# Guide to Moving to Hämeenlinna

An Unofficial Guide to Hämeenlinna and Its People

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# Contents

1. Welcome to Hämeenlinna ..... 2
2. From Häme to Hämeenlinna ..... 5
3. Hämeenlinna today ..... 11
4. The Häme Mindset ..... 16
5. Highlights of Hämeenlinna ..... 21
6. The Hämeenlinna You Have Walked Past ..... 31
7. Houses Tell Stories ..... 44
8. What Happened to Old Hämeenlinna? ..... 53
9. Hämeenlinna Oddities ..... 59
10. Hämeenlinna in Practice ..... 66
11. Hämeenlinna–English Dictionary ..... 73
12. Now You Are a Hämeenlinna Local ..... 80

# 1. Welcome to Hämeenlinna – Finland's oldest inland city, in the heart of southern Finland and the Häme way of life.

This guide is intended for you who are considering moving to Hämeenlinna, have already made your decision, or find yourself waking up one morning as a Hämeenlinna resident and wondering what is really going on here. The guide can also be a pleasure for those who have lived in the city for a longer time. There are surprisingly many places, stories and oddities in Hämeenlinna, which you can pass by for years without knowing anything about them.

Hämeenlinna is a comfortably sized city. There is so little congestion here that locals recognise a traffic jam as soon as they see three cars at the same junction. From the centre, you can quickly reach a forest, a lakeshore or a ridge, yet the city still has a theatre, museums, restaurants, a cultural centre, a university of applied sciences, a hospital and even top-league sports teams.

Location is one of Hämeenlinna's strengths. The city is so centrally located that it is easy to drive straight past it. Helsinki is to the south, Tampere to the north, and Hämeenlinna in between. The motorway cuts through the city and trains stop here, so the rest of Finland is easy to reach. For today's Hämeenlinna residents, however, that does not mean they need to be constantly going somewhere. What's the hurry in a world that's already finished?

## The old city - but not quite in the way you might think

Hämeenlinna received its city rights on January 19, 1639. The people of Hämeenlinna are happy to tell you that Hämeenlinna is Finland's oldest inland city, but they often forget to mention that Savonlinna received its city rights only half a year later, on July 29, 1639. The people of Savonlinna are diligent in reminding you of this, but at the same time they forget to tell you that Savonlinna's city rights were revoked already in 1683 after the city fell and was destroyed by the Russians. 1656. Savonlinna got its city rights back in 1721, Hämeenlinna has remained a city and an important trading place continuously since 1639.

However, as a city, Hämeenlinna is much younger than its castle. Häme Castle was already here centuries before the city was founded, and people in Häme thousands of years before the castle. The current Hämeenlinna, on the other hand, has grown beyond its original boundaries so many times that today there are entire former municipalities and old parishes inside the city.

History is everywhere here, but it does not always make much noise about itself. In Kaupunginpuisto, there is a stone with a horseshoe carved into it to commemorate an emperor's visit. Jean Sibelius's father rests in the Old Cemetery Park. The walls of buildings in the centre bear commemorative plaques to people who later became presidents, composers, writers and prominent figures in Finnish culture. In one handsome Art Nouveau building, Hämeenlinna residents went to the municipal sauna; in another, alcohol was sold before the building later became a venue for temperance work.

## Hämeenlinna Beneath the Surface

You could easily write a beautiful tourist brochure about Hämeenlinna. Here are the medieval castle, the Aulanko national landscape, the Ahvenisto ridges and lake, Vanajavesi, the national urban park and as many as 339 lakes in whole or in part in the city area. All of this is true. But that still doesn't tell you what Hämeenlinna is really like.

To understand Hämeenlinna, you also need Appara, Parkki, Reska, Hikisilta, Kerho and hotsi. You have to accept that a pile of branches left in a city park can be part of local process management, and that a Hämeenlinna resident may criticise their hometown thoroughly precisely because they care about it.

In this guide, we visit Häme Castle, Aulanko and Ahvenisto. But after that, let's digress a bit. We are looking for small traces of history, houses whose past use cannot be deduced from their current use, places that have disappeared and local oddities that cannot be found in a standard tourist brochure.

At the same time, we learn a little about Hämeenlinna. It is difficult for a new resident to manage for a long time without knowing where Appara, Parkki and Reska are. Hämpton can also be talked about, even if no one can exactly define where it begins and where it ends.

The purpose of this guide is not to convince you that Hämeenlinna is a perfect city. The purpose is to help you understand why we enjoy ourselves here despite that – and maybe that's why.

# 2. From Häme to Hämeenlinna

The history of Hämeenlinna does not begin with Hämeenlinna or even with Hämeen Castle. When the first people moved in present-day Häme, there was no city, no castle, and not even Finland as it is today. After the Ice Age, the landscape was just taking shape.

When the continental ice retreated about 10,000 years ago, the highest areas of Häme were among the first to rise above the water. In the region of present-day Aulanko, you can still see the shapes of the landscape related to the shore stages of the ancient Yoldian Sea. The first people lived by hunting, fishing and gathering, and the Häme area has been inhabited since the Stone Age.  The city came much later.

## Before Hämeenlinna, there was Häme

During the Middle Ages, Häme was much larger than the current province. When you look at the map of Kanta-Häme as a new resident of Hämeenlinna, it seems like a very compact and nice inland corner. But when entering the Middle Ages, Häme was something completely different. In old documents, a descriptive expression is repeated, according to which Häme once stretched "from salt sea to salt sea" - that is, from the Gulf of Finland all the way to the Gulf of Bothnia.

This isn't just some silly megalomania or romantic legend, but the expression has a surprisingly cool and official background: it comes from medieval court records and tax disputes.

The story begins in 1458, when the lawspeaker Henrik Bitz and Olavi Tavast crossed the border from the so-called "border of the three kingdoms". From their work, a border list was drawn up, in which the extent of Häme ancient wilderness and export routes was written down: the border started at the southern salt sea (Gulf of Finland) and ended at the northern salt sea (Gulf of Bothnia). The export ports of the Häme people were at that time located in the mouths of the Porvoonjoki, Halikonjoki and Kokemäenjoki, and their resource-use areas deep into Ostrobothnia.

This old judgment letter came to life properly a hundred years later, in 1553. That's when the lawspeaker Henrik Klaunpoika Horn had to resolve exceptionally persistent and heated border disputes in the lands of Harviala and Hauho-Tuulos. Horn dug out the regent Eerik Akselinpoja's old judgment book from the archives and stated that the borders of Häme land have once and for all been measured from sea to sea.

So when you walk through the quiet streets of present-day Hämeenlinna, remember that you are standing at the heart of an ancient wilderness realm. Crossing its territory once meant travelling hundreds of kilometres on horseback – because even distant coastal areas were part of the lands and customary-use areas claimed by the people of Häme.

Not everything is known for certain about the details of the Christianization of Häme. Old sources also mention the possibility of a crusade by the Germans in the 13th century. Instead, Sweden's so-called second crusade to Häme is traditionally dated to the middle of the 13th century. As a result, Häme became even more closely connected to the Swedish kingdom. The oldest written mention of Häme County is from 1319. And at some point, during this time, a building appeared on the shores of Vanajavesi, which would define the city more than 700 years later.

## The castle came first

Häme Castle was built at the end of the 13th century. The first known written mention of it is from 1308. In its earliest stages, the castle was a grey stone camp castle with perimeter walls. Later, in the 14th and 15th centuries, it was expanded and raised, and brick, which was still rare in Finland in the Middle Ages, was used in the construction.

The castle was built as a base for the kingdom's power and administration. Its initial stages also included the function of a border castle, but it was short-lived: the Peace of Pähkinänsaari in 1323 moved the border between Sweden and Novgorod far to the east. The importance of the castle still did not disappear. It developed into the administrative centre of Häme, around which other life gradually began to form.

The castle also has a darker side. Prisoners were apparently held there already early on, and in 1837 the castle was completely converted into a prison based on the plans of Carl Ludvig Engel. In 1881, the only women's house of correction in Finland was established there. The use of the main castle as a prison ended in 1953, and the buildings of the perimeter wall only in 1972. The restored main castle was opened as a museum in 1979. When you walk inside the red brick walls of the castle today, you should remember that it is not a building that has spent seven centuries waiting for groups of tourists.

## The city is born – on the wrong side of the castle



Hämeenlinna's first town was located on the north side of the castle, around the current Linnankasarmi and Kaupunginpuisto. In the 1770s, the city was moved to the site of the current centre.

Hämeenlinna received city rights on January 19, 1639. Since then, Hämeenlinna has been a city continuously.  But the first Hämeenlinna was not located where the current centre is located.

The old town was built on the north side of the castle, around the current Linnankasarmi and Kaupunginpuisto. In today's landscape, there is not much that is easily recognisable left of this first city. However, one small monument talks about the place where Hämeenlinna's first church, completed in 1666, was located. It's one of those places that you can pass by without knowing what was there at the time - and we'll come back to it later in the Hämeenlinna you've walked past chapter of this guide.

The location of the old town turned out to be inconvenient over time. The low and narrow area near the castle did not offer good opportunities for the growing city. When Hämeenlinna was started to be redeveloped in the 18th century, they eventually came to a solution that sounds quite radical from today's perspective: move the city.

The lands of Saaristen Latokartano, located south of the castle, were chosen as the new location. Saaristen Latokartano was the crown's farm, whose courtyard was in the western part of the current city centre near Saaristenkatu. The rest of the future centre was largely arable land.

King Gustav III ordered the city to be moved in 1777. In addition to the availability of land, the choice of the place was influenced by defensive reasons: the city was wanted to be located far enough from the castle so that the road leading to the castle could be controlled with cannons if necessary. Major General Axel Magnus von Arbin prepared a grid plan for the new city, and the final site plan was confirmed in 1778. The city gradually moved to a new location at the turn of the 1770s and 1780s.

The current centre of Hämeenlinna is, in a way, a new city designed for a field. The castle stayed where it was, but the town around it moved to the other side of the castle. A small memory of the farm on which the new Hämeenlinna was built still lives in the name of Saaristenkatu.

The area of the old town was later largely used for military and park use. Walking there today, it's hard to imagine that the actual centre of Hämeenlinna was once here.

## The city grows beyond its borders

The current Hämeenlinna is much more than the old grid-plan city centre.

For a long time, the town was surrounded by Hämeenlinna's rural municipality and old parishes who had their own centres and identities. The shape of the current city has arisen because of several changes in municipal boundaries.

In 1948, the rural municipality of Hämeenlinna was divided between the city of Hämeenlinna, Rengo and Vanaja. The next major change took place in 1967, when the municipality of Vanaja, which had its roots in the Middle Ages, was abolished and its areas were joined to Hämeenlinna, Janakkala, Renko and Hattula.

The biggest single change came in 2009, when Hauho, Kalvola, Lammi, Renko and Tuulos joined Hämeenlinna. The area of the city grew enormously, and at the same time, Hämeenlinna became something a little special: in addition to the compact central city, it includes extensive rural areas, villages, forests and hundreds of lakes.  Therefore, the current Hämeenlinna can mean completely different environments.

It can be an apartment building next to Reska, a few minutes' walk from the market. It can be a detached house in Hätilä or Kauriala. It can be a new apartment in Asemanranta. But a Hämeenlinna resident can just as well live in Lammi, Hauho, Rengo, Tuulos or Iittala tens of kilometres away from the centre.

Of course, the identities of the old parishes did not disappear in the municipal merger. A person from Hauho is still a person from Hauho and a person from Lammi is still a person from Lammi, even if the mail comes with a notice from the city of Hämeenlinna. And the existence of parishes in the inner city will certainly be remembered at the latest when the discussion turns to reducing the school network or other services.

## You don't need to look for history separately here

In the end, Hämeenlinna's interest lies not in the fact that there is a lot of old things here. It is interesting how many different Hämeenlinna have been built on top of each other.

Next to the medieval castle is a barracks area from the 19th century. The site of the first city has a park and military history. In the current centre, the wooden houses of the 19th century were replaced by Art Nouveau, next to them functionalism and later the concrete of the 1960s and 1970s. The old industrial area has been transformed into Verkatehdas, Asemanranta has sprung up around the railway station and the new Assi has been created next to the old hospital.

Something has survived. Something has been moved. A lot has been demolished. And sometimes history remains only as a small plaque on the wall, a strange stone in the park or a house whose current purpose could not possibly be deduced from what was done there a hundred years ago. Those traces in this guide will be looked for in more detail later. First, however, let's see what this place that has developed around the castle for more than 700 years and developed as a city for almost 400 years has become in 2026.

# 3. Hämeenlinna today

If you look at Hämeenlinna on a map, the first observation is a bit confusing. The city looks huge. And that's what it is in terms of surface area.

Hämeenlinna's land area is 1,786 square kilometres and there are another 246 square kilometres of water areas on top of that. It is more than 80 kilometres from one end of the city to the other in the east-west direction. At the end of 2025, there were 68,622 inhabitants in this fairly spacious city.

This explains one of Hämeenlinna's special features. Hämeenlinna can mean a dense inner city, a few kilometres wide - or an area formed by forests, fields, lakes and villages, which stretches from Rengo and Iittala to Lammi.

