

Helsinki Highlights tour: This fascinating introduction to Helsinki will begin with your pick-up at port in a comfortable A/C vehicle. There will be photo stops along your route, so have your camera at the ready. You can sit back and relax as you enjoy your city highlights driving tour that will give you an excellent overview of this dynamic capital of Finland.



Helsinki Harbor

Helsinki, the capital of Finland, is a vibrant seaside city of beautiful islands and great green parks. The city's rhythm is laid back yet at the same time refreshingly active in terms of both the number and quality of restaurants and nightclubs.

Founded in 1550 by King Gustav Vasa of Sweden as a trading post to compete with Tallinn, Helsinki's growth was slow until the establishment of Sveaborg (Suomenlinna) Maritime Fortress in the middle of 18th century. In 1809, Finland was annexed by Russia and the capital of Finland moved from Turku to Helsinki in 1812. The Czar felt the Grand Duchy of Finland needed a capital of grand proportions. The architects Johan Ehrenström, a native Finn, and Carl Ludwig Engel, from Germany, were given the task of rebuilding the city in the Empire style. This can be seen today around the Lutheran Cathedral, which was completed in 1852. Finland became independent in 1917, and Helsinki assumed the role of capital of the young republic. Recovering from the hardships of WWII, Helsinki hosted the Summer Olympics in 1952 and became an EU Member State in 1995. Though thoroughly a Nordic capital, Helsinki today reflects the influences gained from the Western and Eastern cultures.

Helsinki – although Helsinki can seem like a younger sibling to other Scandinavian capitals, it is a sea-town par excellence and an exciting, dynamic place to visit. Half the city seems to be water, and the tortured geography of the coastline includes any number of bays, inlets and a speckling of islands. The harbor is the heart of the city, and watching the giant ferries glide into port is a defining memory.

Below is a brief introduction to just some of the sights you will see during your Helsinki Highlights driving tour.



Harbor and Market Square area



Outdoor café's



Market Square



Market Square fresh seafood



Market Square fresh fruit & vegetables



Souvenir dolls

Market Square (Kauppatori):

Located near the center of Helsinki (at the eastern end of Esplanadi and bordering the Baltic sea to the south and Katajanokka to the east), the Market Square is Helsinki's most international and famous market and one of the biggest tourist attractions in the city. The booths here sell traditional market foods and treats, as well as handicrafts and souvenirs. There is also a heated café tent where you can comfortably sip steaming hot coffee even on the coldest days in winter. From spring to autumn, the Market Square is bustling with activity with vendors selling fresh Finnish foods and souvenirs. There are also many outdoor café's at the square. Some cafés also provide meat pastries ("lihapiirakka" in Finnish), and they advertise their pastries as being "the best in the Market Square... in Helsinki... in Finland!" The height of the square's popularity is in early October when the annual Helsinki herring market ("silakkamarkkinat" in Finnish) begins.

From Market Square, you can catch the ferry out to Suomenlinna and nearby islands (Helsinki City Transport maintains an all-year-round ferry link from the Market Square to the sea fortress and in the summer there are also private companies providing ferry cruises).



Esplanade aerial view



Esplanade

Esplanade Park:

Located in the heart of Helsinki adjacent to Market Square, the Esplanade serves as a promenade for tourists and a place to relax for city residents. The park and the Espo Stage host many popular events, including the Marimekko Fashion Show and raising of the midsummer pole accompanied by folk dancing in June and the Jazz-Espo concert series on weekdays throughout July. There are many cafés and shops lining both sides of the Esplanade. The Helsinki Tourist Information office is also found on the northeast side of the Esplanade (Pohjoisesplanadi 19 – close to Market Square) where you can collect free maps, get directions, and purchase tram tickets and such.

Senate Square:

The Senate Square and its surroundings form a unique and cohesive example of neoclassical architecture. The square is dominated by four buildings designed by Carl Ludvig Engel between 1822 and 1852: Helsinki Cathedral, the Government Palace, the main building of the University of Helsinki and the National Library of Finland. Helsinki Cathedral is arguably Finland's most famous and photographed building; it celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2002. The oldest stone building in Helsinki is the Sederholm House located on the southeast corner of the square. The main building of the City Museum can be found on the Sofiankatu museum street.



Helsinki

Cathedral

The beautiful and historically significant Helsinki Cathedral is an Evangelic Lutheran church, and for many it is the symbol of Helsinki. The church was designed by architect Carl Ludvig Engel in the 19th century as part of the Empire-style-downtown Helsinki area. The cathedral was completed in 1852.

