

## LAUTTASAARI



Lauttasaari is a large, mainly built-up island west of the city centre, connected to the mainland by a main trunk-road. The footpath round the south shore of Lauttasaari offers views out to sea, and passes by well-preserved shoreside vegetation and stalwart forests.

### How to get there

Buses 65A and 66A will take you there (not on Sundays). A 200 m walk southwards along Itälahdenkatu Street will bring you to the shore.

### Services

There is a small beach on the southern promontory. The cottagers of Särkiniemi have a sauna here, which you can rent (t 050 567 5352). You will find cafés and restaurants on the built-up part of the island. There is a kiosk on the southernmost tip of the shore of Itälahti.

### Nature

Although the island is largely built up, the city has tried to limit development close to the shore. The walk around the circumference of the island is about 10 km long. The shore meadows and grey alder woods along the west shore of Hevosenkenkälahti (“Horseshoe Bay”) merit a visit, but the southern coastline offers the finest outlook. Here the tiny summer cottages are unobtrusive, and their surrounds are free for everyone to enjoy. The sea’s presence permeates this landscape, which impresses one whatever the weather.

The southern shore is rich in coastal plants, such as the marsh pea (*Lathyrus palustris*) and the sea aster (*Aster tripolium*), which colonises rocky shores pounded by the sea waves. The same surging seas make this southern extremity of Lauttasaari by far the best place in Helsinki for the boatless sea-trout fisherman. If it’s baltic herring you’re after, and you don’t have a boat, you’ll have the best chances from the bridge connecting Lauttasaari with the downtown mainland. In early summer when the herring enter the bay to spawn, you can catch them from the bridge with a shiny, unbaited hook.

Times of low water reveal a land-bridge between the southern tip and the little island of Hattu (“Hat”). The rocks of the southern shore are popular with bird watchers following migrations. Enthusiasts also observe the autumn migrations from Myllykallio bird tower, in the centre of Lauttasaari. To the west of the island lies Tiiraluoto (“Tern Rock”), Helsinki’s first nature conservation area, given protection in 1948.

A special feature of Lauttasaari in late autumn are the owls, four species of which were observed in November, 1999. The eagle-owl and pygmy owl are regular visitors. Several feeding places are provided for small birds.



## LAAJALAHTI



Laajalahti ('Broad Bay') in Espoo, 5 km northwest of downtown Helsinki, is the best area of water around Helsinki. During the migratory seasons, thousands of water-birds spread out over the bay. Nature House Villa Elfvik, strategically sited along the north shore of the bay, has natural history exhibitions and serves as an environmental education centre for the city of Espoo.

### How to get there

Buses 101T (platforms 32 and 52) and 206 (platform 32) go from Helsinki's central bus-station. It's a walk of about 700 m to Villa Elfvik from a bus-stop along the Ring I Road (Kehä I). Also starting from the bus-station, buses 102 and 103 (platform 51) will take you Otaniemi on the south side of the bay and to a nearby bird tower.

There is a parking area by the side of Elfvikintie Road, which leads to the villa.

### Services and restrictions

Starting out from the garden of Villa Elfvik, a nature trail about 700 m long passes by the bird tower. The facilities are designed for people in wheelchairs. There is another bird tower on the south side of the bay near Otaniemi. It doesn't have its own parking area, but you can park along Konemiehentie Road. A wooden causeway less than 3 km





long leads there from Villa Elfvik. In the middle of the day it's easier to see some of the water birds from the more southern tower, where you avoid the glare from a bright sky. Laajalahti conservation area is supervised by the Forest and Park service; for further information ☎ 0205-64 100. You can hike within the conservation area round the clock, but except when the sea is frozen you must keep to the marked route.

Nature House Villa Elfvik is open during the summer season from April 1 to 30 Sept. weekdays 9am-4pm and weekends 10am-4pm, and during the winter from 1 Oct. to 31 March weekdays 9am-3pm, sun 11am-4pm (closed Saturdays). There is a guide on hand Sundays. Entry to the exhibitions in the nature house is free. Most weekdays, school classes study in the centre's nature school. The café is open at weekends, as long as the house is open. Villa Elfvik t 8165 4400, fax 512 0424.

## Nature

At migration times, the commonest birds to populate the bay's waters are the great crested grebe, wigeon, mallard and goosander. In spring, the swans in the bay may number several dozen; these include many whooper swans with their uncanny call. The commonest birds to nest in the area are mallards, wigeon and great crested grebe. Nesting birds which feed on submerged plants and on the accompanying microfauna are the tufted duck, coot, garganey, northern shoveller ja Eurasian wigeon. The bearded tit is very much at home in the extensive reed-beds. When the sea level is low, large stretches of silt are exposed, which attract large numbers of migrant waders.