You may not notice this in the city centre. From the market square, you can walk to the shore of Lake Vanajavesi, Verkatehdas, the bus station or Goodman shopping centre in a few minutes. The railway station is also within walking distance. A slightly longer walk takes you to Häme Castle, Ahvenisto or Kaupunginpuisto. The city's own description of the centre is based on this: services, culture, exercise, history and nature are exceptionally close to one another. Hämeenlinna is therefore both compact and remarkably extensive. And when talking about its location, it is hard to avoid mentioning Helsinki and Tampere.

However, one of the city's undeniable strengths is that it happens to be located right between two of Finland's major growth centres. A motorway and a main line run through the city. By train, you can reach Tampere in about 40 minutes and Helsinki in about an hour. On the other hand, it takes a couple of minutes to walk from Asemanranta to the train station. This makes Hämeenlinna a very usable hometown even for people whose work or other life is not entirely located here.

It is about one hundred kilometres by road to Helsinki and a little less than 80 to Tampere. You can get to the airport, ports and two big cities without having to live in either of them. However, the location also has the eternal curse of Hämeenlinna. Hämeenlinna is so conveniently located between Helsinki and Tampere that it is easily talked about as a place from which you can quickly get to other places. A person from Hämeenlinna might point out that you can also get off the train here.

## A city between water and ridges



Vanajavesi divides and unites Hämeenlinna.

You cannot really understand Hämeenlinna without Vanajavesi. The inner city is built around it, and Häme Castle stands on its shore. Vanajavesi separates the centre from Hätilä and Keinusaari, yet at the same time it connects different parts of the city. Rantareitti, the network of walking and cycling routes along the shores, is one of the city's most popular outdoor environments.

Another factor that defines the landscape is the ridges. Ahvenistonharju and Hattelmalanharju belong to the ridge section that runs through the city. When you add Aulanko, forests, parks and lakes, nature in Hämeenlinna does not start outside the city. It penetrates the middle of the city.

Finland's first national urban park was established in Hämeenlinna in 2001. The idea is very Hämeenlinna: the city, cultural history and nature are not separated from each other, but the same whole runs from Aulanko along the banks of Vanajavesi to the scenery of the castle and the city centre. You usually don't need to go to the forest, lake shore or outdoor trail separately. They're already there.

The actual grid-plan city centre is small, and a large part of daily tasks can be done on foot. Shops, restaurants and services can be found around the market. The library, swimming pool, Verkatehdas, theatre, museums, bus station and train station are all relatively close.

The appearance of the centre is layered. There are old wooden houses, stone houses from the 19th century and spectacular Art Nouveau buildings. Business buildings from the 1950s, 60s and 70s, newer apartment buildings and shopping centres have been built between them. The result is neither a coherent historical urban milieu nor a shiny modern centre. It is Hämeenlinna. And when later in this guide you ask where the old Hämeenlinna disappeared to, you will also find out why the centre looks the way it does. Neighbourhoods have their own worlds.

## The inner city does not end at the edge of the grid pattern.

Kauriala is an old and green residential area right next to the city centre. Hätilä forms its own centre on the other side of Vanajavesi. Idänpää continues the city to the east, Jukola and Ahvenisto to the west. Katuma, Myllymäki, Ojoinen, Loimalahti, Nummi, Papinniitty and many other areas are each different combinations of apartment buildings, detached houses, forest and services.

On the scale of Hämeenlinna, the distances are usually short. In the city's own housing communication, it is said that services and hobbies can be reached from different residential areas within a quarter of an hour. Marketing talk, of course - but in the inner city, the claim is not completely out of the blue.

One of the newest urban environments is Asemanranta. The first new apartments in the area between Vanajavesi and the railway station were completed in 2018, and construction has continued since then. The area condenses much of present-day Hämeenlinna into a small space: new apartment buildings, the railway, the old industrial environment, Verkatehdas, Vanajavesi and Rantareitti all fit within a few hundred metres. And then, of course, there is Pööli – a parking garage with a huge traffic cone hanging on its wall. We will come back to that too.

## And then there are the parishes

The 2009 municipal merger made Hämeenlinna a city, where the word city has a slightly broader meaning than usual.

Hauho, Kalvola, Lammi, Renko and Tuulos are administratively Hämeenlinna, but they are still called parishes. A total of about 16,500 people live in them, or roughly a quarter of the entire city's population.

Living in one of the historic parishes is very different from living in the inner city. Plots and homes are generally larger, distances are longer and having a car becomes considerably more important. In return, you get countryside, villages, lakes and local communities – all within the same city. And each parish has an identity of its own.

A person from Iittala may live in Hämeenlinna, but they still live in Iittala. Hauho is Hauho and Lammi is Lammi. Removing a municipal boundary from the map does not erase centuries of local history. A newcomer to Hämeenlinna should understand this fairly quickly – along with the fact that Iittala may be called Italia. There is no need to look for a rational explanation.

## The city continues to change

At first glance, Hämeenlinna may seem like a city where everything has been roughly in the same place for a long time.

There isn't. Asemanranta has changed the eastern shore of Vanajavesi. The new central hospital Assi has been built in connection with the old hospital area in Ahvenisto. More residents and new construction are planned for the centre. In the city's downtown vision, the goal is up to 4,000 new downtown residents by 2035. At the same time, in Hämeenlinna, there is the same discussion that has been going on there for decades: what to build, what to tear down, where to park, what the centre needs and why exactly that thing had to be done exactly that way.

The people of Hämeenlinna follow changes in their city closely, usually by starting with what might be wrong. First, we look for the drawbacks of a project, then discuss them thoroughly, and in the end we may even conclude that the result was not so bad after all. It is not necessarily resistance to change. It is a local way of taking part.

## A decent sized city

It is difficult to sell Hämeenlinna with a single superlative. It is not Finland's biggest, busiest, youngest or fastest-growing city. The centre does not pulse to a metropolitan rhythm, and there are not ten events to choose from every night.

But here there is a medieval castle, lakes, forests and ridges. There is a theatre, museums, Verkatehdas and league hockey. There are old neighbourhoods, new apartment blocks and entire rural areas. You can live in the centre without a car, and a quarter's drive away you can already live in a very different environment. And when you want to leave, the train goes both north and south. Maybe Hämeenlinna's strength is ultimately just in the scale. It's big enough to be a city and small enough that living in a city doesn't take up all your time. Next, we must learn the most difficult thing: what are the people of Hämeenlinna really like?

# 4. The Häme Mindset

There is one characteristic of the people of Häme that even Finns who have never been to Häme know: the stereotypical Häme local is slow. It is such an old and persistent notion that there is little point trying to refute it in this guide. It is far more interesting to ask what Häme slowness actually means.

It doesn't necessarily mean that things don't happen. They just happen when their time is right. In the Häme song written by J. H. Erko, the Häme people are described as stiff and serious but eager to act when it's time for action. Lots of nature and decent and productive, if a little stiff, people. That's a good place to start.

## Slow Häme – an insult or a way of life?

If you've moved to Hämeenlinna from another part of Finland, you probably won't notice any dramatic cultural clash at first. The store's cash desk operates as normal. The bus leaves (almost) according to the schedule. At the workplace, the meeting starts when it says on the calendar. At traffic lights, no one is left wondering if the green light is after all just a preliminary suggestion to set off. Someone who lived in Hämeenlinna for a year and a half describes his experience like this:

‘Things happen more slowly here. Even entering traffic happens slowly.’ At the same time, the speaker finds people friendly and says it has been easier to get to know them than in other places they have lived. Another newcomer describes this Häme slowness as a sense of calm and lack of urgency: things are done thoughtfully, but they do get done and schedules are kept. That is the essential difference.

Häme slowness is not incompetence at best, but a certain kind of thoughtfulness. You don't have to react to everything immediately. The new thing can be stated first. After that it can be viewed. Then you can think about what others think about it. And when you get used to it, maybe you can get started. So a new Hämeenlinna native should learn to distinguish between the words no and let's see. The first might mean no. The latter can mean almost anything.

## Friendly, but not necessarily a friend right away

Häme's slowness may show more clearly when getting to know people. One person who moved to Hämeenlinna describes the people of Hämeenlinna as slowly warming up. He has sometimes had time to think that he had done something offensive, when the friendship did not seem to be progressing. Over time, however, he has learned to appreciate exactly this shy feature.

This is useful information for a newcomer. If your Hämeenlinna neighbour greets you with a nod during the first year, nothing is necessarily wrong. In the second year, a ‘moro’ may be added. By the third, you may already discuss the weather. After that, the relationship is becoming quite serious.

There is a certain reserve in this shyness, but the other side of it can be persistence. Someone who has lived in the city for two years sums it up like this: ‘Once you get to know people from Hämeenlinna, you make friends for life.’ In the same context, they perhaps sum up the Häme attitude to life even better: ‘What's the hurry in a world that's already finished?’ That could be the motto of this chapter.

## Native-born and junantuoma

You can live in Hämeenlinna for decades without becoming a paljasjalkainen hämeenlinnalainen – a native-born Hämeenlinna resident. You have to be born one. Everyone else is junantuoma, literally ‘brought by train’.

*Junantuoma is not necessarily an insult in this context. It is a practical way of distinguishing people whose childhood memories include the same schools, shops, streets and long-gone buildings from those who arrived later. The difference can show in how the city is perceived. A native-born resident can give directions using a building that has not existed for thirty years. A junantuoma needs Google Maps.*

A native-born resident knows where Höyhensaari was, even though the maternity hospital is no longer there. They understand why someone talks about Lampuri or Lintuvintti and why going to the old central hospital meant going to Mäki. They may have a very precise idea of where Rinksa was and how you were

supposed to drive there. A newcomer learns these things gradually. By the time you find yourself telling another junantuoma, ‘Drive through Poltsari and turn before Appara,’ something irreversible has already happened.

## Even that stupid horse kicks for love

A Hämeenlinna resident loves their hometown in a slightly unusual way. They do not necessarily begin by telling you what is good about the city. It is much more natural to go through everything that is wrong first. This is particularly visible on local social media. Local politics and decisions about the urban environment generate lively discussion, but practically the entire spectrum of life is suitable material, from dog mess to care for older people.

The Hämeenlinna style of conversation likes to approach the issue through negation. Let's look for the downsides first. If they are not immediately found, we will investigate a little more closely. If flowers are planted in the centre, one can ask how much they cost. If they are not planted, one can ask why the centre looks so dreary. If a parking garage is built, it will be too expensive. If there are no parking spaces, the city centre is dead. If something old is demolished, history is destroyed.

If the old building is preserved, someone will soon point out that it cannot be repaired anyway. It should not be concluded from this that the people of Hämeenlinna do not care about their city. Often the problem is the opposite. They care about it so much that everyone has an idea of how it should be handled.

## It's not that busy right now



*Häme process management in two pictures: first the pile of branches is allowed to ripen in peace, and finally the dead lawn is revealed underneath.*

And then there are the piles of branches. Maintenance work is carried out in the city's parks in spring and summer. Branches are cut from trees and shrubs and collected in a pile. So far, so good. Then the Häme method begins. The pile stays where it is.

In the first few days, it looks like someone is going to pick it up right away. After a week, the leaves on the branches start to wilt. Gradually the green turns to brown. The pile is starting to look like it always belonged in the park. Eventually – maybe in three to four weeks – it will be taken away. A dead lawn is revealed below. It would be easy to see it as just a small failure of city maintenance. However, in terms of understanding Häme mindset, it is much more. Why do something today that you can perfectly well do in a few weeks?

## Hämeenlinna can be criticized - under certain conditions

New residents should learn one more local rule. A resident of Hämeenlinna can call Hämeenlinna boring, the city centre dead, decision-making incomprehensible and some construction project in the city a complete disaster. That's part of the point. But if a person from Tampere comes to say the same thing, the situation will change. Then you may have to be reminded of Aulanko, Ahvenisto, Häme Castle, Verkatehdas, Vanajavesi, the city's location, parks, culture and the

fact that in Helsinki you have to pay the same for a studio apartment as here for a decent apartment.

This contradiction is not particularly embarrassing. People everywhere defend their homeland. In Hämeenlinna, it has only been developed into a subtle local art form. You don't have to think of a city as perfect to be able to claim it as your own.

## When does a junantuoma become a Hämeenlinna resident?

There is no official time limit for that. It does not happen in connection with the notification of moving to the population register or after paying the first real estate tax. Maybe the change starts with the small quirks of the city no longer seeming strange.

You automatically know that Parkki does not mean a parking space. The Kerho is not an association but HPK. Appara needs no explanation. Let's go to Reska, not to the pedestrian street section of Raatihuoneenkatu. And perhaps the final sign is this: Someone from elsewhere criticizes Hämeenlinna. You will find yourself in complete agreement with him in principle. Yet you begin to explain why he is wrong.

Congratulations. You are making good progress in Hämeenlinna.

# 5. Highlights of Hämeenlinna

Each city has places that are first introduced to visitors. In Hämeenlinna, you don't have to come up with them by force. A medieval castle in the middle of the city is already a strong start. It will be accompanied by the national landscape of Aulanko, the ridges of Ahvenisto, the old industrial milieu of Verkatehdas and Finland's first national urban park. But in this guide, they will not be reviewed as a list of attractions.

Häme Castle is much more interesting when you know that it served as a prison for a long time. Aulanko becomes a different place when you realise that much of its romantic landscape was deliberately created by one very wealthy man. The ruins in Kaupunginpuisto, in turn, take on meaning when you know that they are connected to the city's first location.

## Häme Castle - the reason why there is a city here at all



Häme Castle had stood here for more than three hundred years before Hämeenlinna received its city rights in 1639.

