

Savonlinna

South Savo · Finland

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Savonlinna is a lakeside town in Finland's Saimaa Lake District, built across a cluster of islands linked by bridges. Its skyline is dominated by Olavinlinna Castle, a 15th-century fortress that still hosts a major opera festival in its courtyard every July. Saimaa, the largest lake system in Finland, surrounds the town on every side, so boating and swimming are part of daily life here, not just a visitor activity.

The town suits travelers who want history and nature together, without crowds. A couple of days is enough to see the castle, walk the lakeside streets, and get out on the water. Savonlinna moves at a slower pace than Helsinki, better suited to relaxed exploring than a packed sightseeing schedule.

When to visit

Summers (June to August) are warm and bright, with long daylight hours for lake activities. Winters are cold and dark, and the frozen lake supports skating and ice fishing from around December to March. Spring and autumn are quiet, with fewer visitors.

Plan around the Savonlinna Opera Festival, one of Europe's oldest opera festivals, held every July in the castle courtyard. Book tickets and rooms well ahead if visiting during festival month.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for watersports	-5° / 2° Feels like -10°	-9° / -21°	14 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
February	Poor Poor for watersports	-5° / 2° Feels like -10°	-9° / -22°	Dry air · Calm winds
March	Poor Poor for watersports	-1° / 4° Feels like -6°	-6° / -13°	Dry air · Calm winds
April	Poor Poor for watersports	5° / 13° Feels like 1°	-1° / -7°	Dry air · Calm winds
May	Good Good for hiking	13° / 22° Feels like 10°	6° / 0°	Dry air · Calm winds
June	Good Good for sightseeing	18° / 26°	12° / 7°	14 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
July	Good Good for sightseeing	21° / 28°	15° / 11°	15 rainy days · Calm winds
August	Great Great for sightseeing	19° / 25°	14° / 10°	13 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
September	Good Good for hiking	13° / 19°	9° / 4°	12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
October	Poor Poor for watersports	6° / 12° Feels like 3°	3° / -3°	12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
November	Poor Poor for watersports	1° / 7° Feels like -3°	-2° / -9°	13 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
December	Poor Poor for watersports	-3° / 3° Feels like -7°	-6° / -16°	15 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds

Best months: August

Climate data: NASA POWER + Copernicus ERA5-Land · 1996–2025

Top sights



A Olavinlinna Castle is Savonlinna's defining landmark: a three-tower fortress built on a rock island in the strait that splits the town in two. Guided tours lead through its courtyards, chapel, and gun galleries, and every July the same courtyard becomes an open-air opera stage.

B Savonlinna Opera Festival fills the castle with a month of celebrated opera performances each summer. Even outside festival season, its ticket office and program displays are worth a look for anyone curious about the tradition.

C Savonlinna Cathedral is a red-brick Gothic Revival building from the 1870s, with room for 1,000 worshippers. It anchors the town's central square and is a short walk from the harbor.

About 23 km from the centre, D Kerimäki Church is the largest wooden church in the world, built in the 1840s to seat up to 5,000 people. It is currently closed to visitors inside, but the towering yellow exterior is worth the detour on its own.

E Kolovesi National Park protects a maze of rocky islands and channels north of town, and is one of the last refuges of the endangered Saimaa ringed seal. Kayaking and canoeing are the best ways to see its cliffs and ancient cave paintings.

F Savonlinna Market Square is the town's lakeside market, where local vendors sell fresh fish, berries, and crafts through the summer months.

G Punkaharju Arboretum, in the Punkaharju area, holds over 100 tree species including Finland's tallest tree, with an easy walking route to a viewpoint over the ridge and lake.

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What to experience

- Take a cruise on a historic lake steamship across Saimaa — several vintage vessels still run scheduled routes from the harbor in summer.
- Paddle a canoe or kayak through Kolovesi's rock cliffs and caves, watching for the ringed seal along the way.
- Try a traditional Finnish smoke sauna followed by a swim in the lake, offered by many lakeside cottages and spa hotels.
- Skate or ice-fish on the frozen lake in winter, when the ice is thick enough to hold both.

Day trips

Savonlinna sits at the centre of the Saimaa lake district, and its best day trips are all about water and forest.

- Linnansaari National Park — about 45 minutes by car plus a short boat crossing. An island-studded park in Lake Saimaa and one of the best places to spot the rare Saimaa ringed seal.
- Mikkeli — about 1.5 hours by car or train. A historic garrison town that served as Finland's military headquarters during the Second World War, with a bunker museum from that period.
- Kuopio — about 2 hours by car. Known for its traditional smoke saunas and the Puijo Tower, which gives a wide view over the surrounding lakes and forests.

