



Tallinn & Helsinki for Skating Competition Trip Notes **March 22 - April 5, 2017**

Headlines:

- Trip was decided at Boston's World Ice Skating a year ago. I was solo going to Helsinki – darned!
- Added Tallinn Estonia to the front end.
- Big event: 125 years International Skating Union and 100 years Helsinki independence
- Records were set at the skating event.
- Tallinn Estonia was much more interesting than Helsinki Finland which I found a bit sterile.

Helsinki Facts:

- Fifth most interesting European destination. (Trip Adviser)
- 2nd best travel destination in the world. (NY Times)
- Central Railway Station is one of the ten most beautiful stations in the world.
- Internet access is a legal right in Finland.
- Restaurant Day 4x a year when anyone can set up a restaurant for one day without a permit.
- 12 Ice Stadiums and 68 natural ice skating rinks in Helsinki.
- Finland is 6th best country for business.
- Helsinki is the world's most honest city.
- 2017 is Finland 100th anniversary of independence.



Surprises about international skating events:

- No eating in the stands which is quite different from the mess of American stadiums.
- No seating during performances.
- American music is universal and maybe that's why English is a universal language.
- Commentary through headphones is generally hosted compliments of Prudential was missed. But assisted by seatmates in absence of my sister Beverly.
- Nearly 80,000 spectators attended the competition events and practice sessions.
- App for Helsinki2017 provided which took away need for paper or programs.

Skating facts and figures from this event:

- 193 skaters from 36 countries
- 6 highest scores (world records)
- Over 450 representatives of the press
- 450 volunteers
- Around 200,000 people from 180 countries visited the official website www.helsinki2017.com during the competition week

Finnish Folks Facts:

- Fully insured with medical care.
- Connected with easy and free Wi-Fi pretty much everywhere.
- City center plans to be car free soon.

- Created the Baby Box
- Not litigious? No cleaning of ice off sidewalks.

Day 1 into Day 2 – Thursday

I'm off to see Estonia

The wonderful Estonia at large.

(Sung to the tune of "I'm off to see the wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz).

It all started last year at this time when my sister Beverly and I were in Boston for the worlds ice-skating championships. They announced that this year it would be in Helsinki and we both got excited. Beverly got less excited over the long flight and the complications whereas I got more excited over seeing something new. (The closest I had been to this part of the world was in Stockholm and Copenhagen when I ran my 100th marathon).

Being a spectator at world championships really is a wonderful way to go. Some of the foreign competition far outpaces the Americans. I especially look forward to the Russian skaters.

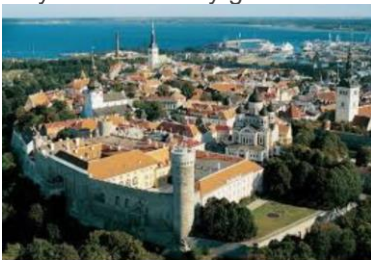
So. When I realized that Tallinn Estonia was only a short ferry ride away from Helsinki, that clinched the deal. When I worked we had a director who was from Estonia and he spoke glowingly of it.

The flight is long and it goes through Frankfurt which is always problematical and the flight is quite expensive. But if not now, when?

Actually the flight was easy and my only complaint was by the time you eat, you only have about three hours to sleep. I was a zombie making my plane connections in Frankfurt. It was about 4AM my body time. But the ramps, and the stairs instead of escalators, and the miles of walking, all helped keep me awake. Even more so was the gate change. I had been told when deplaning from Newark that the gate to Tallinn was A11. In the lounge they told me the gate was A11. But it seem too quiet at gate A11 so I traipsed myself a good distance to the schedule board. Much of Europe has a different way of dealing with gate assignments and there are always crowds around the board waiting for their gate to be listed. Also they don't list by location but rather by time of departure. Alas, the gate was not A11 but a long race down a whole different wing to A28. I was hauling my hand carry suitcases with the suitcase having some garbage stuck in the wheels keeping them from turning properly plus my bag of duty-free booze. Tom would have been much taxed. It was a good thing that the lounge had fed me: a full breakfast and then I stayed long enough to have a little lunch too.

I will attach a web screenshot aerial view of Tallinn. And one of my hotel telegraph in the city center said to be a five star and a member of small luxury hotels of the world. We shall see.

PS. The skating federation has already announced that next year the world's ice skating championships will be Milan Italy. I bet Beverly goes.



Day 2 to 4 - Thursday to Saturday

I spoke of differences of European airports. Not only they walk longer distances, they don't post the gates on the schedule board until practically the last minute, the schedule boards are not alphabetical by destination rather by time of departure, and first class is extremely odd. I'd forgotten but I have also seen this in South American planes too: It is exactly the same small seats of economy with three and three - they just leave the middle seat open.

The allowable suitcase size is considerably less than in the U.S. and maybe only 17 pounds. One however has flexibility over the small size criteria if in first class.

German efficiency. There was no wait at passport control. Whereas Newark TSA line was a mile long even for pre check. On the plane from Frankfurt to Tallinn which was under 2 hours, they still managed to feed us a full meal. With a big smile, wines and after dinner drinks.

I am reminded of why they must be efficient. Why they must make everything to last. America is a throw away economy. Tear down buildings. Buy lots of clothes. Build cars meant to become obsolete. Machines without the staying power of Germans. A tour guide explained it simply: Germans have no extra land for landfill waste.

Arriving in Estonia was particularly easy as there is no passport control, it is a very small airport being rebuilt into a larger one, and I had arranged for a car. The hotel was with the end of the old town but was no more than 15 minute drive from the airport.

My hotel truly is an unexpected five star as is their restaurant. I can only be so lucky if my Helsinki hotel is anywhere as nice. It was an early evening arrival yet I managed a walk in old town, checked out the location for my next days guided tour, and found the grocery store. Grocery stores are practically like going trick-or-treating and this language made it even more so. (The ATM was a guessing game too). Everyone I asked in the grocery store seem to also be a tourist and equally mystified but I ended up sufficiently with my provisions for snacks and morning coffee.

On my various tours I have learned that Tallinn is unique among well-preserved fortress towns which is especially surprising considering all the different countries who have occupied them. It was Scandinavian, it was Soviet Union, then Germany, then more Russia and finally 1991 independence. The Estonian language most closely resembles the Finnish who enjoy taking the two hour ferry to Estonia for cheap shopping.

Since independence the Estonians have made great headway in becoming a tourist site, good culture, modern shopping, and quite civilized. Wi-Fi is in many public areas, (Skype was developed here), hotels are inexpensive as is food, transport is easy, and tours abound. Some of the old Russian influence such as the Tzar Palaces remain as does some Scandinavian influences.

Estonians are well known for their singing Revolution. I visited a site out of town on water's edge where as many as 300,000 people at a time come to sing. (I think there's only about 1.5 million in total). This started during Russian occupation when the Estonians were being pushed down and out and singing was their release. Every five years there is a major singing festival but in between every famous star I've heard of has been here to sing at this outdoor concert stadium.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing_Revolution

The remaining Russian population is the only problem I've learned. Among some lovely architectural sites still exist some Soviet Union communist style buildings. But more troubling are the Russians that do not want to be Estonians nor learn the language nor assimilate. Some believe the problem is like the Ukraine and the Putin influence may prove troublesome. The Estonian woman president just spoke of the problem in the last few days.

Russia is a threat': Estonia frets about its neighbor - https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/russia-is-a-threat-estonia-frets-about-its-neighbor/2017/03/24/011ad320-0f2b-11e7-9b0d-d27c98455440_story.html?utm_term=.0303831a0027&wpisrc=nl_headlines&wpm=1

I really only had a partial day and two full days here and I could've used a bit more. I did a combination walking and bus tour my first day, the little tourist train which is like a hop on hop off, and a walking tour in the rain, sleet, and snow today. I shopped, I ate, I wandered the teeny little narrow cobble streets, and I slept more than usual because I gave in to jetlag.

My best pictures were sent the first day but they were rejected by some servers, probably because they were aerial shots off the web. My best day for pictures was windy and cold so I hesitated to remove my hands from my pockets. Today was wet and rainy and snowy. Thus, pictures are limited.

Pics: Yes the phone works.

My hotel building is historically significant but so is most all of old town. The Estonians laugh that their old town remains intact because they were too poor to tear it down. Now it is UNESCO protected.

This is one of the many gates that connected the wall that is the best unrestored wall in the world. But look at the McDonald's within view!

One of the palaces and some remain from the Russian Tsar days.

The Russian church does not have seating inside. They still hold services here and probably the Russians are the largest religious group. The Estonians are known to be atheist. This sits in upper old town exactly across from the salmon colored parliament building.

Maybe I'll add another page of photos but if this gets bigger some of your servers won't accept large files.