Hämeenlinna without Häme Castle is difficult to imagine. Construction of the castle began at the end of the 13th century, and it had stood here for more than three hundred years before Hämeenlinna received its city rights in 1639. The city therefore inherited its name from the castle, not the other way round. Today, the

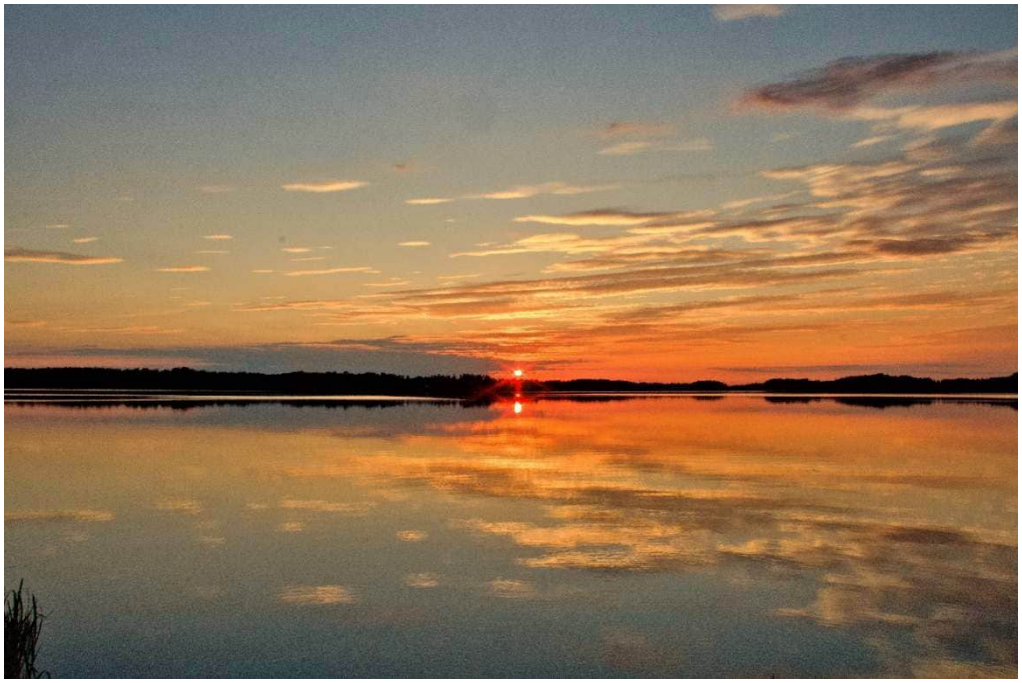
more than 700-year-old castle is a defining landmark of Hämeenlinna and one of Finland's most significant medieval castles.

However, the history of the castle did not end in the Middle Ages. After its military and administrative importance decreased, it gradually took on a completely different role. The castle was used as a prison early on, and in the 19th century it was completely converted into a prison. In 1881, Finland's only women's house of correction was established in Häme Castle. Prison operations continued in the castle area well into the 20th century.

That is why the castle is worth visiting more than once. On the first visit, your attention may go mainly to the walls, towers and halls. On later visits, you begin to understand how many completely different lives have been lived within those same walls over seven centuries. The castle also has another very Hämeenlinna-like quality: it quickly becomes such an everyday part of the landscape that you stop noticing it.

Elsewhere in Finland, people drive hundreds of kilometres to see a medieval castle. A Hämeenlinna local may drive past one on the way to the shops and think mainly about the traffic lights.

## Aulanko – a Landscape Built to Look Natural



Aulanko is at the same time a national landscape, a built landscape park and the everyday nature of Hämeenlinna residents. Sunset at Katajistoranta.

If Häme Castle is Hämeenlinna's historical symbol, Aulanko is its landscape. The view over Aulangonjärvi from Aulanko's observation tower is one of Finland's national landscapes. The area is also associated with Jean Sibelius, who roamed the forests of Aulanko in his youth. The landscape is said to have influenced his music.

However, there is a little twist to Aulanko. It looks like nature, but much of it is a built landscape. At the end of the 19th century, Colonel Hugo Standertskjöld began to develop the surroundings of Karlberg Manor into a large landscape park. Roads, paths, artificial ponds, gazebos, ruins and viewpoints were built in the area. The park was made into a romantic ideal landscape, where nature had to look a little more natural than nature itself usually looks.

The current Aulanko is a layer of this history, nature conservation and later tourism. In addition to the lookout tower, there are Karhuluola, Joutsenlampi, Graniittilinna, the old park forest, the hotel milieu, golf courses and the forests

surrounding Aulangonjärvi. The romantic landscape parks of Aulanko and Kaupunginpuisto also form a historical pair on opposite sides of Lake Vanajavesi. Perhaps the best feature of the Aulanko is that you don't really have to do anything there. You can just go for a walk. That too is quite a Häme hobby.

## Let's Go Swimming at Appara

Ahvenisto is, above all, an everyday outdoor and recreation area for Hämeenlinna residents. There are Ahvenistonjärvi, a beach, ridge forests, outdoor trails, an outdoor swimming pool and a motor track right next to it. However, the history of the place is bigger than an everyday swimming trip.

In the 1952 Helsinki Olympics, Hämeenlinna was the second official competition city in addition to Helsinki. In Ahvenisto, they competed in the modern pentathlon, which included riding, fencing, shooting, swimming and running. The outdoor swimming pool was built for the Olympics. Later, Ahvenisto got yet another layer of international sports history. Completed in 1967, international Formula 2 competitions and major motorcycling competitions have been held on the motor track.

In this small ridge landscape, Olympic history, motorsport, nature conservation and a Hämeenlinna resident heading to Appara on a summer evening with a towel under their arm all fit side by side. A local does not usually announce that they are going to the Ahvenisto recreation area. They go to Appara.

## Verkatehdas – a factory that changed the product



The old industrial environment got a new life as an area of culture, events and museums.

On the other side of Lake Vanajavesi, opposite the grid-plan city centre, lies one of Hämeenlinna's most successful examples of reusing an old industrial environment. Verkatehdas was, as its name suggests, an industrial area. Today, Verkatehdas cultural and congress centre, Hämeenlinna Theatre and Hämeenlinna Art Museum operate in the same landscape. The surroundings of Keinusaari and Verkatehdas, which form part of the city's National Urban Park, have preserved old industrial and institutional buildings as part of the modern city.

The change is a good example of how preserving an old building does not mean turning it into a museum. A building can continue its life by doing something completely different. Fabric used to be manufactured at the textile factory. Today, concerts, theatre, meetings and occasionally remarkably long queues for intermission service are held there. For a Hämeenlinna resident, the place is of course simply Verkis.

## Old Town – The Town That Moved Away

Those looking for Hämeenlinna's old town should be warned. If you imagine cobbled streets and a unified 17th-century wooden town, you will be disappointed.

The original town of Hämeenlinna was located to the north of Hämeen Castle in the surroundings of the current Linnankasarmi and Kaupunginpuisto. The city was moved in the 18th century to the site of the current centre. That's why Hämeenlinna's old town is interesting precisely in what you can no longer see of it.

Today there is a castle, barracks, a park and monuments in the area. The small memorial stone of Hämeenlinna's first church talks about the place where the city's church once stood. You should use your imagination here. When standing on the north side of the castle, you are not looking at the edge of the city. Looking at the place where Hämeenlinna once stood.

## Kaupunginpuisto – from Pyövelinmäki to Parkki



The poet Larin Kyösti's home was moved to its current location in Parkki.

Kaupunginpuisto is one of those places whose official name and Hämeenlinna name coexist. It's the Kaupunginpuisto. But it's also Parkki. And before that it was Pyövelinmäki.

The actual development of the park began under Governor Otto Rehbinder in the 1840s. The aim was a romantic landscape park in which views over Vanajavesi, hills, paths, plantings and built features formed a carefully designed whole. At one time, the park was even known as Ihana Parkki. And then there are the ruins. They look old, and they are meant to look old – but they were deliberately built as ruins. The English-style romantic landscape garden embraced ideas of the past and the passage of time, so a large artificial ruin was intentionally constructed in Parkki.

So Hämeenlinna has so much history that it had to be built a little more. The long-time home of the poet Larin-Kyösti is also located next to the artificial ruins, which was moved there from the centre of Hämeenlinna from Lukiokatu 15 in the 1960s. At that time, the city planned an open-air museum area in Kaupunginpuisto, but the logs of the demolished houses rotted in Linnanpuisto and ended up as firewood. In the end, Larin-Kyösti's house was the only building that was successfully moved and erected in the park.

You should walk slowly in the city park anyway. There are more old stone structures, embankments, views and small traces of history than you can see on the first walk. And in the summer, Ämyrock has been organised there, which has brought free rock to the Parkki since 1974. HUK - Hämeenlinna's New Summer Theatre is also located in the city park, which has established itself as Hämeenlinna's summer theatre. From Pyövelinmäki to a landscape park and from a landscape park to a rock festival and summer theatre stage. Not a bad development arc.

## The Gingerbread House – the House That Survived



In the 1970s, Piparkakkutalo in Kirkkorinne was in danger of disappearing, but opposition from local residents helped save it.

Piparkakkutalo (The Gingerbread House), standing on the corner of Kirkkorinne, seems such a natural part of Hämeenlinna today that it is hard to imagine it was once in danger of disappearing. The site also has a connection to one of Finland's best-known artists. Albert Edelfelt's childhood home once stood on the site of the present-day Gingerbread House. Edelfelt spent his childhood in Hämeenlinna from 1855 to 1866, when his father, Carl Albert Edelfelt, worked as the provincial architect of Häme. A commemorative plaque dedicated to Albert Edelfelt can be found on the wall of the present-day Gingerbread House.

Piparkakkutalo is one of those old Hämeenlinna buildings whose preservation was by no means guaranteed. In the 1970s, it was threatened with demolition, but opposition from local residents helped save it. That makes the house more than simply a beautiful building.

It is a reminder that the cityscape does not survive by itself. Someone decides to keep it - or someone manages to oppose the demolition loudly enough. When we

later ask where the old Hämeenlinna disappeared to, Piparkakkutalo serves as a good counter-question: why exactly was this left?

## Skogster – from a department store to a museum

Skogster, located on Raatihuoneenkatu in the centre, is a handsome reminder of the time when the department stores in the centre were the centres of the city's commercial life.

The building is known as the former Skogster department store, but today it houses Museo Skogster, the main site of Hämeenlinna City Museum. The museum's other sites are Palander House and the Birthplace of Sibelius. Museo Skogster presents the history of Häme and Hämeenlinna through changing exhibitions. Here too, the change of use is almost complete: a building people once entered to buy things now preserves objects that are no longer for sale.

## Schmausser's villa - a brewer's home in the middle of the city

There is a building on the shore of Vanajavesi, which many people from Hämeenlinna might know better by its appearance than by its name.

Schmausser's Villa was built in 1902 as a residence for a brewer. The adjacent Neo-Gothic brick building of Schmausser's brewery dates from the same year. The villa represents international Art Nouveau. Together, the buildings recall a time when Hämeenlinna's waterfront was home not only to parks and housing but also to industry. In today's waterfront landscape, the villa can look almost decorative. Originally, it was not: it was a brewer's home beside the brewery.

## Birthplace of Sibelius

The small wooden house at Hallituskatu 11 is one of Hämeenlinna's most internationally significant buildings. Jean Sibelius was born there on 8 December 1865 and spent the first twenty years of his life in Hämeenlinna. His birthplace is now a museum presenting his childhood and youth through furniture,

documents, photographs and objects. The museum was renovated and reopened in summer 2025. In Hämeenlinna, however, it is worth forgetting Sibelius the national composer for a moment. Here he was Janne – a boy who went to school a few blocks away, roamed the city and its forests and played chamber music with his friends.

Sibelius' Hämeenlinna is still surprisingly easy to walk. Lyseo and Sibelius Park can be reached in a few minutes from the birthplace. In the park, Kain Tapper's young Sibelius looks towards the place where his school was once located. In addition to Sibelius, students of the current Lyseo have included J. K. Paasikivi and Eino Leino. Quite a lot of Finnish cultural history in a few blocks. And yet the most interesting traces are sometimes even smaller. Next, let's leave the well-known sights behind for a while and go in search of Hämeenlinna, which you have walked past.



Sibelius' birthplace on Hallituskatu.

# 6. The Hämeenlinna You Have Walked Past

In Hämeenlinna, history does not always stand in the middle of the landscape as a red-brick castle. Sometimes it is a small stone beside the barracks fence, sometimes a plaque on the wall of a house, and sometimes an old grave cross in a park that people walk through on their way to the centre. Sometimes it is a statue you can pass for years without knowing that it was modelled on a young woman who later became world-famous.

You don't usually come to Hämeenlinna for these places. They don't necessarily end up in the top ten of the city's attractions, and you don't usually see a tourist bus in front of them. When you live here, however, you should learn to see them. Small traces gradually make a familiar city completely different.

In this chapter, we don't go sightseeing. Let's go see Hämeenlinna, which you may have already walked past.

## Here the Emperor Dismounted



The letter A and the horseshoe commemorate Emperor Alexander II's visit to Hämeenlinna in 1863.

In Kaupunginpuisto, or Parkki, there is a rather modest stone with the letter A and a horseshoe carved into it. If you do not know what it means, you can easily walk past without a second thought. In 1863, however, Hämeenlinna received a rather more distinguished visitor than usual: Alexander II, Emperor of Russia and Grand Duke of Finland.

