



# 13 Awesome Things to do in Savonlinna, Finland

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## Your Ultimate Guide to Savonlinna, Finland

Savonlinna is a stunning old city located in the middle of Finland's largest lake system, the Saimaa Lakes. When you visit Savonlinna you are literally surrounded by water and can immerse yourself in a beautiful yet non-touristy Finnish city.

Though many people may not have heard of it before traveling to Finland, there is a surprising number of things to do in Savonlinna. From exploring the stunning Olavinlinna Castle, to paddling through the national park while spotting the world's rarest seal, or cruising around the harbor on a traditional steamboat, you won't get bored here, that's why I've also listed it as [one of the top places in Finland](#).

We visited Savonlinna for 4 days as part of our two-week road trip around Finland. But to be honest, we could easily have spent an entire week here.

In this guide, I will cover 13 things to do in Savonlinna. Note that a few of these will only be applicable in the summer months, so be sure to check opening hours and availabilities while you plan.

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## Olavinlinna Castle

### **Get Lost in Olavinlinna Castle**

Olavinlinna Castle was built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, originally named St Olaf's Castle by a Danish noble called Erik Axelson Tott. The castle was historically a key strategic fortress along the former border of the Swedish and Russian Empires. Over the centuries it changed hands between the two empires several times after bloody medieval battles were fought on its grounds.

These days, Olavinlinna Castle is the northernmost medieval stone fortress which remains standing. It is a heritage protected national icon in Finland.

There are guided tours which depart every hour, on the hour. We joined one of these which I highly recommend. The tour gives you a much better understanding of the history and the purpose of the different rooms. Also, you are only permitted up

access the upper levels of the castle if you join one of these guided tours. (We were sneaky and went to the upper levels ourselves but got completely lost and eventually found by some not so happy staff).

Olavinlinna Castle is open daily from 11am to 6pm.

## Hop on a Steamboat Cruise

One of Finland's most nostalgic activities is to board a steamboat on a nice sunny afternoon. There are a number of old steamboats right around the Lakeland region.

There are three steamboats in Savonlinna; SS Punkaharju, SS Paul Wahl, and SS Savonlinna (SS denoting Steam Ship). We took a 1.5-hour cruise on [SS Punkaharju](#) which went around the harbor passing Olavinlinna Castle, a bunch of small islands in the lake, and some beautiful old summer houses by the water.

The steamboat captain named Juri runs these trips out of pure love for the boats. I highly suggest having a chat with him if your boat isn't too crowded, he's interesting and very easy to talk to.

Steamboat cruises run around Savonlinna harbor from the start of June to the end of August. The boats only typically run if they get at least 6 passengers.

## Savonlinna Old Town

### **Wander Through Savonlinna's Old Town**

Nearby Savonlinna's harbor you will find a few old cobblestone streets lined with colorful wooden buildings. This is the typical Finnish historical town settings, similar to the old towns in Raahе, Kokkola, and Porvoo.

I suggest taking a walk along Linnankatu where you will find a few nice restaurants, bars, cafes, and old buildings. It's only a 2-3 minute walk from Olavinlinna Castle.

Lörsty from Teboil Savonlinna

## **Eat Lörsty, Savonlinna's Local Delicacy**

It's like a donut filled with a meat pie, then topped with a cucumber salad. Sounds weird, tastes delicious. Lörsty is the local dish from Savonlinna, and apparently, it's pretty tough to find a decent one elsewhere.

It might be a contentious point, but I've been told the best Lörsty is from the Teboil

Kallislahti (petrol station) about 17 kilometers west of the city. That's where I got mine (pictured above). Others say the best Lörsty in Savonlinna is at the harbor near the steamboats. If you try both, please let me know which one is better in the comments section below.

Savonlinna Craft Beers

**Taste the Local Craft Beers**

It's no secret that I love beer, and tasty craft beer all that much more. Considering how expensive alcohol is in Finland, it's actually quite surprising that this craft beer trend has kicked off around the Saimaa lakes region, particularly in Savonlinna.

There are some amazing breweries operating in the region such as Waahto Brewery, Mustaan Virran, and the Saimaa Brewing Company. You can buy their beers from most good supermarkets these days, but nothing beats having a cold beer on tap at the source.

Visit Waahto Brewery or Mustaan Virran Brewery right near Olavinlinna Castle on a nice warm summer's afternoon.

## Stay at a Lakeside Cabin

What would a trip to Finnish Lakeland be without spending some time in a lakeside cabin? You'll typically need to drive a bit further out of town to find there, but it's totally worth the effort. Just about all these cabins come with a wood fireplace, and wood sauna, keeping you warm all year round.

Our summer cabin (booked through Airbnb) was located about 30 minutes out of Savonlinna near to the village of Kerimäki. We loved waking up next to the lake and going for a swim each morning. It's the perfect way to live the slow life in Savonlinna.

Kerimäki Church

Inside Kerimäki Church

## **Visit the World's Largest Wooden Church (Kerimäki Church)**

Kerimäki Church is the largest wooden church in the world measuring 45 meters long, 42 meters wide and 27 meters high. It's pretty impressive from both the interior and exterior. Kerimäki Church is large enough to seat over 3000 people at once!

The church is located about 23 kilometers east of Savonlinna in the small village of

Kerimäki. It is typically open from 10am to 6pm, however, you can [check specific opening hours](#). Entry to the church is free.

## Punkaharju Hotel

### **Enjoy the Punkaharju Hotel Buffet**

I've said it in my summer guide to Rovaniemi, and I'll say it again. Finns LOVE buffets. This is a Finnish culture I had no idea of before visiting the country for the first time.

