1km to the east of the kaupattori, while the train and bus stations are about 500m to the north. Puijo hill is to the northwest of town.

Information

Kuopio tourist office (☎ 182 585; www.kuopioinfo.fi; Haapaniemenkatu 17; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-3pm Sat Jul, 9.30am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Aug-Jun) Has information on attractions and accommodation in the entire Kuopio region. They also sell the Kuopio Card (€11), which gives various discounts on shopping and museum entry as well as one major saving (in summer 2005 it was a free cruise).

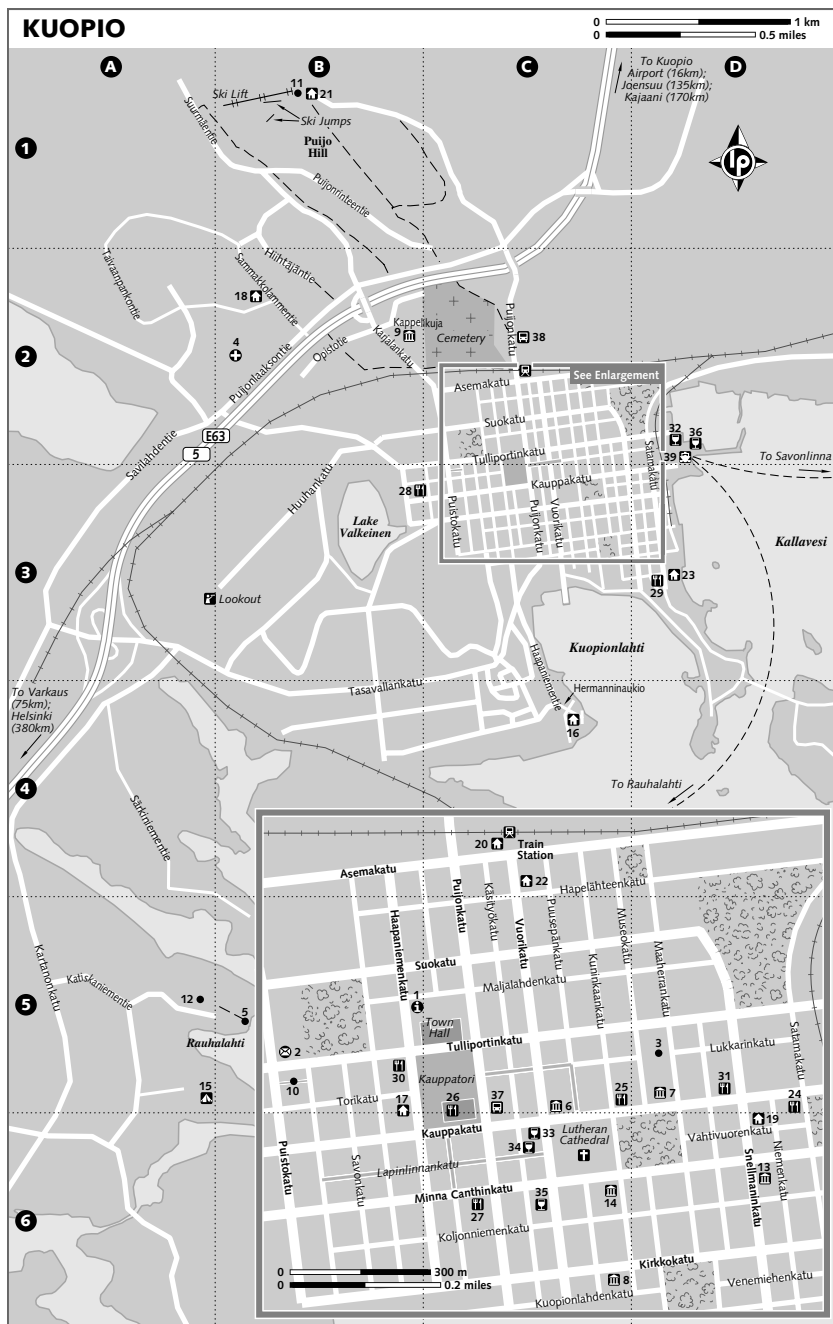
Main post office (Tulliportinkatu) Situated just west of the market square.

