

The Finnish capital has plenty to offer a nation of music lovers and its visitors – and it's not all Finnish tango, karaoke or heavy metal, as Pirkko Kotirinta reveals

**H**elsinki is one of the northernmost capital cities of the world. So the timing of your visit is important – if you go in the summer, your experience will be totally different than if you visit Helsinki in December, when the light is almost absent.

From spring through to autumn the city feels alive and vibrant with locals making the most of the parks and seaside cafés, strolling the streets late into the evening. Thanks to Nokia, Helsinki has a high-tech reputation but it still retains a down-to-earth atmosphere.

Finland has very few immigrants: just over two per cent of the approximately five million population (in Helsinki it's around six per cent of the half a million

population), but interest in world music is still evident, especially in the capital. Curiously the most popular genres of music are heavy metal and Finnish tango. So if you happen to be near Kaisaniemi park during a certain weekend in June or July, you'll come across thousands of metalheads milling around for the Tuska Open Air Metal Festival ('*tuska*' means agony or pain). And if you find yourself in Seinäjoki, some 350km west of Helsinki, during another weekend in July, you'll be met by thousands of tango lovers dancing silently – and pretty straight-faced – in the streets of this Ostrobothnian city. This is Tangomarkkinat (market of tango) – an annual tango festival.

Despite the international fame of modern Finnish

folk music groups such as Värttinä, Maria Kalaniemi, Kimmo Pohjonen, JPP, Frigg and Sväng, this music is seldom performed live in the capital. There are however some club evenings in various bars and restaurants and a summer stage in the main park where quality folk and jazz is played (see listings below), but for many Finns the new folk music is virgin territory.

You could of course always meet the singing Finn in his or her most authentic venue – the karaoke bar. Since the days of the epic poem *Kalevala*, it's common knowledge that Finns are a singing nation. And it's true – with hundreds of choirs across the country and hugely popular karaoke bars: more popular the later the evening gets, of course.



## FESTIVALS

### Helsingin Juhlaviikot (Helsinki Festival)

During a fortnight in late August and early September, a large tent by the shore of Tokoinlahti (Bay of Tokoi) is erected every year for the festival which hosts quality world music acts, illuminating warm August evenings. Juhlaviikot offers a rich quality worldly programme at Huvila (meaning 'summer house' or 'villa') – a landmark for the festival.

**Various venues, [www.helsinginjuhlaviikot.fi](http://www.helsinginjuhlaviikot.fi)**

### Etnosoi!

The main autumn festival for world music fans. 2007 marked its 20th year and the event has introduced many great world music names to Finnish audiences.

**[www.globalmusic.fi](http://www.globalmusic.fi)**

### Taigajuhla

The most important festival for folk enthusiasts and organised, since the 80s, by the Sibelius Academy folk department.

**Every April. Various venues, [www2.siba.fi/taiga](http://www2.siba.fi/taiga)**

### Finnish-Irish Festival

For jigs, reels and good beer, October is the month for the annual Irish Festival in Finland, now in its 22nd year.

**[www.finnish-irish.fi](http://www.finnish-irish.fi)**

### Maailma Kylässä (World Village Festival)

A global village with lots of good music and ethnic food sets up camp every May in the heart of Helsinki. Free entry.

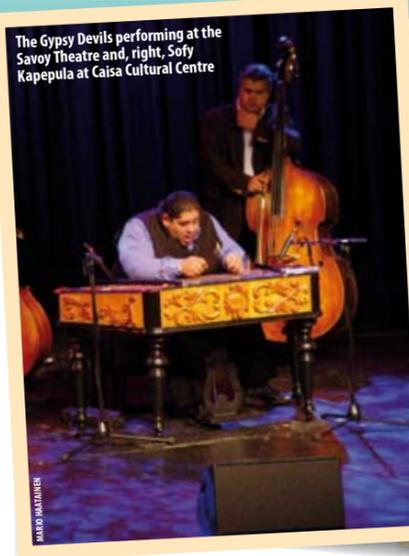
**Kaisaniemi Park, [www.maailmakylassa.fi](http://www.maailmakylassa.fi)**

**For more about Finland's festivals, check out: [www.festivals.fi](http://www.festivals.fi)**



Finnish-Cuban dance group, Salsa de Cuba, shake their stuff at World Village Festival

The Gypsy Devils performing at the Savoy Theatre and, right, Sofy Kapepula at Caisa Cultural Centre



## VENUES

The talk of the town for some time has been the big hole in the ground, opposite Parliament House. It's supposed to be the Musiikkitalo, (the Music Hall), which will host the Sibelius Academy Orchestra, the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and the Radio Symphony Orchestra. When completed, it may well become one of the main venues for world music and folk music in the city.

### Savoy Theatre

This is the main venue for world music in Helsinki – a nice old movie theatre with a capacity of 700. Concerts this autumn included Kimmo Pohjonen, Angélique Kidjo, Fanfare Ciocărlia, Chucho Valdés, Vocal Sampling and Orchestra Baobab. It will be under renovation during spring 2008.

**Kasarmikatu 46-48, +358 (0)9 310 12000, [www.kulttuuri.hel.fi/savoy](http://www.kulttuuri.hel.fi/savoy)**

### Sibelius Academy

New folk music concerts can be heard regularly in the chamber music hall of the main building of the Sibelius Academy. Occasionally a folk club called Feeniks takes place on the ground floor level.

**Pohjoinen Rautatienkatu 9, +358 (0)20 753 90, [www.siba.fi](http://www.siba.fi)**

### The Cable Factory

A well-established venue and home for many cultural activities, including music.

