

Seinäjoki

STARS FROM THE

CAPITAL OF SPACE

A COSMOPOLITAN CHOOSSES SEINÄJOKI

Convinced by the rapid development

12

STORIES

of life in the
Capital of space

KOOP & CORDELIA

From London to Seinäjoki.
A cottage holiday sparks the idea for a move.

MILA BRINGS DANCE TO THE PLAINS

"You want to stay in a place
where they treat you well"

ALAN ENDS UP AS AN ENTREPRENEUR IN SEINÄJOKI BY ACCIDENT

"I'd never give up
what I've got here"

HI!

IMAGE TUUKKA KIVIRANTA

You are now reading Stars from the capital of space, a publication in which the residents of Seinäjoki talk about their lives in the Capital of Space. The goal of Seinäjoki has always been to make the dreams of its residents come true and be the best city it can be. We have enough space for big ideas and the makers of the future. We welcome you to join us!

Seinäjoki CAPITAL OF SPACE



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Seinäjoen kaupunki

 
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City of Seinäjoki and Into Seinäjoki Oy

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STRAIGHT FROM LONDON TO NURMO

TEXT OUTI RANTALA
IMAGES TUUKKA KIVIRANTA & MINNI PITKÄMÖ

Everything is already in its proper place at the home of **Koop** and **Cordelia Arponen**. After holidays, the idea of staying permanently in Finland solidified. The city offers everything that the family of four needs.

? KOOP & CORDELIA ARPONEN

Koop is a singer and a music industry professional. He comes from the United Kingdom, and he moved to Seinäjoki in 2020. Koop has lived in Seinäjoki before in 2008.

Cordelia works in the event industry. She is also from the United Kingdom and moved to Seinäjoki in 2020.

The atmosphere at the breakfast table of the Arponen family is relaxed. The baby **Remy** sits in Cordelia's lap, while Koop opens a mobile phone game for **Harrison**. The four-year-old eagerly taps at the game.

"Harrison also loves spending time outdoors. Sometimes we go to a lean-to in the woods to fry sausages," Koop reveals.

They think that, compared to London, living in Seinäjoki offers families with children more opportunities to enjoy hobbies and a diverse natural world.

"I take Harrison to the day care centre on a bicycle nearly every day. That could never happen in London."

Harrison was born in London, and Remy in Seinäjoki.

"Remy was born two weeks before the due date, only one day before we moved into our new home," Cordelia laughs.

Cordelia found a mother and child group via Facebook, and she goes walking with them regularly. From the perspective of a former resident of a big city, Seinäjoki is ideal for family life.

"Everything is nearby, nature is right outside your door, and all services are just 5–10 minutes away by car."

In the spring of 2020, the family came to Finland on holiday for a couple of months.

"The lease on our London flat had ended, and we moved our things to storage to wait until we could move to Central England, where we had bought a house."

They stayed at a friend's cottage in Nurmo. During the holiday, all events in the UK were cancelled, and they started to rethink their future. Koop was working as a Business Development Manager for the European branch of Citizen Ticket, while Cordelia worked at a theatre where she managed the agreements and other arrangements between visiting performers and the theatre.

"Work in the event industry in the UK ended due to the coronavirus. At the same time, we received job offers from Finland, and interesting projects were about to start. We love it here, so we decided to stay in Finland permanently," Cordelia says.

They bought a house in Nurmo, which had proved to be a lovely place during their holiday. In late 2021, they went back to England to get their things. ➔

New inspiration for music

Koop and Cordelia met at the university in 2006 while they were playing in the same band. They have visited the Provinssi rock festival several times together. Over the years, they have built a circle of close friends in Seinäjoki.

"I've been to Provinssi every year, the first time I was 17 when my second cousin invited me. Cordelia has also worked at the festival as a contact person for British performers," Koop says.

Koop's family on his father's side comes from Finland, and he has even completed his compulsory military service here. After the university, he came to Seinäjoki for a summer job in 2008. It was one of the turning points in his life.

"I had spent a couple of months doing railway maintenance work for the Finnish railway company VR when I saw an ad for the Idols competition."

Winning the Finnish Idols competition in 2008 gave Koop work as a singer. He went to Helsinki, and Cordelia also moved there. When Koop's band broke up in 2015, the couple started wandering around Europe, and after a few months they ended up in the United Kingdom.

Koop stopped singing for five years. Now the singer is doing gigs again, and the band Flute of Shame is back together.

"I've found new inspiration for my own music, too. At the moment, I'm managing the contracts of various artists as a freelancer for Warner Music. I've been working together with **Pete Parkkonen** for a long time. He's a good friend of mine and Harrison's godfather."

Koop has also helped with finding sponsors for the Lapua movie production project.

Welcomed by the community

The Arponens speak English at home, but outside their home they also use Finnish. Koop was born in Lappeenranta, but when he was 2, he and his family moved to Belgium, and when he was 5, they moved to the UK.

"It's important for me to have one language that I can use to express myself fully. My Finnish vocabulary is pretty small. In my childhood home, I spoke Finnish with dad and Dutch with mom. My parents spoke German with each other, because they met while they were working in Austria. I spoke English with my sister, at school and with friends, so it became my strongest language," Koop explains.

They have been able to practise their Finnish while learning about their new neighbourhood.

"We have nice neighbours here. We've felt welcomed by the community," Cordelia says with appreciation.

"We found out something funny after we moved here: one of the neighbours is British. It's nice to chat with him," Koop adds.

Koop gained weight after eating all the delicious food during Christmas, and he wanted to find a way to do physical work a couple of days a week. He ended up talking about it with the roofing entrepreneur next door.

"Our neighbour asked if I could put scaffolding together. I had experience in the construction industry, so I got the job. That helped me lose eight kilos in weight," Koop is happy to say.

The Ostrobothnian-style outbuilding in their yard sparked a unique business idea, and the business-positive atmosphere in Seinäjoki seems beneficial for its development.

"We've been thinking about how the outbuilding in our yard could be used as a bed and breakfast, where we could offer visitors accommodation in the English style," Koop explains their vision. •



KOOP & CORDELIA

”

WE RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE

In Seinäjoki, you feel welcome in the community. The city has plenty of things to do for adults and families with children. The only thing missing is a curling track. Here you can find everything you need.



KOOP & CORDELIA



STARS FROM
THE CAPITAL OF SPACE

TEXT HANNELE NORJA IMAGE MATTI HAUTALAHTI

THE MOVE WAS A CHAIN OF COINCIDENCES

The Patana family went jogging in Pajuluoma for roughly five years before the local master plan was drawn up. They already loved the area back then.

? MIKKO PATANA

Mikko is financial manager in Into Seinäjoki Oy. He and his wife moved to Seinäjoki in 2016.

They had been planning to move to Jyväskylä. Mikko and Jenny Patana, who had been living in Espoo, did not want to raise their children in the Helsinki region.

"Jyväskylä would've been convenient for Mikko's job at the time, but after he got a new job, Seinäjoki came up as an option," Jenny Patana says.

In the end, because there were already friends and relatives living in the area, the choice between locations was easy.

They picked Pajuluoma as the area to live in for many reasons. Now the sporty family can jump on a jogging track straight from their front door.

"When you go to the city from Pajuluoma, you don't need to cross any highways, and there are no industrial areas or anything on that route. It's great for children, in particular because there are no empty spaces on the way," says Jenny.

Plenty of friends in the neighbourhood

The family had been living in Kärki since 2016 until they moved to Pajuluoma a year and a half ago.

"We often went jogging in the Pajuluoma area while we were living in Kärki. When the local master plan of the area was drawn up, we joined the draw for a plot right away," Mikko says. ➔

IMAGE TUUKKA KIVIRANTA

LIVING

Seinäjoki offers a large variety of housing options for its residents. You can live in the city centre, in areas with blocks of flats or detached housing, in a village milieu or close to the water. There is a housing option for every situation in life.

In Seinäjoki, the benefits of a big city are combined with the community and comfortable atmosphere of a small town. More than 65,000 have already chosen it as their home. Geographically, Seinäjoki is in an excellent location. The transport connections work well, and because the city is a railway hub, you can also reach different parts of Finland easily by train •

”

Even though the home of the Patana family was in a trial area for construction without restrictive land use planning requirements, they did not take any excessive risks in their own house. They had already been dreaming of a black wooden house.

The Patana family were in luck: they were one of the first to get the opportunity to pick a plot. Now they are living happily at the end of their street with the Pajuluoma stream flowing right next to them.

"Lots of our former neighbours from the Kärki area have also moved here," Jenny adds.

They are especially happy, because there are many other families at a similar stage in lives in their new area.

"The kids have lots of friends of the same age in the neighbourhood," Jenny says.

Exercise and smoothly flowing traffic

When Jenny goes cross-country skiing from her own yard, she can take a continuous route of 50 kilometres, all the way to the neighbouring municipality of Ilmajoki.

"The excellent transport connections make it easy for the kids to have sporty hobbies such as athletics, cross-country skiing or football," Mikko says.

For their part, the couple wanted to invest in the exercise opportunities in the city by establishing the company KOMIA Flow Oy. They run the business along with their own paid work.

This is all you need

Jenny Patana says that the Pajuluoma area has everything the family needs in their everyday lives.

"In addition to the school and the day care centre, there's also a shop and a post office nearby. You can even find nature right next door."