Public library (☎ 182 111; Maaherrankatu 12; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat) Free Internet terminals.

Sights**PUIJO HILL**

In a country with few hills, Puijo Hill is the pride of Kuopio – the spectacular panoramic lake and forest views from the 75m **Puijo Tower** (adult/child €3/2) are said to represent 'the national ideal of Finnish scenery'. There's a revolving restaurant on the 12th floor, a café on the 13th and an open-air viewing deck at the very top.

Surrounding Puijo Hill is one of the best-preserved **spruce forests** in the region. It's a popular spot for walks and picnics. Also here is an all-season ski jump and chairlift. Even in summer you can see ski jumpers in training. Unfortunately there are no public buses to Puijo, but it's a nice walk through the trees, or a short drive or cab ride.



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JÄTKÄNCÄMPÄ SMOKE SAUNA

There are different types of saunas, but the smoke sauna is the original and, some say, the best. This, the largest in the world (although few other countries have attempted the record), is a memorable and sociable experience that draws locals and visitors.

The lakeside **Jätkäncämpä sauna** (☎ 473 473; admission €10; ☹ 5-10pm Tue, also Thu from Jun–mid-Sep) is at a former loggers' camp near the Rauhalahdi Tourist Centre. The 60-person, mixed sauna (record capacity is 103 people) is heated 24 hours in advance with a wood fire (hence 'smoke sauna'). Guests are given towels to wear but bring a swimsuit for a dip in the lake. The technique is to sweat it out for a while, cool off in the lake, then repeat the process several times – devoted sauna-goers do so even when the lake is covered with ice. Then buy a beer and relax, looking over the lake in a Nordic peace.

There is a restaurant in the loggers' cabin serving a traditional dinner (buffet plus a hot plate €17) with accordion entertainment when the sauna is fired up, as well as a lumberjacks' show on summer evenings. Bus 7 goes every half-hour from the market square direct to just near the Rauhalahdi hotel complex, from where it's a 600m walk to the sauna, or take the lake ferry from the passenger harbour in summer (see p138).

This is one of Kuopio's highlights, but it is vital to ring ahead and check the opening hours to avoid disappointment.

MUSEUMS

Kuopio has several worthwhile museums, each with discounted entry if you have a Kuopio Card.

Kuopio Museum

The beautiful Art Nouveau 'castle' (☎ 182 603; Kauppakatu 23; admission €4; ☹ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat, to 5pm Jul, 9am-7pm Wed, 10am-5pm Sun) was built in 1907 and houses the Kuopio Museum, with interesting archaeological and cultural displays. There are also frequent special exhibitions.

Old Kuopio Museum

This block of old town houses (☎ 182 625; Kirkkokatu 22; adult/child €2.50/free; ☹ 10am-5pm, to 7pm Wed mid-May–mid-Sep, 10am-3pm Tue-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun mid-Sep–mid-May) forms another of Kuopio's delightful museums. Several homes – all with period furniture and décor – are very detailed and thorough and the level of information (in English) is excellent. Apteekkimuseo in building 11 contains old pharmacy paraphernalia, while in another building it's fascinating to compare photos of Kuopio from different decades.

There is also a museum café, with coffee and the delicious *rahkapiirakka* (a local sweet pastry).

Kuopio Art Museum

The **art museum** (☎ 182 633; Kauppakatu 35; adult/child €3/free; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue, Thu & Fri, 10am-7pm Wed, 11am-5pm Sat & Sun) features mostly modern art in temporary exhibitions, but also displays permanent works. Look out for paintings by the local artist Juho Rissanen (1873-1950), whose realistic portraits of Finnish working people were a contrast to the prevalent Romanticism.

Snellman Home Museum

This **museum** (☎ 182 624; Snellmaninkatu 19; adult/student/child €1.50/1/free; ☎ 10am-5pm, 10am-7pm Wed mid-May-late Aug) is a branch of the Kuopio Museum. JV Snellman, an important cultural figure during the National Romantic era of the 19th century, used to live in this old house from 1854 to 1849.