**Tallberginkatu 1C 15, +358 (0)9 4763 8300, [www.kaapelitehdas.fi](http://www.kaapelitehdas.fi)**

### Caisa International Cultural Centre

Bursting with music and events from Finland's immigrant communities, including concerts, exhibitions and lectures.

**Mikonkatu 17C, +358 (0)9 310 37500, [www.kulttuuri.hel.fi/caisa](http://www.kulttuuri.hel.fi/caisa)**

### Vanha Ylioppilastalo (Old Student House)

Very centrally situated and with a nice

bar but not as active on the concert scene as it used to be. It's owned by Helsinki university's student union and the basement is the place for dancing couples – the true soul of old-fashioned Finnish popular culture. Tuesdays is ladies night. ([www.wanhantanssikkellari.fi](http://www.wanhantanssikkellari.fi))

**Mannerheimintie 3, +348 40 571 1728, [www.vanha.fi](http://www.vanha.fi)**

### Finlandia Hall

Impressive, centrally located concert hall designed by the most famous Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto, and named after Jean Sibelius' famous composition. It's home to the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and also the main venue for the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

**Mannerheimintie 13, +358 (0)9 40241, [www.finlandiatalo.fi](http://www.finlandiatalo.fi)**

### Hartwall Arena

Helsinki's main rock concert venue. The Eurovision Song Contest 2007 was held here in May in a spectacular manner. Finns had to wait 45 years for victory but they won in 2006 with Lordi's magnificent show of monster-heavy rock.

**Areenakuja 1, +358 (0)204 19 97, [www.hartwall-arena.com](http://www.hartwall-arena.com)**

## RECORD SHOPS

### Digelius Music

For an unequalled stock of Finnish and Nordic music head here. If owner Emu Lehtinen doesn't have it, he'll know where to look.

**Laivuririnne 2, + 358 (0)9 666 375, [www.digelius.com](http://www.digelius.com)**

### Eronen

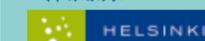
Also on Laivuririnne street, Eronen has lots of reggae, Latin, jazz, classical and African music.

**Laivuririnne 2, + 358 (0)9 638 816, [www.dubjazzsalsa.com](http://www.dubjazzsalsa.com)**

## Competition

We are offering the chance to win a three-night, long weekend break for two people in Helsinki, courtesy of Visit Finland. The prize includes return flights, city centre accommodation and a Helsinki Card (free entry to museums and transport, plus other discounts). To enter, simply answer the following question: **Which Finnish group won the 2006 Eurovision Song Contest?**

Conditions: the tickets are for two people travelling together and must be used by April 30 2008. Travel over Christmas and New Year is excluded, no travel between 20.12.07-1.1.08. Flights are for London Heathrow-Helsinki or Manchester-Helsinki in economy class and always subject to availability. The tickets are non-transferable and have no cash value. Travel must originate in the UK. Accommodation in twin/double room with breakfast in a city centre hotel. This prize is non-negotiable, non-refundable and does not include insurance or transfers in the UK. Reservations for the flights must be made at least 14 days before departure. Deadline for competition entries is January 10 2008 and winners will be notified by email by January 15 2008. See p5 for Songlines competition rules and email address.



**WIN**  
a long  
weekend in  
Helsinki!

## CLUBS

The club scene for folk and world music changes all the time. Live music is varied at indie-orientated Kuudes Linja (in Kallio, Kaikutie 4) and the more stylish Club Liberté (Kallio, Kolmas Linja 34). In Punavuori, Gloria (Pieni Roobertinkatu 12), an old movie theatre and Club Belly (Uudenmaankatu 16-20) are among the main clubs.

### Perinnearkku

Some active folk musicians have organised Perinnearkku clubs ('*perinnearkku*' means a box or coffer) at different bars and restaurants – lately at a warm and cosy restaurant/piano bar called Piano (Rauhankatu 15, [www.ravintolapiano.fi](http://www.ravintolapiano.fi)).

**Various venues, [www.perinnearkku.net](http://www.perinnearkku.net)**

### Juttutupa

One of the oldest restaurants in Helsinki hosts a jazz club called Rytmihäiriökлуби (The Rhythm Club), very popular every Wednesday.

**Säästöpankinranta 6, +358 (0)20 7424 240, [www.juttutupa.com](http://www.juttutupa.com)**

### Storyville

A club which offers a more traditional jazz repertoire.

**Museokatu 8, +358 (0)9 408 007, [www.storyville.fi](http://www.storyville.fi)**

### Korjaamo Culture Factory

An interesting, new place – an urban space concept hosting concerts and club nights.

**Töölönkatu 51B, +358 (0)20 7417 000, [www.korjaamo.fi](http://www.korjaamo.fi)**

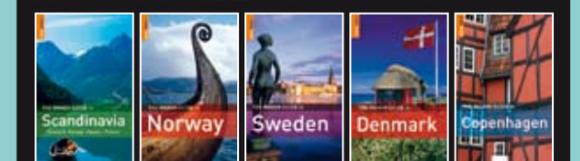
## GOING TRAVELLING?

Songlines has now profiled the world music scene in over 30 cities. Check the archive on [www.songlines.co.uk](http://www.songlines.co.uk)

Sponsored by



## ROUGH GUIDES DO SCANDINAVIA



**"THE BEST GUIDE TO THE COUNTRY"**

The Telegraph reviewing The Rough Guide to Sweden

Over 300 travel titles and 70 reference books [www.roughguides.com](http://www.roughguides.com)