Tomorrow I take a ferry to Helsinki.



Day 3 - Friday

Dinner at the hotel was a boozy event and quite different from my typical peanut butter and jelly sandwich style. The restaurant called Tchaikovsky is quite well-known, would earn one or two Michelin stars if Michelin came to the Baltic countries, and I knew Tom would enjoy the pictures and description too. I was sure he would have enjoyed the experience but not the effort to get here.

I'd only meant to have one course but the small tasting menu grabbed my attention. It also added to my size.

The setting was beautiful and I even hated to remove the napkins that look like swans from the water glasses. One of the butters was from an unusual berry found only in the Baltic countries called the sea buckthorn. It has an unusually high level of vitamins and they also make oil's from both the seed and the fruit. <https://www.google.ee/search?q=sea%20buckthorn>

A leak and potato with moulles for a starter.

Bluefin tuna tartare with a layer of pearly trout roe held together around the edge with little baby cucumber slices. On top was a lemon gele with an avocado type dollops around the edge.

An intermezzio was more special than how the French serve a light sorbet. It had layers of little crystals and an airy fruit and was simply meant to cleanse the palate for the next course which I thought was the star of the show. Little round raviolis filled with a rabbit mixture with a garlic truffle cream sauce and real truffles shaved over the top.

The main course was pretty unique but I had already been so wowed that it didn't seem a main course. A small glazed quail filet was served rare and simply fell apart. Within its cream sauce were small smoked quail hearts, some Jerusalem artichokes, and still another type of black truffles cream sauce. You know that when there are truffles, the smell permeates the room.

I couldn't resist a special Savignon Blanc for my first two courses, followed by an Italian red, and those only because there are limited wines made in Estonia. They do make a dessert wine similar to a Sauterne. The wine was better than the desert but I rarely do desserts. This raspberry sorbet, pomegranate, little bits of grapefruit and some kind of crunchy things had all sorts of flavors with a warm sauce poured over the top.

Maybe so I wouldn't mind the bill, they brought this box of chocolate bonbons. Little did they realize that I thought the bill was a bargain. All of this cost me a little more than three hours and a few bucks. And not only left me with maybe an extra pound but lots of nice memories.



Day 4 - More in Tallinn

University students offer free daily walking tours. They rely on gratuity and since about 45 people showed up despite the rain, sleet, and snow, I would suspect that this sharp cookie named Heli did pretty well.

One of the original towers - all with humorous names. This one was the tower called "looking into the kitchens" because that's just what the guards did: spied on the lower level houses. The next door tower was the "tower of the virgins" because it had once been the jail for prostitutes.

Do you see how sweet it was of these seabirds to pose at the panoramic overview? The town has retained its look from at least 400 years ago and much even longer. They never had the money to tear the buildings down. The tower you see, with a cross on it, had been struck by lightning not once but 11 times until they finally made it shorter.

There is an upper old town and lower old town. This is the backside to the government and Parliament buildings and you can see the stairs leading up which was about the most exercise I got all day. The two towns and the people were separated by a wall that all our guides made fun about particular towards the Americans. They said the wall never worked. Yet it remains.

Saint Catherine Street was just out my hotel and it was full of Stone buildings and little craft shops. The cobblestones are most common throughout town and were said to have come from shipping vessels that would dock at the port and having used rocks as ballast, they would toss them out before filling up with goods. Those rocks used as ballast became the streets.

This is part of the town square and an old medieval restaurant with costumes and shows. The cruise ships send busloads of people.

The red palace remains from the early Russian days and is set within acres of lovely parks and wooded areas. The lakes become ice rinks.

The famous theater on the edge of the water where 300,000 people at a time come to sing. The crowds are said to be so big that they come on foot like in a parade. The much bigger than life statuary is of the founder.

There is a view of the old town (which sits on a hill) from across the water. In the same area is a victory statue. The Estonian's victories have been as short as one day and once about two weeks and most recently they have been independent since 1991.

Most of their churches are used for concerts or museums. They pride themselves with having no particular religious affiliation nor practicing. Those that do are generally Lutheran and about 13 percent of the population (pictured is a white modern building as a church that doesn't fit in at all) or the remaining Russians who frequent their ultra-orthodox churches.

The salmon colored building is the Parliament; it is set high on a cliff overlooking old town and the water. Across the street is the Russian orthodox beautiful church. It is said this series of Parliament buildings became beautiful when Catherine the great decided the series of buildings were ugly and needed a facade across them all. It is backed by the tallest tower that bears the country's flag.

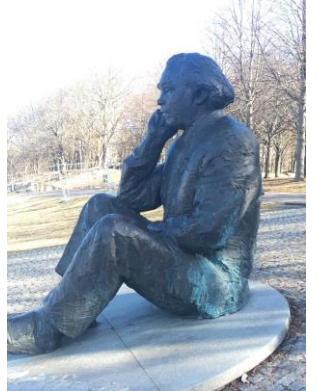
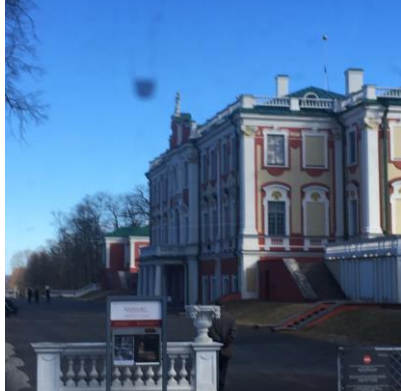
Inside the Dome Church is the largest collection of coat of arms known. They are all huge, detailed and unique. Along the edge and underneath you walk on tombs of famous people and sometimes they contain many people: if the families didn't pay the upkeep bills, another family would just be added to the tomb.

It was very unusual and something I've never seen before - shops typically use these stuffed and amusing mannequins as signs to their shops. They are everywhere and usually a mitten'd hand would point you to the door or hold a sign.

Then the little red house was on the shortest street in Tallinn and contained handmade Estonian items. They had one little item that I couldn't resist. At the entry to the block was the oldest known continuous running pharmacy in the world. I have been to one of those in Croatia and also one in Florence. Allegedly they did not run continuously. I didn't purchase any of their snake oil's but they have powders to cure a broken heart and preparations for about anything. Only they nor anywhere in the old town area had an ATM machine.

The last picture was an attempt to do a panorama picture of part of the town square. Their Townhall is said to be the most original and oldest in the northern countries.

Now I really am on my way to the ferry for a two hour crossing to Helsinki.





Day 5 - Sunday - Tallinn to Helsinki.

My ferry to Helsinki was about a 10 minute taxi ride from my hotel which would have been walkable were it not for the suitcase and all the cobblestones.

A ferry terminal bears some relationship to an air terminal. There are ticket counters, a lot of people, a lot of suitcases, noise, crying babies, little shops, and lines.

Yet equally there are a lot of differences. No security nor passport check, less wait time, hugely more people for a vessel that is 10 stories high and must hold a zillion people (2800 foot passengers), shopping and Wi-Fi onboard, restaurants and bar, lounges, gambling on two floors, locker storage, and \$50 instead of hundreds. Automatic self-check-in. One can't tell when it "takes off" nor that it's moving. https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/MS_Megastar

The passengers: I never saw a fat nor an old person. Both may have had a challenge walking up the 2 to 3 blocks worth of ramp. I believe it took 40 minutes to load everyone. Then many took to shopping and I suspect it's duty free for all the packages I saw. There were literally cases of booze going off the ship.

Me? I asked and I followed and I wondered. The change of boarding gate mystified me at first but it became obvious when everyone changed direction. After boarding I got into an elevator and went where they were going, exiting near lockers and a series of booth tables surrounded by airline type seating and complete with electrical and USB ports.

Arrival at the hotel? I have always been hesitant of Radisson hotels and I continue to be. Here is what I wrote to Beverly: If you were feeling the tiniest of remorse about not coming, I can probably alleviate that. I'm sitting in the hotel lobby waiting for a junior suite to open up so that I can even look at it and consider if I want to pay an extra €50 a day. I had already paid up for a double room for single use knowing that they were all super small. I've looked at three of those rooms and the bathroom was minuscule and the bedroom was not meeting my expectations so I'm willing to pay up IF the junior suite is anything better. They offered me plus €30 a day more for a business room but it gives me nothing more than the lounge and I won't even be here for most of that. I'm hoping to get into one room or the other by 6 PM having arrived here at 4 PM. UGH.

Well the junior suite was not worth five euros a day let alone €50 a day. So I reverted and I'll do fine but I have sure been spoiled.