Orthodox Church Museum

A fascinating, well-presented museum, the **Orthodox Church Museum** (☎ 287 2244; Karjalankatu 1; adult/child €5/1; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun May-Aug, noon-3pm Mon-Fri, noon-5pm Sat & Sun Sep-Apr) holds collections brought here from monasteries, churches and *tsasouni* (chapels) in USSR-occupied Karelia. Today it is the most notable collection of eastern Orthodox icons, textiles and religious objects outside Russia. The oldest artefacts date from the 10th century.

The museum is in a plain brown building about 1km west of the train station; take bus 7 from the market.

VB Photographic Centre

There are excellent exhibitions in the summer at the **Photographic Centre** (☎ 261 5599; Kuninkaankatu 14-16; admission €3, during summer exhibitions €5; ☎ 10am-7pm Mon-Fri, 11am-4pm Sat & Sun in Summer, 11am-5pm Tue-Fri, 11am-7pm Wed, 11am-3pm Sat & Sun other times), devoted to Victor Barsokevitch, who was a local portrait photographer regarded as one of the pioneers of Finnish photography. His studio is now a photo gallery, but there are enough old cameras and photos to call this a museum. In the garden you can enjoy a cup of coffee in summer and be astounded by the camera obscura.

PIKKU-PIETARIN MARKET ALLEY

Just off Puistokatu, about 200m west of the kauppatori, **Pikku-Pietarin Torikuja** (☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sat Jun-Aug) is an atmospheric narrow lane of renovated red wooden houses converted into quirky shops stocking jewellery, clothing, handicrafts and other items. There's also a good little café with a terrace.

Activities

Rauhalahti Tourist Centre (☎ 187 718; www.rauhalahti.com) has grown around Rauhalahti Manor (Kartano Rauhalahti), an area converted into a year-round family park. The whole area is full of amusements and activities for families including boating, cycling, tennis and minigolf in summer, skating, ice-fishing, snowmobile safaris and a snow castle in winter. Take bus 7 from the town centre or a lake ferry from the passenger harbour in the town centre in summer (one way/return €5/10, 30 minutes, three to four daily).

You can rent bikes from around €10 a day, rowing boats, canoes, inline skates, and even hire Icelandic ponies for gentle trail rides.

At **Puijo Hill**, there are mountain-biking and walking tracks, including a marked nature trail. In winter there are cross-country ski trails and equipment rentals are available.

Tours

In summer there are daily departures for several different cruises. Two-hour cruises from the harbour cost €10 to €12 (half price for children) and depart hourly from 11am to 6pm. Special theme cruises include dinner and dancing, wine tasting or a trip to a local berry farm. There are also canal cruises and a monastery cruise to Valamo.

There are cruises to Rauhalahti tourist centre Tuesday to Saturday in summer (and Sunday in July); the best one is the smoke-sauna cruise on Tuesday and Thursday (single/return €5/10) at 5.45pm and 8.30pm.

Tickets for all cruises are available at the passenger harbour. Schedules are available at the harbour or from the tourist office.

Festivals & Events

Tanssii ja Soi is the **Kuopio Dance Festival** (☎ 282 1541; www.kuopiodancefestival.fi) in mid- to late June, the most international and the most interesting of Kuopio's annual events. There are open-air classical and modern dance performances, comedy and theatre

gigs, and the town is generally buzzing at this time.

In addition to performances, dance lessons are also given during the festival, but you'll need to make a **booking** (☎ 368 6200) in advance.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Hermannin Salit (☎ 364 4961; www.hermannin-salit.com; Hermanninaukio 3A; dm from €18, s/d €42/48; ☎ ☎ ☎) This is the city's most central hostel, about 1.5km south of the market square. It's a small, friendly place that's very well run. There's a laundry, shop and cafeteria offering cheap breakfast and lunch. Linen is included in the rates.

Puijon Maja (☎ 255 5250, www.puijo.com; Puijon-tornintie; s/d €55/60; ☎ ☎ ☎) Perched on top of Puijo Hill is this HI-affiliated place, with a great location among the trees by the tower. The rooms are spick-and-span, and there are very good facilities, including meals available. It's popular with groups, including practising ski jumpers, so book ahead. There's no public transport from the town centre.