One of the best lunch buffets in all of Finland is at Hotel Punkaharju, located 36 kilometers southeast of Savonlinna on the stunning Punkaharju Ridge. The hotel and restaurant is run by Saimi Hoyer, a super famous Finnish model and TV personality.

What makes the restaurant particularly famous is that all the food is sourced locally.

From the fresh herbs, vegetables, and mushrooms to the fish and meats. Some Finns tend to say their country lacks its own food identity, however, Hotel Punkaharju is taking Finland one step closer to solving that.

The restaurant at Hotel Punkaharju is open from 11.30am to 10pm daily, however, the lunch buffet is only served from 11.30 to 3.00pm daily. The restaurant can get quite busy for lunch, so you may like to consider making a reservation on [Hotel Punkaharju's website](#) the day before you visit.

## Explore the Kuikonniemen Fortress

There were some bloody battles fought against Russia in Finland's Winter War, however, the fighting never actually made it to Punkaharju. The Kuikonniemen Fortress was one of the defenses built by the Finns around 1944 to defend the esker region (Savonlinna/Punkaharju).

The Kuikonniemen Fortress is a long series of trenches hidden in the forest along the Punkaharju Ridge. The trenches are lined with wooden logs but have deteriorated over time and are now fenced off so that you are only supposed to walk around the outside.

Finding the Kuikonniemen Fortress is a bit tricky. There is a carpark along Punkaharju Ridge with a sign which indicates the trenches are nearby. In fact, the best way is not to walk through the carpark, but another 50 meters up the road (heading south) where you will easily find the trenches on the left-hand side.

The trenches are open all day, and there is no entry fee.

Saimaa Ringed Seal – Image: Ismo Pekkarinen / AOP

## **Spot the Saimaa Ringed Seal**

The Saimaa Ringed Seal is the rarest seal in the world. Only about 360 of these seals remain in the wild, and all of them live only in the Saimaa lakes region. The population fluctuates each year depending on how heavy the winter is.

The Saimaa Ringed Seal has been cut off from the ocean since the last Ice Age (at least 8,000 years ago). Since then it has adapted from living in seawater to

freshwater.

The best place to spot the Saimaa Ringed Seal in around Linnansaari National Park. There are daily tours departing from [Orvai Village](#). The tours are weather dependant, if the wind is heavy then the water will be quite rough and unsuitable for the small lake boats. Tours typically cost about 70 euro per person and run for a few hours in the mornings.

## **Visit the Lusto Forest Museum**

The Lusto Finnish Forest Museum is one of the quirkiest places I have been to in Finland. It explores various aspects of the close relationship between Finns and their forests. If you hadn't noticed yet, there is a lot of forest in Finland.

A series of exhibitions will take you through the history of forestry in Finland, from the 1800s and prior where logs were transported by floating them downriver, to the modern-day where sustainable forestry practices are implemented.

A 2 hour visit here will give you a much better appreciation for one of Finland's primary industries, and how it has shaped the country and the people today.

Check the latest entry fees and opening hours on the [Lusto Forest Museum website](#).

## **Hike or Kayak through Linnansaari National Park**

The Linnansaari National Park is the true essence of Finnish Lakeland. It is located just east of the small villages of Rantasalmi and Porosalmi (about 45 kilometers north of Savonlinna).

There are a number of hiking trails in the national park ranging from 2 to 7 kilometers

in length. All of these trails are located on the main Linnansari Island. You can read more about the trail on the [national park website](#).

Canoeing and kayaking around the islands are both popular in the summer months. There is a 40 kilometer water trail which you can follow, provide you bring a tent and allow 6 to 7 days. Whether you want to paddle around the islands for half a day or half a week, you can get further information [on equipment rental here](#).

## Kick Back in Sauna World

It sounds like some too good to be true Finnish theme park, but I kid you not, Sauna World exists. This is actually part of what the Finns refer to as a “wellness retreat” at the Jarvisydän Hotel and Spa located about 30min north of Savonlinna.

For 30 euro you get access to a whole series of saunas; traditional smoke saunas, steam saunas, really hot saunas, and some more mild saunas. You will also be able to use the spa pools with their super strong massage jets, plunge in the outdoor ice pool, or take an “arctic storm” rain shower.

Sounds like the relaxation you need? [You can book online here](#).

## How to Get to Savonlinna

Savonlinna is located about 330 kilometers northeast of Helsinki. Although there is an airport, I don't see much point in flying when you are on holiday. I will cover the following three options; bus, train, and car.

- **Car** – the drive from Helsinki to Savonlinna is beautiful. The road passes by many huge lakes and along some very scenic ridges where you will be surrounded by endless water on either side. I'd suggest driving via Mikkeli

which takes under 4 hours direct. Hiring a car in Finland? Check out my guide to getting the [cheapest rental car in Helsinki](#) (I personally saved over \$1000!).

- **Train** – there are 5 train services per day from Helsinki to Savonlinna. You will need to make a transfer in the village of Parikkala. The total journey time is just over 4 hours, tickets cost about 40 euros depending on the time of departure from Helsinki. Tickets can be booked online at [VR Finnish Railways](#).
- **Bus** – there are 5 bus services per day from Helsinki to Savonlinna, 4 of which are direct. The journey time is just over 5 hours, and a ticket costs 19-25 euro depending on the time of departure from Helsinki. Tickets can be booked online at [Matkahuolto](#).

Have you found something else worth visiting in Savonlinna? Please let me know in the comments section below, I'd love to hear about it.

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Disclaimer: We visited Savonlinna as part of a partnership with [Visit Saimaa](#), the regional tourism board across the Saimaa Lakes region (Savonlinna, Mikkeli, and Varkaus). As always, you can trust me when I say that all opinions are my own.

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