

Out Front

WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF MOUNTAIN BIKING




1 BIKE PARK LAPS

Mountain biking is growing rapidly in Finland, with many ski resorts transforming their facilities to cater to summer visitors. As a result, bike parks are springing up all over the country. While most of these parks are still in their infancy, that doesn't mean they aren't epic places to ride.

Take Iso-Syöte Bike Park, for example. This has 12 official trails, with the number growing each season, and while they lack the length of Alpine tracks, they more than make up for it with top-notch flow, technical features,

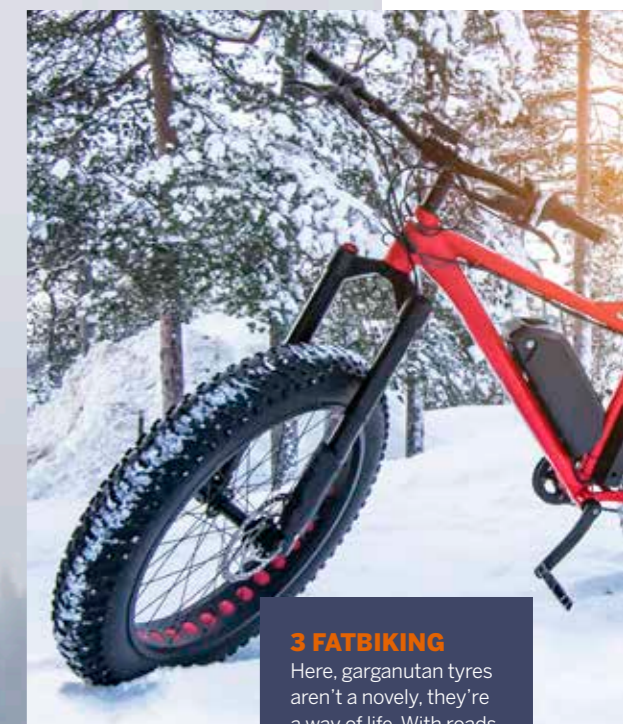
and smart design. Plus, at around £20 for a lift pass, you'll pay a fraction of what you would elsewhere, with the bonus of no long lift queues.

I'm not big on airtime, but the jump lines are well-built, and most of them are rollable, making them ideal for progression. I found myself consistently landing in the sweet spot on two of the tabletops – cue some serious whooping! – which kept me coming back for more.

The trails are filled with features, and you can choose to bypass the more challenging sections while still enjoying the flow. I found the ability gradings slightly tougher than in the UK, but there's something for every skill level, including a beginner area for newcomers and kids.



I was impressed by the variety of trails on offer at Iso-Syöte Bike Park



3 FATBIKING

Here, gargantuan tyres aren't a novelty, they're a way of life. With roads and trails buried under deep snow for half the year, these bikes are the perfect solution to keep you riding year-round. I had the chance to try out an e-fatbike, and it was a blast!

While I'm not planning to swap my XC rig for one with giant tyres and a motor anytime soon, I was pleasantly surprised by how well it handled. The large tyres absorbed a lot of bumps, helping to make up for the lack of rear suspension, and the bike felt incredibly planted in the corners. Climbing steep hills in boost mode was a lot of fun, and as a holiday activity, it's something I'd highly recommend.

TRAIL TALES

FINDING THE BALANCE

There's more to a good bike holiday than just dawn 'til dusk shredding. **Rach Bennet** headed off the beaten path to Finland – here's why she reckons it should be on your bucket list

Pics Teija Soini and Getty Images

Finland may not be one of the first places that comes to mind for a mountain biking holiday, but perhaps it should be. With summers in central Europe becoming increasingly hot, and unpredictable weather patterns making planning difficult, now is the perfect time to consider an alternative, overlooked destination.

This Nordic nation doesn't boast towering mountain ranges or steep descents, but its pristine nature, fresh air and breathtaking scenery make the riding very enjoyable, and leave you feeling refreshed and recharged.

There's so much to discover beyond the expanding MTB scene too, and you can easily fit these adventures around your daily rides. It's also more affordable than you might expect, and most Finns speak English, making it easy to connect.

During my trip to the Syöte area, I discovered just how much this country has to offer – here are my top things to do on a biking trip to Finland...



2 'FOREST BIKING'

In Finland – like in many parts of the UK – the trails weave through dense woodland, rather than carving down rocky peaks. Hence, the Finns use the term 'forest biking' rather than mountain biking. Unless you're in a national park, you can ride pretty much wherever you'd like.