The shallow waters of the bay are an important spawning area for bream, pike and pike-perch. Fishing is permitted in the nature conservation area only during the winter. The reed beds provide a habitat for the muskrat, whose winter nests built of piles of reed stems can be seen here and there.

On the east side of Villa Elfvik is a fine grove by the side of a brook flanked on either side by fine groves, with stands of touch-me-not, ostrich fern and hops. Birds found here include the thrush nightingale, blackcap and lesser spotted woodpecker. In winter-time, in the fine primaeval spruce forests close to the bird tower, it's worth listening for the noisy black woodpecker, or the quieter three-toed woodpecker. You may also spot the agile weasel in winter, even inside the nature house!

All in all, it will pay to start the trip by looking around Villa Elfvik and its immediate surroundings. In the nature house, you can ask about the most recent natural sightings, and gain more information about where to go within the reserve. If you have the time, it's worth setting off along the path from Villa Elfvik towards Otaniemi, where you will find the other bird tower. In early summer you will hear the songs of birds which inhabit the area: Blyth's reed warbler, grasshopper warbler, rosefinch and thrush nightingale. If you're really lucky, you may spot a barred warbler.

## History

The bay was polluted upto the 1980's. The sewage works were closed down in 1986, after which both the water plants and the water birds subsisting on these recovered rapidly. A nature conservation area was established in Laajalahti in 1989. The shore meadows were pastured by cattle until the 1960's. Since the nature reserve was set up the meadows have been re-pastured and restored to their original state.

Villa Elfvik was built in the Art Nouveau (Jugend) style at the beginning of the 20th century as the residence of a high-ranking family. Upto the 1950's, a widowed baroness lived in the house with her two sisters. These ladies were aristocrats living in their past memories, who maintained the formal trappings of a glorious past in a house overrun by rats. In times gone by, the residents were conveyed to the villa in a steamboat, to which the stone jetty by the bird tower bears witness.



**Other birds nesting in Laajalahti:**

common pochard, goldeneye, red-breasted merganser, goosander, water rail, spotted crake, corn crake, common snipe, common redshank, yellow wagtail, common grasshopper warbler, great reed warbler. (Source: Laajalahden luonnonsuojelualueen linnusto, Forest and Park Service 1994.)

Other sites of interest

**Iso Huopalahti**

Iso Huopalahti is a small, shallow bay with abundant bird life, a kilometre to the north of Villa Elfvik. It has a golf course, squeezed in between the former waste-tip and the motorway. The bay is a good place to hear nocturnal song-birds. At low water the exposed flats are favoured by waders.

**Tarvaspää**

Halfway between Iso-Huopalahti and Elfvik, close to the Turku motorway is Tarvaspää (27 Gallen-Kallelantie Road). This was the studio of Finland's national painter, Akseli Gallen-Kallela, and serves nowadays as a museum displaying his works. In summer, the museum is open Mon-Thu 10am-8pm, Fri-Sun 10am-5pm; in winter Tue-Sat 10am-4pm, Sun 10am-5pm, closed Mondays.



## SUOMENOJA



Suomenoja Bay (also called Finnoonlahti) in Espoo may not be the loveliest of places, but makes up for a lack of beauty in having a rich bird life. It consists of a small area of water, artificially and somewhat fortuitously formed from a combination of a silted up bay and old sewage treatment tanks. The resulting lake is a surprisingly good place for water birds, which can be observed at close quarters. The best times are late spring and July, when the place is swarming with fledgelings.

### How to get there

Bus 132 leaving from Kamppi goes to the east side of Suomenoja Bay, to a stop by the stables, about 2 or 3 times an hour. From the stables follow the footpath along the edge of the meadow southwestwards for about half a kilometre, where the path crosses over a wide ditch. Turn immediately right, and you will come out at the bird lake. The large power-station is a good landmark, at the foot of which you will find the lake. If you go by car, drive 14 km from the centre of Helsinki along Länsiväylä (the 'Main West Road', route 51) to the Suomenoja junction, where you turn left and go 0.5 km along Rusthollarinkatu Street and 0.5 km along Hylje-luodontie Road. At this point turn left along a narrow road that leads to a parking lot by the bird towers. The services for bird watchers at Suomenoja include a postered nature trail and two bird towers.

### Nature

A large colony of black-headed gulls nests in the reed-



Arto Nironen

beds around the reservoir. The reeds also afford good protection to many kinds of water birds and waders that nest and rest here. This is the best nesting area for moorhens, which are otherwise rare in Finland. Other unusual birds nesting here are the Slavonian grebe, gadwall and great reed warbler. Birds are plentiful here, and they are easy to observe from the paths along the walls surrounding the reservoir, or from the towers. You'll manage very well without a telescope. The place is very popular with bird photographers.

Suomenoja attracts migrant birds that follow the coastline to pause in their flight, and unusual species are frequently encountered. At the height of the migrations, take a glance upwards now and again, as the birds' migratory route passes over the area.

