



Helsinki Extends Warm Welcome

Helsinki, Finland - Ranked as the world's most "in-touch" nation, with English widely spoken, avant-garde architecture and an open-minded attitude that emphasizes reserve, this hi-tech nation has literally reinvented itself in the last few years - and the gay and lesbian community has noticed.

The Helsinki 2004 Pride takes place June 28 through July 4, 2004 and offers a special program including meetings, picnics, shows, and parties and of course the parade (www.helsinkipride.fi). Travelers have made note of Helsinki's rising star as a "hip" cosmopolitan capital. Finland's friendly people, "hot" culinary scene, cool architecture and expanded cultural venues appear in glossy high-profile magazines touting the world's best places to visit. Travelers keen on exploring cutting-edge attractions will find more than 70 museums and numerous art and antique galleries including Helsinki's newest attraction: Kiasma, the highly interactive, state-of-the-art contemporary art museum. The Harvard Architectural Digest tapped Helsinki as the "Best Designed City in Europe." And with clean, wide boulevards and parks, and world-famous architecture it is!

Design conscious buyers can pick up Hackman pans and tools created by the leading Finnish designer Stefan Lindfors and the Italian master Antonio Citterio. Iittala's stylish crystal and Marimekko's bold and sassy prints can raise one's home décor to all-new heights. And new Finnish labels like Picnic and Ril's are well worth a look. Numerous same sex partners will have registered their relationship in Finland where such unions became legally binding in March 2002.

Most of the hotels in Helsinki are gay-friendly and range from tourist class to high end. Scandinavia's first truly five-star Hotel Kämp fuses invigorating Scandinavian design with historic elegance and redefines Finnish luxury. The world's glitterati -including Whitney Houston and Madeleine Albright grace its restaurant and spa, and great weekend rates make it affordable for all.

Helsinki also offers a variety of restaurant and dining options. Gay and lesbian bars are within an easy walk of each other, well marked and well lit with every reason for being there. They include Lost & Found Hideaway Bar and Don't Tell Mama (open until 4AM). Hercules is popular with the younger crowd - and with a novel twist as dancers foxtrot, twist and waltz. The newest casino in Europe, the Grand Casino Helsinki designed by American architect Paul Steelman, opened on April 1, 2004, and is the world's first digitally enhanced casino. Helsinki This Week, available at hotels, provides a more complete list of places to go. Sauna and outdoor activities are also ways to enjoy Finnish culture and make new friends. Helsinki is also a great base for traveling along the King's Road. Visa free cruises to St. Petersburg (Russia); day trips to medieval Tallinn in Estonia and minicruises to Stockholm heighten one's experience of the Baltic Sea region.

For more information on Finland contact the Finnish Tourist Board at 212-885-9700, fax 212-885-9710, email mek.usa@mek.fi or visit www.visitfinland.com/na.