The distance to the city centre is roughly 7 kilometres, or a bit less along the pedestrian and cycle path.

The couple likes to go to orienteering competitions, and they can do this easily along with visiting relatives in Southern Finland. The Itäväylä road ensures that they do not need to waste time in city traffic.

Luckily, some of the relatives of the Patana family live much closer. They thought the area was so great that Mikko's parents completed their new home this summer in the neighbouring street. •

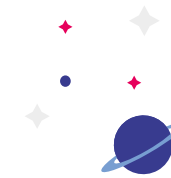
” WE RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE

the city invests in sports and exercise as well as exercise locations.



“
WHEN THEY TREAT
YOU WELL, YOU
WANT TO STAY

TEXT OUTI RANTALA IMAGES MINNI PITKÄMÖ



Dancing her way to the plains

Mila Miloff has made a home for herself in Seinäjoki. She has been able to make her dream of becoming an independent entrepreneur and dance teacher come true.

1. Why and from where did you move to Seinäjoki?

I'm from Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. I came to Helsinki in 1995 as a contestant in an international ballet competition. I was 22. I stayed in Finland to work as a classical ballet teacher.

I came to Seinäjoki in 1999 as a maternity leave substitute for one of the teachers of the Silkkivarvas dance school. The parents of the students accepted me easily, and I felt welcome here. You want to stay in a place where they treat you well.

2. What is working in Seinäjoki like?

I studied Finnish and completed the Further Vocational Qualification for Entrepreneurs. I also have training as the principal of a school. I taught at the Silkkivarvas dance school until 2003, when the school was shut down and the students moved to the Miloff Tanssiopisto school that I founded. Silkkivarvas started in 1991. We have now been providing high-level teaching in dance and ballet in Seinäjoki for 30 years. In 2005, I established Miloff Boutique, the largest dance equipment business specialising in sales and import in South Ostrobothnia.

I consider it a top achievement that the City of Seinäjoki granted the dance school a permit to provide basic education in dance in 2006. We teach classical ballet in Seinäjoki and Kauhajoki based on the highly respected and well-documented Vaganova method. We offer a wide variety of different forms of modern dance from show dance to jazz for students of all ages. We have even represented Seinäjoki in the World Championships, and there are our students studying in the Vaganova Akademia in St Petersburg.

Seinäjoki is a good place to work as an entrepreneur, because there is a strong entrepreneurial spirit here. There's plenty of work to do. I'm lucky, because there are parents who value my work and education and want to bring their children to the dance school. The children are absolutely wonderful and eager to learn. They are the best part of my job. ➔

3. How did you adjust to your new hometown?

I have found good friends and support over the years. In the beginning, I didn't have a support network that could've helped me with practical matters. I had to find out about everything myself. Luckily I'm tenacious, just like the Finns. I wouldn't be an experienced entrepreneur now if someone else had taken care of everything for me. In Finland, you always get good and professional service. The authorities help with everything if you just explain what you need clearly and wait patiently. I've never been scammed.

I struggled enormously to gain recognition in Seinäjoki. As a foreigner, you have to do a ton work and show good results to be noticed and accepted. I even went into politics to make sure that people knew my name.

For my son, moving to Seinäjoki was the right decision. **Ilya** had just turned 7 at the time. I'm temperamental and spontaneous and, ever since he was little, Ilya has been thoughtful and super careful about doing everything correctly. He adjusted wonderfully to living in Seinäjoki. He's become a conscientious worker. In addition to his everyday job, Ilya runs an escape room company. We work on the same premises. My beloved son married a wonderful girl last summer.

4. What do you do on your free time?

I go to the sauna on Saturdays after the working week. On Sundays, I spend the day home in my pyjamas while I rest and take care of household matters. I don't do anything unless I absolutely have to. My childhood dream was to have a house of my own. In the early days, we lived in the Seinäjoki city centre with Ilya, but seven years ago I had a house built. If I had more time, I'd love to sit on the patio and sunbathe.

5. What keeps you in Seinäjoki?

Seinäjoki is becoming a pleasant city that feels like home. I love the people of Seinäjoki, and I've been happy here. Seinäjoki is my city. In Seinäjoki, you will get good and professional service. My students are very sweet and the parents are encouraging. I mainly get good feedback from the parents. I see criticism in a positive light, learn my lesson and fix things. In this way, I develop the operation. All of these things keep me in Seinäjoki. •

”

I RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE

this is a good place to work as an independent entrepreneur. The city is being developed so that it is pleasant and feels like home. The people are wonderful, and you get good service everywhere.



? **MILA
MILOFF**

Mila is a ballerina, a dance teacher and the entrepreneur in charge of the Miloff Tanssiopisto dance school and Miloff Boutique. She is from Georgia, and she came to Seinäjoki in 1999.

“YOU COULD NEVER DO THIS IN HELSINKI”

Alan Morris says that the success of his aquarium company is the result of a chain of coincidences. He even ended up in Seinäjoki by accident. But a happy one, judging by the results.

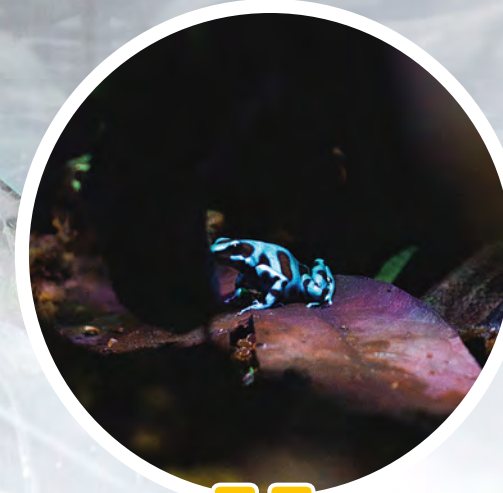
TEXT KIRSI HAAPAMATTI IMAGES MINNI PITKÄMÖ

“I RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE

the café **Valkoinen puu** in the city centre is a lovely oasis. I remember the first time I found it. It's been a real life-saver for someone like me who loves spending time downtown just relaxing and watching people walk by.

? ALAN MORRIS

Alan and his spouse run the companies Fishtank.fi and Terraario.fi that specialise in aquarium equipment. Their brick-and-mortar store and storage space are located in Kapernaum. Alan is from Chester in the United Kingdom and he has lived in Seinäjoki since 2018.



Growing aquarium plants is challenging, and it requires special growth cabinets. A poison dart frog lives in this one. At the moment, the company does not sell animals, but they are thinking of expanding.

I never thought I'd end up living in Seinäjoki. I'd already lived and worked as a hotel clerk in Helsinki for 13 years. Every once in a while I visited my mum in Jyväskylä, and then something happened that changed my whole life.

I was using this dating app. It had a distance limit on. I would never have met Ville through the app while I was in Helsinki, since he was living in Seinäjoki, but this time it happened. We met and fell in love, and soon we started planning our life together in Helsinki.

I'm from Chester, which is a city in the UK. My mum fell in love with a Finnish man, and we moved to Jyväskylä when I was 10 years old. It was difficult for me at start, because of course I didn't speak a word of Finnish. Still, I've now built my life in Finland and Seinäjoki.

My spouse Ville and I were going to move to Helsinki, but that plan was cancelled when Ville found work easily in nursing as a physiotherapist and a psychiatric nurse in Seinäjoki. I'd had enough of the hotel business. It also felt liberating to realise how spacious you could live in Seinäjoki for the same sum you'd have to pay for a small one-room flat in Helsinki. I'd been living in a 25-square-metre flat for years. Now we have plenty of space in our home in Soukkajoki, where we live with Ville's 13-year-old son.

The online shop was originally Ville's idea. He thought that running an online shop would be interesting. I was the one who thought of aquariums. During my childhood and youth, I practically lived in a pet shop, because my relatives work in the industry. We established Fishtank.fi together with Ville.

Our company has had a great start. After only a few years, we have expanded to new premises and added more storage space three times. We initially wanted to start out very small: we planned to clear out a few shelves at home to serve as storage for the company. However, the business started to grow quickly. We began to sell aquarium equipment wholesale right away, and we also import several brands, which means that we need space. In the Helsinki region, it would be completely impossible financially to keep so much storage space.

I'm in charge of the daily operation of our business. Ville works in psychiatric care, and he's amazing at it. He also has his own company that offers tattoo removals.

I'm happy with my life in Seinäjoki. It seems incredible that ending up here and with this company both happened completely by accident. My hometown Chester is a bit bigger than Seinäjoki, and it's really old and has gorgeous architecture. For example, it has a mediaeval city wall. Seinäjoki is different, but it's still a lovely city. I'd never give up what I've got here. •



NUMBER ONE FOR ENTREPRENEURS

IMAGE MARKO KOIVUPORRAS

Entrepreneurial spirit and cooperative skills are encoded in the DNA of the people of Seinäjoki, and the city sees constant success in entrepreneurship comparisons. The belief companies have in Seinäjoki is manifested in strong commitment and a desire to make investments. In 2017–2021, companies invested more than a billion euros in Seinäjoki. And the pace has not slowed down much since.

Right now, Atria is making the largest investment in the history of the company: an EUR 155 million expansion of poultry production at the Seinäjoki production plant.

The first agreements for the use of the data centre that is being built in Seinäjoki have been signed, and the Seinäjoki Airport is taking off in many ways. Dronamics Global Ltd is preparing to start unmanned cargo flights in Seinäjoki.