I was amazed by the extensive network of tracks through the Syöte forests, ranging from smooth, flowing paths to rooty, technical sections, which were pretty spicy when wet. The boardwalks scattered throughout were a test of precision, especially when they

turned slippery. I relished every moment, feeling that rush as I crossed them with careful determination.

This wasn't just a leisurely pedal through the woods – it felt like a proper adventure. I found myself riding along ridgelines with breathtaking views of clear rivers winding through the valleys below, and dropping into steep chutes filled with loose stones and scattered roots jutting out at awkward angles.

The Syöte area is known for its challenging terrain and hosted Finland's Enduro Nationals this summer,

so you can expect a good test of both your skills and your stamina.

I loved riding through the lush forests and reaching one of the many picturesque lakeside spots. These areas, complete with cosy shelters, fire pits and stunning views, provide the perfect place to relax and soak in the beauty of nature after pushing hard on the bike.

4 NORTHERN LIGHTS SPOTTING

You don't have to venture far in Finland to escape artificial lighting. When the skies become dark, at around 11pm, the stage is set for an unforgettable light show. Just cross your fingers for clear skies – unfortunately, this wasn't the case during my trip. Consider booking

a room with a glass ceiling at Hotel Iso-Syöte or one of the many accommodations featuring floor-to-ceiling windows that look northward. Even better, take a stroll into the wilderness, where you can sit in nature and marvel at the magical lights dancing cross the sky.



6 FORAGING

The Finnish forests are bursting with an abundance of delicious treats, making every morning an opportunity to gather blueberries, lingonberries, and cloudberries to elevate your meals to something truly special. Foraging for chanterelle mushrooms is another

rewarding adventure, especially when they're in season later in the summer. Whenever I found myself waiting for the group or taking a moment to soak in the scenery, my hands would instinctively reach down to the forest floor to gather sweet blueberries for a mid-ride boost. Delicious!



5 HUSKY VISIT

Visiting these lovable animals is a must. Although they're hardworking sled dogs, the 97 huskies I met at Syötteen Eräpalvelut were a cheerful and friendly bunch, eager for cuddles and scratches. It was lovely to witness their affectionate nature, and the deep respect and care their owners have for them. This made for the perfect stop on a day's bike ride, and it's an experience I'd highly recommend to any dog lover. And if you're lucky like us, you might even get to snuggle an adorable puppy!

7 TRADITIONAL SMOKE SAUNA

Finland has a rich tradition of sauna culture, and if you're looking to try something unique, I can highly recommend experiencing the traditional smoke sauna at Hanhilampi. During the heating process, the room is filled with smoke. Before you enter, this is released, leaving behind a cosy, smoky aroma and walls stained dark from years of use, creating an unforgettable atmosphere. While it's common for Finns

to enjoy the sauna in the nude, there's no pressure to do the same – although your swimwear may end up with a few smoky stains. I'll let you decide whether I went fully traditional or not! After soaking in the soothing heat, I couldn't wait to dash down the pier and take a refreshing plunge into the cool lake waters. It was the perfect way to unwind after a long day on the bike.



While the riding is great, Finland has many other highlights that you have to make the most of while you're there

9 MEDITATION WALKS

Engaging in a meditative nature walk offers a serene escape from the chaos of everyday life, allowing you to fully embrace the present. Guided by Matti Kinnunen of Hetken Matka, we were encouraged to silence distractions and connect with the lush landscapes. As you meander through

tranquil forests, breathing in the fresh scents and listening to the soothing sounds of nature, you'll find an opportunity for reflection and renewal. This experience also cultivates a sense of peace and clarity, making it a perfect way to unwind and gain a fresh perspective on life after a week of riding fast through the landscape. If you're looking to experience more than just epic biking, Finland can certainly deliver. My trip to Syöte has shown me a new way to enjoy riding trips. 🌿



8 RIVER TUBING

The rivers that wind through the forests of Syöte offer an unusual way to experience the wilderness from a fresh perspective. My first experience of river tubing was filled with laughter, hard work and relaxation. At times, you'll gently float along with the current, taking in the serene landscape and the sounds of the forest, all while

keeping an eye out for moose or reindeer hidden among the trees. But as you approach the rapids, it's time to focus and get paddling to navigate the churning waters and surf through in one piece. When water levels are low, manoeuvring around rocks becomes the main challenge. It's all about watching the river, reading the flow and finding the right path to avoid the hidden obstacles below the surface. And if you do find yourself stuck, a spirited bum shuffle is all it takes to shimmy off the rocks and back into the water's embrace.