Getting there

- **By air**: Savonlinna Airport has limited seasonal flights; most travelers fly into Helsinki and continue by train or car (around 4 hours by road).
- **By train**: Direct trains connect Savonlinna to Helsinki (around 4 hours) with a change in Parikkala or Huutokoski depending on the route.
- **By bus**: Long-distance coaches link Savonlinna with Helsinki, Kuopio, and other regional towns; journeys take 4–5 hours from the capital.

Getting around

- **On foot**: The town centre sits on a few small islands connected by bridges, so the castle, cathedral, and market square are all within a 15-minute walk of each other.
- **Cycling**: The terrain is flat and pleasant for cycling; rental bikes are available in town, though bridges can get busy with car traffic in summer.
- **Taxi**: Local taxi services are available for trips outside the walkable centre, such as to Kerimäki or the national parks.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

The town centre sits on a cluster of small islands linked by bridges, so the castle, cathedral, and market square are all within easy walking distance of each other.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Moderate

Cycling is pleasant on flat terrain, though bridges can get busy with car traffic in summer; rental bikes are available in town.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?**: Not needed for the town centre, which is fully walkable, but useful for reaching Kerimäki, Linnansaari, and other sights spread around the lake district.
- **Parking**: Paid parking zones cover the centre, payable by app or at machines; free parking is easy to find a short walk from the core.

Food & drink

Savonlinna sits in the Savonia region, home of kalakukko, a rye-bread loaf baked around fish and pork. Look for it at bakeries and the market. Muikku (vendace), a small lake fish usually fried whole, is another local staple worth trying by the water.

For a casual meal with a view, the stalls and cafes around Savonlinna Market Square are the best spot to try local lake fish and berries in season.

What to eat & drink

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Karjalanpiirakka
Thin rye pastry filled with rice porridge, traditionally topped with egg butter.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Salmiakki
Salty liquorice candy that divides visitors — Finns are devoted to it.

Leipäjuusto
Mild, squeaky "bread cheese", usually served warm with cloudberry jam.

DRINKS

Koskenkorva · Koskenkorva Viina
Finland's best-known grain vodka, often mixed into long drinks like the Lonkero.

SIGNATURE DISHES

Ruisleipä
Dense, dark sourdough rye bread eaten with almost every meal.

Poronkäristys
Sautéed reindeer served with mashed potatoes and lingonberry jam, a Lapland classic.

Kalakukko
Fish and pork baked inside a thick rye-bread crust, a specialty of the Savonia region.

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Safety & health

Savonlinna is a very safe town for travelers, with petty crime rare even during the busy opera festival month. Normal city-centre awareness is enough. Tap water is safe to drink straight from the tap everywhere in town.

History

Olavinlinna Castle was built starting in 1475 by *Erik Axelsson Tott*, a Swedish nobleman, to guard the eastern border against Novgorod. It is the northernmost medieval stone fortress still standing, and it withstood several sieges over the following centuries as the border between Sweden and Russia shifted around it.

The town of Savonlinna itself was founded later, in 1639, growing up around the castle's trading position on the lake routes. The Savonlinna Opera Festival began in 1912, when the castle courtyard was first used as an opera stage, a tradition that lapsed for decades before its post-war revival in 1967 turned it into the international event it is today.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Finland at a glance:

CURRENCY
EUR

EMERGENCY
112

ELECTRICITY



Type C / Type F
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES
Finnish, Swedish

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Savonlinna Essentials

Savonlinna serves as the cultural hub of the Finnish Lakeland, defined by its deep connection to Lake Saimaa. This selection features the world's largest wooden church in Kerimäki and the historic Riihisaari museum, which houses a unique fleet of heritage steamships. The list extends to the Punkaharju ridge, home to one of Finland's oldest hotels and a vast research arboretum. Visitors can explore underground art galleries at Retretti, sample traditional lörtsy pastries at the lakeside market, or navigate the labyrinthine channels of Kolovesi National Park.





A Savonlinna Cathedral

Savonlinna Cathedral is located in Savonlinna, Finland. It was built between 1874 and 1878 and designed by architect Axel Hampus Dalström in...

8 Pappilankatu, Savonlinna 57100, Finland (61.86841, 28.87722)



B Kerimäki Church

Completed in 1847, this is the world's largest wooden church. The Neoclassical structure features a central dome and can accommodate up to 5,000 people. It is primarily used for services and concerts during the summer months.