The emperor visited Hämeenlinna on his way to the Parola military camp and visited Kaupunginpuisto. The stone marks the spot where he is said to have dismounted, and the letter A and a horseshoe were hammered into it to commemorate the visit.

The monument is rather charming in its modesty. There is no grand statue or emperor on a bronze horse – just a stone, a letter and a horseshoe. It is a remarkably understated way to commemorate an imperial visit. Alexander II's visit also

left another mark on Hämeenlinna, one that was considerably more important to Finnish history than the horseshoe.

## On the Same Trip, the Emperor Also Took Care of a Little Language Policy

The commemorative plaque on the wall of the former county government building at Hallituskatu 16 is related to the same imperial visit in 1863. Alexander II met J. V. Snellman in Hämeenlinna, and the visit was accompanied by a language rescript, which started the strengthening of the position of the Finnish language in the administration in relation to the Swedish language.

The event was part of a development, as a result of which Finland gradually rose to a more equal position with Sweden. Today, a person walking along Hallituskatu can pass the place in a few seconds, unless they happen to look at the wall of the building.

The same emperor's visit to Hämeenlinnan left two very different monuments in the city. One talks about a big change in Finnish language history, the other about where the emperor got off his horse. History has different ways of leaving its mark.

## Here was Hämeenlinna's first church



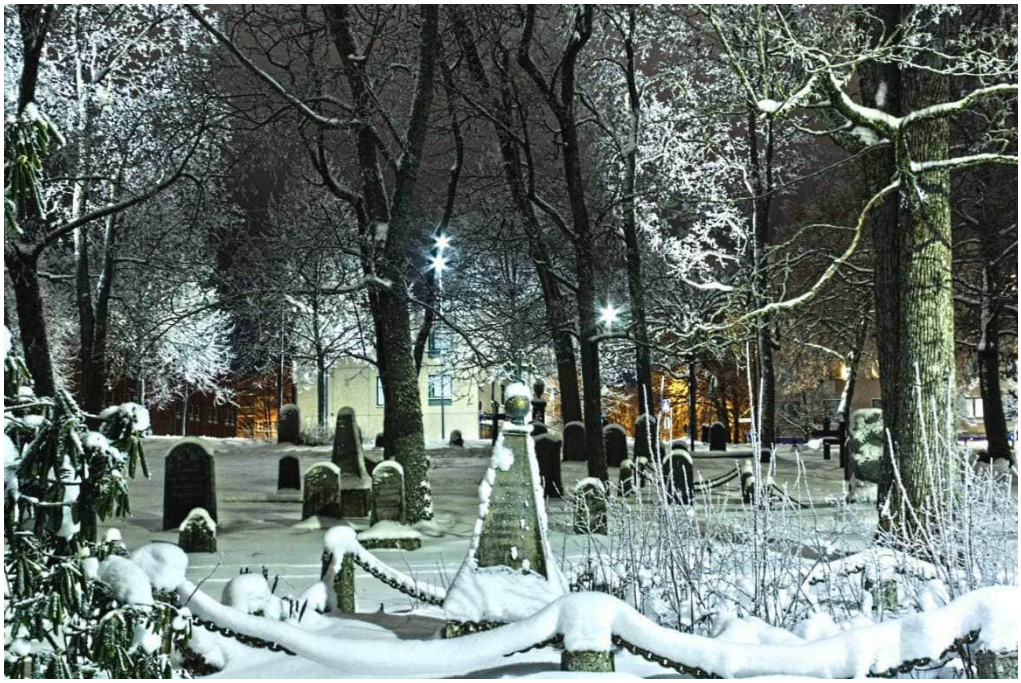
*A monument hidden in Puska in the Linnankasarmi area marks the site of the first city church.*

On the north side of the castle, in Linnankasarmi, behind the barracks fence, there is another easily overlooked memorial stone. It marks the site of Hämeenlinna's first church.

When Hämeenlinna was founded in 1639, the city was still located north of the castle. The first city church was completed in 1666. It was a small wooden cruciform church, whose fate was partly due to a bad building site: the wet soil caused problems for the building, and already in the early 18th century, it was said that the walls of the church had sagged considerably. A new church was completed in its place in 1739.

In today's environment, it is hard to imagine the old city. The city was moved to the south side of the castle in the 18th century, and the area was later largely converted to military use. When you stand by the memorial stone, you should try to erase the current buildings and roads from your mind for a moment. Then you are not standing on the outskirts of the centre of Hämeenlinna, but in the middle of the place where the actual Hämeenlinna once stood. The memorial stone itself is not particularly impressive. What is interesting is what is no longer there.

## The Old Cemetery Park is not just a park



The old cemetery was turned into a park, but the tombstones and monuments still tell of the area's original purpose.

The Old Cemetery Park lies between Goodman shopping centre and Kauriala. The unofficial name Raatopuisto (literally ‘Carrion Park’) has also been used for the park, although there is no conclusive evidence of how widely the name has been used.

The area was Hämeenlinna's cemetery from the end of the 18th century to the 19th century. When Ahvenisto's new cemetery was put into use in 1872, the old cemetery fell out of use. The area was taken over by the city in 1906, and gradually the cemetery became a park. However, not all graves disappeared.

That's why in the Old Cemetery park; it's sometimes worth deviating from the actual footpath and looking around. Among the old trees are, for example, the Nordenswan family's empire-style burial chapel, the Rehbinder family's grave and several old grave markers. However, one of the most modest grave monuments in the park belongs to a man whose last name is known all over Finland.

## Sibelius' father stayed in Hämeenlinna

Jean Sibelius' father, Christian Sibelius, was a doctor who worked in Hämeenlinna as a city doctor and a military doctor. The year 1868 was the worst of the last great years of hunger in Finland, and diseases spread among the malnourished population. Christian Sibelius ran a fever hospital in Hämeenlinna and got sick himself. He died on July 31, 1868, only 46 years old. Jean was two years old at the time.

The grave of Christian Sibelius is still in the old cemetery on the Parolantie side of it. It can be recognised by a rather simple wrought iron cross, at the foot of which there is a summer flower planting. The grave is easily missed if you don't know how to look for it.

A few blocks away, at Sibelius' birthplace, we visit the place where Finland's national composer was born. In the park of the old cemetery, you will encounter a much more personal piece of the same history. Here is not the monument of the national composer, but the grave of his father and the family history of the little boy.

## The Germans Made Way for Sibelius

In the park of the old cemetery, it is also much more difficult to miss the 1918 German military grave with its monuments. However, its current location is not original.

In the final phase of the Finnish Civil War, German troops took part in the capture of Hämeenlinna in April 1918. The 53 German soldiers who fell in the battles were buried in the current Sibelius Park, which was known at the time as Tähtipuisto. A memorial was also erected to them.

Decades later, a new famous resident came to the park. It was decided to place Kain Tapper's sculpture of young Jean Sibelius there. In 1962, the grave of the German soldiers with its monuments was moved to the Old Cemetery, and the statue of Sibelius was unveiled in Tähtipuisto in 1964.

The history of the city's parks can therefore accommodate a rather special chain of events. First, German soldiers from 1918 were buried in the park. Then Sibelius was wanted. The Germans moved the Old Cemetery to the park and Janne stayed.

When you know this, you look at both Sibelius Park and Old Cemetery Park a little differently.

## There is quite a list of names on the wall of the Lyceum




An extraordinary piece of Finnish political and cultural history can be seen on the walls of Hämeenlinna Lyseo.

You can walk past the Hämeenlinna Lyceum on Linnankatu for years without paying special attention to the commemorative plaques on its walls. When you start reading them, you quickly realize that you are at the edge of a rather extraordinary Finnish personal history.

Jean Sibelius, president of the republic J. K. Paasikivi, poet Eino Leino, poet Larin-Kyösti and linguist E. N. Setälä have studied at the Hämeenlinna Lyceum. The walls of the Lyceum form a kind of small directory of Finnish cultural and political history.

J. K. Paasikivi's memorial plaque also has its own story. When in the 1950s a commemorative plaque was wanted for a former Lyceum student on the school wall, the matter did not proceed in a straightforward manner. Among other things, the school thought about on what basis one famous former student should be elevated above the others.

At that point, Paasikivi had managed to act as the Prime Minister of Finland and the President of the Republic, so the resume could not exactly be called modest. So he was good for Finland. Lyseo still considered. The commemorative plaque was finally unveiled in 1959.

## Tove Jansson Stands in Pikkutori – and She Does Not Look Like a Moomin



*Viktor Jansson's Youth sculpture was modeled on his daughter Tove Jansson.*

Near the small market, next to the current Kumppanuustalo, stands the bronze sculpture Youth, cast according to Viktor Jansson's plaster model. It is easy to walk past the sculpture depicting a classic young woman without paying much attention to it. However, the work becomes much more interesting when you know that its model was the sculptor's own daughter Tove Jansson.

The sculpture dates from a 1931 plaster model, for which the sculptor's daughter Tove posed while still young. Tove later became world-famous as the creator of the Moomins, as well as a writer and visual artist. Hämeenlinna's bronze version came later. Its history is also connected with the Hämeenlinna construction

company Kummila Oy, which had the sculpture cast in bronze and donated it to the city. Youth was unveiled in Hämeenlinna in 1967.

If you don't know the story, you can see a sculpture of a young woman in the park. When you know the story, look at young Tove Jansson. It's just such a small piece of information, after which you won't see the statue in quite the same way.

## Rakentajat (The Builders) – a Concrete Monument to an Era



*Rakentajat, completed by Kari Juva in 1973, is both a monument to the construction industry and an image of its era.*

Another type of Hämeenlinna monument stands on Lahdensivuntie. Kari Juva's Rakentajat (The Builders) , completed in 1973, which has also been called the

Sockel and the ugliest statue in Hämeenlinna, is a concrete sculpture in which builders work in the middle of a structure that resembles prefabricated construction. It was donated to the city by Kummila Oy, a construction company from Hämeenlinna, in connection with the company's 50th anniversary.

Kummila was one of Hämeenlinna's prominent builders for decades. Many residential, business and public buildings in the city are left behind. That's why Rakentajat is an interesting monument not only to construction work but also to an entire era when Finnish cities changed rapidly.

In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, old buildings were demolished and replaced by new commercial buildings, apartment buildings and prefabricated houses. Concrete did not symbolize ugliness but the modern future. Hämeenlinna changed along with it, and not always in a way that later generations have praised.

*Rakentajat has aroused mixed feelings over the years, and it would probably not be the first work chosen for a postcard of Hämeenlinna's most beautiful sights. That is precisely why it is interesting. Kummila as a company has disappeared, but the Hämeenlinna it built is all around us. The concrete monument remains as a reminder of an era when the city wanted to look completely different from before. We will return to that later when we ask what happened to old Hämeenlinna.*

## A small tile can change an entire house

When you start paying attention to Hämeenlinna's memorial plaques, you can easily get hooked. There are dozens of them in the city, and an ordinary-looking building can open a whole new story with the help of one small metal plate.

The plaque on the wall of Niittykatu 1 says that Eino Leino lived in the house during his school days. Leino moved to Hämeenlinna in 1890 at the age of twelve to attend school and lived in several addresses in the city before graduating.

At Saaristenkatu 5, a plaque talks about the birthplace of Uno Cygnaeus. The original home of Cygnaeus, who was called the father of the Finnish national school, is no longer there, as it was demolished in 1971. So the plaque not only talks about a famous person, but also about a building that has disappeared from the city.

Elias Lönnrot will meet you at Hallituskatu 18. Before he became the compiler of the Kalevala, Lönnrot interrupted his schooling in Porvoo and in 1820 came to Hämeenlinna as a pharmacy student. He spent a few years in the city before continuing his studies.

The commemorative plaque is perhaps the city's smallest time machine. The house looks ordinary at first, but when you read the text on the wall, a person suddenly appears in the same street scene, whose name you came across at school in a completely different context.

## You don't have to find everything the first time

Hämeenlinna is particularly suitable for this kind of history collecting, because most of the sites do not require a separate trip. You come across them when walking the dog, on a shopping trip or otherwise just walking around the city. First you notice one commemorative plaque, then another, and gradually you notice that you are looking at the walls of old houses in a completely different way.

The same thing happens in parks. The park of the old cemetery ceases to be just a park when you know the stories of some of those buried there. The stone in the park is no longer just a stone when you notice a horseshoe carved into it and know who got off the saddle on it. The bronze young woman in Pikkutori turns into Tove Jansson.

The city is gradually getting a second layer. Nothing new has been built and the landscape has not changed, but the same walking route looks different because you know what was there and who walked it before us. That is perhaps the best part of Hämeenlinna. You don't have to find everything the first time. The city can reveal its stories little by little.

Next, let's take a closer look at the houses. You can't always tell from their current appearance what has been done inside them over the years.

# 7. Houses tell stories

You can easily learn to look at the city's buildings based only on what is in them now. A restaurant is a restaurant, a museum is a museum, a school is a school, and an apartment building is an apartment building. In old cities, however, this quickly leads to confusion. Over the course of a hundred years, it has been possible to take a sauna, study, eat, drink, give birth, make a radio, take care of government affairs or shoot a pistol in the attic in the same house.

The centre of Hämeenlinna is full of such buildings. Some have survived almost by chance, some have changed their use many times, and some look so polished and dignified today that nothing about them reveals their former lives.

In this chapter, therefore, we are not looking for the most beautiful houses in the city. We are looking for houses with a good story.