Camping Rauhalahti (☎ 473 000; Kiviniementie; camp site per person/family €11/17, 2-4-person cabins €30-54; ☎ mid-May-Aug) Next to the Rauhalahti spa complex, this place has a great location, plenty of facilities and is well set up for families.

MIDRANGE & TOP END

Spa Hotel Rauhalahti (☎ 473 473; www.rauhalahti.com; Katiskaniementie 8; s/d Jun-Aug €87/102, Sep-May €97/124; ☎ ☎ ☎) This hotel at the Rauhalahti Tourist Centre, 5km south of town, is a superb place to stay. In addition to the spa facilities, the hotel has a restaurant, café and popular dance club. They offer some very attractive family packages on their website. In the same complex is the cheaper **Hostelli Rauhalahti** (s/d €61/70), with simple Nordic rooms and full use of the hotel's facilities, as well as an **Apartment Hotel** (2-4-person apts from €124/196) with excellent brand-new modern pads with all the trimmings. Take bus 7 from town. The smoke sauna is about half a kilometre further past the hotel.

Matkustajakoti Rautatie (☎ 580 0569; fax 580 0654; Asemakatu 1 & Vuorikatu 35; s with/without bathroom €46/36, d €75/56; ☎ ☎ ☎) Run out of the friendly grilli in the railway station, two types of very decent rooms are offered. The cheapest, across the road on Vuorikatu, are good

and light, with TV and comfortable beds but shared bathrooms. The rooms in the station itself are comfortable and surprisingly peaceful, with ensuite and family rooms available. Linen and breakfast are included.

Hotel Savonia (☎ 282 8333; Sannakkolammentie 2; s/d €88/110, weekends & summer €68/79; ☎ ☎ ☎) On the hills northwest of the town centre, this likeable and welcoming hotel has cheery rooms with bright Marimekko florals and very good facilities, including a pool. There's a restaurant here, as well as a deli-café for lighter meals. Breakfast, sauna and swimming are included in the room rates.

Scandic Hotel Kuopio (☎ 195 111; www.scandic-hotels.com; Satamakatu 1; s/d €116/140, weekends & summer €69/79; ☎ ☎ ☎) This is a large hotel in an excellent location on the shores of Lake Kallavesi, about 1km from the kauppatori and near the cruise boat harbour. It has excellent facilities, including a Jacuzzi. The parquet-floored rooms are attractive; the standard rooms face the street, but it's worth paying extra for the water views.

Other recommendations:

Hotel Atlas (☎ 211 2111; www.hotelliatlas.com; Haapaniementie 22; s/d €85/99, weekends & summer €63/69; ☎ ☎ ☎) Ageing but comfortable, on the kauppatori. Popular €10 lunch special.

Hotelli Jahtihovi (☎ 264 4400; www.jahtihovi.fi; Snellmaninkatu 23; s/d €79/99, weekends & summer €65/80; ☎ ☎ ☎) Pleasant and intimate with a good restaurant. Soft-coloured rooms with pine furnishings and small bathrooms.

Eating

The kauppahalli at the southern end of the kauppatori is a classic Finnish indoor market hall with fresh produce and food stalls. Look out for the local speciality *kalakukko*, a large rye loaf stuffed with whitefish and then baked. It's delicious hot or cold but you'll probably have to buy a whole one (around €15), enough for several picnics!

Musta Lammas (☎ 581 0458; Satamakatu 4; mains €17-24, degustation menu €48; ☎ 5pm-midnight Mon-Sat) The 'Black Sheep' is one of the few truly gourmet restaurants in this part of Finland, set in an enchantingly romantic brick-vaulted space. The menu is mainly French in inspiration, but with some Finnish ingredients and dishes. Duck breast, roast lamb and monkfish take their places alongside oysters and some sinful chocolate desserts. The set menu is a veritable feast.

