



Vegan in HELSINKI

Finding Finland's botanical bliss

The popularity of humble wooden shacks known as mökki, or summer homes, reveals much about what Finnish people value most: simplicity, sustainability, and deep communion with nature. Finland is one of the most forested nations on earth, with 70 per cent of its surface covered by fir, birch and oak trees. Even in the bustling capital of Helsinki, there is an average 105.70 square metres of green space per person, according to TravelBird (travelbird.com). Protected and recreational areas surround the city, too, and are known as Viherkehä (the Green Ring). The 'right to roam' means you can easily access these lakes, rivers and land areas – for hiking, swimming, foraging, camping and a host of other activities.

Although much of the traditional Finnish cuisine features meat, a new generation of restaurateurs are now showcasing the region's

seasonal, sustainable, plant-based, forest-sourced fare. So from golden chanterelles, to fragrant herbs and nutrient-packed berries, prepare for a walk on the wild side.

TOP 5 PLACES TO VISIT

SUOMENLINNA

Located a short ferry ride from the heart of Helsinki, Suomenlinna is an 18th Century sea fortress surrounded by picturesque walking trails, along rambling paths and windswept cliffs. Amid the ancient stone and militaristic monuments, you'll see an amazing collection of sea birds and wild flowers.

NUUKSIO NATIONAL PARK

Lush primeval forests and rugged rocky gorges are awaiting those who venture into Nuukio National Park. Pack a picnic or bring

a basket, because this is a prime place to forage for wild foods. You haven't tasted a raspberry until you've plucked it from the bush yourself.

LÖYLY

In the Finnish language, 'löyly' means the steam that arises when bathers throw water on a sauna's hot stones, but also refers to the life force of any living thing. Stretched along the Helsinki waterfront, Löyly offers a traditional smoke sauna and a wood-fired sauna, plus easy access to the ocean. Healthy meals are also available on-site.

KIASMA

Part of the Finnish National Gallery, this contemporary art museum exhibits work by local and international artists. 'Goodness' is the theme of the 2019 program, which will feature New York-based Icelandic artist



Hrafnhildur Arnardóttir, aka Shoplifter, who creates installations from synthetic hair!

KATAJANOKKA

A bicycle ride around Katajanokka, an upscale island neighbourhood located close to downtown Helsinki, can be unexpectedly rewarding. Keep your eyes peeled for charming architecture, moored icebreakers and cafés at which you're likely to be the only tourist. Explore the grounds of the Hotel Katajanokka, which was renovated and reopened after serving as a prison from 1837 to 2002. The SkyWheel Helsinki and Allas Sea Pool are also located on Katajanokka.

WHERE CAN I EAT?

CARGO

It was only a matter of time before the shipping container craze reached the port city of Helsinki. Cargo makes great use of space, with a breezy terrace atop the café proper. Soak up the sleek, industrial ambience as you chow down on delights from a vegetarian and vegan breakfast and lunch menu, accompanied by some of the city's best coffee. Fresh, energy packed juices are also a popular choice.

Where: Ruoholahdenranta 8, 00180 Helsinki

OMNAM

Yogic by name, yogic by nature. From superfoods to comfort foods, all dishes at OmNam are 100 per cent vegan and most are gluten-free, too. You could fill up on soup or the salad bar, but the a la carte menu is when OmNam really comes into its own. Think dashi-roasted greens with organic tofu and seasonal mushrooms, or raw lasagne with courgette, carrot, marinated mushrooms, nettle pesto and cashew cream.

Where: Annankatu 29 B, 00100 Helsinki

YES YES YES

It's a bar, a restaurant, and an interior designer's dream. Fight your way through the foliage, order a glass of rosé and prepare yourself for a treat. Select something from the piping hot tandoor oven, or perhaps explore the roots and greens menu. How good does whole artichoke, cherry vinaigrette and corn cashew hollandaise sauce sound?

Where: Iso Roobertinkatu 1, 00120 Helsinki

SILVOPLEE

Buffet restaurants don't usually ring my bell, but Silvoplee is an exception. The daily changing vegetarian buffet boasts more than

30 different dishes, the majority of which are made using ingredients which are both raw (not heated above 40°C) and organic. The raw vegan cakes, including tiramisu, carrot and mocha caramel, are perfect for those with a sweet tooth. And in case you needed another reason to visit, Silvoplee also follows fair trade principles.

Where: Second Line 7, 00530 Helsinki

ALLAS CAFÉ

Located within the Allas Sea Pool complex, overlooking Helsinki's waterfront, Allas Café offers healthy, affordable lunches. The soup of the day (parsnip with sage and peanuts, on the day I visited) comes with green salad and carve-your-own bread. Work up an appetite beforehand in one of Allas' three pools, or pencil in time for a post-meal sauna.

Where: Katajanokanlaituri 2a 00160 Helsinki

ORA

Dining at 23-seat Ora is like being taken on a gastronomic journey. Chef and owner Sasu Laukkonen showcases Finnish ingredients sourced from forests, lakes and farms. Depending on the season, anything from porcini mushrooms and marigolds, to meadowsweet and sea buckthorn berries, will take the spotlight. Ora's dégustation menu is easily and lovingly adapted for vegan or vegetarian diners.

Where: Huvilakatu 28A, 00150 Helsinki

NOLLA

The Nordic region's first zero-waste restaurant showcases locally sourced, organic produce. To reduce the 70,000 kilograms of waste the average restaurant produces in a year, nothing wrapped in single use plastic is permitted through the door. Vegetarian and vegan menus are available on request.

Where: Liisankatu 2, 00170 Helsinki

GRÖN

Small, intimate Grön offers a four-course standard or vegan menu, which shifts according to the seasons. The restaurant's naturally leavened sourdough bread is a delicious revelation.

Where: Albertinkatu 36, 00180 Helsinki Finland

• **Words:** Denise Cullen
Twitter/ @CullenDenise
deniscullen.com.au



• Silvoplee



• Ora



• Yes Yes Yes