## Linnankatu 9 – a house where the people of Hämeenlinna went to the sauna

The yellow Art Nouveau house standing on the edge of Linnanpuisto at Linnankatu 9 looks like a quite valuable town house today. However, its original function was very practical: the building was completed in 1912 as Hämeenlinna's municipal sauna. Even in the city maps of the period, it is simply marked as a municipal sauna.

The municipal sauna tells of the time when a private bathroom was not part of the equipment of a standard city apartment. Common facilities were needed for washing, just as the city needed schools, hospitals and other public services. To modern people, building a municipal sauna in an impressive stone house may sound strange, but at the time it was an important city service.

Later, the building took on a completely different life, and for a long time it was also known as Yleisradio's (the Finnish Broadcasting Company) Hämeenlinna office. The building has since been renovated and converted to residential use. The history of the house is thus quite a cross-section of the transformation of a Finnish city: first we went there to wash, then radio was made there, and finally we live there.

There was a building on the site even before the present Art Nouveau house. The previous wooden building at Linnankatu 9 was built in the 1830s, so the history of the plot extends well beyond the present building. The next time you walk past, imagine a Hämeenlinna resident a hundred years ago standing at the door with a towel under their arm. They are not going to a spa. They are going to the municipal sauna.

## Rauhanlinna – from a Liquor Shop to a Temperance Restaurant



The building on Raatihuonekatu first sold alcohol and later operated a sober restaurant.

The history of Rauhanlinna, located at Raatihuoneenkatu 6, contains a twist that would be difficult to invent for the building after the fact. Art Nouveau building was completed at the end of the 19th century for the Licensed alcohol-serving company of Hämeenlinna. Brewing companies were a way of organising the sale and serving of alcoholic beverages in a controlled manner. Rauhanlinna had

wine warehouses, sales of alcoholic beverages and restaurant operations. A workers' restaurant called Tillikka is also connected to the building.

Then times changed, the abstinence movement grew stronger and the attitude towards alcohol in Finland became stricter. Sobriety restaurant operations began in the building. In later decades, Rauhanlinna housed, among other things, government offices, and the building has since been renovated for residential use. From the current facade, you wouldn't guess at first how many social changes have been experienced inside it.

Rauhanlinna is also a good reminder that the names of buildings can last much longer than their purposes. In the city, the name may continue to live, even if almost everything else around it has already changed.

## Paavonkulma – a House with a Lift and a Place Where Native Hämeenlinna Residents Were Born



Paavonkulma is remembered, among other things, for the maternity hospital: for many Hämeenlinna residents, it was literally the first address in the city.

Paavonkulma is one of those buildings whose meaning is not revealed just by looking at the facade. It is related to the urbanization of Hämeenlinna and the phase when the construction of the centre began to become clearly more modern.

The building's history is connected to one significant technical innovation of its time: an elevator. Today, an elevator in an apartment building is taken for granted so much that its absence attracts more attention than its existence. At one time, the elevator building was a sign of a completely new kind of urban living. Paavonkulma is remembered as one of Hämeenlinna's early elevator buildings.

The building is also associated with significantly more personal memories. There was a maternity hospital there, which is why many Hämeenlinna's lives began at Paavonkulma. The name Höyhensaari was used for the maternity hospital, which remained alive in the local vocabulary even after the original operation had ended.

These are exactly the things that, when listening to the talk of old Hämeenlinna residents, you should sometimes ask what a name means. To an outsider, Höyhensaari might sound like a summer house or a children's fairyland. In Hämeenlinna, it can mean the place where a whole group of townspeople saw the light of day for the first time.

Paavonkulma is therefore more than an old city centre building. For many, it is literally the first address in Hämeenlinna.

## Art Museum – a Granary Before Fine Art




Keinusaari's old granary shows how an old building can get a whole new life.

Looking at the buildings of the Hämeenlinna Art Museum in Keinusaari, it is easy to see that they were not originally created for the purpose of presenting art. The buildings are old warehouses, called Engel and Lohrmann after their designers. Today, visual art from the history of Finnish art to contemporary art is presented inside them.

The warehouses are related to Keinusaari's old administrative and industrial history. In the past, the eastern shore of Vanajavesi was not a cultural area like it is today, but an environment of workplaces, warehouses and industry. Verkatehdas, warehouses and other old buildings in the area still remind us of this.

The transformation from a granary to an art museum is almost a textbook example of how to find a completely new function for an old building without destroying its history. Thick walls and large storage rooms, which were once built for a completely different purpose, are now part of the museum's character.

The change in the use of the building is also a good counterpoint to the history of the demolition of Hämeenlinna that will come later. Renewing the city does not always require destroying the old. Sometimes it is enough to find a new reason for existing for an old building. The grain left. Art came. The house remained.

## The first lyceum – a school building that became part of Finnish history



Hämeenlinna's school history is connected to Jean Sibelius and J. K. Paasikivi, among others.

In the area of Sibeliuskatu and Lukiokatu, there is a building that is easily overshadowed by the present stately Lyseo. However, its importance in the history of Finnish education is considerable.

The Finnish-language normal high school started in Hämeenlinna in 1873. It got its first premises from the upper elementary school building completed in the 1840s along Sibeliuksenkatu. The establishment of a normal high school was part of the development of the Finnish school system, and the school located in Hämeenlinna was the first Finnish-language normal high school leading to a university.

The most famous student of the school was undoubtedly Johan Julius Christian Sibelius, who was called Janne by his family and friends. He later became Jean Sibelius. The future president of the republic, J. K. Paasikivi, also attended the school.

However, the Hämeenlinnan phase of normal high school was relatively short. It was decided to move the school to Helsinki in 1887. Ironically, the decision was made just when a new, handsome school building was being built for it in Hämeenlinna.

## Hämeenlinna Lyseo – a school that was built for one school and given to another

The handsome neo-renaissance building at Linnankatu 12–14 was completed in 1888. Its construction is one of the great ironies of Hämeenlinna's school history: the building was planned for a normal high school, but during the construction work it was decided to move the normal high school to Helsinki. Hämeenlinna's Finnish classical high school moved into the finished building.

The building was designed by the architect Magnus Schjerfbeck at the General Board of Public Buildings under the direction of the chief architect Georg Wilenius. In its time, the school was exceptionally handsome: high classrooms and a large ballroom exceeded even the usual requirements for school buildings of the time. The building was expanded in 1936, but its historic main building has retained its essential character. The ballroom with its coffered ceilings has even been described as the most beautiful interior in the city.

However, the importance of the Lyceum does not arise only from the architecture. Its history is associated with an exceptional group of names from Finnish culture, science and politics. At various stages, the school's students have included, among others, Jean Sibelius, J. K. Paasikivi and Eino Leino, and in later decades also Irwin Goodman and Vexi Salmi.

## Hämeen Suoja – ballroom, offices and a shooting range in the attic

When looking at Hämeen Suoja, located at Palokunnankatu 12, pistol shooting is not necessarily the first thing that comes to mind. However, that was also practiced in the building.

Hämeen Suoja was completed in 1930 for the Civil Guard and the Lotta Svärd organisation. The building was much more than an office. It contained a ballroom, lecture and meeting rooms, offices, the commander's apartment and various storage spaces. The complex served the Civil Guard at a time when these organisations played a significant role in Finnish society.

One of the building's most special facilities was the pistol range located in the attic. The idea of a shooting range on the top floor of a house in the middle of the city sounds strange at least from today's perspective, but the building was designed specifically for the organization's needs. When the purpose changes, so does the perception of normal.

The Civil Guard and Lotta Svärd were disbanded in 1944, after which the building's original function ended. The house survived, however, and found new uses. Today, a commemorative plaque on its wall tells of its earlier life.

Häme Finland is a good example of why it pays to look at street level and find out what the original purpose of the familiar facade was. The most interesting part of the building may not be visible outward at all. In this case, it was in the attic.

## The houses are the city's memory

These buildings have something in common. None of them have remained completely unchanged and need not be. A municipal sauna can become a home, an art museum of granary and a school over 100 years old can be restored to the next generation. Maintaining the building does not mean stopping the city from the moment the house was completed.

Vice versa. Often it is precisely the change of purpose that keeps an old building alive.

In Hämeenlinna, this is a particularly interesting perspective, because the city also has another building history. Not all old houses got a new function. Some were demolished, some remained under new construction, and some of them only have photos, commemorative plaques or place names used by old Hämeenlinna residents left. When you start to see the past lives behind the current buildings in the city centre, the following question inevitably arises: What would still be here to see if everything old had not been demolished in time? That's where the next story begins.

# 8. What Happened to Old Hämeenlinna?

Hämeenlinna is an old town. However, it doesn't always seem that way.

When you walk in the centre, you can see a surprising number of buildings from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s around the town founded in the 17th century. There are older stone houses and a few wooden houses between them, but it is pointless to look for a unified historical centre in Hämeenlinna.

Of course, there are many reasons for this. The city has burned down, buildings have reached the end of their service life and the growing city has needed new apartments, business premises and streets. But the look of Hämeenlinna changed especially strongly in the decades after the wars, when the old town began to be rebuilt into a modern one.

The solutions made are easy to criticize afterwards. The world looked different then. Automobilization was progress, department stores were the future, and an old wooden house could appear instead of a valuable cultural heritage as a cold, cramped and impractical building without proper sanitary facilities. Still, for a few decades, the city was in a remarkable hurry to get rid of its old self.

## The city decided to be modern

Post-war Finland urbanized rapidly. People moved from the country to the cities, the number of cars increased, trade changed and people began to expect completely different comforts from living than before. In urban planning, traffic and efficient construction took centre stage.

Hämeenlinna participated in the change with full enthusiasm. Low wooden and stone buildings in the centre were demolished, and larger commercial and residential buildings were built on their plots. Vanajavesi's old arch bridge was allowed to give way to a wider bridge, traffic lanes were widened and a motorway was built through the city.

From today's point of view, it seems incomprehensible why the old city was not protected more. However, in the thinking of the era, the question could have

been quite the opposite: why preserve a small old house on a valuable central plot, if a modern commercial building and apartments can be built on the site?

That way of thinking also made a lot of sense. The problem was only noticed later. When enough individual old houses had been replaced by new ones, not only a number of buildings in poor condition had disappeared. A piece of the city had disappeared.

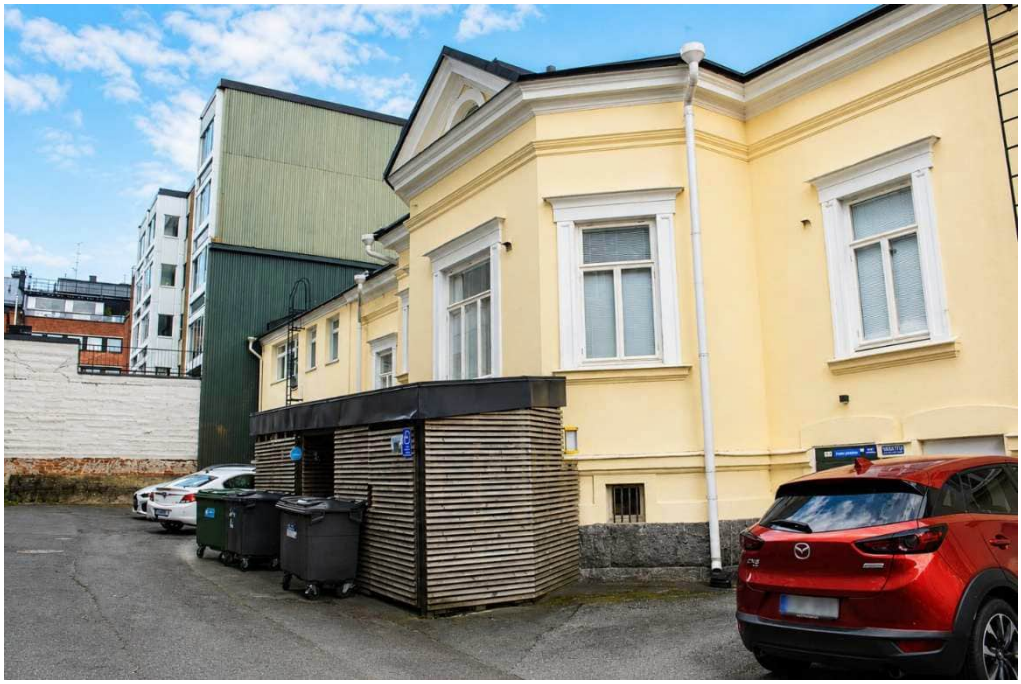
## The centre changed the scale

The disappearance of the old Hämeenlinna is best understood by walking in the centre and looking at the scale of the buildings. A low building from the 19th century may stand on one lot, and a multi-storey commercial and residential building from the 1960s on the next. It is precisely in these joints that the city's change is still visible.

For example, at the corner of Palokunnankatu 20 and Sibeliuksenkatu 2, there was a building from the 19th century, which was demolished in 1956. Säästöpankki's four-story commercial and residential building rose in its place. One house was replaced by another, but at the same time the scale of the street space, the construction method and the whole concept of using the city centre changed.

There were many such cases. Each of them was an individual construction project in its own time. When you look at them decades from now as a whole, they form one of the biggest urban changes in Hämeenlinna's history. So the old Hämeenlinna did not disappear overnight. It was demolished house by house.

## House of Sargren - the old in the squeeze of the new



An old building under the pressure of a new one. The cityscape of Hämeenlinna tells about the construction of different eras sometimes very concretely.