I confirmed the web listings that it's a 5-star. . . From [booking.com](https://www.booking.com): One of our top picks in Helsinki. This historic hotel from 1917 is next to Kaisaniemi Park, 500 feet from Helsinki Central Station. It offers free fitness center access, an award-winning restaurant and modern air-conditioned rooms with free Wi-Fi. Each room at Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel Helsinki is decorated in style with Finnish design items. Rooms come with a flat-screen TV, tea/coffee maker and Magic Dream beds with a pillow menu. Some rooms offer city views. Restaurant Kitzens is recommended by Guide Michelin and offers a modern menu with specialties from 5 continents. Bar 7 Blings serves drinks, while snacks and light dishes are offered at the 24-hour HUB bar. Room service is also available all day long. The Grand Casino Helsinki and the Finnish National Theater are both within a 5 minute walk of the eco-friendly Radisson Blu Plaza Helsinki. The Aleksanterinkatu shopping street is a quarter mile away. Eteläinen Suurpiiri is a great choice for travelers interested in design, food and museums. This is our guests' favorite part of Helsinki, according to independent reviews. This property is also rated for the best value in Helsinki! Guests are getting more for their money when compared to other properties in this city. End.

So I took a walk. A long hard walk getting lost while searching the location of my tour in the morning, a grocery store, and then the Opera House. That's a silly story best told another time when I'm not pissed off about my extra six miles.

A few pictures then a good night.

Honestly the Shanghai Cowboy is a restaurant near to an exclusive area. Not at the train station - also pictured.

That big white monstrosity is their opera house; more on that another time.

Maybe Finnish architecture will grow on me.

The End for now.



Day 6 - Monday in Helsinki

I began my first full day with one of those hated but helpful "Flyover" type tours to figure out the lay of the land as well as where to return. So -- there are half million people in Helsinki out of Five million in all of Finland. How have they managed to stay Independent since early 1900s vs Estonia's continual takeovers? I wonder.

There are two official languages: Finnish and Swedish though few use Swedish full time. Signs are in both languages and they bear no similarity. I can tell you that anyone I ran into spoke perfect English. 60 percent own their own home, even more are Lutheran and there is a sprinkling of Russian Orthodox.

Water is a big part of their life with 5 Harbors, multiple Islands, and enough saunas that everybody could sauna at the same time. Even private homes have sauna, apartments have shared saunas, and it is thought that at a minimum a Finn would sauna at least once a week. Do they live longer? I wonder.

They are very proud of hosting the 1952 Olympics but probably like Lake Placid, they could not accommodate the Olympics now days. (I remember in Lake Placid their explaining how the entire complex would now insufficient to hold even for the press corps let alone the athletes). I saw the 1930-built Olympic building but then came the war and it never happened until 1952. A statue of the Flying Finn is revered: Paavo Nurmi was a Finnish middle- and long-distance runner who dominated distance running in the early 20th century.

Nearby were a number of medical facilities and we learned they are in the top world rankings for their care and their teaching. Apparently students come from all over the world for their medical school. Medical care, School through University, are all free. Oddly school begins at age 7 unless one goes to preschool and that's at age 6. I wonder why we need to start school at age 2 or 3? Maybe because they allow for a parental leave for up to four years.

Observation so far: Everything is so clean and yet borders on being sterile. I wonder if anyone who loves Paris also loves Helsinki.

I saw some of the same sites on my last night "lost" walking tour at 6 miles but at least I got a better idea of what I was looking at. From the presidential palaces with guards to the ultra-orthodox church, the wedding cake looking Cathedral, Finlandia hall, Parliament House, the opera still again, out toward the islands and embassy row, past a number of harbors with huge crew ships or ferry boats, down there ritzy shopping street, passed my own neighborhood and the national finish theater and the main railway station, plus many museums. So if I can't find another guided tour I have plenty of places to return to.

Rock Church this it was a real oddity - Excavated directly into solid rock, the Temppeliaukio church is situated in the heart of Helsinki. Because of its special architecture, the church, completed in 1969, is one of the main attractions in Helsinki. The church hall is covered with a dome, lined with copper and supported on the rock walls by reinforced concrete beams. The interior walls are of rugged rock and rubble wall. Before noon, the light spreads from the row of windows surrounding the roof periphery to the altar wall, where an ice-age crevice serves as the altarpiece. Due to its excellent acoustics the church is a popular venue for concerts.

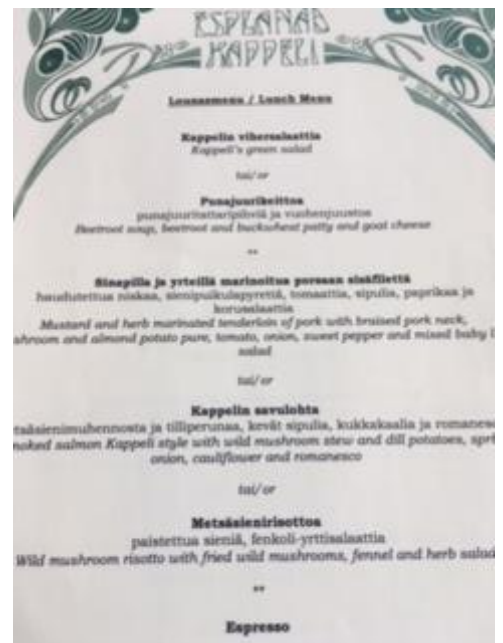
<http://www.visithelsinki.fi/en/see-and-experience/sights-and-attractions/temppeliaukio-church-rock-church>

Following the tour, I went back to the park where there was this beautiful old historical Kappeli Cafe. <https://www.raflaamo.fi/en/helsinki/kappeli> It was in the middle of Esplanade Park where I had a window seat and could both enjoy the art and history but also the full menu, wine and espresso. I have a little book, yet to read, about their artwork and statuary. Since I get more attention out of my food pictures than anything else, I'll send a few. Smile.

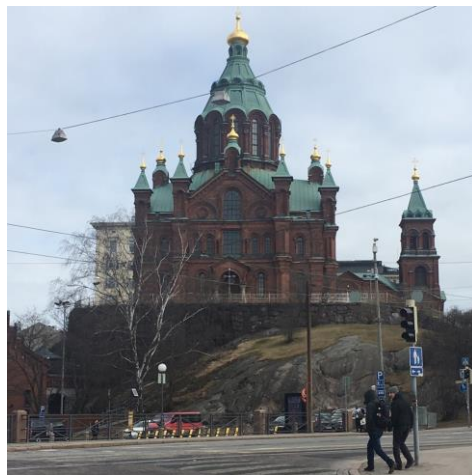
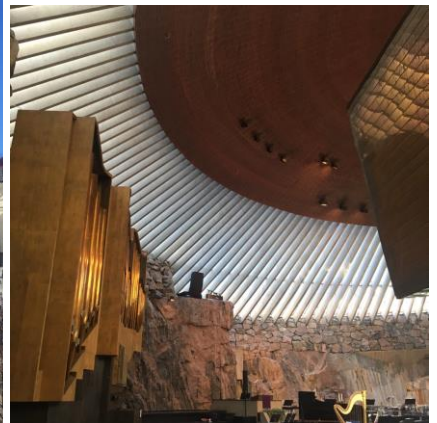
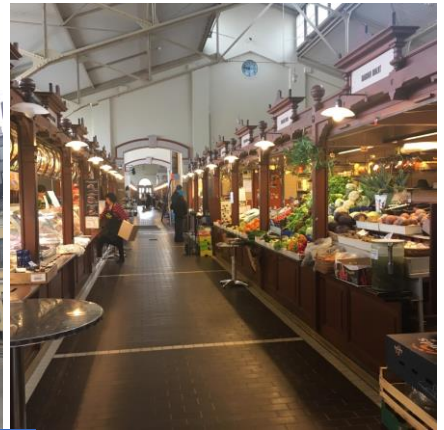
Next foody stop up was the indoor food market which was a beautiful old red brick building water-side and inside the stalls were made of a deep dark rich wood. It was full of people shopping and eating and surely I will return there. Next up I need to find a student led walking tour and a food tour in order to better see the real Helsinki.

My day continued onto the flower market as I felt my austere room needed some warmth. If you noticed yesterday my disappointment in my room, I will now say that I can find some upsides: The bedding and down pillows are top quality and might even be as good as Frette linens. The odd wood ceiling and sides are a bit of Danish type artwork. The built in flat screen TV is real quality and neatly hidden. The room is very quiet despite being only a block from the train station. The concierge was a sweetheart and I gave him enough money to hope he is back this evening to help me purchase my train ticket. The breakfast was all one could hope for: multiple tables of choices and even a small shot of vitamin water delivered to the table.

Some tourist pictures from today are added with the hope they fit into your server's memory bank. I'll give a try.



Next up, this evening I have a Shakespeare play in the Finnish national theater.