A hub in the station area

The station area is one of the most important locations for investments in Seinäjoki. The area includes approximately 30 hectares in total; during the 2020s, it will gradually become one of the busiest and most impressive hubs for travellers and public transport in Finland. The station will also become the home and work environment for hundreds of people. The station is an integral part of the city centre. The distance from the station to the new Keskustori central square is no more than a couple of hundred meters. •

WHAT IS THE SECRET OF THE GREAT BUSINESS CLIMATE IN SEINÄJOKI?

IMAGE KATRI KORPELA



LEENA PERÄMÄKI – INTO SEINÄJOKI, CEO

Studies show that Seinäjoki is a great place for entrepreneurs. Why?

We ensure that we are business-friendly in our everyday work, as a part of normal services throughout the whole city organisation, and especially in the business services provided by Into Seinäjoki. A solution-oriented approach and valuing the companies are essential factors.

How will you maintain a good business climate in the future?

Maintaining a good business climate requires taking it into account in services, decision-making and strategic choices, both now and in the future. The companies themselves are also involved in establishing a good climate.

What is the first thing you say when you present Seinäjoki to guests, interest groups or customers?

Seinäjoki is a growing city and the number one city for entrepreneurs in Finland.

What is especially exciting in Seinäjoki?

The people with a can-do attitude. They have a strong will to grow and develop; people aim to solve issues and they look forward.

How do you see Seinäjoki in 2030?

As one of the growth centres in Finland, an increasingly international student city and one of the most attractive places in Finland for companies.

Your favourite place in Seinäjoki?

Kampusranta park. It has to be the most beautiful campus in Finland, and it's on the banks of the river, within walking distance of the city centre. There is a beautiful pedestrian and cycle path on both sides of the river. I'm also lucky, because I can work in the area every day.

Reveal a person, place or thing that most people do not know about Seinäjoki!

The Paukaneva duckboard route. Plenty of nature lovers and birdwatchers have already found this gem. You feel like you're in Lapland while walking on the duckboards.

Finish this sentence:

"If I had the power, Seinäjoki..."

...would offer more higher education places and the train to Helsinki would take only two hours instead of nearly three, like now.

JAAKKO KIISKILÄ – THE MAYOR OF SEINÄJOKI

Studies show that Seinäjoki is a great place for entrepreneurs. Why?

Entrepreneurship has a long tradition in Seinäjoki. I've heard the saying that what an entrepreneur needs is another entrepreneur. Here you can find another one.

How will you maintain a good business climate in the future?

By cooperating extensively and working on developing it every day. It's clear that resting on your laurels is not an option. We also need to take the entrepreneurial perspective into account in the decision-making of the city.

What is the first thing you say when you present Seinäjoki to guests, interest groups or customers?

There's space for all of the good things in Seinäjoki. We value entrepreneurship in particular. In Seinäjoki, the distances within the city are short, and as a hub on the main railway, it's also easy to travel from here to the rest of the world.

What is especially exciting in Seinäjoki?

The great cooperation and can-do attitude. We care about each other and succeed together.

How do you see Seinäjoki in 2030?

Seinäjoki will be an increasingly widely known growth centre with highly developed education opportunities and a forward-looking, can-do attitude.

Your favourite place in Seinäjoki?

For me, that's Ruuhikoski golf course, but really, I have a long list of favourites.

Reveal a person, place or thing that most people do not know about Seinäjoki!

It's hard to say what most people don't know about, but let's say the Kiikun monttu, a former quarry that's a great place to go for a swim.

Finish this sentence:

"If I had the power, Seinäjoki..."

...would continue to develop as a place for amazing companies, which means that employment and wellbeing would keep on improving. •

SEINÄJOKI IN FIGURES

IMAGE SAMUEL HOISKO

More than
65,000
inhabitants

Growth
+600/YEAR
= 1%

The
16TH LARGEST
city in Finland

The only regional centre in Finland, in which **THE POPULATION HAS GROWN CONTINUOUSLY EVERY YEAR** for more than 70 years.

Jobs
32,000

Employment rate
75 %

Self-sufficiency in workplaces
111 %

Business premises
5,000

Investments by companies, 2017-2021
OVER 1 BILLION
euros

Under construction:
10,000 HECTARES
of business areas

The first construction stage of
THE DATA CENTRE AREA
will start in 2022

NEARLY 600
shops



CONSTRUCTION BOOM GOING STRONG IN THE CENTRE OF SEINÄJOKI

IMAGE TUUKKA KIVIRANTA

Seinäjoki city centre continues to reach new heights and magnitudes. Within a few years, dozens of construction projects have been and will be implemented in the city centre, their combined number of square metres of floor area reaching approximately 250,000 in total. The value of the upcoming (2022-2027) investments will be at least EUR 400 million.

"We already have a new Keskustori central square, an underground car park, many blocks of flats that reach higher than ever before, the head office of a Finnish bank (Oma Säästöpankki) and a cinema with six screens (BioRex). In the next few years, the railway station will become a real centre of services for city residents and travellers, in addition to being an important work area. Whole areas with modern blocks of flats with homes for the increasing number of residents are also in the pipeline. In fact, our goal is to increase the number of inhabitants of the city centre by 50% to roughly 11,000," says the Mayor **Jaakko Kiiskilä**.

Of the major Finnish construction companies, YIT, Peab, Lakea and FinCap Rakennus, among others, are hard at work in Seinäjoki. •



HOMES AND BUSINESS PREMISES BEING BUILT AT SEINÄJOKI RAILWAY STATION

The Seinäjoki railway station area is undergoing a complete transformation. The Veturikortteli area will become a landmark of the location, seen by everyone who lives in Seinäjoki, visits the city or simply admires the region through a train window.

Veturikortteli is a junction of modern living, modern business premises and a wide range of services. Comfortable urban homes with all of the modern conveniences for easy living will be built in the area. A big part of the ease of everyday life is that the residents can find many of the services they appreciate right next door. Facilities for a health centre and an early childhood education centre have already been provisionally reserved.

The station building has approximately 8,200 m² of business premises. The centre of the growth-oriented city of Seinäjoki is a good place to do business. More than 2 million passengers per year pass through the train station alone. The business premises are modern, safe and pleasant. The central location of the business premises, stellar transport connections and excellent parking facilities make the area a true driving force for Seinäjoki. •

IMAGES OOEPA

- The station area right in the city centre will become one of the busiest and most impressive hubs in Finland for public transport and the movement of people. The station will also become the home and work environment for hundreds of people.
- In Seinäjoki, the station is an integral part of the city centre. There are only a couple of hundred metres from the station building to the Keskustori central square.
- The first phase of the construction has begun.
- The construction of the parts of the Seinäjoki railway station area on the side of the city centre has been divided into four phases. The social welfare and health care centre Aallokko, an office building that contains the new station hall, residential and business buildings as well as a multi-storey car park with places for 450 cars will be built during the first phase. The scope of the construction phase is approximately 25,000 square metres.
- The first phase is located on the south side of the current station building, in the bus station area.
- The construction of the first phase started in the summer of 2022 and will be completed in 2024. The cost estimate of the project is over EUR 30 million. Seinäjoki issued a public invitation to negotiate in order to find the right partner for the first phase of construction. Public art will be installed in the Seinäjoki station area as part of the construction.



GLENN IN WONDERLAND

OR THE FINNISH BERRY FOREST

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I RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE

Seinäjoki is like the glue that makes the whole South Ostrobothnia region so strong. The region has a lot of things to see and do, which makes this the best place in Finland for business, hobbies and tourism.

**? GLENN
MURRAY**

Glenn graduated from SeAMK, the Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, where he studied business, and creates a podcast and videos presenting South Ostrobothnia together with Mark Wiltshire. Glenn is from Cairns in Queensland, Australia, and he has lived in Ilmajoki, a neighbouring municipality of Seinäjoki, since 2013.

Glenn Murray says that he's from the Australian bush and has a foul mouth, which means that he's adapted successfully to living in South Ostrobothnia. The process was not painless, however.

1. How did you end up in Seinäjoki?

I met my Finnish girlfriend in my home country of Australia. She spoke Swedish, so I thought she was from Sweden. I had no idea that Finland was a bilingual country. She was visiting Australia, but those were the last days of her trip. She returned to Finland, but soon she came back for a longer stretch of time. After a while, we made the decision to move to Seinäjoki. Or actually, we moved into the neighbouring municipality of Munakka in Ilmajoki.

2. What surprised you here the most?

The nature, absolutely, and how you can enjoy it here. You can just go and pick berries in the woods and put them right into your mouth! You can't do that in Australia, nearly everything you find in the woods can be poisonous. When my mum visited us, she was absolutely enchanted by the berries and mushrooms that anybody can pick, just like that. There is no everyman's right in Australia that would make something like this possible. Plus, there's always the constant threat of poisoning, of course. I remember right after getting used to eating blueberries straight from the woods and grabbed a handful while hiking. Then my girlfriend said that they weren't blueberries. I was sure that I was done for – I must've eaten poison berries by mistake! (Editor's note: they were most likely bog whortleberries, which are also safely edible.)

