

Towards North

Päivi Pälvimäki, a swimming guide from Finland, shares her favourite outdoor swimming spots and events in Finland this year



Have you ever dreamt of a pristine lake so smooth, clear and untouched that you get a sense that no one has ever swum there before? Or of an urban sea swim through the archipelago with friends? Or fulfilling that new year's resolution to join an open water swim event? Finland is the best-kept secret of outdoor swimming where you

can experience all these and more. Here are a few insider tips of off-the-beaten-path swimming paradises and authentic Finnish swim events. Travel with me from the urban Baltic Sea in the southern regions of Finland, across the patchwork of lakes and ponds of the National Parks, and on to the North to swim in the wilderness lakes of Lapland.

EASY ACCESS SWIMMING IN THE HELSINKI REGION

Outdoor recreation areas in the Helsinki Region are blanketed with forests and dotted with small lakes and ponds. It's easy to set out for a hike and spontaneously decide which of the many lakes you would like to swim across. My choice of lakes for wild swimming are the Salmi and Laukki outdoor recreation areas, 25-35 km from Helsinki City. Swimmers particularly love these areas because of the many lakes and hilly forest paths.

Lake Kaitalampi, the most popular open water swimming location in Helsinki Region, is also situated in Laukki. With its circular 2km swim route marked with buoys, it is perfect for longer swims and swim training. It's also near to Nuukso National Park, which has numerous lakes and ponds of its own. You could easily spend a week exploring the lakes in these outdoor recreation areas and Nuukso, all of which are easy to access by public transport. There are also few official beaches, which can be populated during the sunniest summer days. Just go deeper in the woods and you'll find a lake solely for you.

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Above: Swimmer chills out at Lake Livejärvä

Right: Happy swimmers in Kaitalampi



If you prefer sea swimming and Baltic cultural vibes, then check the boat maps and schedules for island hopping in the archipelago of Helsinki Region. Also, don't forget to visit Alas Sea Pool and Löyly Sauna in Helsinki City Centre!

SWIM EVENTS IN FINLAND ARE TINY AND GROWING

Some open water swimming events have a long history in Finland - Viikinsaaresen ympäristö in Tampere for example has been organised 82 times since 1919. However, most events remain low-key without mass participation. If you're looking for a relaxed swim event with a cosy atmosphere, then take a look at the open water swim events: Ahlaisten avoestiinti and Jojärven avoestiinti, both of which are held in July near the city of Pori, which is famous for its jazz festival.

There are also a few up-and-coming swim events that are drawing more swimmers to the clean Finnish waters. These events are perfect for experienced swimmers, but also attract those new to open water swimming too. One of these is the Kaitalampi 10K Open Water Swim, which will run for the third time in August 2020. You can choose 10km, 6km or 2km distances and enjoy happy swimming with good company. Another is the Raasepori Open Water event, which takes place in July at Lake Kullaanjärvi in Southern Finland. The event is being held for the second time there and is hosted by the local Sport Institute Kisakeskus. Distances available are 200m, 1.5km and 3km. The Finnish Open Water Swimming Association is involved in organising both of these events.

The Bomarsund Open Water event, held in historical fortress surroundings in Åland (the autonomous archipelago province between Finland and Sweden) is a more challenging swim around an island. The 3km race holds official Finnish Open Water Swimming Championship status, although participants can also choose shorter distances in more protected water and are open for anyone to participate.

Swim the Arctic Circle in Torne River between Finland and Sweden is another event which has been growing every year. The 2km and 3km races in July sell out as soon as