Vapaasatama Sampo (☎ 581 0458; Kauppakatu 13; muikku €10-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is the spot for a truly local taste. It's the town's oldest restaurant – it's been in Kuopio for almost 70 years – and is famous all over Finland for its *muikku* (small whitefish), served in various forms, especially fried. It's delicious and the restaurant is cosy and typically Finnish.

Puijon Tornin (☎ 255 5255; mains €13-23; ☎ summer) This is the revolving panorama restaurant at the top of the Puijo observation tower. The cuisine at revolving restaurants isn't always commensurate with the altitude, but here it's very good, with a lot of emphasis on Finnish specialities. The Finland three-course set menu (€35) includes whitefish, reindeer, and cranberry tart, but there's equally toothsome dishes available on the à la carte menu.

Isä Camillo (☎ 581 0450; Kauppakatu 25; mains €10-22; ☎ 11am-midnight Mon-Thu, 11am-2am Fri & Sat) Set in a beautifully renovated bank – look out for the old strongroom – this spacious place is an enjoyable place to eat, with warm, elegant décor. It's reasonably informal and well-priced; the menu is international with plenty of Finnish specialities and there's a good enclosed terrace at the side.

Lounas-Salonki (☎ 281 1210; Kasarminkatu 12; lunch specials €7-8, mains €8-13, ☎ 9am-9pm Mon-Sat, noon-9pm Sun) Another good spot for lunch is this charming place in an old wooden building west of the centre. There's a salad buffet and a daily hot lunch, as well as good à la carte options. The interior is beautiful, with Empire-style horsehair chairs and other elegances.

Kummisetä (☎ 369 9889; Minna Canthinkatu 44; mains €9-16. ☎ 5-10pm Mon-Fri, 1-11pm Sat, 1-9pm Sun) This is a very popular pub-cum-restaurant, a rustic place like a little red barn. On sunny summer days its terrace gets pretty crowded. The food is good, with traditional staples like liver alongside beef madeira and wood-pigeon or the big 'godfather' steak (€24).

Helmi (Kauppakatu 2; pizzas €8, panini €5; ☎ 10am-midnight or later) Located in a 19th-century stone building near the harbour, Helmi is a downmarket bar with an excellent terrace. It has no frills but does four things, and does them well: pizzas, panini, salads and seriously cheap beer!

Trube Torinkulma (☎ 263 2557; Tulliportinkatu; ☎ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-4pm Sat) This place at the Sokos building near the kauppatori has the best pastries and cakes, as well as sandwiches and other light fare.

Drinking & Entertainment

Most of Kuopio's nightlife is conveniently strung along Kauppakatu, running east from the market square to the harbour. Here, the grungy but likeable Ale Pupi ('Sale Pub') draws people with cheap beer and karaoke, but there are many other options in this block.

Wanha Satama (☎ 197 304) Down at the harbour, this is set in a beautiful wooden building. It has pricey beer but a huge terrace, and is the place to be on a July weekend.

Albatrossi (☎ 368 8000) Across the way from Wanha Satama, this is another summer pub, set in old wooden warehouses. The massive beamed interior is something to behold, and the dance floor gets pretty lively at weekends.

Henry's Pub (Käsityökatu 17; ☎ from 7pm) This is one of the best rock music venues in town with regular live bands in its atmospheric downstairs venue, but it's a good bet at any time.

K Klubi (Vuorikatu 14; ☎ from 6pm) This is one of Kuopio's best bars, with an eclectic bunch of punters, ranging from a bohemian, arty older set to discerning students who value Finnish rock and loathe Europop. Always interesting.

Giggling Marlin (☎ 288 8100; Kauppakatu 18; ☎ 10pm-4am Tue-Wed, Fri & Sat) This is a frenetic 'Suomi pop' club with DJs, dancing on the tables, theme nights and plenty of youthful enthusiasm. There is a minimum age limit of 22 at weekends.

For good old-fashioned Finnish dancing and karaoke, the Hotel Rauhalahhti has a dance-restaurant packed on Friday and Saturday nights, when there's a live dance band.

Getting There & Away

AIR

There are several daily flights from Helsinki to Kuopio, run by both Finnair and budget airline Blue1.