You can sometimes see the change of town best in a place where old and new have been left side by side. Sargren's house is like this. The old building has remained in the grip of a newer and much larger building stock. The difference in the scales makes it visible what happened more widely in the centre: around the low old city and gradually grew a higher and more efficient built city.

It is precisely such sites that are more interesting for this guide than a fully preserved historical milieu. You don't have to show the reader an old photograph of what this place once looked like. The current environment tells of change in itself. When the house is depicted so that the surrounding newer building can also be seen, the same picture holds two Hämeenlinna. The old one hasn't disappeared completely. It's just stuck inside a new town.

## Kummila built a new Hämeenlinna

When the old Hämeenlinna was demolished, something was of course replaced. One of the builders of the new city was Kummila Oy, a construction company from Hämeenlinna.

Kummila's history can still be seen in the city, even if the name of the company doesn't necessarily mean anything to a new resident. Over the decades, the company-built apartments, commercial buildings and public buildings and thus participated concretely in what post-war Hämeenlinna began to look like. Its projects included, among other things, large commercial buildings in the centre and many other objects that represented the modern Hämeenlinna of the time.

However, the significance of Kummila should not be described simply as a story about an evil construction company that demolished the old town. The company did what was needed in a growing Finnish city at the time and what was ordered from it. People needed apartments, shops needed bigger spaces and the city wanted to modernize.

The monument of the era still stands on Lahdensivuntie. The concrete figures and element structures of Kari Juva's Rakentajat sculpture look exactly like the future that was built in the early 1970s. When you look at the sculpture in this context, it's not just a slightly strange concrete statue. It is the self-portrait of the new Hämeenlinna.

## Motorway in the middle of town



Motorway 3 makes Hämeenlinna exceptionally easy to reach.

Perhaps the largest single post-war urban solution in Hämeenlinna is not a building, but a road. Motorway 3 runs right by the city centre, practically within town. For a present-day Hämeenlinna resident, the motorway is such an obvious part of the landscape that its speciality may not be noticed. In a few Finnish cities, motorway traffic is just as close to the historic centre.

In time, the road fundamentally changed the western edge of the city and the surroundings of Vanajavesi. It eased traffic and strengthened Hämeenlinna's excellent accessibility between Helsinki and Tampere, but at the same time it formed a powerful traffic corridor between the city centre and the western neighbourhoods.

This sums up much of the post-war development in Hämeenlinna. The city got something it wanted: fast connections and a modern transport system. At the same time, it lost something that might not have been seen in the same way. Hämeenlinna is now an exceptionally easy city to enter by car. After the construction of the motorway, it also became a city, which is exceptionally easy to drive through without stopping.

## Valli's barbecue - two boxes of clothing were left in place




A local landmark may disappear as a building but stay in the speech. There are now two containers of clothing in the place of the Valli barbecue.

Sometimes the disappearance of the city is downright comically concrete. Valli's grill was a local landmark, whose name remained alive in the speech of Hämeenlinna residents. Such grills, kiosks, bars and small shops are the everyday history of the city. They don't usually end up in building historical inventories in the same way as Art Nouveau houses or architecturally significant public buildings, but they may be much more important in people's memory.

In Valli's grill, the contrast between the past and the present is particularly embarrassing. In the place where the grill used to be, today there are two clothes collection containers. A city's history doesn't always need a monument. Sometimes two containers are enough.

# 9. Hämeenlinna Oddities

When you live in a city long enough, its quirks gradually cease to seem strange. A Hämeenlinna resident doesn't necessarily think it's anything special that in the middle of a ridge forest there is an outdoor swimming pool built for the Olympics and a motor track right on the other side of the ridge. He is not surprised by the artificial ruins built in the city park or the fact that next to the city centre there is a woman over 50 metres tall standing on the wall of a grain silo. However, these are useful observations for a new resident. They sometimes talk more about the city than the official attractions.

Hämeenlinna is old enough that oddities have accumulated here, and small enough that they have become common local topics of conversation. Some are historically significant, some are culturally peculiar and some are simply such that you wouldn't really expect to find them in Hämeenlinna.

## Finland's Second Olympic City – Yes, Really

The 1952 Helsinki Olympics were not just the Helsinki Olympics. Hämeenlinna was the second official competition city of the games, and in Ahvenisto the modern pentathlon was contested. For the Olympics, a sports and outdoor recreation centre and an outdoor swimming pool were built in the area, which is still in use. The sports of the pentathlon were riding, fencing, shooting, swimming and cross-country running.

The Games were no minor footnote in the life of the city either. Ahvenisto held its own opening ceremony, the Olympic flag also flew at Kauriala sports ground, and an Olympic village was established at Aulanko. Half of the Olympic field-hockey matches were played at Kauriala. The flags of the fifteen participating countries lined the edge of Aulanko golf course. For five days, Hämeenlinna lived a very real Olympic life.

The Olympic history remains unexpectedly present at Appara. In addition to the outdoor swimming pool, the old cross-country route has been relocated, and an Olympic commemorative plaque was acquired in 1962 at the Centre for Sport. It was not until ten years after the Games that the tile was placed, when we began

to wonder whether there had been no monument left of such an important event. So, if anyone claims that nothing will ever happen in Hämeenlinna, one of the possible answers is that there has been an Olympic Games.

## At Appara You Can Hear Both Birdsong and Racing Engines

The second speciality of Ahvenisto is literally found on the other side of the ridge. Next to the nature reserve, lake and outdoor routes are located Ahvenisto Race Circuit which was completed in 1967 and is one of Finland's most famous motor sports sites. The track is still active, with competitions and other motorsport events taking place.

The combination is at least peculiar. On the other side of the ridge, you can swim in the lake, walk along the forest paths of the nature reserve or look at Häme's provincial flower, the Hämeenkylmänkukka (Pulsatilla patens). On the other side of the same ridge, a motor track is driven around with a racing car. A planner would hardly place a similar entity in the same way today. You don't have to in Hämeenlinna. It's already there. And the combination works.

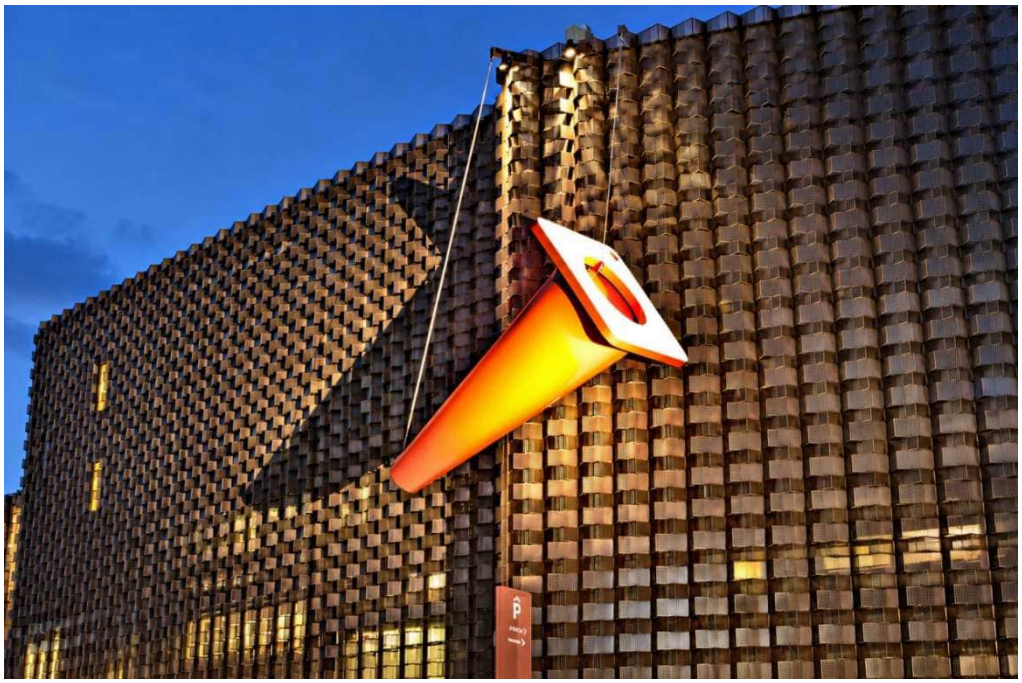
## The biggest mural in the Nordic countries is painted on a grain silo

Old grain silos rising in the direction of Kantola event park may not seem to be the most obvious place for international contemporary art. In 2017, the Australian artist Guido van Helten painted a photorealistic mural over 50 metres high on their side.

The work was completed as part of the UPEA17 Urban Art Festival, and Hämeenlinna describes it as the largest mural in the Nordic countries. Van Helten did not just come to the city to paint a random huge face image, but he became familiar with families and local lifestyles in Hämeenlinna before starting work. His way of working is based precisely on combining works with the community in which they are located.

The result is one of Hämeenlinna's most unusual landmarks. From a distance, the human figures in the mural almost blur together, even though the image rises high across the surface of the old industrial building. In Hämeenlinna, even an old silo can become a work of art. Demolition was not the only option this time.

## A Bollard and a Traffic Cone Suspended in Mid-Air



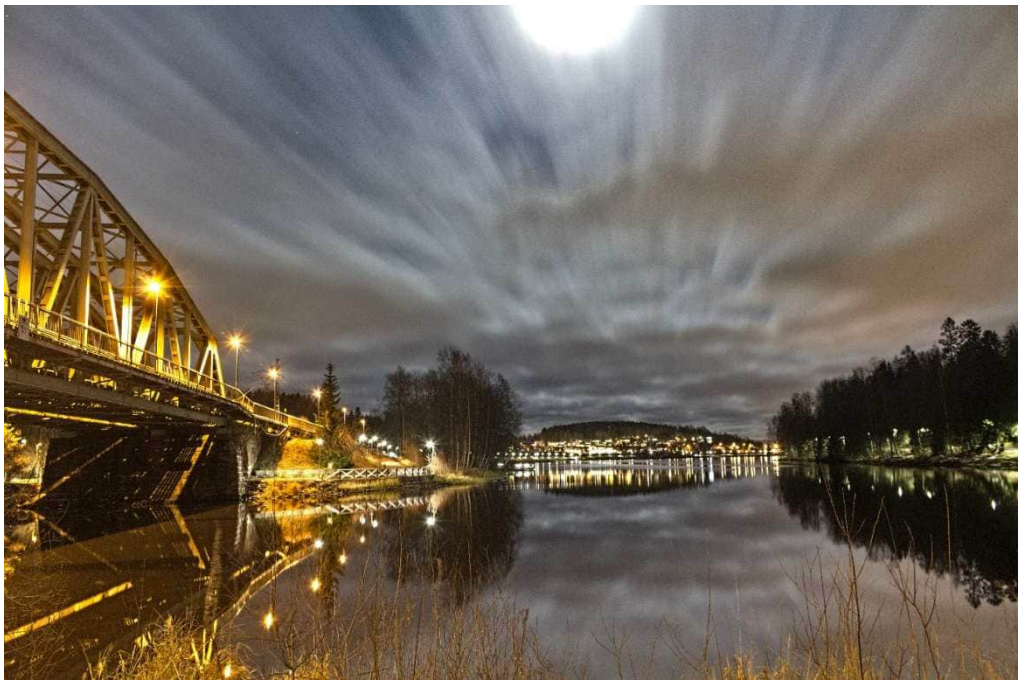
Pööli in Asemanranta shows that new local landmarks are still being created – sometimes in the form of a parking garage.

Asemanranta is one of the newest parts of Hämeenlinna. The parking facility is called Pööli, a local name that has quickly become part of the vocabulary a newcomer needs to learn.

But he wasn't content to be a parking garage. In this context, attention is drawn to a large traffic cone hanging around the building. It has quickly become one of the new landmarks in Hämeenlinna, which do not need to exist for centuries before city residents start using them for navigation and discussion.

This is actually interesting from the point of view of the birth of cities. Not all local landmarks have to be medieval. Someone builds a parking garage, hangs a huge traffic cone on it. We can talk about it for a while, soon no one thinks it's particularly strange anymore.

## Hikisilta – the Name Says It All



Yes, Hikisilta sounds like a joke played on newcomers.

Not all local specialities need great history. Sometimes a name is enough. There's Hikisilta in Hämeenlinna.

At first, a new resident may think he has misheard, but it is an established local name. These informal names are of interest to urban culture, precisely because they were not designed at City Hall. They are born in use and stay alive if the name is good enough. For the sweat bridge, the name has clearly been good enough.

## Hotsi – Hämeenlinna's Own Local Classic

If Hämeenlinna had an unofficial signature food, hotsi would be a strong candidate. Hotsi is a local take on the hot dog, but it is best not to dismiss it as just a hot dog in front of a Hämeenlinna local. It is a local tradition, part of the same layer of urban culture as the city's unofficial place names and other small things that only begin to make sense once you live here.

Such local foods are interesting precisely because they are not usually born for tourism marketing. No one has ever sat in a working group thinking about the gastronomic brand of Hämeenlinna and ended up in a hotsi. It was born in practice, and it stayed alive. Well, at least the new Hämeenlinna local knows what they're talking about when someone suggests we go for a hotsi. Eating is a personal solution, then.

## Club's not a club.

In Hämeenlinna, the word Kerho (club) usually refers to HPK, or Hämeenlinna Ball Club. Hockey is so much part of a local identity that no one uses the full name in the conversation.

