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Insights From Finland's Finest Concierge

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The Hotel Maria, the luxurious inner-city oasis that debuted in Helsinki December 2023 is redefining the hospitality landscape in the Nordics, and its Head Concierge Sami Joutsenvuo is largely responsible for pulling strings and making arrangements that take the wow factor to the extreme here.

Sami is President of Les Clefs d'Or Finland and has been a member of the prestigious organization since 2004. He is so dedicated that he even has its logo, the keys, tattooed on his arm.

According to The **Hotel Maria's Head Concierge Sami Joutsenvuo**, Helsinki has lots more to offer than you might think at first, and with The Maria's opening, there's never been a better time to visit.

Here are some of Sami's insights, suggestions and special connections:

What local "insider" extra special ½ or full day experiences in/near Helsinki are you most excited to share with guests?

I always love getting requests from guests for special experiences outside of the city center so I can share lesser-known hidden gems, such the local cafes, green parks and islands in Helsinki archipelago. One of my favorite places is **Suomenlinna Island**, which is a stunning sea fortress and Unesco Heritage Site – it's a very special cultural treasure. There is also **Porvoo Old Town**, which has numerous award-winning restaurants, cute cafes, quirky boutiques and

chocolateries. Old Porvoo is also surrounded by a beautiful National Urban Park that stretches over the whole river valley. There is also [Fiskars Village](#), originally an ironwork site, is now a very picturesque artisan village about 1 hour 15 minutes' drive from Helsinki.

Of course, when I help guests visit these places I do my best to ensure they have a highly personalized and a most memorable experience!

What are you most excited about in Helsinki right now?

The growth of local new microbreweries & taprooms, where we of course have special connections, as we also do for the Michelin Starred restaurants in Helsinki. There is also an increasingly strong focus on sustainability here, which is pretty exciting.

What is one of the most extraordinary requests you have received from guests?

A guest called once saying that an important item was needed in London the next day, but delivery companies wouldn't make it on time, so I personally traveled from Helsinki to London for a day and hand delivered it. Another time a Swiss guest forgot his wedding ring in the hotel, and I happened to have a trip planned to Zurich - so I delivered the ring personally as well. A lot of the requests have been what we consider to be 'normal' concierge duties, for example arranging a private jet in one hour or getting tickets for a fully booked opera performance on New Year's Eve.

What would your Perfect Week in Helsinki entail?

For anyone who's never been to Helsinki, I think it's vital to have a private tour with one of my favorite guides on arrival to further illustrate the nuances and contrast of nature and the modern urban lifestyle coexisting here. Even though we have great saunas in the hotel, both in our Spa as well as in many of our suites, that tour could – and should! – also include local sauna experiences, for example the [Lonna sauna](#) island with its dreamily picturesque scenery or a private sauna experience in [Löyly](#) with a cold plunge option in the winter and a refreshing swim on the sea in the summer time.

For active types, I would recommend spending a full day bicycling around the city with a couple of "pitstops" in local breweries on the way. Nights would be spent exploring our bar culture and eating in our fine local restaurants, but I'd also suggest one night staying outside of Helsinki in a nearby forest lodge with a BBQ on an open fire.

In the summer, the perfect week would include a boat or private yacht trip to Helsinki archipelago with lunch on one of the islands made by a private chef with locally sourced ingredients.

For culture-lovers, I love arranging day trips by helicopter to the [Savonlinna Opera Festival](#) in Lake Saimaa. The festival is held in a medieval castle, which is located on a small island in Lake Saimaa, the largest lake in Finland. There are total of 188 000 lakes in Finland so there are many options for a lakeside experience.

Guests could also take a day tour by helicopter to Turku Archipelago on the west coast. Finland has one of the largest coastal archipelagos in the world. Helsinki City Archipelago consists of 300 islands, but Finland's coastal archipelago is over 70,000 islands, and Turku Archipelago around 20,000 islands. There is so much to see!

Fall might also include a hike in Nuukio National Park to see the *ruska* (autumn colors).

Even in the winter, I love sending guests on bicycling trips, with a local guide and traditional Finnish food (reindeer, smoked salmon, mushrooms), Finnish kettled coffee and marshmallows on an open fire. The Helsinki Christmas Market is also not to be missed.

Be sure to make time to enjoy The Hotel Maria too. A beautiful full day. Its Champagne & Caviar Bar, Bar Maria, Lilja and Garden Terrace Restaurants and The Maria Spa with saunas and plunge pools are all so very special and are highly celebrated destinations for locals – so I would always suggest not overlooking what's in your backyard!

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