Rock Church: The Temppeliaukio Kirkko (Rock Church) is a thrilling work of modern architecture. Completed in 1969, it is built entirely underground and has a ceiling made of copper wire. The Temppeliaukio Kirkko was designed by architect brothers Timo and Tuomo Suomalainen. Construction began in 1968 and was finished a year later. The architects chose a rocky outcrop rising about 40 feet above street level, and blasted out the walls from the inside. The Temppeliaukio is now most commonly known by its English name, the Rock Church or Church in the Rock. It is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Helsinki and frequently full of visitors.



Rock Church



Sibelius Park



Sibelius Monument

Visit Sibelius park and view the famous composer Jean Sibelius' (1865-1957) monument by Eila Hiltunen, completed in 1967. The Sibelius Monument, resembling organ pipes, is made of welded steel with the bust of the composer on one side. The monument is one of Helsinki's most popular statues and one of the most well-known tourist attractions. The monument is 8.5m high, 10.5m wide and 6.5m deep. It is built of over 600 pipes and weighs 24 tons.



Uspenski Cathedral

Uspenski Cathedral

Completed in 1868, the Uspenski Cathedral is the largest orthodox church in Western Europe. It was designed by architect Aleksei M. Gornostajev. The red brick church has eastern and western influences. Its facade is an example of the old Slavic tradition in the Byzantine style and shows influences of Italian art.

Tour Description:

Our City Highlights Tour will take you to the most important and interesting parts of the city. You will start from the port and drive along Esplanadi Street, one of the most popular and interesting streets that connect the waterfront with Helsinki's main thoroughfare - Mannerheimintie. Numerous famous buildings are located here - the Presidential Palace, the Swedish Embassy, the historic Kappeli Restaurant, the Grönqvist House, the State Banqueting Hall and the Swedish Theatre. On Mannerheimintie (Mannerheim Street) you will see the National Museum and the Finlandia Hall, designed by the famous architect Alvar Aalto. Other impressive sights are the Opera House, the Finlandia Concert Hall and the Parliament Building.

Our next stop is the Temppeliaukio Church, also known as the Rock Church. This unique church is a highlight for most visitors to Helsinki, and is considered to be one of Europe's most interesting churches. It was carved out of solid rock from the side of a mountain and is topped by a copper dome. During our visit you will have the opportunity to admire its natural stone walls and the magnificent beaten copper ceiling.

Then we shall visit the Sibelius Park and see another of Helsinki's landmarks - the Sibelius Monument, a huge construction made from hundreds of steel pipes to honor the famed Finnish composer Jean Sibelius.

Our tour will then take you back to the city center where a short stop at Senate Square will allow you to admire the beautiful neo-classical architecture of the University and the Lutheran Cathedral. On the way we will pass the Uspensky Cathedral, the biggest Russian Orthodox church in the Nordic region.

Then we shall walk to the colorful Market Square, to see local vendors selling traditional foods and treats as well as handicrafts and souvenirs.

Finally we will return to the port.

NOTE: At the conclusion of your tour, you may elect to remain in town rather than return to port – please let your guide know if this is your wish.

3 hour Highlights Drive Tour

Type: History, Architecture, drive with photo stops
Length: 3 hours
Status: Open group tour
Group size: Max. 32 persons
Activity level: Medium - Mainly by vehicle. A little walking is involved
Transportation: A private air-conditioned vehicle corresponding to the group size
Inside visits: The Rock Church (if open for visitors)

NOTE: The itinerary below is a sample. The *actual* start and end times of our tours are adjusted to coordinate with your ship's arrival and departure. Please contact us for the exact itinerary of your ship.

Note regarding Churches: In the event that religious services/special events are scheduled, the churches will be closed to the public.

Helsinki Highlights Drive Tour

8:00 Arrival in Helsinki

9:00 Meet on the pier

9:00-10:00 City tour with the views of: Presidential Palace, Swedish Embassy, historic Kappeli restaurant, the Grönqvist House, The State Banqueting Hall, Swedish theater, the National museum, Opera House, Finlandia Concert Hall and Parliament building.

10:00 Picture stop at Temppeliaukio (Rock) Church

10:30 Visit Sibelius park with the monument

11:00 Walk on Market Square

12:00 Arrive to the pier.

Price includes:

- Guide for 3 hours per itinerary
- Driver & A/C vehicle for 3 hours as per itinerary