Kerho plays at Rinkelinmäki, and the arena is naturally known as Rinkeli. This is a good example of how quickly a newcomer to Hämeenlinna can find themselves in a situation where every Finnish word is familiar but the sentence still makes no sense.

The importance of hockey is particularly evident when HSK succeeds. The city is not huge, so the success and failure of the league team will be visible and quickly heard around people who do not go to games themselves. You don't have to like the club. But you should know how he's doing. It'll make the conversation easier.

## Irwin and Vexi – from Kauriala into the Finnish Songbook

In Hämeenlinna, Irwin and Vexi are not just names of national entertainment history. They belong to the local cultural landscape and vocabulary in the same way as Janne Sibelius during his own time. The city has therefore managed to

produce both a national composer and a man who sang about the Rogue’s Rose . Cultural history can accommodate many things.

Both were deeply rooted in Hämeenlinna, especially in the Kauriala district. Vexi Salmi was born in Hämeenlinna in 1942 and grew up on Rinkelinkatu. Irwin's Hämeenlinna lives so strongly in local memory that his house in Kauriala is still known as Lampuri. Nearby, on Brahenkatu, there is now also Vexi Salmi Park. Their collaboration produced a huge number of songs familiar to Finns, combining Irwin's recognisable voice with Vexi's direct, humorous and often socially observant lyrics.

## SCC - three letters with deep local trauma

If you want to get a slightly more grown-up discussion going, you can try three letters: SCC. Sunny Car Centre was a huge car dealership designed for a visible location along the Hämeenlinna motorway in the early 2010's. There was much talk of the project, big plans and a significant attraction for the city.

Then everything went the way that SCC became much more in Hämeenlinna than an unrealised construction project. It became a trauma. Over the years, the SCC has been a metaphor for unrealistic plans, big promises and projects in the local debate, where someone might ask if this is yet another Sunny Car Centre.

The new resident doesn't need to know every turn of the case. It is good to know, however, why the three letters can cause laughter, sighing and a long explanation at the same time for those who are in Hämeenlinna locals. The SCC was eventually not built. In the local cultural heritage, it was built very thoroughly.

## The city's best specialities are not attractions.

The interesting thing about Hämeenlinna's oddities is how poorly they fit together. An Olympic city, a motor racing circuit in the middle of a forest, a gigantic mural, hotsi, Pööli and one failed car-shopping-centre project do not make a particularly coherent tourism brand. Fortunately, they do not have to.

These are the kinds of things that make a city begin to feel like your own. First you learn the important places. Then you learn their unofficial names.

Eventually you know things you do not really need to know at all, but knowing them makes you a little more local. By then Appara is no longer Ahvenisto, Kerho needs no explanation, and the letters SCC trigger an immediate reaction.

# 10. Hämeenlinna in practice

Once the moving has been completed, the boxes are unpacked and the location of the local store will begin with the actual test of living in the city. How do you get to work here? Where can I leave the car? Where are the health services? What if, tonight, you want to go to the theatre, in the morning to the woods or on Sunday to the lake?

The strength of Hämeenlinna is beginning to appear in such everyday matters. The city is large enough to find basic services, culture, hobbies and commercial services mainly in its own town, but so small that it does not normally have to be booked for half a day. In a few minutes, you can move from city blocks to the beach of Vanajavesi and a little later in the forest.

Hämeenlinna can therefore be considered as a city where the scale is often quite human. However, one thing should be understood at once: on the map Hämeenlinna is much bigger than you could imagine when moving in the centre.

## The car can get almost everywhere, sometimes too easily.

Hämeenlinna has developed strongly around car travel, which has both advantages and disadvantages. The motorway runs through the city centre, and its junctions provide quick access to different parts of the city. The location between Helsinki and Tampere also makes travelling outside the city exceptionally easy.

Large commercial concentrations outside the centre have further strengthened the position of the car. Many large retail stores have concentrated in the Tiiriö, and Tuulosen's shopping centre serves a completely different part of the city. In the centre, trade and services are within walking distance of each other.

The driver's first lesson in the city of Hämeenlinna is usually linked to the fact that it is not appropriate to view the place solely based on street addresses. The local may advise you to drive through Poltsari, turn from the corner of Verkis or continue in Tiiriö. Once you learn these names, the city becomes much simpler.

And at least traffic is relative. In Hämeenlinna, we can talk about congestion in a situation where the Helsinki citizen is still looking for signs of where traffic starts.

## Parking - a topic that always leads to discussion

Parking is one of the things about which almost every city has its own constant discussion. Hämeenlinna is no exception. The centre has street-side seats, parking areas and parking facilities, and the parking arrangements and their prices have over the years provided elements for local exchange of views.

The most important thing for a new resident is to learn some key parking places and always check the conditions in place. Parking arrangements in the city centre can change every week, so this guide should not try to act as a parking price. That kind of information would have expired before the guide had been published.

Pööli, next to the railway station, is a useful name to learn straight away. It is the Asemanranta parking facility and one of the city's new local landmarks. If someone says they left their car in Pööli, the car has not entered some mysterious Häme limbo. It is in the parking garage.

## There are two important directions to the train.

The location of Hämeenlinna is often promoted by how quickly you can reach Helsinki and Tampere from here. The argument has the small problem that it sometimes sounds like the city's most important feature is the possibility of leaving quickly.

Before talking about how quickly you can get away from here, it is worth remembering that Hämeenlinna was the first place in Finland you could reach by train. Finland's very first railway line, from Helsinki to Hämeenlinna, was ceremonially opened on 31 January 1862. This was no later rush to catch up, but the true starting point of Finnish railway history, giving new momentum to the city's industry and everyday life. Neighbouring Tampere had to wait for the rails until 1876.

Location really is one of Hämeenlinna's practical strengths. The railway runs through the city centre, and connections on the Helsinki–Tampere main line make it possible, for example, to work outside the city without a car. Helsinki is about an hour away by train and Tampere about 40 minutes away.

The railway station is on the eastern side of Vanajavesi, but the city centre is very close. Verkatehdas is practically next door, and the market square is just over a ten-minute walk away. Asemanranta, built around the station, has transformed the area quickly: the first new residential buildings were completed in 2018, and the former railway-yard and food-factory surroundings have grown into a new district. Hämeenlinna is therefore one of the few Finnish cities where you can live in a fairly peaceful small city yet board a main-line train in the morning. More importantly, the same train will bring you home again in the evening.

## You can take the bus, but you should watch your schedule.

Local transport links the city centre to the districts and some of the wider areas of Hämeenlinna. In a city the size of Hämeenlinna, however, bus traffic has different realities than in Greater Helsinki. Not all routes take buses every few minutes, and there may be fewer shifts at night and on weekends. If life is built on public transport, you should check the connections between your home and the most common destinations when choosing where to live.

In the city centre, the need for a car or bus is rapidly reduced. Shopping, restaurants, cultural services and many other everyday destinations are within walking or cycling distance.

## The city looks a lot different down by the water.

It is also worth learning how to get around without being in a hurry. Rantareitti along the shores of Vanajavesi is ideal for that.

The beaches connect the city centre, castle, town park, Verkatehdas, Asemanranta and other central areas of the city. At the same time, you can see something essential about Hämeenlinna's structure: the city is not only built around streets but also around water.

Walking or cycling along Rantareitti reveals a completely different version of the city. The castle looks different from the water, the old industrial environment of Verkatehdas becomes part of the waterfront, and Aulanko suddenly seems surprisingly close.

Hämeenlinna National Kaupunginpuisto was first founded in 2001. Its whole is around Vanajavesi and combines historical environments, built city, parks and natural areas. This is not just a tourist title, but the idea of an urban park can be seen in concrete terms in how far green and accessible connections can go through the city.

If you've moved to Hämeenlinna, it's worth going around the beach at least once. After that, the city's geography will be much easier to understand.

## Shopping and services are not in one place

The commercial centre of Hämeenlinna has spread over decades. The traditional centre with its markets and pedestrian streets is still a concentration of services and restaurants, but there is also much retail trade elsewhere.

In the city centre, Goodman shopping centre forms a large commercial complex. Its location is, in fact, very Hämeenlinna-like: the shopping centre was built over the motorway. At one point, the route through the city that once divided the urban structure was covered with shops.

Tiiriö is where you go when you need large supermarkets, household goods, a hardware store, furniture or something else you would not normally buy from a small shop on the pedestrian street. A new resident soon learns that many everyday purchases in Hämeenlinna mean a trip to Tiiriö.

However, the size of the city makes it reasonably easy to understand. When you know the services of the city centre, Tiiriö and your own part of the town, most of the everyday life starts to be under control.

## Health Services Have Moved to Assi

The map of the health services in Hämeenlinna changed significantly with the completion of the new Ahvenisto Hospital. The new hospital is known as Assi, and you should learn the name just like Appara, Park and Pööli.

Assi was built on the site of the old Kanta-Häme Central Hospital in Ahvenisto. It is not merely a new hospital building, but an extensive centre for health and

social services, bringing other services together alongside specialised medical care. In local speech, the old central hospital was simply known as Mäki.

This also means the gradual transformation of one local word into history. For decades, going to the Old Mäki in Hämeenlinna meant going to a hospital. For the new resident, the hospital is Assi. The language of the city changes, while the town changes.

In health services, responsibilities and establishments can change, so the list of individual receptions or on-call services would be quickly obsolete. In practical matters, you should always check your well-being area and not the years-old migration guide.

## There's a lot of culture in terms of city size.

Hämeenlinna is very difficult to claim as the capital of Finnish culture, and there is no need for it. However, the size of the city has a considerable cultural diversity.

Verkatehdas is a hub for concerts, events, fairs and meetings. Hämeenlinna Theatre and Hämeenlinna Art Museum operate in the same area. Museo Skogster, the Birthplace of Sibelius, Palander House and Häme Castle complement the offering, while Sibelius's history can be seen in many places around the city centre.

In the summer, the event calendar of the city is clearly becoming livelier. The medieval festival is quite naturally suitable for the city, where the medieval castle is ready. Wanaja Festival brings a bigger music event to Castle Park, and Ämyrock in Park represents an entirely different kind of festival tradition.

The Kantola event park has shown that a relatively small city can, if necessary, receive a very large audience. The AC/DC concert in 2015 made the Kantola event park known throughout Finland and brought to Hämeenlinna for one day an audience of the same magnitude as the entire population. On that day, the local definition of congestion will have to be revised for a moment.

## Kerho Is Kerho

Hämeenlinna's best-known sports club is HPK, and the role of ice hockey in the city should not be underestimated. Kerho plays at Rinkelinmäki, and on match days its presence can be felt outside the arena as well.

But Hämeenlinna's sporting life does not end with ice hockey. In addition to swimming, skiing, running and other outdoor activities, Ahvenisto has traditions in motorsport, athletics and football, and the city offers a wide range of other sports as well.

For the new resident, the names of sports sites will again give rise to a small language test. If someone goes to Reska, Appara or Puller, they may not feel like using any nicknames. He's just telling me where he's going.

## Nature begins almost at home

This may be the greatest of Hämeenlinna's practical strengths. There is no need to make a separate weekend trip in nature, because it's inside and just around the city.

The Aulanko is the most famous entity, but it's not the only one. Ahvenisto's ridges and lake are almost in the centre, Hattelmalanharju forms its own valuable natural area, and the beaches of Vanajavesi pass through the city. In Hämeenlinna, finding a swimming place, fishing water or cottage landscape is not particularly difficult.

When you go further from downtown, the scale changes completely. Evo is one of Finland's largest integrated forest areas and offers a completely different framework for camping than the central parks. In turn, lakes, forests and rural landscapes are not recreational areas on the edge of the city but a normal habitat.

This makes Hämeenlinna a bit difficult to define as the city. In the same municipality you can live in the centre a few hundred metres from the square or by the lake in the middle of the countryside. But even those living in the city centre can get into the woods quickly. Often faster than out of town.

## Here, everyday life is pretty easy.

Hämeenlinna may not win competition between cities by having the most of all here. In many everyday situations, it wins because enough things are close enough.

There are many things you can do in the city centre, walking. The car usually gets to the other side of town quickly. The train leads to Helsinki or Tampere. You don't have to go to a theatre, concert or league game, and you can get into the woods without having to drive an hour out of town first.

Of course, the disadvantages of a small town come with. There are fewer special services than large cities, public transport does not travel everywhere frequently, and the commercial life of the centre is not what it once was. If you need something very special, Tampere or Helsinki may meet.

But perhaps the practicality of Hämeenlinna is best summed up in ordinary everyday life. In the morning, you can go to work, in the afternoon take care of things downtown and in the evening walk with your dog on the beach or in the woods at Appara without having to make a real trip plan for any of these. It doesn't sound like a big city attraction, but once you've tried it for a while, it can be surprisingly difficult to give up.

And when the city starts to move, there's one more practical problem. In Hämeenlinna, you don't always call things by their real names. You need your own dictionary.

# 11. Hämeenlinna–English Dictionary

When you move to a new city, you learn the names of the streets and places first. After that, you can tell the locals don't use them. In Hämeenlinna, this stage will be met quite quickly, and the train brings suspicion that he missed a language course in connection with the move.

This dictionary will get you started. It can't be perfect, because one of the characteristics of a local language is that as soon as you think you've learned it, someone will mention another place you never heard of.

## Appara

Ahvenisto, especially Lake Ahvenisto and its surroundings, including the outdoor swimming pool and recreation areas. ‘Let's go to Appara’ can mean going swimming, skiing, jogging, walking or simply spending time in the area. Few Hämeenlinna locals would say they were heading to the ‘Ahvenisto recreation area’ in their spare time. If you can hear engines, you are still in the right place.

