

Fannish Inquisition Survey: Helsinki Worldcon Bid

Worldcon Bid: Helsinki in 2015

What are the proposed dates for which you are bidding? Thursday 6 August – Monday 10 August 2015

What is your proposed convention host city? Is your convention site in a city center location or a suburb? If a suburb, what are the transport options into the city center? How far is the site from the city center?

We're bidding to host the 73rd Worldcon in Helsinki, Finland, at the Helsinki Exhibition and Conference Centre. The site is located in Pasila, a district within Helsinki that's just over two miles north of the very centre.

Travel to and from the centre is easiest by local train, as the Pasila station is immediately adjacent to the con site and one stop (5min) from the central train station, with 10-35 trains each hour in both directions. Three tram lines also have a stop right in front of the site, and it's well served by other bus and tram connections. The City of Helsinki will be providing all attending members of the convention with free public transport.

What is the typical current airfare to your closest airport from world cities such as London, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Melbourne? Atlanta?

For flights now available for a week's stay in August 2013 and rounding up a bit, I can find the following return tickets to Helsinki in economy class: London \$170, Boston \$900, Chicago \$900, Los Angeles \$1100, Melbourne \$1700.

Do international flights, as well as domestic, fly into your local airport? Which airlines? If not, where is the closest international airport? Are direct flights from the cities above flown into your local airport?

Direct flights from North America to Helsinki are currently available from New York (Finnair) and Chicago (AA). In the recent past direct connections to at least Boston, Toronto and Orlando have also been available at least seasonally.

Within Europe, there are multiple daily direct connections to pretty much all the hubs (London, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, etc.) at which a plane from the US or elsewhere in the world might be landing. Helsinki is the main Northern European hub for traffic between Europe and Asia.

How far is your convention site from the nearest airport/train station and what is the likely cost of getting to the hotels by both public transport and taxi from that airport/train station?

Getting to Hotel:: The City of Helsinki will be providing all attending members of the convention with free public transport (subway, trams, buses, local trains, and the ferry to Suomenlinna), which should include travel to and from the airport (about \$6 one way otherwise).

The nearest train station (Pasila) is a 350m walk away, and all trains to and from Helsinki stop there, including the connections to St. Petersburg and Moscow.

The airport is 10 miles from the site by car, and by 2015 will be served by a direct train connection that should get you to either Pasila or the centre of Helsinki in 15-20 minutes. Taxi from the airport is likely to cost about \$40 (at current prices).

The port of Helsinki—with regular passenger connections to Sweden, Estonia, Russia and Germany—is also well served by public transport, with all quays 10-15 minutes' travel from the central train station. Taxi from the port to the convention site would probably cost about \$20.

What hotel(s) are being used for the convention? How many rooms, what type, accessibility issues, etc.?

There is a Holiday Inn at the con site that shares lobby space with the conference centre, with which we have a preliminary block reservation for most of their 244 rooms. We're negotiating with other hotels as well; there are about 40 hotels within 20 minutes' travel by public transport, with over 6000 rooms in total. A major concern that we will keep in mind is the ease of travel between the hotels and the con site, as most will require travel by local train or by tram (free for our members).

What are your hotel room rates? Do these rates include breakfast? Do they include internet in the room? How firm are these rates?

For the Holiday Inn attached to the convention site, we have a very preliminary rate of \$165/room/night for double occupancy. This includes breakfast, taxes and other costs, as well as a free internet connection in the room. We're still negotiating, mind. We're looking to accommodate a range of budgets for stays at other hotels and hostels.

What is the cost to *park* at the convention/hotel facilities?

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Parking at the convention centre is currently \$9/day. Parking at hotel facilities in central Helsinki is likely to be more expensive.

What is the distance from the main hotel(s) to the closest entrance of the convention site? What are the transportation options for those who prefer not to walk or who have mobility difficulties?

The closest hotel is the Holiday Inn that shares lobby space with the conference centre. Under one mile's walking distance are two other hotels, but in travel time the hotels right by the main train station may be even more quickly reached. Most of the trains and trams are low-floor, as well as all buses, with access at the same level as the station platforms.

If using overflow hotels (or hotels not directly connected) what is the cost of a cab ride door-to-door with the convention center?

A taxi ride to the convention centre would probably be \$15-20, but it's likely that using public transport would get you there just as quickly and cost you nothing.

Please describe your convention site facilities. For example, the quantity and sizes of rooms, tech options, accessibility issues, etc.

Predicting at this stage—or even within the next year or so—how big a Helsinki Worldcon might be is a difficult task. Obviously, the facilities we'll be using need to reflect the likely size of the con.