3. Could you describe your first experiences and compare them with your present day?

We moved to the middle of nowhere, a place with no public transport. I didn't have a car. With the exception of my girlfriend and her family, I felt really alone. I didn't know anybody. I tried to find out what the world around me could offer, hobbies and other things to do, but all the information was in Finnish. There was hardly anybody who spoke English. I wasn't very happy in those days.

Then I met Mark (Wiltshire) completely by accident, and through him, I discovered a whole community of people who had moved here from abroad. Before Mark, I had practically no friends who spoke English here. That meeting actually started a completely new phase in my life.

I have dyslexia, which means that learning foreign languages is slow. I can still manage in Finnish in everyday situations, after all, I studied Finnish for a few years at the Etelä-Pohjanmaan Opisto (South Ostrobothnia Folk High School). Finnish skills are required for nearly all jobs that I've applied to. Even if you might imagine that working as a forklift operator or bus driver, which are some of the things I've done in Australia, the language wouldn't matter as much.

At the start, with absolutely no Finnish skills whatsoever, I did give parkour and freestyle lessons to kids with the Seinäjoki SVO Gymnastics Association. That was fun. Even though a lot of the kids were shy with an English-speaking instructor to start with, in the end I became a real favourite with some of the kids, and they hung on to me like little monkeys.

4. What would you like to do here in the future?

The studies put a lot of emphasis on entrepreneurship, which is a strong characteristic of this region.

Currently, making a podcast and videos on the topic of tourism in South Ostrobothnia is a time-consuming hobby that's very close to my heart. Someone said that you should do what you love and don't need to work a day in your life.

Do what you love and you don't need to work a day in your life.

So I might hope that making different kinds of videos and podcasts or photography could be my job in the future. ➔



I'M THE ENGLISH GUY WITH A HAT

NEARLY EVERYBODY IN SEINÄJOKI KNOWS MARK WILTSHEAR

TEXT KIRSI HAAPAMATTI IMAGES MINNI PITKÄMÖ

Mark Wiltshear jokes that he's branded himself as the Londoner in a hat. And there are many people who know him. Especially those who have come here from afar.

1. How did you end up living in Seinäjoki?

I was working at Harrods in London. At work, I met a woman from Peräseinäjoki, who later became my wife. We had children and lived in London, but when the kids were starting to reach school age we decided to move to Finland. Our family was bilingual: at home, the kids spoke Finnish with their mother and English with me. Our common language at home was English. That's still true, even if we divorced later and I have a new wife, Satu; we have a big, blended family together that also includes her children.

2. How did you continue working when you moved to Seinäjoki without knowing any Finnish?

I managed to bring the work with me, meaning that I continued to work remotely. Now I work for our company that helps Finnish companies in exports abroad.

3. Could you tell us about WIISE?

E-P WIISE ry is an association that was established for networking. Through it, people create connections that promote their job opportunities. Very highly trained people are constantly moving to Seinäjoki and the region around it.

4. You are also involved in integrating international residents into Seinäjoki in other ways. How?

I've set up a WhatsApp group for local English-speaking residents. I want to make sure that nobody who moves into the area is lonely or left alone with everything that has to be arranged. We communicate constantly and actively about all kinds of things all the way from looking for a flat to mapping job or study opportunities. The English-language group has about forty members. The Spanish-language group that's also been set up here has the same number of members.

5. You come from South London. What is your current living environment like compared to it?

I live in Hallila, which is a great neighbourhood. I have a lot of admiration for the post-war detached houses built by war veterans, and there are plenty of those in Hallila, even if I don't unfortunately live in one myself. Hallila is a nice residential area, and it's conveniently close to the city centre.

6. How committed are you to Seinäjoki?

Very committed. My family and my work are here. I'm also applying for Finnish citizenship, which is why I've been practising my Finnish language enthusiastically. You have to pass a language proficiency test to be granted citizenship. ➔

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I RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE

spending time outdoors is the best. You can choose between a safe fitness track or a more adventurous nature trail. To finish, I always take my guests to the lean-to for barbecue under the open sky. During the summer, I recommend riding a bicycle around Seinäjoki. Above all, you should go and watch an SJK football match.

? MARK WILTSHEAR

Mark is the entrepreneur behind the MT Xport consulting firm, and he also steers the project 'Kokka kohti Etelä-Pohjanmaata' (Heading towards South Ostrobothnia) at the Vocational Education and Training Institute Sedu. He makes podcasts and videos presenting South Ostrobothnia with **Glenn Murray** in addition to his own podcasts 'The Finnish Football Show' and 'The Explore Finland Radio Show'. With others, Mark has established the association E-P WIISE ry that brings immigrants together. He comes from the UK, South London to be more precise, and has lived in Seinäjoki since 2008.

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I WISH OTHERS ALSO UNDERSTOOD HOW SPECIAL SOUTH OSTROBOTHNIA IS

The podcast by **Mark Wiltshier** and **Glenn Murray**, **What's On in Southern Ostrobothnia**, is a talk show where they present all the interesting things that are currently happening in Seinäjoki as well as South Ostrobothnia as a whole. In addition, Glenn Murray creates video content for his YouTube channel 'The Nordic Tourist', and Mark has a radio show called 'Explore Finland'. Their content ranges from yoga at the Art Hall, tasty beer by local microbreweries, or an amazing trip to see prehistoric relics at a natural site.

"It's important to market Seinäjoki and the region as a whole in English and from perspectives other than just the local ones. It seems that those of us who have moved here from abroad see and experience the region in a different way compared to the locals. Often the locals comment after a video or an episode saying "hey, I didn't realise we've got this or that tourist attraction or natural site here," Glenn Murray says.

Murray believes that the tourism potential of the region has not been utilised fully enough. Foreign tourists or people like exchange students moving to Seinäjoki go to spend their money elsewhere in their free time, such as Lapland or Eastern Finland, because they do not know any better.

"Still, we have a lot of the best things in the country here. We have the best rock'n'roll festival, an absolutely majestic world-class opera festival and the biggest crater lake in Europe. I think we should praise the entire region down to the coast when marketing Seinäjoki," Murray enthuses.

Mark Wiltshier confirms that large groups of tourists need material in English to support their holiday choices.

"Often foreigners only notice two things about Finland: there's Helsinki and then there's Lapland. Even though there's so much more, especially with us here in South Ostrobothnia. •



IMAGE TUUKKA KIVIRANTA

A GROWING STUDENT CITY

Seinäjoki is a growing student city, and the campus in the city centre is located only 700 metres from the railway station.

The **Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (SeAMK)** is a community with approximately 5,000 students and 400 staff members. The international university of applied sciences with an entrepreneurial approach is tasked with increasing expertise, competitiveness and wellbeing in its region. Roughly a thousand students graduate with a degree every year from the 21 bachelor's and 13 master's degree programmes at SeAMK. According to a national student feedback survey, SeAMK is the best university of applied sciences in Finland.

The **University Consortium of Seinäjoki** is a multi-disciplinary community with 80 experts that consists of four universities and operates as a network. Tampere University, the University of Helsinki, the University of Vaasa and the University of the Arts Helsinki operate in the University Consortium. The partners also include the University of Turku, the Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke), the Migration Institute of Finland as well as the University Association of South Ostrobothnia (Epky). The operations have four focus areas: sustainable food solutions, intelligent and energy-efficient systems, welfare services and cultural experiences, and entrepreneurship, business competence and innovations. The activities of the University Consortium of Seinäjoki are geared towards research and development relevant to the area, degree programmes and continuous learning services, as well as artistic activities and promoting societal impact.

The **Epanet network** that consists of five universities increases the efficiency of research and expands the local research and development community. At the same time, they create a new kind of cooperation network between Finnish higher education institutions.

Every year, more than 10,000 students gain more skills and knowledge at the **Vocational Education and Training Institute Sedu**. The institute offers 80 different qualifications, and 2,000 experts and professionals complete a vocational qualification each year. Sedu's goal is to train professionals to operate in a multicultural work environment and increase the number of international students in our region. •

TEXT KIRSI HAAPAMATTI IMAGE FRANCESCA CESARI

NO NEED FOR PIZZA!

Silvia Gaiani praises Seinäjoki like an enthusiastic tourism advertisement. And she means every word.

"Italian tourists are famous for always eating Italian food when they travel. Not me. When I'm in Finland, I want to eat Finnish food. I love Karelian pies, squeaky cheese, Finnish mushrooms and blueberries and everything the amazing restaurants in Seinäjoki have to offer," Silvia Gaiani says.

Gaiani is a real fan of Finland. She previously worked for the University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu, and during her two-year stint there, she travelled between her two homes in Joensuu and Bologna. Now she intends to move to Seinäjoki in Finland "for real".

"I'm moving here with my family. Right now, I'm looking for places in day care for my three children and a home with a sauna for all of us. This is my dream. I feel that I'm now in the right place."

Silvia Gaiani has a double doctorate, and she has been making an international career studying the sustainability of the food system. A five-year research project has now brought her to Seinäjoki, and she could not be happier.

"The move was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic, because the whole Italy was in lockdown for a long time. Still, I've already had the chance to visit Seinäjoki several times. I feel like this is my town, my home. When I'm here, I'm stress-free. Every time, I already relax the moment I step into the train to Seinäjoki in Helsinki. My mind is at peace."

The Italian researcher praises Seinäjoki as being a town that is just the right size and offers everything a person needs. It has culture, nature and also things to do for children.

