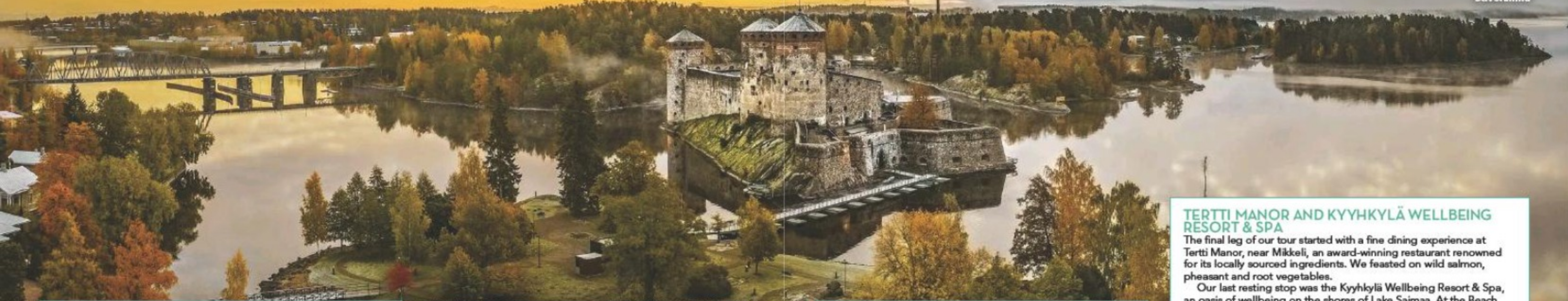


FINN AND TONIC

TAKE A ROAD TRIP AROUND FINLAND'S ENCHANTING LAKELANDS FOR A TRULY HAPPY HOLIDAY

Olavinlinna Castle in romantic Savonlinna



HALLA RESORT AND SAVONLINNKA

Setting off from Finland's capital, Helsinki, and soaking up the magical scenery, it was evident why the Nordic nation has been voted the happiest in the world for four years running. Our first stop was a luxury lakeside villa at Halla Nature & Design Villas in Anttola, Mikkeli. Showcasing Scandi architecture, ours had its own sauna and a private lakeside dock from where we watched the sunrise the following morning before heading to Savonlinna.

The historic "capital of Saimaa" is home to 15th-century Olavinlinna Castle and also the birthplace of the Mobile Phone Throwing World Championships. Fortunately we kept hold of ours! We then took a VIP tour of the SS Steamship Paul Wahl, a boat-hotel fit for A-listers docked in the local harbour. As we basked in the winter sun on deck, we kept our eyes peeled for the elusive Saimaa ringed seal, which likes to inspect the boat's guests.

For a traditional meal, we recommend Cafe-Restaurant & Hotel Saima. We enjoyed salmon soup followed by a choice of desserts. Lusikkaleivät, a delicate jam-filled biscuit, was our favourite.



Lakeside views at Halla



Fairy-tale Punkaharju Hotel

PUNKAHARJU RIDGE

Next on our whistle-stop tour was a stay at the 11-room, pink Punkaharju Hotel. Full of fairy-tale charm, it's nestled on a hilltop surrounded by pine trees in one of Finland's most scenic areas, Punkaharju Ridge – the perfect spot to reconnect with nature. The hotel's wellness coach Tero guided us through forest meditation and some mindful sauna yoga.

During our stay we discovered that the Finns love to forage and use fresh, local ingredients when possible, creating wholesome yet elegant meals. The dishes from the seasonal menu at Restaurant Punkaharju fully celebrate this, with a particular passion for mushrooms. We even indulged in a mushroom cocktail, using black trumpet mushroom infused bourbon – it was delicious and garnished with candy cap mushrooms. This was a dining experience not to be missed.

JÄRVISYDÄN

For lovers of outdoor adventure, our next stop, Järvisydän Hotel & Spa resort is just the ticket. Located in the middle of Lake Saimaa and close to Linnansaari National Park, it hosts a variety of activities including skating, fishing, seal watching and hiking. We enjoyed an exhilarating bike ride through the forest before a cosy hot cocoa break by the fire.

The Lake Spa, built in the middle of natural rocks, offers respite after an active day with six saunas and five pools lit by hundreds of fairy lights.

For a luxury adults-only escape, try the serene Kuru Private resort. Here we enjoyed a delicious lunch celebrating flavours of the forest – a mushroom risotto made with spruce needles, salted cranberries and Parmesan, followed by a refreshing spruce shoot ice cream, pear mousse and crystallised white chocolate. We ended our visit with a relaxing sound bath.



The Lake Spa is ringed by natural rocks

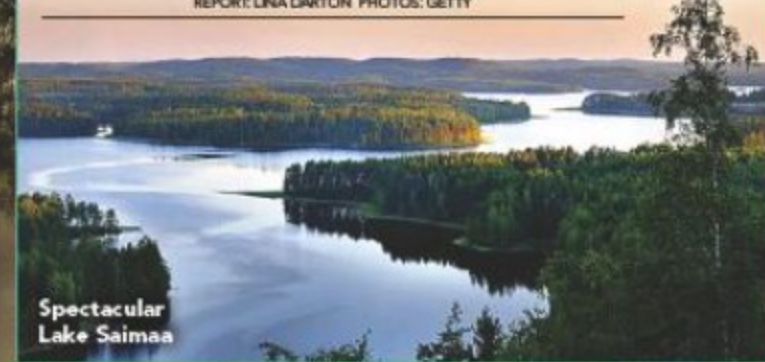
TERTTI MANOR AND KYHKYLÄ WELLBEING RESORT & SPA

The final leg of our tour started with a fine dining experience at Terti Manor, near Mikkeli, an award-winning restaurant renowned for its locally sourced ingredients. We feasted on wild salmon, pheasant and root vegetables.

Our last resting stop was the Kyyhkylä Wellbeing Resort & Spa, an oasis of wellbeing on the shores of Lake Saimaa. At the Beach Sauna we were introduced to the "sauna whisk", a bouquet of eucalyptus used to give a special kind of massage as one bather slaps the other with the warm, water-soaked whisk to relieve muscle pains and cleanse the skin! If you're brave enough, emulate the Finns with a dip in the lake's icy waters afterwards.

To round off, we retreated to our cosy cabin for a drink – and a cheers, or "hölökynkölökyn!", to an amazing trip. **OK!**

REPORT: LINA DARTON. PHOTOS: GETTY



Spectacular Lake Saimaa

HOW TO BOOK

For more information, see visitfinland.com and visitsaimaa.fi/en/. Rates at Halla Resort (hallasort.fi/) (okasie-villas) are from €245 per night; Hotel Punkaharju (hotel.punkaharju.fi/en/) from €146 per night; Kyyhkylä Wellbeing Resort (kyyhkyla.fi/) from €90 per night. Finnair flies between London Heathrow and Helsinki from £110 return per person, including all taxes and charges. Prices may vary. To book, visit finnsir.com.

The best places to chill on your doorstep

Make every second of your free time count

Visit 2Chill.co.uk

2Chill