Day 7 - Tuesday is start of the Sitting Marathon

Last night I went to the lovely old National Finnish Theatre to see Shakespeare's Macbeth which story could be very dark but this one was not as it was modernized to the extreme. Even somewhat risqué and complete with a modern Lady Macbeth in a revealing slinky negligee while using a smartphone. And doing other unmentionables. From the website:

William Shakespeare's Macbeth, a futuristic classic. For the centenary of Finnish independence in 2017, the FNT opens its season on with a true classic, William Shakespeare's powerful Macbeth. In a fresh new interpretation by the directors, the Macbeth tragedy demonstrates how one man's actions can release irrepressible forces that spin out of control. Caught in this vicious circle is a self-appointed tyrant. Nature's crowning glory is a false king in borrowed robes. He is convinced he can govern the natural order, but nature is bent on revenge.

The Performance was in Finnish with English subtitles promised which never came to pass. We were to download an app on our smartphone but no one could make it work. Some of the kids tried to switch my phone to Finnish to see if it would pick up the app but to no avail. They offered me a rebate which I just couldn't take because I enjoyed the stage show so much, no matter.

Not back to my room until almost 10:30 PM and I didn't get myself calmed down with lights out until 1 AM.

The morning Train Challenge seems to be conquered: I have a 6-day rail pass and overall it was easy. It was the obsessing about it that was difficult. I found that one does not stand in line for tickets but rather get a numbered ticket for your next turn. Just like in a deli. It is all automated to tell who is next and at what window. One train stop and then 1 km walk and entry was easy as no security and no bag check.

The arena is absolutely infested with Asians. It is only practice day yet it was hard to get through the masses. The stands are fuller than some competition in Boston. I might be even happier yet to have paid for the VIP access the next four days. A picture of the stands with multiple signs will prove the Asian influence.

I arrived in time for the end of men's short program (I wasn't about to arrive at 6:15 AM for the start of it) but in time for women's. Followed by pairs then ice dance until 10:55pm!

My seat is excellent. Row 7, Section 117, and an aisle seat. Or it would have been had it not been taken by a couple who got it first and reminded me it should be pretty open seating for practice. He was BIG. I didn't argue. I would have preferred to be closer to kiss and cry anyway which on the far corner to my seat. And - this would never happen in our country, but there are no banisters on the stairways.

Ashley Wagner was her usual glorious cocky self. Her performance is an old one that is perfect for her. She better fix her costume though because she keeps pulling at its front.

Mariah Bell looked hot and the music was perfect for her but she kept falling.

It is the Russians who are the stars. Yet you may as well not come to practice to see them as they do very little and we wonder where they practice. I did find out that there is an underground ice rink for practice. That must be where Evgeniya Medvedev (Russia) practices though she performed at practice more than usual and is still one of my favorites.

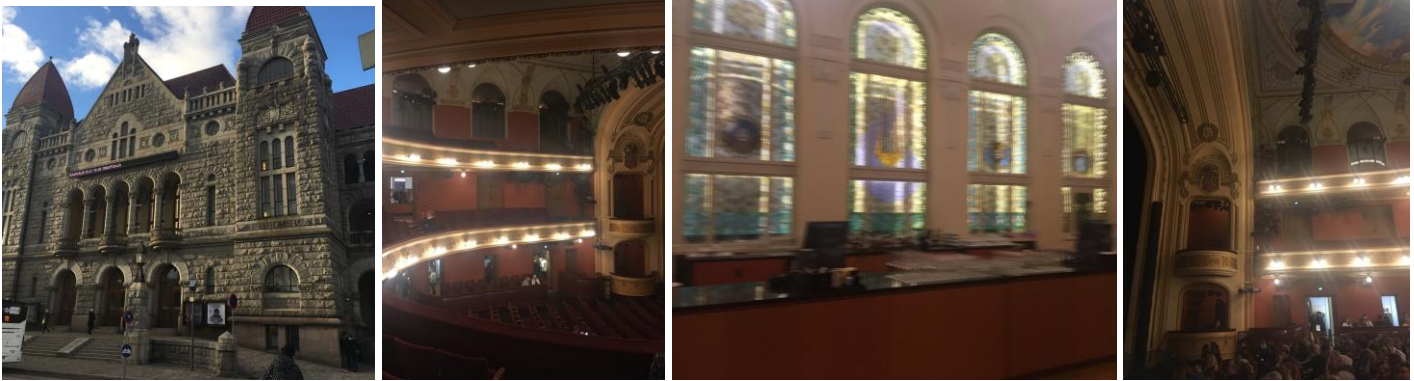


As a generality, the little Asians make it an athletic event whereas the Russians are both artistically graceful and mix it with their athleticism. I believe their government subsidizes their training from an early age.

In pairs, USAs Knierm couple are hot. But not one pairs did all of their program. Darn but nothing is like the Russians; especially Ksenia Stolbova and Fedor Klimov. Wow! They could make the trip worthwhile for me - yet I realize they are not on most lists as potential medalists.

Stadium food is a surprise in that there appears to be healthy and reasonably priced food. Pizza Hut is represented yet without English. Only their local HES hamburger chain has a line and that is primarily with the school children. Food doesn't go into the seating area though I don't see a prohibition sign. It just doesn't.

The program doesn't contain the lineup information we are used to but it was only €10. It seems they save paper too as the practice lineup is only wall posted and I was advised to take a picture of it. Announcing is sort-of in English done by a Chinese with very limited ability.



Day 8 - Wednesday and first day of competition.

Up early though I use that term loosely as I'm not sure I ever settled down for the night. Huge and healthy breakfast and did I say that they serve this little shot glass of a vitamin drink? How can one resist? I faithfully believed them when they said it was just berries; it was very bitter berries.

The train is super-efficient, modern, clean, and easy, once you get the hang of it and are willing to ask strangers to translate. There's no English; Finnish is unlike any other languages (excepting Estonian and a little like Hungarian) and there's just no clue. So I ask and everybody readily helps.

My VIP Experience didn't feel so VIP when no one at the VIP entrance knew to let anyone but press folks in. Once I found the area, services were limited but at least coffee, a bar and snacks had no line and even better was the available rest rooms. A buffet dinner with wine available was worth a lot and even more so the Internet connection since the arenas was down.

Ladies Short Program - Mariah Bell had perfect choreography for her. Cute little thing and very talented. Sorry for her couple glitches but glad she left all her falls on the practice ice.

Kaetlyn Osmond of Canada a delight and even more so by using Edith Piaf music. Per Ice Network: Kaetlyn short program will be remembered as one of the more remarkable moments of the season. The talented Canadian skated a fantastic routine to place herself second entering the free skate. In recent time, Osmond has become known as one of the very few skaters who manage to integrate powerful technique, balletic posture, and storytelling into each one of her programs.

Karen Chen of USA beautiful white flowing costume and equally beautiful presentation. Music with sounds of birds and she looked like a little sparrow but in white.

Russian gal still favorite. After Ashley Wagner USA of course. From Ice Network: Evgenia Medvedeva's enactment of her short program Wednesday was quiet and subtle and, above all, perfect. The reigning world champion hasn't lost a competition since 2015. She didn't let any of her competitors contest her status as the No. 1 one skater in the world, as she won the short program here.

Pairs Short Program: Harven Denny and partner for USA pairs were a disaster. As my seatmates, a skater and a coach, said "It was hard to find something they did right". They might have screwed up the USA rights to a Pairs spot. They didn't even qualify for the next program.

A French Pairs partner almost missed the event by sleeping through his flight. Vanessa is a big beauty and she might be the only dark skinned competitor here.

Costumes. I have pictured some of them before which can be beautiful or as tacky as can be. The Italians and the Chinese come to mind as coming up with lots of tacky.

Tours. Check out UniWorld or Silver Blades. Maybe a way to handle Milan World's next year? I am prone to go it alone though I know that is not the most efficient method. It is less expensive and I rather enjoy the challenge.

Reminder - Check out Jamie Sale and David Pelletier - Canadian pairs with a classic program.

I am frankly tired and saturated with skating. I knew from the last event that I shouldn't be a spectator for too many practice sessions. I forgot.

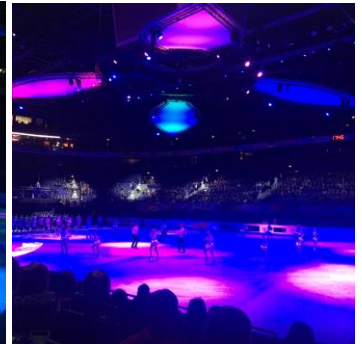
The Japanese and Canadians are here in great numbers and very enthusiastic

Opening program truly was spectacular to include an ice skater trapeze artist; after the program was over we were mesmerized by her difficulty in getting up and out through the rafters despite many tries.

The spectacular included synchronize skaters and correctly called "Light". Beverly did this screenshot and amazingly found me. Only seven rows up and quite hidden.