According to Silvia, the Ostrobothnians being stiff and introverted is just a myth.

"Even though I don't speak much Finnish, I've found plenty of friends here, both among my colleagues at the Ruralia Institute as well as the entrepreneurs in the food sector that I've had the chance to meet during my work. Every time I come to Seinäjoki, there's a lot of social interaction on the programme. We go to have coffee or dinner and visit art exhibitions at the Art and Culture Centre Kalevan Navetta. Oh, and shopping! I love Finnish design."

The Italian who is soon to become a Seinäjoki resident has also fallen in love with the Finnish outdoor culture.

"Italians mostly stay indoors if the weather is bad. Here people seem to go outside no matter how hard it rains."

According to Silvia, there are many similarities between Bologna and South Ostrobothnia. Both regions have a strong identity as food producers, and there is plenty of active entrepreneurship around food.

At the time of this interview, Silvia does not yet know where in Seinäjoki she and her family will eventually settle. They hope to find a home somewhere between rural scenery and the city centre.

"I want to integrate into Seinäjoki and make sure my children also grow roots here. They will go to a Finnish-speaking day care centre, and I'm studying Finnish both independently and on an online course at the University of Helsinki. Unfortunately, my spouse can't move to Seinäjoki full-time and has to travel between Bologna and Seinäjoki. I think that our time in Seinäjoki will be wonderful." •

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I RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE

The **library Apila** in Seinäjoki is an amazingly beautiful building. I go there to sit down, open a book and just relax. I also strongly recommend riding a bicycle. Everybody should jump on a bike and start exploring Seinäjoki. It makes the city open up for you in a completely unique way.

? SILVIA GAIANI

Silvia works in Seinäjoki, leading a research team studying innovation and entrepreneurship towards sustainable food systems; the team is a part of the Epanet network and operates at the Ruralia Institute. She is from Bologna, Italy, and she has lived in Seinäjoki since 2022.



THE WHOLE PLACE IS AN ACTIVITY CENTRE

TEXT OUTI RANTALA IMAGE MINNI PITKÄMÖ

You might think that anyone would get a culture shock after moving to Seinäjoki from a city in China with more than ten million inhabitants. That did not happen to this family who value the healthy living environment as well as having both services and the nature nearby.



The family of **Jani Vänskä** and **Ni Xiaohong**, who lived in Suzhou for ten years, moved to Seinäjoki roughly five years ago.

"When you've lived abroad for long enough, you start to value and hope that your children also get to live a different kind of life. The kids have plenty to do in Seinäjoki as the whole place is an activity centre," Jani Vänskä laughs.

"If I went to China now with my family, I might get reverse culture shock. A city with millions of people can be a nice place if you're single."

Vänskä works for Atria as an Export Manager, with China as his area of responsibility. His wife Ni Xiaohong is from Southwest China. She found a job at a communications agency in Tampere, where she helps companies to network in the Chinese market via WeChat, the country's largest social media platform.

Children can move freely

In five years, the family has found that Seinäjoki has everything a family with children needs during its busiest years. They have two sons, 11-year-old **Vili** and 7-year-old **Veeti**, who have lots of hobbies.

"The boys have music and art as hobbies. You can get education at a high level in those subjects in Seinäjoki, and that's not always the case. We go on bicycle rides together. I like Törnävä and the Kyrkösjärvi area. For me, exercise in nature is important. I love gathering berries and mushrooms, and I try to get the kids to join me in the woods, too," Ni Xiaohong says.

"In Seinäjoki the kids can move around freely, and we don't need to fear for their safety. The air and food here are clean. Life is healthy."

The couple met over 20 years ago, when Vänskä was in

China for the first time. They were married in 1998, after which both went to study in Helsinki.

"I graduated with a Master of Arts from the University of Helsinki in the early 2000s. My wife was studying for a bachelor's degree in business at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, and she was in Belgium as an exchange student when I got a job at Metso and went to work in China alone to begin with. My wife came along later."

In China, everything costs a lot more than in Finland. For example, the day care fees are many times higher. When their second child was born, the family decided to move to Finland. Another factor that affected the family's choice of location was Vänskä's brother and his wife, who live in Nurmo. They are in close contact, and the boys love spending time together with their aunt and uncle.

Everything works well in Seinäjoki

The family lives in Jouppi, where they found a detached house after a long search.

"The best thing about Seinäjoki is that everything is nearby. I was raised in the Kontula neighbourhood in Helsinki, so I know how long the trip to hobbies and services can be in Finland, too. In Seinäjoki, everything just works. The service infrastructure we have here works well: everything is available and there are no bottlenecks," Vänskä notes.

They speak Finnish and Chinese at home. The boys are in an English-language class in the Marttila school.

"I teach my children Chinese. I also instruct them in music. I've played piano and the accordion. I used to work as a kindergarten teacher in China, but I haven't been able to do this job in Finland, because I'd need better Finnish skills," Xiaohong says. •

WE RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE

Seinäjoki has everything a family with children needs during its busiest years. In Seinäjoki, children can move around freely, and you don't need to fear for their safety.

? JANI VÄNSKÄ & NI XIAOHONG

Jani is an Export Manager. He comes from Helsinki, and he moved to Seinäjoki from Suzhou, China, in 2016.

Xiaohong is a WeChat Marketing Specialist. She comes from the Sichuan Province in Southwest China, and she moved to Seinäjoki from Suzhou, China, in 2016.

TEXT OUTI RANTALA IMAGE MINNI PITKÄMÖ

A COSMOPOLITAN CHOOSES SEINÄJOKI

Business manager **Michael Mansour** and his family found a house close to nature in Seinäjoki. They are planning to settle down in the city indefinitely.

”**I RECOMMEND
SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE**

the city is a green and peaceful place to live. Seinäjoki has education at the top level, a diverse business life and different kinds of activities for your leisure time.

**? MICHAEL
MANSOUR**

Michael is the Executive Chairman of Rodstein Oy. He is from the United Kingdom and moved to Seinäjoki from Turin, Italy, in 2020.



STARS FROM THE CAPITAL OF SPACE

I work as Chairman of the Board of the growth company Vaski, Rodstein Oy, and I'm the principal owner of the company.

In addition to the business, my family keeps me in Seinäjoki. My wife **Emma** is Finland-Swedish, and she comes from Munsala on the coast of Ostrobothnia. We have two young children: 3-year-old **Ella** was born in Turin, Italy, and 1-year-old **Eevi** was born in Seinäjoki.

We've been happy in Seinäjoki. We recently bought a house in the village of Katila. Another reason why Seinäjoki is an excellent place for us to live is that my wife's parents live just one hour's drive away.

Seinäjoki is a nice place to spend your free time. I play football, tennis and padel. There is no lack of opportunities for hobbies in the city. It's also great to see the city develop. Seinäjoki city centre has seen plenty of renovation. In 15 years, the city has moved forward at a staggering rate.

I was born in London in 1981. I spent my childhood and youth in Abu Dhabi. I studied at Oxford and graduated with a master's degree in mathematics when I was 21.

I first came to Seinäjoki in February 2008. I worked as a Finance Director for the Italian group Prima Industrie, and I'm still a member of their management team. I helped with merging the companies when the group bought the company Finn-Power from Kauhava. The factory makes machines for processing sheet metal-working machines; it was moved to Seinäjoki in 2018, and it is a part of the Prima Power in the corporate group. In 2013, I went to the UK, and later my wife and I moved to Italy. After having a child, we decided to come back to Finland in 2020.

I joined Rodstein, a company established my Finnish partners that is now called Vaski. When we were deciding where our company should be located, the choice was easy: Seinäjoki. Another option was Mikkeli, but I thought that Seinäjoki had expertise and higher education as well as several other companies in the same field. Within a few years, our turnover has quadrupled. We have around twenty employees.

It's easy to attract highly educated employees to Seinäjoki. Our working language is English, because we have employees from several different countries.

Seinäjoki has an excellent university of applied sciences, and it has the potential to be even better. What Seinäjoki is missing is a university. That might happen once the number of inhabitants grows past one hundred thousand. •

KEEP THE PULSE RACING

IMAGE TUUKKA KIVIRANTA

Seinäjoki is a dream come true for people who love sports and exercise. Seven teams competing at national level ensure that the spectators' pulses are also racing.

There are more than 60 sports clubs and organisations in Seinäjoki. Jouppilanvuori, also known as Joupiska, outdoor recreation area located right next to the city centre has become a hub for many different kinds of sports. •





EXPERIENCE EXERCISE

Seinäjoki has been a city of adventure sports since 2009, and it is one of its pioneers, according to the Director of Development **Erkki Välimäki**.

"Everything started back in 2005, when **Hannu Salo**, Project Manager of the Lakeuden elämysliikunta ry association, started to lead various projects for constructing trails in the Jouppilanvuori and Kyrkösjärvi areas. The city was happy to support them. The enthusiasm of Salo and the active group of volunteers involved was convincing. Things really started to happen, fast.

The Lakeuden Elämysliikunta ry association has implemented several trail projects and built accessible trails, rest areas, campfire sites and a nature house, in addition to children's trails and a barefoot path. One of the most popular sites is the adventure stairs next to the Jouppilanvuori ski centre.

