

An aerial photograph of a Finnish amusement park, likely Linnanlahti, situated on a peninsula. The park features a tall, slender observation tower with a circular viewing platform at the top. Several roller coasters with colorful tracks are visible, along with other rides and greenery. The park is bordered by a body of water, and a cityscape is visible in the background under a clear blue sky.

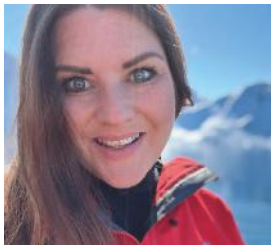
Finland for families

From Lakeland to Lapland, the Finnish outdoors is a perfect playground for a family adventure at any time of year, finds
Cathy Toogood ➤

DESTINATIONS

FAMILY HOLIDAYS | FINLAND

ASK THE experts



Inga Antoníusdóttir, general manager northern Europe, Intrepid Travel

"What often surprises people is how incredible Finland is in summer, with endless daylight, beautiful forests and pristine lakes you can swim in. Finland also offers a unique chance to connect with Sámi culture and local communities that share their deep relationship with the land – something most of us can really learn from. Finland is a place that stays with you, no matter when you visit."



Allan Cooper, travel expert, The Aurora Zone

"Finland offers families an enchanting blend of nature, culture and adventure in every season. Families can enjoy unforgettable experiences such as husky sledding, visiting reindeer farms and chasing the northern lights, even outside of winter. The country's family-friendly appeal often surprises visitors. Safe towns and cities, excellent public transport and attractions such as Santa Claus Village, which is open all year, make it a stress-free destination for parents and kids alike."



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Tampere harbour; the northern lights; writer Cathy with May, Zac and Ed **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Särkänniemi amusement park in Tampere, Finland

PICTURES: Laura Vanzo; Visit Tampere; Shutterstock/Trabantos



Surrounded by a pine forest with the cobalt-blue Lake Näsijärvi sparkling in the sun in one direction and Lake Pyhäjärvi glistening in the other, the view from Tampere's Pynnikki Observation Tower is spectacular. But my eight-year-old son Zac is too distracted to take it all in. He's focusing all his energy on plucking up the courage to step over the tower's stone edge to abseil down.

"It's 26 metres high but feels higher due to the setting," says instructor Eero Suvela from Kelo ja kallio Adventures, who is full of patience and encouragement.

Zac points to Lake Pyhäjärvi and tells Eero that we plunged into it the day before, following his first-ever sauna. "Last week, both lakes were still frozen," says Eero. Zac smiles, takes a deep breath and gingerly steps backwards.

I'm in Tampere in southern Finland, with Zac, my 11-year-old daughter May and my husband Ed. We're combining a spring city break in this southern Lakeland region with outdoor adventures in the Lapland resort of Levi, farther north. We travel on the cheerfully named overnight train, the Santa Claus Express to Kolari (an hour from Levi), going to sleep with the city illuminated and waking up with the sun shining over a snowy pine forest.

FAMILY FUN

The magical combination of Santa, snow, reindeer and huskies keeps families flocking to Finnish Lapland every Christmas – festive holidays here sell out year after year.

"Family adventures in Finland, which is regularly voted the happiest country in the world, should not be limited to winter trips

In March, to keep up with growing demand, Tui launched December packages to Finland's Arctic Lakeland with direct flights from Manchester.

Chris Logan, Tui UK commercial director, says: "Arctic Lakeland offers everything families love about a Finnish Christmas experience, from husky sledding and reindeer rides to personal Santa meetings, but in a more intimate setting and at a more accessible price point." He adds that Tui has already seen strong interest in the packages.

But family adventures in Finland shouldn't be limited to winter trips, as the country that is regularly voted the happiest in the world has endless opportunities for spring, summer and autumn escapes with the kids, from swimming in lakes and sharing sauna sessions to visits to quirky museums or Moomin World.

Our trip to Lapland was during the Easter school holidays, but it was still snowy enough to enjoy husky and reindeer rides, try ice-fishing and even pay a visit to Elves Village – and all outside peak season, so we had the attractions practically to ourselves. ➤

DESTINATIONS

FAMILY HOLIDAYS | FINLAND



ABOVE: Moomin World celebrates the cute characters from Tove Jansson's series of books; Zac with husky puppy **PICTURE:** Jenni Virta Iloinen Liffari Oy; Cathy Toogood

BOOK IT

Regent Holidays offers a seven-night Finnish Lakeland Family Summer Break. Accommodation is in a log cabin at Lehmonkärki Resort on the shores of Lake Päijänne, where activities include guided e-biking, hiking or kayaking, a fishing experience and a trip to a husky farm. Prices start at £2,945 for adults and £1,065 for children, including flights to Helsinki and car hire. regent-holidays.co.uk

The Aurora Zone has a three-night autumn lights tailor-made family break from £695 for adults and £305 for children. The price includes accommodation in a glass-roofed Aurora Cabin at the Northern Lights Village in Saariselkä, all meals, airport transfers, cold-weather clothing and an aurora alert service. Flights are extra. theaurorazone.com

Summer is the cheapest time to visit Levi, though, and is a good recommendation for clients looking for a memorable family holiday away from the crowds and the warmer climate of the Med. Kids might try panning for gold in the river or picking herbs with the elves as part of the summer activity schedule.

And, while May and Zac loved the thrill of our sleigh ride with All Huskies safari, the part of our visit they still talk about is meeting more than 70 huskies afterwards, learning their names and stroking an excitable pack of puppies – all of which is still on offer, even when there's no snow on the ground.

MOOMIN MAGIC

Another obvious family draw for Finland is Tove Jansson's cute Moomins – and this year is the perfect time to recommend a trip for fans, as 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the publication of Jansson's first book, *The Moomins and the Great Flood*.

There are several celebrations taking place across the country, including special events and exhibitions at Tampere's Moomin Museum, autumn dance performances in Tampere, a Tove Jansson exhibition opening in October at Helsinki's Architecture and Design Museum, and fantastical fun at the whimsical Moomin World theme park 10 miles from Turku.

The Moomin books cover the wonder of nature, and as an active family, we loved that we were never

“May and Zac still talk about meeting more than 70 huskies, learning their names and stroking the excitable pack of puppies

far from green space or an outdoor activity in Finland, even when basing ourselves in the cities.

In Tampere, we took part in an escape room set in a forest overlooking Lake Pyhäjärvi with Nature Escape, then tested out the Flou floating sauna with dips in the lake to cool down in between. Families visiting Helsinki can also take a bike ride down the Vantaa River or enjoy downtime on one of the beaches or nearby islands accessible by ferry, such as Pihlajasaari.

We returned from our family holiday to Finland feeling thoroughly refreshed and reflecting on the words of northern lights safari guide Heli Alatalo, from Soma Adventures. When I had asked Heli why Finland was consistently voted the happiest place in the world, she relied: “We are very positive because we have space and nature. We don't get stressed and live in the moment.”

In a world where families rush around and screens are a constant distraction, these are the ideal factors for switching off and enjoying each other's company. **TV**