Helsinki 2017 created an app that gives us a lot of information including what's up next, all of their results, their program, and bios. It would help if they kept their Wi-Fi working.

Next step? I might sleep through the first one or two groups of practice on Thursday morning.



Day 9 - Thursday and into Friday - still sitting a lot

More big breakfast but I am fatigued and taxed enough that this is not a time to watch weight. Excuses excuses. Fortunately it looks like just with the train commute that I'm getting about 4 miles a day anyway; but clearly it's not enough. I usually go home and go on what I call a vegetable diet. This time I may have to go home and go on a starvation diet.

Thursday began with Pairs practice, more lines (but this time inexcusable for the VIP area), followed by 12:30pm men's competition, then pairs skate.

Kevin Reynolds Canada - A fun Scottish type performance. One might expect that hair to weigh him down. It's real and wild. See pic.

Audiences fully participated in program of Alexander Majeov SWE as much for the Finnish folk music. He did his first quad so surely will qualify.

Watch Dennis Vasiljevs of Latvia! Frantic. This is what the new scoring gives us but this was uniquely good and the audience loved it.

Misha Ge UZB got a standing ovation but not one of us could figure out why. A snore my seatmates said and the judges weren't much different giving him a 4th place at the time. But then came the series of skaters ratcheting up the quad count and then we did understand.

Jason Brown drew the very last skate slot so I had to hang around until after 10pm. He hoped he could do well without a quad which he hasn't mastered and likely won't. He came in 8th. From Ice Network earlier: *Brown holds optimism despite quad-less programs. Though he hasn't landed a clean quad in competition, 2015 U.S. champion Jason Brown has chosen to focus on other abilities as he takes aim at the podium in Helsinki. The practice rink is carved out of the granite below the main arena. As Jason skated in that stonewalled ice cave, the setting was an appropriate metaphor for the state of his career since he made his only appearance at worlds in 2015. With injuries having slowed his progress the past two seasons, Brown, a 2014 Olympian, finds himself caught between a rock and a hard place. The rock? Quadruple jumps. The hard place? Being the only one among the world's once-and-current top men skating here to never land a clean quad in competition. That was a substantial obstacle for Brown in 2015, when he managed to place fourth in the world with two quad-less programs that left him a whopping 19 points from the podium. Now it looks like an insurmountable wall between him and the awards at a global championship. "It's amazing the level compared to two years ago, how much people are pushing it."*

Javier Fernández of Spain and Nathan Chen, are the sport's new quad kings. While I like them I like Jason better so I am sad about this judging problem.

Pairs: Russian Ksenia Stolbova is so cool. Partner Fedor Klimov. They were out/off awhile? Started with the less experienced pairs which suggests they have had an absence.

Kneirm's was sweet but likely won't cut it. They were the only USA representation left. Here is a video with a little bit of their story. She almost died and that was right after this pair got married.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhVRhx59rzs&sns=em> Alexa and Chris K- he cries! So sweet.

Savvhenko and Massot of Germany were near perfect union and synchronization. More importantly, lovely. Judging seems to favor the athletes but they did well despite the Chinese couple (Who even had a fall) coming in first. If you want to see a lovely show, look in at the German couple. If you want to see a gymnastic show look in on the winner.

Ice dancing short program started Friday morning. It snowed. It was icy. On the way to the train was easy enough but after exiting the train it was slip-sliding up the hill and then down the hill. They do not clean the streets nor put down any salt. Lord knows what 11 PM is going to be like. Snow is predicted for tomorrow also.

Did you know the skate shoes/boots and the blades are different than for pairs? For ice dance, the ankle of the shoe is lower since no jumping is needed and the blade is shorter because of the danger of close partner skates.

Bags of Stuffed Animals and fabric flowers. It is not unusual to see an Asian gal coming in with a big full shopping bag to toss on the rink for their favorites. Remember I said the arena was infested with Asians? Japan Airlines added 20 flights and over 6,000 Japanese are here. That's no typo.

Food rules or just consideration of others? Within the rink the spectators do not eat and rarely drink while in their seats. In this arena there is a lot of seating areas near to the restaurants and kiosks.

Where are the old folks who wear USA flag jackets and always sit in front row opposite kiss n cry? In Kansas City they had decreased in number. I hope they aren't gone yet I guess we'll all be gone eventually.

Beverly, note that the tour group benefit of transport from hotel to Arena is not worth anything to us. They don't come for practice.

Judging. I suppose criticism is common but I've never heard as much as here. It is thought that judging gives credit to tenure and the country's audience numbers. This came from coaches and old timers with no axe to grind.

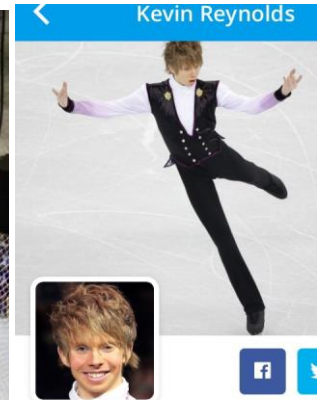
If judging continues to reward quads and so much athleticism, the beauty some of us enjoy will soon be gone. So will hips. I'm told that some skaters are needing hip replacement in early 30s.

Pics:

The underground ice rink for practice that is dug out of the rock.

I gave myself flowers for the room and then decided that I spent more time in the bathroom than anywhere else. While I was awake that is.

Thanks to Beverly, here's a fun picture of Jason Brown and Nathan Chan, both who are famous now. End for now.



Day 11 - Saturday.

Last night gave me a huge buffet dinner of high style. It should have been good for the cost and it was. A picture of one of the four day worth of menus is attached. It has turned out to be well worth the price for having no lines for the toilet or the bar and also having useable Wi-Fi. They also included a big screen TV for what one might be missing upstairs, and a selection of guest speakers.

Ladies long program started at 6pm and went on until after 10pm. (It was a sold out). These are long days for me with lights usually out after 1am and up at 7 or 8 am. If my sister Beverly were here she'd have me up far earlier so as not to miss an early practice. (Instead she's getting to watch on TV at her leisure. Something is wrong with this picture).

Snow. This was a surprise and we had two day worth of snow but only one day did we have to traipse through slush and ice. Did I already share my observation that they must not have a litigious society because the sidewalks were not cleared of ice? I tip-toed very cautiously.

Keypad. Laitteen hyödy Lamberg mäki yhteys. Translates to: I've been here too long since my keypad turned to Finnish. Worst is that dictation did it too (as you see). I finally found the switch back to English.

Our skaters didn't do very well for the USA. Some, like Jason Brown, did beautiful performances but they just cannot compete with the athleticism of the Asians and their multiple quads that bring about big point earnings.

I have come to understand that the judging and the granting of points for all these quads is going to be here to stay. It is bringing in a lot of headlines and more audience and more excitement that the hobby needs. There will likely be a cycle that when it turns into nothing but a lot of gymnastics.

Some USA Skate results:



An article about one of my favorites. You could Google to see her performance: Evgenia Medvedeva set multiple records en route to claiming another gold medal. The Russian dynamo was once again brilliant, and by recording 154.40 points for her 'Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close' free skate -- the highest score ever recorded in ladies skating -- as well as a new event record of 233.41 points, the 17-year-old was able to celebrate her second straight world championship.

Sunday is the exhibition of champions or otherwise known as "the spectacular." Then I will resume a more normal tourist schedule with a food tour on Monday. I need to walk but I don't need to eat.

Pics:

An idea of some of the costumes that I found tacky.

This Canadian couple were skating to Saturday night fever and probably purposefully tacky. The surprise was the next night when the guy showed up without his wig and big mustache.

The three lady winners were all lovely. It was practically a historical first to have two Canadians on the podium. The next day we would have two Japanese on the podium. The gal in the middle is the Russian favorite. I've included some pictures of her in other settings.

Skating spectators reach from one extreme to the other. Some are fat and some are fit. Some are in crazy costumes and some are beauties like our Russian gold-medalist. A good many of them could be grandparents to the skaters.

The Japanese bring bags full of stuffed animals and fabric flowers to throw out for their favorites. Then the little sweeper-skater-kids come out and collect them. This was the largest haul I have seen since Jason Brown skated in his hometown of Chicago. Some skaters donate their stuffed animals to children's hospitals.

For the second time we had two medalist from the same country and in this case it was Japan with two and one China.

Because of an arcane set of rules based on placements at the 2017 world figure skating championships, the 10th place finish by Americans Alexa Scimeca Knierim and her husband and skating partner Chris Knierim was not good enough to qualify two U.S. pairs teams for Pyeongchang.

So, for only the second time in Winter Olympic history, the United States will be allowed to send just one pairs team to the Games. The other time that happened? The very first Winter Olympic Games in Chamonix, France, in 1924.