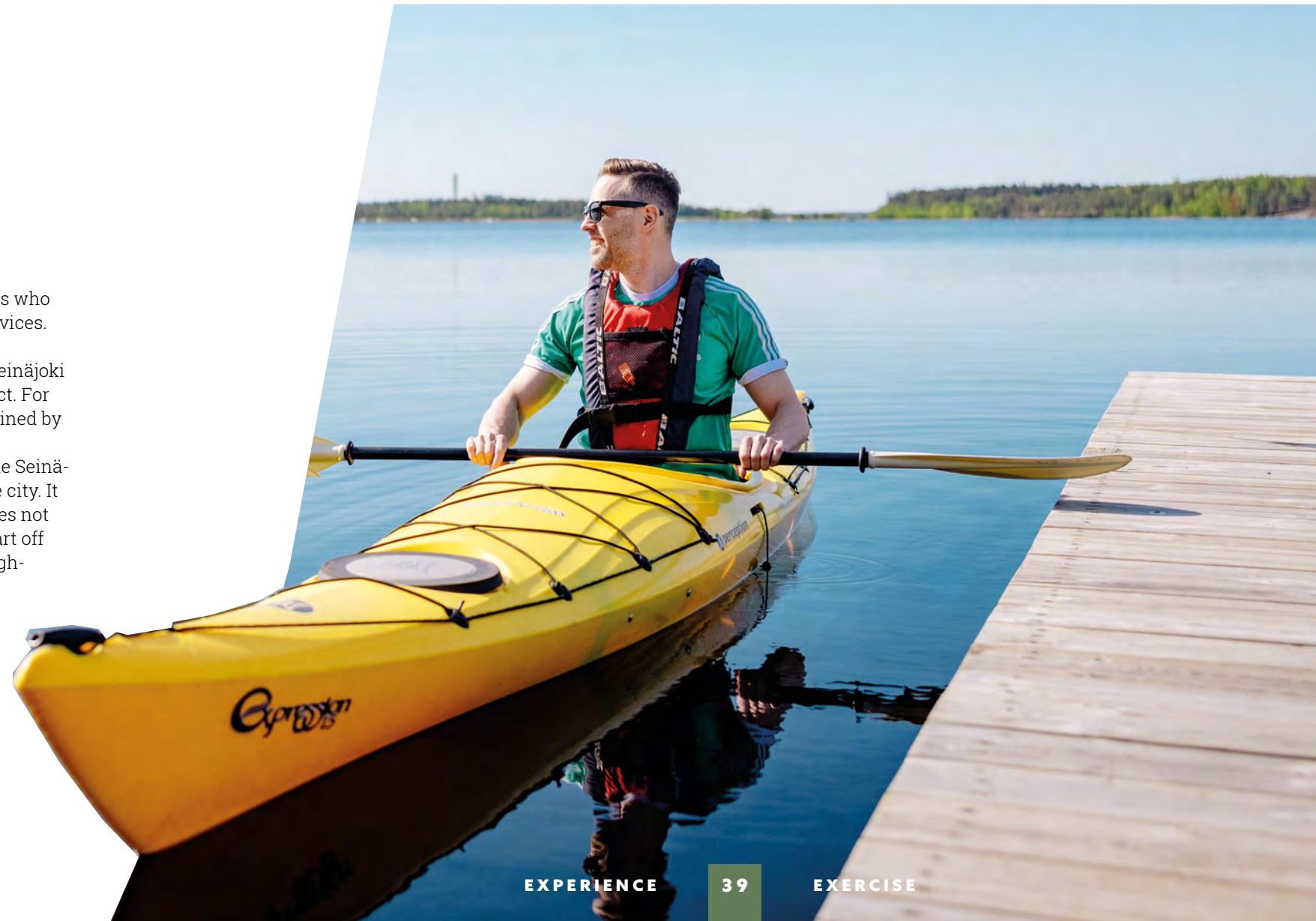
"We are proud to be a city of adventure sports, and we are grateful for the activity of the Elämysliikunta ry association. Here, exercise in nature is available for everyone, right next to the city centre. In addition, the routes and other sites that have been built have also attracted com-

mercial operators to the area, new entrepreneurs who offer exercise as an experience among their services. This is absolutely wonderful," says Erkki.

The area located a few kilometres from the Seinäjoki city centre has inspired plenty of operators to act. For example, the cross-country cycling trail maintained by the bicycle association Ride EP is very popular.

The latest place to find new experiences is the Seinäjoki hiking trail of 170 kilometres, created by the city. It runs from Ylistaro to Peräseinäjoki. The trail does not have a beginning or an end; instead, you can start off at any point on it. The Seinäjoki hiking trail roughly follows the nature trail built in 1998. The trail has been repaired and partially renovated. At the same time, a mountain biking and trail running track was implemented in the area of Jouppilanvuori, rest areas and lean-tos were repaired and the surface of the Ylistaron Asema fitness track was replaced. •

IMAGES TUUKKA KIVIRANTA



STARS FROM THE CAPITAL OF SPACE

AMERICAN FOOTBALL BRINGS PEOPLE TO SEINÄJOKI FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD

Filip Zacok and **Christian Powell** play American football in Seinäjoki, even though they would also have plenty of other opportunities around the world. Why?

TEXT KIRSI HAAPAMATTI IMAGES MINNI PITKÄMÖ

STARS FROM THE CAPITAL OF SPACE

This story could easily become too syrupy sweet. Still, we will take the risk and let Christian Powell and Filip Zacok sing the praises of their team and club, the Seinäjoki Crocodiles. The Crocodiles plays in Vaahteraliiga, the Finnish national championship league for American football.

"This club is not like the others. In the Crocodiles, they see the players as people and help them. I've heard a lot of horror stories about football players in Europe and the rest of the world who haven't been as lucky as I have. Some people have been promised an apartment and wages and help with starting out their lives in a new country, but in reality the players have ended up with nothing, trying to survive alone," says Christian Powell, who moved to Seinäjoki from the USA.

Filip Zacok agrees with his teammate.

"The Crocodiles are my club, it's the community where I grew into the sport. The atmosphere of the club is amazing, the coaches are great and your teammates quickly become your friends. The team spirit is like nothing you've ever seen before."

Los Angeles and Seinäjoki are like night and day

Like most of the other international reinforcements, Christian Powell ended up in Seinäjoki via the Europlayer website. American football players use the site to find clubs in Europe. Christian entered his information into the site just to try it out, and Crocodiles contacted him straight away.

"I have to say, I had no idea what kind of a country this was. Finland? Seinäjoki? I googled them and found out that it was pretty green with lots of forest. The first time I came here was during a heatwave in the summer, and I thought, well, that's great! My friends had warned me to pack up all of my warmest clothes for nothing. I went back to the USA for the winter, and the next summer I experienced the real Finnish weather. It was cold and it rained for weeks. Now I've also seen the winter, too, and the cold is pretty brutal for someone used to the weather in Los Angeles." →





Christian is now playing for the Crocodiles for the fifth season, which means that the place has been to his liking. The experienced running back would have plenty of opportunities in other countries, too, but Powell feels that Seinäjoki is his home and the Crocodiles are his team.

"I've also worked in Seinäjoki as a personal trainer at a local gym, but right now my job is to play and get ready for the coming season."

Christian Powell has already recovered from the culture shock he experienced when moving to Seinäjoki in 2018.

"The weirdest thing was probably how different the people were compared to the US. In my home country, people are open and they like to talk a lot. Finns keep a straight face and mind their own business."

Christian says that he is not a party animal, so the slow and quiet life in Seinäjoki have not been a problem for him.

"I like to read books and ride a bicycle. I live in Simuna, which is close to everything, especially our winter training hall in Bullerintie. My teammates have also become my friends. I don't feel lonely. Instead, I've been happily surprised how free you are to live your life in Seinäjoki."

You can go anywhere safely, if you compare it to Los Angeles."

The shy boy learned Finnish very quickly

In practice, Filip Zacok is a "local boy," because he and his family moved to Finland from Slovakia already in 2012. He went to upper secondary school in Seinäjoki in the English-speaking programme.

"We moved to Seinäjoki due to my dad's job. He's a meat cutter. I remember the first day in upper secondary school when I stepped into the classroom and everybody else was already in there. It was a tough spot for a shy boy. And then I had to speak English, so the whole situation was pretty embarrassing."

Even though the school programme was in English, some of the teaching was in Finnish and naturally you could hear Finnish everywhere. Soon Filip started to look for a hobby. In Slovakia, he'd been a successful judoka but, based on his father's suggestion, he decided to try out American football. ➔

"I loved the sport immediately. I'm sure that my background in judo helps with body control, among other things. The atmosphere at the club during training was also really nice and encouraging. While playing American football, I also started to speak more and more Finnish, and that helped a lot with learning the language."

Shyness is no longer Filip Zacok's most remarkable feature. Still, he says that he has adopted a more Finnish mentality – at least compared to the American. Filip spent nearly four years in Indiana, USA, studying with a full sports scholarship and playing college football.

"In Seinäjoki, the people are quiet and maybe even shy. In the US, it felt weird at first when everybody came to ask who you were and what you were doing here. I even thought about getting a business card. I could've just handed out one to anybody who asked. They were that interested in me. Interest like that feels strange for someone from Seinäjoki." ➔

“The Crocodiles have a unique team spirit.”

Home is in Seinäjoki, at least the home of the heart

Filip Zacok is currently working at the same company in the food industry in which his father worked when they moved to Finland. He does not receive actual pay for playing football.