In the summer of 1999, a plant species new to Finland, soft hornwort (*Ceratophyllum submersum*) was found in the reservoir. We know, though, that this plant grew in Finland during the warm period 5000 years ago, after the last Ice Age!

## PORKKALA

6-24h



Porkkala is popular with fisherfolk, bird-watchers and hikers alike. There are hiking and recreational areas for the municipalities adjacent to Helsinki itself in the area. Porkkala is a well wooded peninsula, whose extremity projects well out into the sea. The rocky coastline is impressive in many parts, especially near the tip of the peninsula. Porkkala is a fine place for a day out at any time of year.

### How to get there

Starting from the city centre, you can take Länsiväylä (the "main west road", route 51), which continues as the Hanko Road (also 51) for a total of 32 km. Turn left at the sign to "Porkkalanniemi", and drive the 18 km to the end of the peninsula, where the tarmac gives way to an unmetalled surface. Turn right at this point, and follow this dirt road about 800 m to the shop junction, where you turn right and continue about 1.5 km in the direction of the coastguard station. On your right is a parking area and an information poster.

The bus from Kamppi bus-station, platform 30, takes you to the point where the tarmac ends, which is the terminus. From here you continue on foot as described above.

Buses go mon-fri 6.45, 10.50, 14.30, 16.20, 18.10; sat and sun 9.20. Some of the departures involve a change of buses in Kirkkonummi. A one-way fare costs about 8 €.

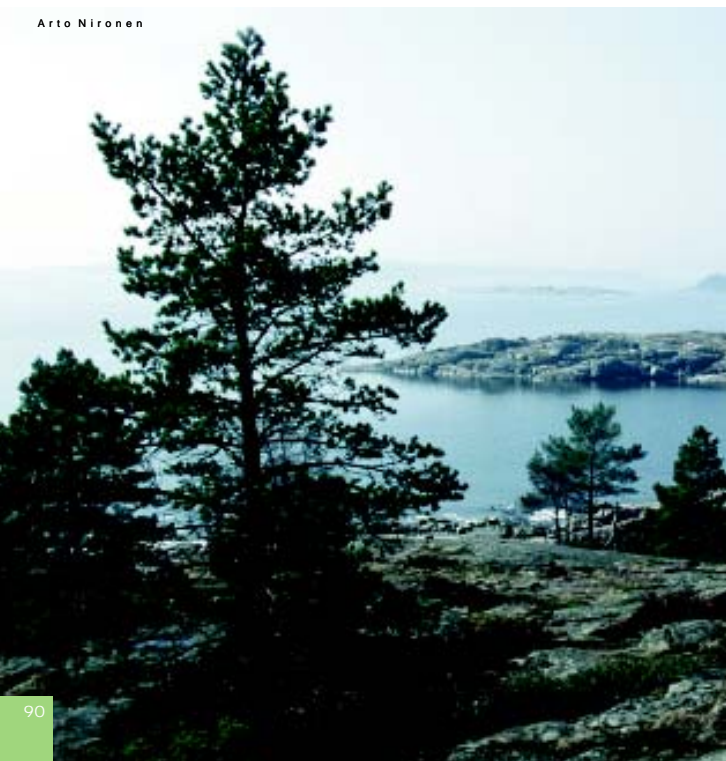
## Services

There are roofed facilities for lighting a fire in the recreational park for hikers and campers. Lähteelä Park has a bird tower where you can follow the migrations.

## Nature

The extremity of the Porkkala Peninsula is one of the best known places in Finland for observing bird migrations. It's not easy for newcomers to find their way there, but it's well worth making the effort. The view out over the archipelago from the rocky heights is among the finest in southern Finland. The tip of the peninsula is the ideal place for an outing at any season, but the best times are from the end of April to the beginning of June, and during September and October. Even a short way onto the peninsula, just 3 km after you have turned off the

Arto Nironen



main road to Hanko, you will pass by the reed beds and fields of Saltfjärden, which are especially favoured by birds of open places.

You will have excellent chances of seeing elk and deer anywhere on the peninsula. The best times are early morning and late evening, when these animals are grazing in fields surrounding the forests. Drive especially carefully at these times, as the animals are likely to wander straight out of the forest onto the road. Flying squirrels are also active during the dusk; they are abundant in the mature, mixed forests of the southern extremity of Porkkala. They don't show themselves nearly so often, though.

Fishermen make for the recreational park of Lähteelä, which is owned by the City of Helsinki. You can rent a rowing boat for 1 € an hour, or 10 € for the day. Bait fishers usually try for sea trout; the best time for this is late autumn, just before the winter sets in. In summer you should catch pike, too. You enter the park 300 m from the parking area and the superintendent's house, and it's another 800 m to the shore. Call the superintendent at ☎ 298 4231 or 040 827 8310.