1 Hälväntie, Kerimäki 58200, Finland (61.91264, 29.28515)

savonlinnanseurakunta.fi/kerimaen-kirk... , +358505679620



C Savonlinna Market Square

Lakeside market square known for local specialties like lörtsy pastries and fried vendace. It serves as a central hub for regional boat traffic and local commerce, especially during the summer opera season.

7 Kauppatori, Savonlinna 57130, Finland
(61.86808, 28.88476)

Mo–Sa	06:00–16:00
Su	09:00–16:00

D Savonlinna Provincial Museum

Housed in a 19th-century granary on Riihisaari island, this museum details the history of Lake Saimaa's sailing, fishing, and timber industries. It also hosts the Saimaa Nature Centre's exhibitions on the endangered Saimaa ringed seal.

Riihisaari 1, 57130 (61.86353, 28.89523)

E Savonlinnan Provincial Museum - historic steamboats

A collection of heritage vessels moored at Riihisaari, including the 19th-century steam schooner Salama and the tugboat Ahkera. These restored ships represent the golden age of steam-powered transport on the Saimaa waterways.

(61.86324, 28.89415)



F Kolovesi National Park

Kolovesi National Park is a national park in the Etelä-Savo region of Finland. It was established in 1990 and covers 23 km2.

58180, Finland (62.25750, 28.81667)



G Hotelli Punkaharju

Originally built in 1845 as a forester's lodge, this is Finland's oldest hotel. It is situated on the narrow Punkaharju esker and features historic wooden architecture surrounded by protected pine forests.

(61.80101, 29.30749)

hotellipunkaharju.fi, + 358 15 511 311

H Saimaan taideluola Retretti

An art center famous for its extensive exhibition spaces excavated into the bedrock. The complex includes man-made caves, an underground concert hall, and unique acoustics used for contemporary art displays.

Tuunaansaarentie, 58450 Savonlinna, Finland (61.80354, 29.29028)



I Punkaharju Arboretum

This arboretum in Punkaharju contains over 50 different tree species planted for research and conservation. The park features some of Finland’s tallest trees and diverse walking trails through various coniferous and deciduous stands.

(Unnamed Road), 58450, Finland (61.80594, 29.31488)