“I work three shifts in logistics. That makes participating in training a bit difficult. The job is something like a stepping stone. I’ve applied for university in Vaasa and Oulu,” says Filip who already has a degree in business management from an American university.

He may still have an international football career. He has been invited to a training camp by the Canadian league this spring. Those who are invited to the next

stage will compete for the chance to play professionally in Canada.

Christian Powell’s plans for the future are also open. Playing as a professional in the USA is still an option.

“No matter what happens, I will always consider Seinäjoki and this team as my home. Every day I thank my lucky stars that I ended up here in this cold country.”

Still, Christian has not become completely Finnish. He has yet to try out ice skating or cross-country skiing. He says that he only knows a few words in Finnish.

“It’s an incredibly difficult language.” •

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CHRISTIAN’S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SEINÄJOKI:

It might be only an artificial lake, not a real one, but I still have to go with **Kyrkösjärvi**. There’s a lot of atmosphere on its shores. The best restaurant is the **Matador**. I’m pretty familiar with it, because they take us players there to negotiate our contracts.

”

FILIP’S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SEINÄJOKI:

I would’ve loved to say Kyrkösjärvi, but because Christian already took that, I’m going with the **Tanelinranta** beach. Out of the restaurants, I like **Pancho Villa** best.

<div>?</div> <div>CHRISTIAN POWELL</div>	<p>Christian plays American football for the Seinäjoki Crocodiles. He comes from Los Angeles, USA, and he has lived in Seinäjoki since 2018 (with periods in the USA in between).</p>
<div>?</div> <div>FILIP ZACOK</div>	<p>Filip is a student who also plays American football for the Seinäjoki Crocodiles. He comes from the city of Poprad in Slovakia, and he has lived in Seinäjoki since 2012 (in addition, he has also spent several years in the USA).</p>



CHRISTIAN

FILIP



STARS FROM THE CAPITAL OF SPACE

THERE'S SPACE TO MOVE IN SEINÄJOKI

IMAGE WILMA HETEMAJ

”

I RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE we've got amazing jogging tracks and stairs here in Joupiska. You can do interval training on the stairs, for instance.

? MEHMET HETEMAJ

The footballer **Mehmet "Mehu" Hetemaj** was born in Kosovo. He represents Seinäjoen Jalkapallokerho (SJK) football club and is the captain of his team.



STARS FROM THE CAPITAL OF SPACE

Mehmet Hetemaj is an iconic part of the club. That tells you everything about what "Mehu" means for the team and the whole club. Hetemaj, who has already played eight seasons with SJK, gives his all on the field and acts as a role model off it.

1. What is your perfect day for training and exercise like?

A perfect training day consists of training that's hard enough that you have to give your all. One tough training session and recovery for the rest of the day is a perfect combination. Sometimes I have two training sessions in one day: one with the ball and another in the gym.

2. Could you recommend some exercise locations in Seinäjoki?

Wallsport is perfect for the winter: you can have a diverse training session at the gym, and in the field you can do spurts, jog and of course also train with the ball.

3. What is the best place in Seinäjoki to work up a sweat?

That depends completely on how much you're willing to work for it. You can do a hard bodyweight training session at home or go running on the stairs. Everything depends on how much effort you put in.

4. What exercise sites are the best when you want a more relaxed pace?

A walk around the Kyrkösjärvi lake is great for recovery exercise. Once I tried mountain biking in the woods, and that was totally amazing.

5. Is there a surprising exercise site or opportunity in Seinäjoki?

My wife runs the Hot Yoga Seinäjoki yoga studio, which is a surprising place because there you can either calm down and relax or go all in during the tougher lessons.

6. What is the best company for your training: your own thoughts, nature sounds, music, podcasts or audiobooks?

My best company for training is any kind of catchy music with a good beat. For instance, I listen to a lot of Albanian music, such as Ledri Vula, Noizy and Dafina Zeqiri. Music also gives me strength before a game.

7. Finally, could you give us exercise tips or instructions for a surefire way to get into shape?

The duration of the training session is not an indicator of how effective it is by any means. Do an effective half-an-hour gym session and jog the Joupiska stairs up and down three times. •

A CITY PERFECT FOR A SPORTY LIFESTYLE

TEXT OUTI RANTALA IMAGES MINNI PITKÄMÖ

Due to studies, New Zealand was changed for Finland and the McDade family found a home in Seinäjoki in 2016. The children are native Seinäjoki residents.

James McDade is from the city of Auckland, New Zealand, which has 1.5 million inhabitants and a completely different climate. He has already got used to the Finnish weather. Exercise and spending time outdoors are integral to his life. Seinäjoki is a place that suits his lifestyle.

"I go all-terrain biking round the year. Jouppilanvuori has great trails. Our whole family goes ice skating in the winter. Seinäjoki also has nice playgrounds."

He met a Finnish woman in New Zealand, where she was working as an au pair. They fell in love, and he moved to Finland.

"I've been living in Finland for ten years. In March 2012, we came to Kannus, where my wife **Krista** is from. In the beginning, I worked on her parents' big dairy farm."

They and their children, 5-year-old **Max** and 2-year-old **Elisabet**, live in a terraced house in Jouppi.

"Our children are born in Seinäjoki, which makes them natives. At home, my wife and I speak English, and we speak both Finnish and English with the kids."

Rugby and other sports

The couple ended up in Seinäjoki in August 2012, when Krista was studying as a nurse. The sporty man quickly found something to do.

"I've been playing rugby since I was a little kid, and I still like to play. I joined Seinäjoki Rugby club in 2016. I'm a member of the board of the Finnish Rugby Federation. I also like to play football and floorball."

James' family is Australian and Polynesian on his mother's side, and British on his father's side.

"Based on looks, not many people would guess that my family comes from Samoa. I got my pale skin and blue eyes from my dad, but my build is from my mom's family."

A man with three professions

The New Zealander speaks Finnish fairly well. The 41-year-old man exudes positive attitude and bursts into laughter every few minutes. Still, he had some adjusting to do in the new country, such as changing professions.

"I used to be a chef. In New Zealand, I worked as the head chef of a company specialising in artisanal food. It was difficult to find work in my own field in Seinäjoki, because I would've had to be able to speak Finnish."

In 2016, he completed a degree in international business in the Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences. For years, he has worked with students in the Seinäjoki Entrepreneurship Society. ➔



Soon he will be adding a third profession to his CV. By the summer, James will graduate as a logistics engineer.

"I started working for Wärtsilä as a sales engineer through a traineeship programme. We sell ship engines all over the world."

A progressive hometown

James praises his hometown as being progressive and developing, with a family-oriented approach and a wide variety of events.

"The best thing about Seinäjoki is that it's not a huge city, but we still have everything. The city is safe for family life."

He has noticed that entrepreneurship is a part of the culture in Seinäjoki.

"People are very enterprising. When they want to do something new, they find a way to make it reality. Nothing ventured, nothing gained." •

"I RECOMMEND SEINÄJOKI, BECAUSE

Seinäjoki takes people of different ages into account: there's something to do for everyone. Plenty of new opportunities come up all the time. We have great events. Goods and services are easy to find.

**? JAMES
MCDADE**

James is from New Zealand, and he came to Seinäjoki in 2016.

IMAGE TUUKKA KIVIRANTA

A CITY OF ALVAR AALTO AND CULTURE

The administrative and cultural centre in Seinäjoki designed by Alvar Aalto is internationally recognised; the location is completed by the magnificent Apila library. The bell tower of the Cross of the Plains Church is a landmark in Seinäjoki.

The Art and Culture Centre Kalevan Navetta, the museum centre Tiklas and the adult education centre Tammi-kampus are new locations for culture, hobbies and encounters. Rytmikorjaamo is one of the largest and best-known rock music clubs in Finland. You can work, study, have meetings and organise events under the same roof.

Seinäjoki is known for its Provinssi rock music festival and Tangomarkkinat tango contest. Thanks to its excellent transport connections, Seinäjoki is a popular city for holding meetings and events. •

VISITSEINAJOKI.FI • KALEVANNAVETTA.FI • RYTMIKORJAAMO.FI
SEINAJOKI.FI/KANSALAIPOISTO • SEINAJOKI.FI/MUSEO





STARS FROM THE CAPITAL OF SPACE

A CITY FULL OF CULTURE

IMAGES KATRI KORPELA & TUUKKA KIVIRANTA

Art and Culture Centre Kalevan Navetta, museum centre Tiklas and adult education centre Tammikampus are new locations for culture, hobbies and encounters.

LEENA KRÅKNÄS – DIRECTOR OF CULTURAL SERVICES

What is the cultural life like in Seinäjoki?

Seinäjoki is a city of culture with its own personality and events all around the year. The wide range of cultural services in our area is provided by dozens of different operators from art institutions, cultural associations and entrepreneurs in the creative fields to active individuals. Seinäjoki is known for its major events, and here if anywhere you can grow your event into something big. Still, it's the large number of small events and occasions organised around the year that makes the artistic and cultural life in the city complete.

What makes us stand out from the crowd?

Seinäjoki is an excellent city of culture thanks to its ideal size. We are small enough to have networks that work well, and big enough that we have the infrastructure to implement both large and small productions as well as things that are a bit out of the ordinary.