BOAT

Ferries and cruise boats depart from the passenger harbour, about 1km east of the kauppatori. In summer, the lake ferry MS *Puijo* departs from Savonlinna on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 9am (€75, 10½ hours), going via Heinävesi and Oravi. It returns from Savonlinna on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

SHE AIN'T HEAVY, SHE'S MY WIFE

If the thought of grabbing your wife by the legs, hurling her over your shoulder and running for your life sounds appealing, make sure you're in Sonkajärvi, 18km northeast of Iisalmi, in early July, because you won't want to miss the **Wife-Carrying World Championships**. What began as a heathenish medieval habit of pillaging neighbouring villages in search of nubile women has become one of Finland's oddest – and most publicised – events.

The championship is a race over a 253m obstacle course, where competitors must carry their 'wives' through water traps and over hurdles to achieve the fastest time. Dropping your cargo means a 150-second penalty. The winner gets the wife's weight in beer and, of course, the prestigious title of World Wife-Carrying Champion. To enter, you need only find a consenting woman – but all borrowed wives must be returned. Estonians are particularly proficient; teams from that nation had triumphed in eight consecutive events to 2005.

The championship is accompanied by a weekend of drinking, dancing and typical Finnish frivolity.

BUS

The busy bus terminal, just north of the train station, serves the entire southern half of Finland, with regular departures to all major towns and villages in the vicinity. Express services to/from Kuopio include: Helsinki (€49, five to seven hours), Joensuu (€23.20, 2½ hours), Kajaani (€25.60, 2¾ hours), Jyväskylä (€23.20, 2¼ hours) and Savonlinna (€25.60, three to four hours).

TRAIN

Five trains a day run to Kuopio from Helsinki (€47, 4½ to five hours). Kouvola, Piek-sämäki, Iisalmi and Kajaani also have direct trains to/from Kuopio.

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Kuopio airport is 17km north of town. **Buses** leave from the kauppatori by the Anttila department store 55 minutes before Finnair departures (€5 one way, 30 minutes). Airport **taxis** (☎ 106 400) cost €12 for one person, or €24 for two to four people, and must be booked two hours in advance.

BIKE AND CAR HIRE

You can hire bikes for €12 to €13 a day at Hertz and Asemagrilli, both in the railway station building. Both also hire cars.

IISALMI & AROUND

☎ 017 / pop 22,639

Iisalmi, 85km north of Kuopio, is known as the home of the **Olvi Brewery** and, naturally, for its annual **beer festival**. Aside from this

and a handful of oddball festivals in the district there's not much to draw travellers here, though there's an Orthodox church and a couple of local museums.

The **tourist office** (☎ 830 3391; www.iisalmenseutu.info; Kauppakatu 22; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm in winter) is across from the bus terminal.

The **Karelian Orthodox Cultural Centre** (☎ 816 441; Kyllikinkatu 8; adult/child €2.50/1.20; ☎ 9am-6pm) displays icons, murals and models of Orthodox churches and *tsasouni* from Russian Karelia. Some icons had lain forgotten in attics and barns, and were later discovered to be valuable. The very attractive adjacent **Orthodox church** (☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun in summer) has beautiful illustrations painted in 1995.

Kuappi, at the harbour's edge, bills itself as the world's smallest pub – it has one table, two seats, a bar, a toilet, and an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

Hotel Artos (☎ 812 244; hotel.artos@co.inet.fi; Kyllikinkatu 8; s/d €65/85, weekends & Jul €58/75) is the best of the town's hotels. It's run by, and adjacent to, the Orthodox church, and the modern rooms are pretty good value, with polished wooden floors and plenty of light. Some are equipped with their own sauna. The restaurant here has an €8 lunch buffet.

The many bus services include Kuopio (€12.70, 1½ hours), Joensuu (€27.40, 3½ hours), and local buses to surrounding towns and villages like Sonkajärvi (€4.60, 30 minutes).

There are five trains a day from Helsinki to Iisalmi, via Lahti, Mikkelä and Kuopio. Coming from the north, you can reach Iisalmi from Oulu or Kajaani.

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