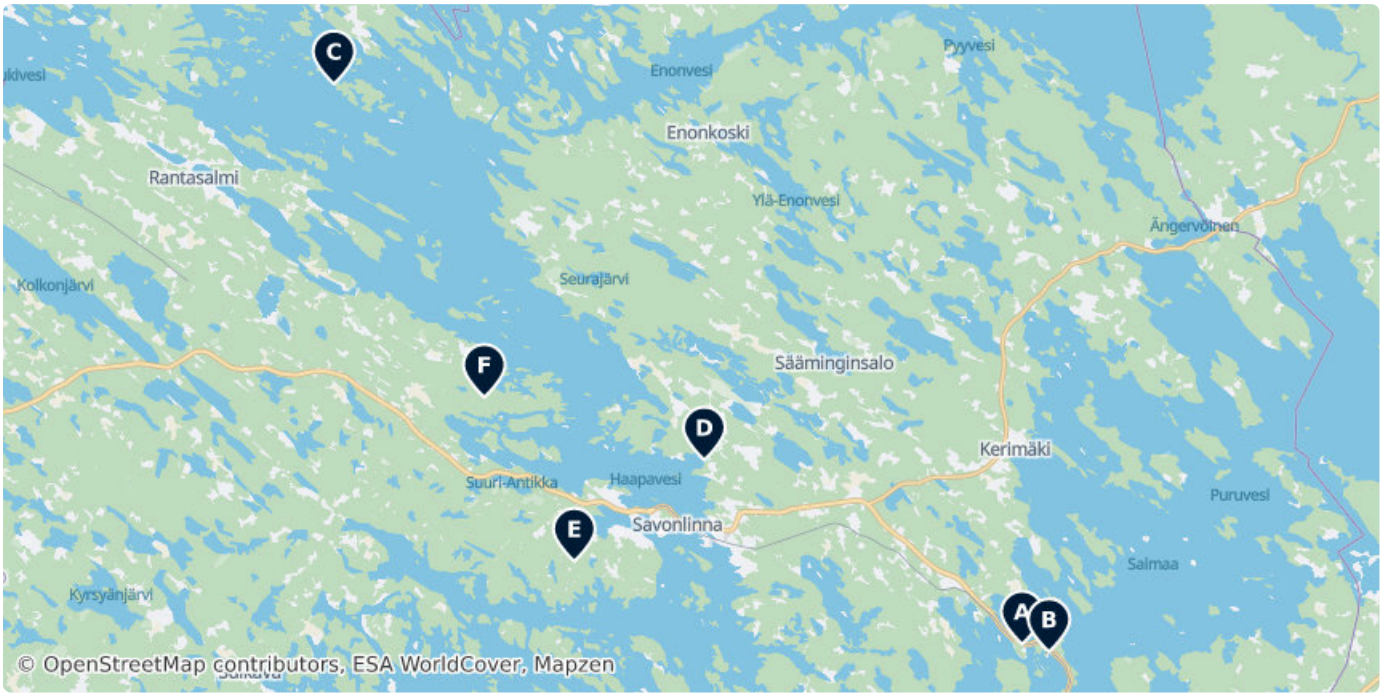
J Summer Theatre

An open-air performance venue hosting seasonal Finnish plays and musical productions. Located near the waterfront, it offers a traditional setting for local summer theater culture.

(61.87191, 28.89536)

Savonlinna Region Highlights

The Savonlinna region integrates unique underground architecture with national heritage and expansive natural vistas. The area features Retretti Art Centre's subterranean galleries carved 25 meters into bedrock and Lusto, the national museum dedicated to Finnish forest culture. Complementing these cultural sites are several elevated vantage points, including the Iron Age hillfort of Linnavuori and the Haapalahti observation tower, which provide panoramic views of the Saimaa lake system.



A Retretti Art Centre

This is really something spectacular - an art centre 25 metres underground. Displays a vast variety of different artworks.

58450 Punkaharju, Finland (61.80333, 29.29000)

retretti.fi, +358 15 775 22 21

B Lusto - Finnish Forest Museum

National museum and science center for forest culture. Exhibits detail the history of Finnish forestry, timber technology, and the human relationship with the forest through historical machinery and interactive displays.

Lustontie 1, 58450 Punkaharju, FI (61.79906, 29.32213)

lusto.fi, +358 15 345 100

C Linnavuori

Iron Age hillfort characterized by 55-meter vertical cliffs and remains of ancient defensive stone ramparts. The site offers expansive views across the Saimaa archipelago.

(62.11635, 28.47129)

D Haapalahti birdwatching tower

Observation tower situated by the bay, designed for monitoring migratory waterfowl and local wetland bird species.

(61.90657, 28.91192)

E Soininmäki

High-altitude vantage point providing panoramic views of the Finnish lakeland and surrounding forest terrain.

(61.84981, 28.75736)

F Hauki

Elevated viewpoint overlooking the local lake system and forested islands.

(61.94165, 28.65028)

Secluded Nature & Wilderness Huts

This collection features remote rental cabins and natural wetlands within the Savonlinna region, specifically focusing on sites within Kolovesi and Linnansaari National Parks. The selection includes historic structures like the former fire watcher's residence on Ukonvuori and traditional log huts. Complementing these shelters are several mire ecosystems, including the Sammalsuo and Pitkäsuo bogs, which represent the diverse peatland landscapes of Eastern Finland.



A Lammasharjun mökki

Wilderness rental hut located within Kolovesi National Park.

79a Vaahersalontie, 58450, Finland (61.79319, 29.30233)

luontoon.fi/lammasharjunmokkivuokratupa, 015 345100

B Palovartijan talo

Former fire watcher's residence situated on Ukonvuori hill in Kolovesi National Park.

(Unnamed Road), 58450, Finland (61.77120, 29.34940)

luontoon.fi/palovartijantalovuokratupa, 0205 64 5916

C Mäntysalon kämppä vuokratupa

Log cabin rental in Linnansaari National Park, accessible by boat.

79910, Finland (62.29615, 28.77246)

luontoon.fi/mantysalonkamppavuokratupa, 0205 64 5916

D Sammalsuo

Peatland bog ecosystem characteristic of the Saimaa lake region.

57810, Finland (61.84663, 28.75063)

E Pitkäsuo

Natural peatland bog area.

57810, Finland (61.83390, 28.72595)

F Valkialampi

Small forest pond located in the Kolovesi region.

(61.79111, 29.31052)

G Ankkalampi

Small forest pond located in the Kolovesi region.

(61.78591, 29.30809)

H Rajasuo

Wetland marsh area.

59310, Finland (61.65005, 29.41568)

I Lampisiensuo

Wetland marsh area.

59310, Finland (61.65926, 29.48534)

DATA SOURCES

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