For the record, Jill Watson and Peter Oppegard won the bronze medal at the 1988 Calgary Olympics, and Kyoko Ina and John Zimmerman won the bronze at the 2002 world championships in Nagano.





Day 12 - Sunday

Could it really be over with? While it felt like Forever Fatigue, the skating and sitting marathon has gone quickly. Thank you sister Beverly for a couple screenshots of the audience. I was blessed to be sitting with a group of knowledgeable skaters and coaches supplemented with Beverly's email tips.

Sunday called for the big extravaganza where all medalists get to show off their talent without worry of judging. It's called The Spectacular. It really is.

Beverly, I do believe that their MC is sillier than the guy in the USA. Add to that a heavy accent and heavy dark rimmed glasses and maybe he was supposed to be a comedian.

Japanese influence. There are ads and billboards totally in Japanese advertising Real estate, beauty products, an app, and travel services.

Rink lighting and coloring. It sometimes looks like a big deep swimming pool. The upper four huge "petals" moved and changed colors.

Booths. I went up to the top level where most of the vendor booths are placed and it was so infested with Asians that one could not navigate and I had to leave. I never saw the freebies that we typically have in the USA.

Small medal ceremony. This was an understatement. I went to it and saw a big ribbon go around their neck with a metal about the size of a quarter. I don't know what this is about but it was nice to see skaters in their civilian clothes and hair. (They did get watches as gifts too.)

Back to being a tourist:

My hotel. I've grown more accustomed to it despite being even more firm that I will avoid Radisson's from now on. They are not up to snuff management wise. This is certainly not my only time thinking they are not consistent.

Look at the picture of the hotel hallway. It is very dark except for spotlights and the room number on the floor changes color as to whether you choose "do not disturb" or "housekeeping". I can tell you that the call for housekeeping isn't always successful and one day they never made it.

Yet it is well rated and the breakfast room and lounge bar are elegantly beautiful. Pictures added but darned if I can figure out why they shuffle placement.

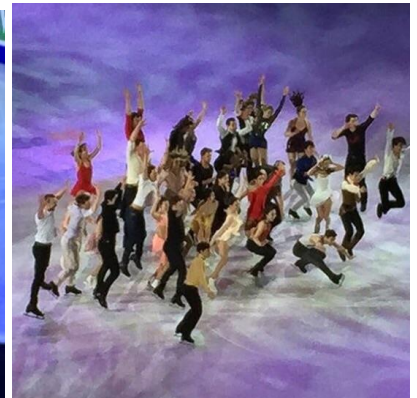
The picture in the stands is Nancy and Richard. Nancy, who we met in Kansas City in January, will be traveling to San Jose in January with Beverly. Richard is a skater married to a coach. They were all generous with their time to help me understand more about the skating.

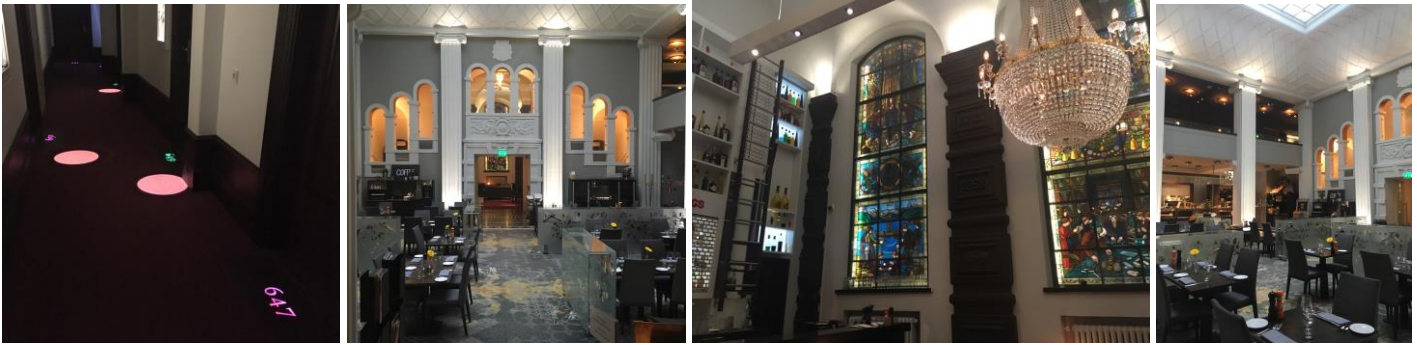
The skaters dressed in Fat Garb didn't go over very well. I think it was not politically correct plus too many in the audience are fat. I heard a few of my neighbor Americans and Canadians saying "they forgot who their audience is".

The gold medalist male skater tried to do quad. Then he tried again, and again, and we were all nervous that it might be like Nathan Chen who broke his hip at Boston's spectacular. He finally gave up and the picture of him hunkered down with his hands over his eyes laughingly in shame is a treasure.

It was an absolute lovely surprise that they let Jason Brown skate. Normally only the medalists skate. He might have been 7th. He again got a standing ovation. We don't know why Ashley Wagner was not there as she too is a big favorite.

On TV? I believe the spectacular will be offered on NBC network sports this weekend. Bev?
Next up? A food tour on Monday. Ha ha ha. Like I need more food.





Day 13 & 14 - Monday and Tuesday.

I left skating to become a tourist. But to be frank and to admit - I'm sort of done with it all and I'm ready for a New Jersey visit. (I will have about a week in New Jersey before leaving to the Netherlands for a hike).

I will add a picture of the lay of the land to show the amazing amount of water in Helsinki. I understand that Finland itself has something in the hundred thousand of lakes too. Are they worried about climate change? Apparently their land is rising which might compensate.

Monday was a food tour starting early and going until almost 3 PM. I probably didn't need any food let alone a day's worth of sampling.

Pictures:

Their largest department store is called Stockman's and in the basement is a huge gourmet deli and a place to be educated on food from Finland. They love bread and there are all types of bread's and some have over 40% vegetable. Most are thick, dark, and heavy. Maybe that is why the locals can eat so much bread and not be fat. I felt at home since I never met a bread I didn't like but I don't touch the white marshmallow type stuff.

Little dark tartlets have a very thin wheat crust and might be filled with potatoes or a cheese and egg mixture. They are commonly on the breakfast buffet and the gourmet market had a large selection.

They are into fresh herbs sold in a pot. This seal of a swan shows that it was produced in Finland and note that it is also a play on their flag.

A cold room made to look like a storage cellar contains many types of potatoes with indication of how to use them. Again, Finns are not fat yet they consume a lot of potatoes. Maybe it is that they don't put butter and sour cream on top?

Pickles are commonly found even on the breakfast buffet and sometimes consumed as a snack. There are many types. I remember at European marathons it they would give out big fat pickles during and at the end of a marathon.

Fish salads and more fish salads. We tasted a few. Then it was off to sample porridge with and different toppings. How about hot pepper flakes? I tested the dark apple butter and the butter with cinnamon and sugar, and some of the hot pepper flakes. The usual selection of flaxseed, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc. are available. My usual every morning was the bitter little berries said to have more vitamins in one little berry than an entire orange.

The red brick building is a fire house built before autos. They have trouble getting into the narrow garages that were built for horse and buggy.

Licorice wrapped in dark chocolate and coffee? A special gourmet surprise called Eggs. Then off to Alco. Alco is a state run series of liquor stores that are not open on Sunday. I found out the hard way. In Finland they produce gin that has won a lot of honors and also a series of dessert liquors using their little berries that are only found in Nordic countries.

On their famous shopping street that faces the Esplanade, where I had a special meal early in my stay, we went into some design centers. This is an example of their most famous designer. Both the glassware and the pictures are recognizable worldwide.

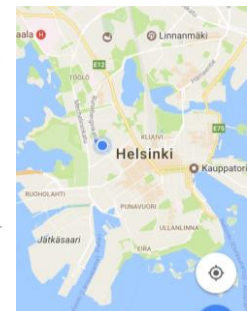
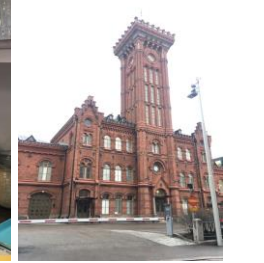
Having worked up a little bit more of an appetite, we entered an alleyway and found a brewery that was famous for their sausages, which were surrounded by good seed mustard and sauerkraut. A flight of beer accompanied and exposed me to a new light rose beer said to be more like a white wine. Heather, in the red dress, was my guide and it turned out I got a private tour which was very generous of her.

On my first day I visited their red brick indoor market that is harbor side. This visit revealed a lot more to include sampling of some local cheeses. We also saw reindeer pate and a number of other unique ones. They even eat bear. Bear pate and bear steaks. Here for €10 the bargain is a big soup bowl with a basket of all the dark bread you can eat.