Our agreement with the Helsinki Exhibition and Conference Centre allows us to postpone the decision on what spaces to actually use and pay for until the end of August 2014, a bit after Loncon 3. Essentially, until then we have a right of first refusal for all of the conference rooms (11 in the range of 100-400 people, 6 smaller ones for 36-80 people), a number of lounge spaces, a sauna, and up to about 100,000 sq.ft of hall space.

All of the conference rooms are equipped with a digital projector and screen, and all the bigger ones also include a sound system with 3-4 microphones. All of the conference centre and hall space is fully wheelchair-accessible, spread over two floors in total, with four elevators connecting the floors.

Where will your large events (i.e. Hugo Ceremony and Masquerade) be held?

We're looking to build a 2000-seat theatre (flat) in the convention centre hall space, which will be separated from the rest of the space by hard movable floor-to-ceiling walls. If our membership numbers start to look like this arrangement might not be sufficient, we'll have the option to build a bigger theatre or use the convention centre's 4400-person sloped auditorium, located just next to our hall space.

Please describe the restaurant scene near your site.

The restaurants at the convention site itself will be completely renovated and expanded within the next year, so predicting the caliber of the currently 12 on-site restaurants is difficult. However, we would expect a range of options including coffee bars and fast-food outlets as well as more upmarket restaurants.

Outside of the convention centre, finding a fine-dining restaurant may require a 5 minute train trip to the centre of Helsinki. Overall, Helsinki is a good city to eat in; it currently hosts five Michelin-starred restaurants.

Please describe the policies / laws regarding smoking in your hotel(s), convention center, and city.

In Finland, smoking is prohibited in public spaces, restaurants, pubs, etc. Hotels may allow smoking in a small portion of their rooms; the on-site hotel has six rooms for smokers. The convention centre itself is non-smoking, but does have a separately ventilated smoking room in the conference centre and a designated smoking area outside.

What type of weather can we expect at the time of year your convention is to be held?

A Worldcon in Helsinki would be the northernmost Worldcon yet, at 60°N. It would therefore also be the sunniest Worldcon, with approximately 17-hour long days. July and August are the best time to visit Helsinki, with average temperatures ranging from 22°C (72°F) during the day to 13°C (55°F) at night.

What are some of the main tourist attractions of your city?

Helsinki is fronted by Suomenlinna, one of the largest sea fortresses in the world and a UNESCO World Heritage site. The nearest national park, Nuuksio, is 22 miles from the city centre. The city's architecture is a unique mix of the East and the West, and it's the best place in the world for buying Finnish design goods. It's a modern pocket-sized metropolis, with something for everyone.

However, if you do come, you shouldn't just visit Helsinki, but also come see the Baltic Sea; take a 2-hour ferry to Tallinn, Estonia, or an overnight cruise to Stockholm or St. Petersburg, and see the Finnish archipelago (we have 179,584 islands). Or visit Lapland in the north (the true home of Santa Claus) and experience the midnight sun.

Who is on your committee? Who is your bid chair? What experience do they have in general? In running this convention in particular?

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The bid chair is Eemeli Aro, and the bid committee currently includes Andrew Adams, Jukka Halme, Lisa Hertel, Crystal Huff, Johan Jönsson, Kristoffer Lawson, Karo Leikomaa, Kimmo Lehtonen, Mitja Mieskolainen, Jeff Orth, Ann Marie Rudolph, Nicholas Shectman, Vesa Sisättö, Heikki Sørum and Megan Totusek.

That's a mix of folk from both international and Finnish fandoms, and it's a wide base of experience to plan the best con possible. We have experience in running Worldcons (at least six of us have been on staff at more than one, including three as division heads—unless I've missed my count) as well as other SFnal fannish conventions of comparable size, including past chairs of Eastercon, Readercon, Arisia, and a number of Finncons, our national convention that in recent years has had 3,000-15,000 attending members.

If known, who will be the chair of the convention? What experience do they have?

The composition and structure of the con committee has not yet been decided, but will be determined and announced well ahead of LoneStarCon 3.

What arrangements will be made for evening socializing and party space? Do you have a corkage waiver?

Our current plan is to organise party space at the conference centre, but we're looking into a few other options as well. We're still negotiating with the hotels and the convention centre's catering company regarding corkage waivers and other concerns, so more on this later.

Are you planning to have any membership discounts for certain groups, such as young adults, military, or seniors?

We have not yet determined our price structure, so we've not made any decisions about discounts either. We hope to make a con that's as affordable as possible for everyone while not compromising its quality. The Finnish conrunning tradition expects membership to be free, but that's not something we can sensibly make happen with a Worldcon. What we can do is use our experience to raise as much money as we can from non-member sources.

Are you participating in pass-along funds?

If selected, Helsinki in 2015 would participate in passalong funds.