## Assi

The new hospital in Ahvenisto. Assi is one of those local names that you probably won't be able to learn from a new resident for very long. The name comes from the Ahvenisto Hospital, and with the new hospital it has gradually replaced the old local hospital vocabulary. If they give you an appointment for Assi, don't look for someone named Assi.

## Aulanko

This is exceptionally easy: the Aulanko means Aulanko. The problem arises only from the fact that it can mean a hotel, nature reserve, observation tower, park forest, golf course, Lake Aulangonjärvi or the whole city. It's the context.

## GM

Goodman shopping centre is located on the western edge of the city centre, above the motorway. The abbreviation appears particularly in written local discussion. If someone says they are going to GeeÄmmä, they are not necessarily trading their car for an American one.

## Hikisilta

The local name for the old railway bridge across Vanajavesi and the pedestrian and cycle route that follows it. It forms part of the lakeside route. The name comes from conscripts using it on foot or by bicycle on their way to and from the Hätilä firing range. Once you start using the word Hikisilta without thinking it is an unusual name for a bridge, you have integrated well.

## Hotsi

Hotsi is not a generic name for any hot dog, but a clearly defined part of Hämeenlinna's local food culture. It is unwise to start an argument with a local who has strong views about what a proper hotsi should contain. In its basic form, hotsi consists of a steamed, thick bread roll with fillings and one or two Finnish sausages. The seasonings are added to taste.

## Hämpton

Hämpton means Hämeenlinna beneath the surface: the city's distinctive local culture and the places where things happen. Key words include Sibelius, Irwin, Turisas, Kantola, Ämy, Wanaja, Kerho, Verkis, Suisto, the Medieval Festival, Tavastia Armigeri, Birgeri, Noora's Wine Bar and the cafés along Vanajavesi. Hämpton is Hämeenlinna with a distinctive character, hometown affection and pride.

## Höyhensaari

The maternity hospital in Paavonkulma on Rauhankatu, founded and for many years run by Dr Ensio Kurki-Suonio, operated from 1929 to 1968. This is where many native-born Hämeenlinna residents first entered the world.

## Italia

Italia is a local nickname for Iittala and requires no Italian accent. Iittala is part of Kalvola and present-day Hämeenlinna, but it has a strong identity of its own. If a Hämeenlinna local says they are going to Italia and does not pack a suitcase, wait a moment before asking about the flight time.

## Janne

Jean Sibelius, the town's own son. Sibelius's family and friends called him Janne. In Hämeenlinna, the national composer is also closer to everyday urban history: here he was born, went to school and spent his youth.

## Joutsenlampi

A well-known artificial pond in Aulanko Park Forest. The name is not a poetic invention of tourism marketing but an established place name. Joutsenlampi is part of the landscape created at Aulanko by Standertskjöld and a good reminder of how much of Aulanko's ‘natural’ appearance is in fact a carefully designed park landscape.

## Kahtari

A small lake in Tiiönmäki, with a beach on the shore and around it.

## Kantola

Hämeenlinna 19. a part of the city, mainly an old industrial area built in the 1950s, which is located among other things Kantola event park opened in 2015.

## Kerho

Hämeenlinna Ball Club or HPK, for true supporters simply the club - the most beloved child since 1929.

## Lintuvintti

Also known as the Recycling Centre. Formerly the legendary Kolibri dance restaurant on Hallituskatu.

## Miekkalinna

The police station in Poltinaho.

## Mäki

Old Kanta- Häme Central Hospital in Ahvenisto. Going to the hill meant going to the hospital for decades, in a speech from a Hämeenlinna. With the new Ahvenisto Hospital, Assi, the word is likely to gradually start moving into local history.

## Parkki

Kaupunginpuisto. If a Hämeenlinna local suggests a walk in Parkki, they do not mean a car park. Parkki is the historic city park north of the castle, formerly known as Pyövelinmäki and later developed as a romantic landscape park.

## Poltsari

Poltinaho, an old barracks area established in the eighteenth century. Today it contains, among other things, Hämeenlinna's best-known roundabout, the Miekkalinna police station and a residential area. When you can place Poltsari on the map without thinking, you have passed one part of the Hämeenlinna test.

## Pulleri

A sports park at the corner of Parolantie and Härkätie. People go there to exercise, train, compete or drive someone who does one of those things.

## Pyövelinmäki

A hill located in the city park or Park, whose name is believed to be related to the castle and its prison activities.

## Pööli

The Asemanranta parking garage with the city's most famous and expensive traffic cone hanging on its side. The name was chosen by children at a nearby day-care centre. It is newer than many entries in this dictionary, but it has become established quickly. If someone says the car is in Pööli, everything is probably in order.

## Raatopuisto

Unofficial name used in 1872 for a closed cemetery park. However, there is no conclusive evidence of the prevalence of name use.

## Rantareitti

A network of walking and cycling routes around Vanajavesi and along its shores. Rantareitti is not just one short waterfront street; it means a wider route following the shores of Vanajavesi. It is also one of the best ways to understand how strongly Hämeenlinna has been built around the water.

## Ravari

The old racecourse area next to Pulleri sports park. There is a grill kiosk there where you can get hotsi.

## Reska

The pedestrian street in the so-called first block on Raatihuoneenkatu, formerly Raastuvankatu. Its first section, between Sibeliuksenkatu and Kasarmikatu,

opened in the 1980s, and it was extended from Kasarmikatu to Saaristenkatu in the early 2000s.

## Rinkelinmäki

Kerho's home arena and its surroundings. Rinkelinmäki is the name of the area, while Kerho plays at Rinkeli. When you understand that sentence without a dictionary, you are well on your way through the basic course in the local language.

## SCC

Sunny Car Centre. A permanent psychological trauma for Hämeenlinna: depending on your perspective, either a missed opportunity or an enduring and inexhaustible source of ridicule directed at those involved in the project, particularly political decision-makers. It taught Hämeenlinna's local politicians that board work involves more than pastries and champagne: it also means taking responsibility.

## Tuuvinki

A traditional Häme potato dish, eaten at other times of the year as well as Christmas.

## Uikki

Swimming pool parking lot. A popular youth gathering place at night.

## Verkis

Verkatehdas cultural and congress centre and, more loosely, the surrounding cultural district. A concert can be at Verkis, a meeting can be at Verkis, and someone can simply go to Verkis. The old industrial area has acquired a new life – and lost a few syllables along the way.

## Wetteri

A long-standing name in Hämeenlinna, linked to Wetterhoff and its surroundings. The history of craftsmanship and education linked to the name Fredrika Wetterhoff is so strong in the city that it appears in different local contexts. Wetteri is one of those words which often only survive the exact meaning in a sentence.

## Ämyrock

Free rock festival in the parking lot. Ämyrock has been organised since 1974, so it is not a local whim for the moment, but an urban culture of several generations. Ämy is also a good example of what happens when the historical landscape park in Hämeenlinna meets Finnish rock culture. Both survived.

# 12. Now You Are a Hämeenlinna Local

Moving to Hämeenlinna is not an entrance examination. Nobody will check whether you know the Häme song, whether you have climbed Aulanko's observation tower or what year the city received its charter. Becoming part of Hämeenlinna begins in much more ordinary ways.

At first, the city is a collection of addresses. Home is on a certain street; the shop is found with a satnav and Ahvenisto is a place someone recommended for outdoor activities. Then names begin to appear beside the addresses. Ahvenisto becomes Appara, Kaupunginpuisto becomes Parkki and the pedestrian street on Raatihuoneenkatu becomes Reska. Soon you notice that you are using the names yourself. At some point, something even more suspicious happens. The city starts to feel like your own.

You know you're in the middle of a Hämeenlinna when...

The first sign may be that you stop measuring Hämeenlinna through Helsinki and Tampere. You no longer think about living in a city that can reach Helsinki and Tampere in 40 minutes. You think you live in Hämeenlinna and visit Helsinki or Tampere if necessary. It's a huge change in your world view.

Next thing you know, the scale of distances is starting to change. When you're used to the fact that a large part of the city is a few minutes' drive away, the twenty-minute journey seems long. If an exceptional number of cars occur at the same junction, the word rush may come to mind. At this point, you should be careful not to tell the Helsinki people.

## You don't talk about places with their real names anymore.

The local language is insidious. Nobody decides one morning to start using the word Poltsari. It simply slips into your vocabulary. The final stage comes when you give a newcomer directions using a landmark that no longer exists. Then

you have understood one of the deepest principles of being a Hämeenlinna local: the city's official map is not the same as the map in a local resident's head.

## You'll learn how to take the rush right

People have joked about Häme slowness for so long that no one really knows which came first, the stereotype or the joke. After living in Hämeenlinna for a while, however, you may begin to see something useful in the stereotype. Not everything has to be done immediately.

This does not mean that things will not be completed. They just might settle down. We'll look, think, maybe talk. Sometimes people notice it wasn't as urgent as they thought at first. At some point, you start to understand why she wasn't in a hurry.

## You're starting to notice things you used to walk past.

A new resident sees Häme Castle. A resident becoming local also sees the stone marking the spot where the Russian emperor dismounted from his horse.

He knows why the old cemetery park has Christian Sibelius's Iron Cross, why there are so many names on the walls of Lyseo and why a naked young woman standing at the Little Square joins the Moomin much more closely than can be inferred from appearance. He can look at the old Art Nouveau building, and he can imagine the Hameenlinna residents waiting in line for a sauna.

At the same time, another invisible city begins to appear behind the present one. There used to be a wooden house here, a restaurant there and a shop somewhere else. Something was demolished, something moved. Piparkakkutalo almost disappeared, but did not. In the end, knowing a city is not just knowing where everything is. It is also knowing what used to be there.

## You learned to judge Hämeenlinna right

A Hämeenlinna resident can criticize Hämeenlinna. The development, parking, construction, events, decision-making and, in fact, anything else can be dealt

with very thoroughly. If something works, we can consider why it does not work even better.

Local conversation often progresses through negation. When someone presents a new plan, the first question may not be what good it will do. First, we need to find out what could go wrong and if it can become a new SCC.

But remember, there's a rule in this that's not written on anything. And for love, even the Häme horse kicks. But the horse is ours.

## I'm getting a little interested in the Kerho, at least.

You do not have to become an ice-hockey fan. An HPK season ticket is not included in the city's welcome package. Still, it helps to know how Kerho is doing.

In good times, people in the city talk about them anyway. In bad times, they talk about them even more. When someone says on Monday morning only, 'That was quite a game again,' the right kind of silent nod may be more socially useful than a long analysis. A silent nod also suits Häme conversational culture perfectly.

## I'm starting to feel a little familiar about the city, you know?

Gradually, you also realise that everything does not have to be immaculate. Something may be slightly out of place, somewhere else the grass could have been cut sooner, and in a third place there is something that someone will surely deal with one day. This does not mean that people do not care. Quite the opposite. People are happy to discuss such matters and, when necessary, at length.

Hämeenlinna is not a polished exhibit. It is an old city built, dismantled, moved, repaired and sometimes left to wait for a moment. It contains layers which, fortunately, have not been fully harmonised. Perhaps that is why, over time, we are also beginning to see beauty in places which would not be the first to complain about a tourist brochure.

## You Know Where to Go with the Dog

You rarely make a city your own by touring its attractions. It happens on ordinary days.

You walk the same lakeside route dozens of times. You find your own path at Appara. In Parkki, you notice a detail you passed before. The seasons change around Lake Aulangonjärvi. The ice on Vanajavesi comes and goes. The city's parks, shores and forests gradually change from sights into places of your own.

With a dog, you may learn this faster than usual. A dog does not care whether a place is a nationally significant built cultural environment. It is interested in what happened at the foot of a bush or lamppost five minutes ago. At the same time, you begin to look at the city more closely yourself – and notice the Emperor's stone, an old gravestone, a commemorative plaque or some other small detail you previously passed without a thought.

## Eventually, you'll stop wondering if you're local.

Of course, you cannot become a paljasjalkainen hämeenlinnalainen – a native-born Hämeenlinna resident. That would have had to happen at birth, preferably at Höyhensaari. But you can become a Hämeenlinna local.

It does not take place on a given day and does not require a specified number of years of residence. Maybe the crucial moment will come when you first think about coming home from town. Or when you find yourself defending Hämeenlinna to someone who doesn't know it. Maybe when the demolition of an old building starts to get a little annoying, even though it's never been there. Or, perhaps, much more daily. When someone asks the way, and you say:

"Go here to Ojoinen, and then across the Hikisilta to Verkilis." And only by the look of the questioner will you see that he didn't understand a word.

Then you can help. You used to be on the train, too.

Welcome to Hämeenlinna. Or, as you already know: welcome to Hämpton.



## You can move to Hämeenlinna without a manual. That does not mean, however, that it is not useful.

This guide takes a newcomer into Hämeenlinna and beyond its best-known sights: to Appara, Parkki, Reska, Hikisilta, Kerho and hotsi. Along the way there is a medieval castle, vanished city blocks, strange monuments, a local vocabulary and the Häme way of doing things, where not everything has to be done immediately.

This is neither the city's official tourist brochure nor a newcomer's checklist. It is an unofficial guide to learning how to read Hämeenlinna – and perhaps, gradually, to regard it as your own.

English translation: AI-assisted translation by ChatGPT-5.6

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