The unique atmosphere of the city creates an unexpectedly impressive culture. We have a rich ground for making, producing and experiencing art and culture. We're used to doing things ourselves, which has established the distinctive field of art and culture in the area. You might say that the do-it-yourself attitude and an entrepreneurial approach are in our blood. In addition to the operators, Seinäjoki has robust structures for producing events and other cultural activities. The City of Seinäjoki does everything it can to ensure that different kinds of cultural operators will find working in the city as easy and flexible as possible. •

Leena's tips for experiencing the cultural life in Seinäjoki

- Jazzoikoon! home concerts, organised by the Ylistaron Kaukolankylän Jazzyhdistys ry. association
- Matin-Tupa cinema
- NuermoFest city festival
- Aalto Aesthetics light event
- Afterwork at the Art and Culture Centre Kalevan Navetta
- Skor-klubi events by the Seinäjoki City Orchestra (SKOR) all around the city
- Sahanneva art trail
- Open exhibition openings at the Seinäjoki Art Hall



TIPS FROM THE SEINÄJOKI AMBASSADORS

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO AND EXPERIENCE IN SEINÄJOKI?



IMAGE TUUKKA KIVIRANTA

MARKO MAUNUKSELA – ENTREPRENEUR AND TANGO KING

1. Bicycle routes

You can ride a bicycle on many different kinds of terrains in Seinäjoki. On the riverbank close to the city centre, there are great trails for riding a bicycle and enjoying the scenery by the river. As for lake scenery, you can enjoy it at Kyrkösjärvi lake, also known as Kyrkkäri. You only need a regular bike to ride around Kyrkkäri. The length of the trip is a bit under 20 kilometres. There are also more difficult mountain bike trails and paths in the Joupiska and Kyrkkäri areas where you will keep finding new challenges again and again. There is also a winter bicycle trail for mountain bikers.

2. Theatre

Seinäjoki has a professional and highly skilled city theatre. The theatre building, designed by Alvar Aalto, is a sight to see in itself. The passion with which they create new, bold and stunning performances must be experienced! The City Theatre is the pride and joy of the region, and it definitely punches above its weight in the Finnish theatre scene. In addition, the Törnävä summer theatre brings amazing musicals to the stage year after year without compromising on quality. In Törnävä, summer theatre as an art form has been raised to a completely new level.

3. Keskustori central square

A wonderful new market pavilion, coffee at the market-place, a summer day and no hurry anywhere. Genial and easy-going vendors. What else would you need for a great market atmosphere? In the marketplace, you can always find company for a good gossip. Or if you prefer, simply enjoy a quiet moment by yourself!

4. Ski tracks

Seinäjoki has a diverse and comprehensive network of ski tracks. The web pages of the city's sports and exercise services always have up-to-date information on which tracks have been cleared and when.

5. Aalto Centre

Have you even visited Seinäjoki, if you have not seen the architecture of Alvar Aalto? Aalto's works in Seinäjoki include the Cross of the Plains Church, its bell tower, the parish centre, the City Hall, the City Theatre, the library and the administrative building. One of the works from his youth is the Seinäjoki Defence Corps building, which currently houses the Civil Guard and Lotta Svärd Museum with various exhibitions that are always worth seeing.

6. Summer festivals

Seinäjoki is the city of summer festivals. It hosts major events such as the Provinssi rock festival, the Tangomarkkinat tango contest, the Vauhtiajot Race & Rock Festival and the Solar Sound Festival. There is live music available for everyone's taste. The festival visitors join the wonderful rhythm of the city every summer.

7. Home

Seinäjoki is home. Seinäjoki is a good place to live. This city of migration is growing and developing, combining the heartbeat of a city and a rural landscape. With its excellent transport connections, Seinäjoki challenges many other cities of its size. The train will take you to Tampere in one hour. The city residents are open and honest Ostrobothnians, who are easy to get along with.

PETRA OLLI – ENTREPRENEUR AND WORLD WRESTLING CHAMPION

1. Paukaneva

One specialty of Seinäjoki is Paukaneva, where the scenery is just like Lapland. Even though there are no fells on the horizon, you can still climb the birdwatching tower in the middle of the swamp and look up into space. It is easy to move around in Paukaneva, because you can travel a distance of 5 kilometres on duckboards. The trail to the bird-watching area is accessible. You can enjoy a snack at the lean-to and campfire site.

2. Joupiska fitness stairs

Once you've gone up and down the 278 steps two or three times, you're definitely built up a good sweat. The massively popular fitness stairs ascend the Joupiska slope. There are intermediate platforms on the way where you can catch your breath. There is a viewing platform at the top where you can see over the wide open plains and the city. There will be a mural on the viewing platform and a counter on the website showing the number of visitors in real time. All this and much more in the Joupiska outdoor recreation area have been built by volunteers from the Joupiska Lakeuden Elämysliikunta ry association. It is incredible what kind of things cooperation can accomplish!

3. Outdoor gyms

Several outdoor gyms free to use for everyone have been built in Seinäjoki. Personally, I like the gym on the campus shore next to the University of Applied Sciences, which is right by my jogging route. Now there's a gym with a low threshold for entry!

4. Kyrkkäri beach

The shores of the Kyrkösjärvi lake are developing constantly. The beach, piers, canoeing centre and nature house Kämpälä draw in people. You can reach the Joupiska nature trails and lean-tos easily from close to the shore. Believe it or not, but Kyrkösjärvi, also known locally as Kyrkkäri, is an artificial lake and you can ride a bicycle or go jogging on the dam. If you are lucky, you may spot a peat island floating around Kyrkkäri. Someone has even stuck a signpost on one of the islands, naming it Seilanti – Floatland!

5. Finnish baseball games

Tough matches in our national sport are a summer tradition. It's easy to find one in Seinäjoki, because the men's team of JymyJussit and the women's team of SMJ play in the stadium. You simply have to experience the atmosphere at the stands of a Superpesis baseball game for yourself!

6. Ruuhikoski golf course

It would be hard to find a golf enthusiast who doesn't praise the Ruuhikoski golf course. The course designed by Robert Trent Jones junior with 18 holes and undulating terrain blends beautifully in with the river landscape.

7. Kalajärvi tour skating track

Usually tour skating tracks are built on lake ice, but the track in Kalajärvi, Seinäjoki, runs through a pine forest. The track, which is frozen over a sawdust track, is nicely protected from the wind. You can even go skating while it's dark outside, because the 1½-kilometre route is lit. You can rest and eat a snack in a campfire hut. •



THE ELITE OF EVENTS

IMAGES PETRI LUHTALA

Seinäjoki is a big event city. The major annual events such as the Provinssi rock festival, the Tangomarkkinat tango contest, the Vauhtiajot Race & Rock Festival and the Solar Sound Festival attract tens of thousands of people to enjoy their time in Seinäjoki. In addition, hundreds of other outdoor and indoor events are held in the city every year. Thanks to its excellent transport connections, Seinäjoki is also a popular conference city. •

- **PROVINSSI ROCK FESTIVAL** since 1979
- Seinäjoki **TANGOMARKKINAT TANGO CONTEST** since 1985
- **VAUHTIAJOT FESTIVAL** since 2004
- **SOLAR SOUND FESTIVAL** since 2014

The most important event venues



Seinäjoki Arena

Rytmikorjaamo

OmaSp Stadion



ALVAR AALTO

IMAGES TUUKKA KIVIRANTA & KATJA LÖSÖNEN

Alvar Aalto is a legendary Finnish architect, and you can certainly call him a cosmopolitan of his own era. His expression of form is timeless, yet topical – perhaps that is why so many consider Alvar Aalto an endless fount of creativity and culture. The master's touch always fascinates new friends of architecture and design.

The hand of Alvar Aalto is clearly visible in Seinäjoki. The Aalto Centre in Seinäjoki is unique on a global scale from the perspective of architecture. The only one of the works of Aalto's youth to survive unchanged, the Seinäjoki Defence Corps building completed in 1925, is located in Seinäjoki.

The bell tower of the Cross of the Plains Church is a landmark in Seinäjoki. The administrative and cultural centre in Seinäjoki designed by Alvar Aalto is complemented by the magnificent Apila library, designed by JKMM Architects.

The Aalto Centre consists of six buildings as well as the Kansalaistori square completed in 1988:

- Cross of the Plains Church (1957–1960)
- Parish centre (1965–1966)
- City Hall (1961–1962)
- City Library (1964–1965)
- Government administrative building (1966–1968)
- City Theatre (1986–1987)

Seinäjäjoki

THE CAPITAL OF SPACE

FACTS ABOUT SEINÄJOKI

- » Seinäjoki is one of the fastest-growing and most dynamic cities in Finland.
- » According to studies, Seinäjoki is the best place in Finland for companies. Businesses have repeatedly ranked Seinäjoki as the number one in the business climate surveys by the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK), the Suomen Yrittäjät association for SMEs and the market research company Taloustutkimus.
- » Seinäjoki has 65,000 inhabitants, and the number is growing by roughly 1 % per year.
- » The birth rate in Seinäjoki is one of the highest in large cities, and the employment rate is also at the top in Finland.
- » A significant share of food produced in Finland as a whole comes from Seinäjoki and the region surrounding it.

Distances by train

The location along the main railway in Finland is excellent.

Oulu 2 h 50 min

Tampere 1 h

Helsinki 2 h 50 min

