

Helsinki, Finland: A Disney Cruise Line Port Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Having previously enjoyed our time in [Oslo, Norway](#) and [Stockholm, Sweden](#), we decided that we'd continue our exploration of the Scandinavian countries.

So the following year, we headed over to Helsinki, the capital of Finland. Next summer, the Disney Magic makes that same visit, as part of its wonderful variety of European cruise itineraries.

Perhaps the biggest draw in the city is, ironically enough, not in the center of Helsinki, but on an island, reached by a 15-minute ferry ride. The Suomenlinna Sea Fortress is one of the largest in the world, and was built in the 19th century by the Swedes who, at that time, owned the country, to ward off invasions by the Russians. Sadly, that didn't work and the Russians triumphed, but thankfully the fortress was left intact, as it's a fascinating place to visit today. It's not just about the fortress, as the island is home to variety of different and very beautiful buildings. As you'd expect, it's home to a military museum, but what is more surprising is that it's also home to a fascinating toy museum. There's even a tiny submarine called the Vesikko here, and boy I mean tiny! If you're claustrophobic at all, this is not a good place for you.

□ We really enjoyed our visit out there, although the overwhelming memory we both have of it was the torrential downpour we experienced, where we sheltered in a passageway under a wall until it eased. We survived, but the small puddle near us grew and grew and grew to about four feet across, so that we were almost in a river! Up until that point, it had been a beautiful day, so I guess the moral of this story is that you never know what the weather's going to do here.

□ If you catch the ferry across to Suomenlinna, the chances are you'll see the Market Square, located on the harbor, which is the real heart of Helsinki. Here you'll find cafes and a lively market. Head uphill from the Market Square, and you quickly find Senate Square, dominated by the city's cathedral, the main building of Helsinki University, and the Council of State building. It's a magnificent square, surrounded on all sides by impressive buildings.

Beautiful as the cathedral is (and trust me, it's well worth seeing, both from the inside and outside), there are two other churches that you really need to see on any visit here. The first is the magnificent, and thoroughly opulent Uspensky Cathedral, the largest Orthodox church in

Western Europe. Located a short walk from Senate Square, just look for the impressive 13 gold domes, and you'll easily find it. The other bonus of this place is that you'll have some beautiful views from the steps of the cathedral over the harbor below. Inside is just as stunning as you'd expect, although given the size of the cathedral from the outside, somehow I expected it to be bigger inside.

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□The other church in Helsinki is truly unique, and something that will remain in your mind for a long time. It's called Temppeliaukio or the Church in the Rock and the names tells you everything you need to know, as the church literally is built right into the rock. From the outside, you can't believe you're actually going to go into a building, never mind a church, but if you expect it to be a dark and foreboding place, you're in for a shock. It is much lighter in there than most churches I've visited, and it's also exceptionally peaceful. We spent some time just sitting in there, taking everything in, and enjoying the relaxing feel to this most surprising of places.

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□Other sights I can thoroughly recommend include the Kaisaniemi Botanical Gardens, complete with a massive lake, affording some beautiful views of the city and the Helsinki central railway station. Stop, did I just read that right? Yes, you did. Just like Grand Central in New York City, this is so much more than just a railway station. The halls inside have massive soaring ceilings, while outside, two huge statues stand holding lamps that are lit at night-time. They give the place a slightly surreal feel, but if you love architecture, you'll be fascinated by this place.

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□What I love most about Helsinki is that it's very much a walkable city, with the major attractions all close to each other. Having said that, be prepared to do a lot of work on two legs, as a lot of the time, it really isn't worth using public transport. Of course, as you're on a cruise, you may be luckier than us, and be ferried around the city by bus on a shore excursion, although I have to confess, exhausting as it was, walking around Helsinki was amazing, and we did see so much. Then again, there is so much to see here, and like any major city, more than you comfortably cram into a day…

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□The Disney Magic makes four stops in Helsinki next summer, and the first two are on the seven-night Northern Europe cruises that leave from Copenhagen, Denmark on May 30, and June 13. Helsinki also features on the 12-night Northern Europe itinerary, which departs from Dover, England on July 10, and 22.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every

Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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