A local and famous pastry shop is wrapped around the logo of a rooster. So their Easter displays are not little chicks but rather roosters of which Tom will enjoy. We not only ate pastries but were given a real egg filled full of fudge.

At a little local liquor shop we would taste reindeer jerky. The names of beers are quite amusing and I witnessed someone purchasing about a dozen beers just for the labels.

I will end with a quote from Anthony Bourdain. It came from a favorite writer who now lives in Paris. (To come later OR remind me).



Itinerary - Time difference: 7 hours later

Wed Mar 22

8:45pm Depart Newark EWR via UA#960

Thu Mar 23

9:15am Arrive Frankfurt FRA for plane change – 4 hour connection

1:20pm Depart Frankfurt FRA via Lufthansa LH#882

4:40pm Arrive Tallinn Estonia TLL

Car service by hotel

Hotel Hotel Telegraaf – 3 nights – 5 star
Vene 9, Tallinn 10123 EE Tele 372 60 00600

<https://www.telegraafhotel.com/hotel-tallinn/> e-mail: info@telegraafhotel.com

Coffee – no but kettle requested; Mini bar – yes; breakfast included

From their website: Hotel Telegraaf is a luxury hotel in Tallinn's Old Town. In the 19th century, the telegraph changed the world forever. Today our ability to appreciate an individual moment is rare. Rarer still are those who can create the moments. Spend your holiday in the leading 5 star luxury hotel in Tallinn's Old Town. 84 stunning rooms in 19th-century surroundings with Elemis SPA facilities, underground parking and free Wi-Fi.

From USA Today: 6 enchanting days in Estonia

<http://www.usatoday.com/longform/sponsor-story/toyota-camry/2016/10/31/6-enchanting-days-estonia/92715922/>

Fri Mar 24

10:30am www.traveltoestonia.com for 2 ½ hour tour of both bus and by foot

Join the best Tallinn tour available! With quality tour guide and many great sights to see. You'll see the baroque park of Kadriorg, Song Festival Grounds, 600-year old ruins of Pirita convent by bus and UNESCO World Heritage Site Tallinn Old Town by walking. The 2.5 hour city tour includes a bus tour (60 min) and a walking tour (90 min) with experienced tour guide.

During the walking tour, you'll see the historic city centre Toompea, Palace of Toompea, Aleksander Nevskij Cathedral, Dome Church and many other sights in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Tallinn Old Town. The tour stops at the Town Hall Square. Please note that tours ends on Town Hall Square in Old Town, no drop-offs at hotels.

Sat Mar 25

10:00am Old Town Walking Tour by students at www.traveller.ee and also Ghost Walks and Pub Crawls

12:00noon Tallinn City Tour by www.citysightseeing.ee for a Hop On/Hop Off

Sun Mar 26

Noon Depart hotel – via taxi? Or book car at 28 Euros

1:30pm Depart Tallinn via ferry terminal D – ticketed on Megastar by AS Tallink and prepaid

3:30pm Arrive West Harbour Terminal 2 (T2)

Radisson suggests using Tallink Silja or Eckero which comes into Western Harbor, then use Tram #9 for a 20 minute ride to hotel.

Hotel Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel – 10 nights
Mikonkatu 23, Eteläinen Suurpiiri, 00100 Helsinki, Finland
Tele: +358 20 1234 703 Website: <https://www.radissonblu.com/en/plazahotel-helsinki>
Coffee-yes; Refrig– yes Mini-Bar; Free WiFi- Yes; Breakfast included

From skating website: 5-star hotel - This property has agreed to be part of our Preferred Property Program, which groups together properties that stand out because of their excellent service and quality/price ratio with competitive prices. Participation in the program requires meeting a specific set of criteria and takes feedback from previous guests into account.

From booking.com: One of our top picks in Helsinki. This historic hotel from 1917 is next to Kaisaniemi Park, 500 feet from Helsinki Central Station. It offers free fitness center access, an award-winning restaurant and modern air-conditioned rooms with free Wi-Fi. Each room at Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel Helsinki is decorated in style with Finnish design items. Rooms come with a flat-screen TV, tea/coffee maker and Magic Dream beds with a pillow menu. Some rooms offer city views.

Restaurant Kitzens is recommended by Guide Michelin and offers a modern menu with specialties from 5 continents. Bar 7 Blings serves drinks, while snacks and light dishes are offered at the 24-hour HUB bar. Room service is also available all day long. The Grand Casino Helsinki and the Finnish National Theater are both within a 5 minute walk of the eco-friendly Radisson Blu Plaza Helsinki. The Aleksanterinkatu shopping street is a quarter mile away. Eteläinen Suurpiiri is a great choice for travelers interested in design, food and museums.

This is our guests' favorite part of Helsinki, according to independent reviews. This property is also rated for the best value in Helsinki! Guests are getting more for their money when compared to other properties in this city.

Mon Mar 27

Tours?

- 1.75 hour “Helsinki Panorama” bus tours at www.stromma.fi
- 1.5 hour loop Hop On/Hop Off with Stromma and also with City Sightseeing www.citytour.fi.
- Harbor Tours
- Sibelius Finland Experience in National Hall - Kansallissali is an entertaining cultural experience where images of Finland meet live music of Jean Sibelius on violin and grand piano; Performances 25.2.-13.5.2017 on Saturdays at 12:00 for 1 hour; Location: National Hall, Aleksanterinkatu 44, Helsinki Price: adults 37 € with Tickets by Strömma,
- Tram Tour #2 and #3 with free map from TI. One hour for a figure 8 loop.
- See Rick Steves for private guides at 204 Euros for 2 hours. Or Rick Steves Self-Guided walk
- From NY Times: 36 hours in Helsinki: <http://nyti.ms/29I6OI0>
- From Huff Post: Helsinki: A Very Smart City - http://www.huffingtonpost.com/magda-abufadil/helsinki-a-very-smart-city_b_10436858.html

Ice Skating Event at the Hartwall Arena - is one of Europe's most actively used entertainment venues with a non-stop calendar of concerts, operas, dance performances, conferences and sport events. Now, 18 years after the World Figure Skating Championships 1999 and 8 years since the European Figure Skating Championships 2009, the Arena will again welcome the ISU family and the spectators to enjoy the beauty of the figure skating under its superb facilities.

Address Hartwall Arena, Areenankuja 1, FI-00240 Helsinki, Finland Tele: +358 204 19 97
info@hartwallarena.fi

www.helsinki2017.com and info.worlds2017@gmail.com

Paid for All Event ticket #9 Ice Level 1: Ticket says Lower Tribune 117, Row 7, Seat 101

Purchase 7 day train pass?

Practices: 6:15am to 10:35am Ladies; 10:45am to 2:05 Mens; 2:15pm to 6:45pm Pairs; 6:55pm to 10:55pm Ice Dance

7:00pm Finnish National Theatre (1) – ticket in file

Art meets Sport at both the World Figure Skating Championships and the Finnish National Theatre William Shakespeare's Macbeth, a futuristic classic.

For the centenary of Finnish independence in 2017, the FNT opens its season on the Main Stage with a true classic, William Shakespeare's powerful Macbeth. In a fresh new interpretation by director Janne Reinikainen, Antti Luusuniemi and Katariina Kaitue take the lead roles. Shakespeare's tragedy demonstrates how one man's actions can release irrepressible forces that spin out of control. Caught in this vicious circle is a self-appointed tyrant. Nature's crowning glory is a false king in borrowed robes. He is convinced he can govern the natural order, but nature is bent on revenge. Performance in Finnish with English subtitles.

Tue Mar 28

Practices: 6:15am to 10:36am Mens; 10:45am to 2:05pm Ladies; 2:15pm to 6:45pm Pairs; 6:55pm to 10:55pm Ice Dance

10:00am Old Wooden Town of Porvoo - 4 hour tour ending at the rink – if still on

Excursion to the picturesque Old Town of Porvoo. Charming wooden houses, a beautiful medieval cathedral and the red warehouses on the riverbank. See the yards and narrow streets of Middle Ages in a historically unique wooden town milieu. Free time in the Old Town to visit the delightful little boutiques and artisan workshops.

Wed, Mar 29

10:15am City Tour via bus – skip due to program conflict

Practices: 6:45am to 9:55am Pairs

10:15 AM Short Program, Ladies

4:00PM Dinner in VIP Lounge to 6:00pm – ticket in file

Upgraded ticket for VIP-service – Wednesday and Thursday only: Experience-level, you'll get full access to the Restaurant Platinum services. No crowds, no queues during the breaks. Elegant and cozy VIP area to have good food and chat with your friends. Enjoy the world-class meal, which has been done by using the variety of the finest Finnish ingredients. You will meet figure skating experts and have chat about the competition with other guests. The package includes: Experience-pass, which gives you access to enter Restaurant Platinum at any time during the event; Own entrance, Platinum door; High-class buffet-meal*; Meet and greet with Figure skating experts; Big screens and on-line result service; Own named seat at Platinum; Competition give-away; Coat rack services; VIP-hostess' services

5:15 PM Opening on Ice

6:10 PM Short Program, Pairs

Thu, Mar 30

Practices: 6:00am to 9:20am Mens; 9:30am to 11:40am Pairs

- 12:30pm Art and Design tour – skip due to conflict?
- 12:30 PM Short Program, Men
- 4:00PM Dinner in VIP Lounge to 6:00PM – ticket in file
- 6:55 PM Free Skating, Pairs

Fri, Mar 31

Practices: 7:15am to 10:05am Ladies

- 9:00am Suononline tour – 2 hour tour ending at the rink – if still on

Suomenlinna Sea Fortress of Helsinki Archipelago - Guided tour in Suomenlinna Sea Fortress - the one of the largest sea fortresses in the world. Explore the eventful history of the UNESCO World heritage Sea Fortress as well as the lifestyle on the island today. Suomenlinna was founded in 1748, it is located on six islands outside Helsinki's city centre. Suomenlinna is listed as an UNESCO World Heritage site.

- 11:00 AM Short Dance, Ice Dance
- 4:00PM Dinner in VIP Lounge to 6:00PM – SOLD OUT!
- 6:00 PM Free Skating, Ladies

Sat, Apr 1

Practices: 7:45am to 9:55 am Ice Dance

- 8:00am Wilderness tour – 5 hours – skip due to conflict?
- 10:50 AM Free Skating, Men
- 4:35 PM Free Dance, Ice Dance
- 4:00PM Dinner in VIP Lounge to 6:00PM – SOLD OUT!

Sun, Apr 2

2:00 PM Exhibition

Mon and Tue, April 3 and 4

9:30am Food tour by Heather

https://www.getyourguide.com/s/?q=helsinki&lc=l13&ct=1&date_from=2017-04-03&date_to=2017-04-04&p=1

Wed Apr 5

- 4:00am Taxi to airport
- 6:35am Depart Helsinki HEL via Lufthansa # [redacted] and UA#9047
- 8:10am Arrive Frankfurt FRA for plane change – 4 hour connection

11:20am Depart Frankfurt FRA via UA#961
2:05pm Arrive Newark EWR

(1) Finnish National Theatre - **HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE FNT** - The Finnish National Theatre, founded in 1872, is the oldest Finnish-language professional theatre in the country. The birth of the Finnish National Theatre was closely linked to the political ideology of the late nineteenth century. Finland was part of the Russian Empire, and the country's intellectual elite was Swedish speaking. Finnish language and art, including theatre, became the cornerstones of a cultural movement which began in the 1860's, gradually developed political ambitions by the turn of the century, and eventually led to national independence in 1917.

For the first thirty years of its existence, the theatre functioned primarily as a touring company. The theatre did not acquire a permanent home until 1902, when a purpose-built theatre was erected in the heart of Helsinki, adjacent to the city's main railway station. The building design was by architect **Onni Törnqvist-Tarjanne**. This majestic neo-romantic edifice with its façade of Finnish granite and interiors of soapstone, marble and wood, is one of Finland's most impressive national monuments. The theatre still operates in these premises today, and over the years the building has expanded from its original size to encompass another three permanent stages. In addition to the Main Stage (Suuri näyttämö), the theatre comprises the Small Stage (Pieni näyttämö) built in 1954, the Willensauna Stage built in 1976, and the Omapohja studio built in 1987.

In 2010 the FNT's governing board appointed the current director **Mika Myllyaho**, who has expanded the theatre's activities. He has adopted a policy of associate writers to whom the theatre is committed on a long term basis. He has increased the number of Finnish play commissions and the theatre has also become a venue welcoming a variety of joint productions and guest performances.

A new production unit was established in 2010, under the name of Touring Stage. This unit, which has no fixed stage, aims to take small-scale touring performances to locations throughout the country which have little or no access to theatre, such as schools, day care centres, homes for the elderly, hospitals, welfare reception centres, prisons and so on. The Touring Stage's programme focuses on topical issues which are developed through community research and interaction, reaching out and giving voice to marginalized sectors of society.

Over recent years, the theatre has also expanded its outreach activities in the realm of theatre in education and community work. Theatre Educator **Pirjo Virtanen** has initiated and developed many projects and themed events to engage with different sectors of the FNT's audience base. The programme includes discussion groups, drama courses, literary study, backstage tours and more. The unit also provides educational background material related to the theatre's productions for the benefit of teachers.

In January 2011 the theatre's former restaurant reopened as the Club Scene, transformed into a late-evening club-like entertainment spot. The space has been given a new look, refurbished in a piano-bar stroke artist's living-room style, and it offers a varied programme of music, drama and poetry performances, discussion evenings and artist soirées, put together by producer **Hanna Reetta Majanen**.

Throughout its history the Finnish National Theatre has also maintained international links in various forms of partnership with foreign theatres and festivals. This continues today as the theatre co-operates with, among others, the Helsinki Festival to bring over cutting-edge examples of world drama. The theatre also participates in text-based cultural exchanges and workshops, and regularly

invites guest directors or other artists from abroad, to bring new perspectives to Finnish theatre. The theatre's cultural exchange also includes tours and collaboration abroad.

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Embassy – registered with www.Travel.State.Gov:

U.S. Embassy Tallinn, Estonia
Address: Kentmanni 20 Tallinn
Phone: 668 8100

Embassy of the United States of America
Address: Itäinen Puistotie 14, Östra Allén 14 00140 Helsinki
Phone: 09 616250

Tourist: Finland was chosen one of the top 3 places to visit 2017 by Lonely Planet!
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/best-in-travel>

More information: www.visithelsinki.fi www.myhelsinki.fi

(1/22/17) - U.S. Figure Skating has announced its selections for the 2017 ISU World Figure Skating Championships, 2017 ISU Four Continents Figure Skating Championships and 2017 ISU World Junior Figure Skating Championships. The teams were selected following the 2017 Prudential U.S. Figure Skating Championships in Kansas City, Missouri.

MEN

Jason Brown
Nathan Chen

Alternate 1 - Vincent Zhou
Alternate 2 - Grant Hochstein
Alternate 3 - Max Aaron

2017 World Junior Championships

Alex Krasnozhan
Andrew Torgashev
Vincent Zhou

Alternate 1 - Camden Pulkinen
Alternate 2 - Kevin Shum
Alternate 3 - Tomoki Hiwatashi

LADIES

Mariah Bell
Karen Chen
Ashley Wagner

Alternate 1 - Mirai Nagasu
Alternate 2 - Gracie Gold
Alternate 3 - Caroline Zhang

2017 World Junior Championships

Amber Glenn
Bradie Tennell

Alternate 1 - Starr Andrews
Alternate 2 - Ashley Lin
Alternate 3 - Megan Wessenberg

PAIRS

Haven Denney and Brandon Frazier
Alexa Scimeca Knierim and Chris Knierim

Alternate 1 - Ashley Cain and Timothy LeDuc
Alternate 2 - Marissa Castelli and Mervin Tran
Alternate 3 - Deanna Stellato and Nathan Bartholomay

2017 World Junior Championships

Chelsea Liu and Brian Johnson
Nica Digerness and Danny Neudecker

Alternate 1 - Alexandria Yao and Austin Hale
Alternate 2 - Gabriella Marvaldi and Daniel Villeneuve
Alternate 3 - Laiken Lockley and Keenan Prochnow

ICE DANCE

Madison Chock and Evan Bates

Madison Hubbell and Zachary Donohue
Maia Shibutani and Alex Shibutani

Alternate 1 - Kaitlin Hawayek and Jean-Luc Baker
Alternate 2 - Elliana Pogrebinsky and Alex Benoit
Alternate 3 - Julia Biechler and Damian Dodge

2017 World Junior Championships

Christina Carreira and Anthony Ponomarenko
Lorraine McNamara and Quinn Carpenter
Rachel Parsons and Michael Parsons

Alternate 1 - Chloe Lewis and Logan Bye
Alternate 2 - Eliana Gropman and Ian Somerville
Alternate 3 - Emma Gunter and Caleb Wein

Helsinki Facts:

Fifth most interesting European destination. (Trip Adviser)

2nd best travel destination in the world. (NY Times)

Central Railway Station is one of the ten most beautiful stations in the world.

Internet access is a legal right in Finland.

Restaurant Day 4x a year when anyone can set up a restaurant for one day without a permit.

12 Ice Stadiums and 68 natural ice skating rinks in Helsinki.

Finland is 6th best country for business.

Helsinki is the world's most honest city.

2017 is Finland 100th anniversary of independence.