



Helsinki Airport's Via Lounge, Via Spa Strive for World-Class Comfort

by Chris Kjelgaard on January 13, 2010

Its third and final phase having opened on December 10, 2009 with huge fanfare at a gala evening ceremony attended by thousands of guests, Helsinki Airport's new Terminal 2 extension offers plenty of shopping, dining and relaxation choices to suit a variety of tastes and pocket-books.

At the same time the new terminal extension – which lies in the non-Schengen Agreement part of Terminal 2, so any passengers using the gates or facilities in the extension must go through a passport-control point halfway along the length of Terminal 2 to do so – almost doubles the airport's ability to handle large long-haul aircraft. The gates in the extension increase Helsinki Airport's widebody-capable, jetbridge gates from five to eight.

However, many will regard the terminal extension's new Via Lounge and Via Spa as the cream of the crop of its facilities. So beautiful, well-thought-out, comfortable and egalitarian in their approach are the adjoining new lounge and spa that travelers may soon come to rank them among the best such airport facilities in the world.



Operated by Finnair, the Via Lounge in Helsinki Airport's new Terminal 2 extension boasts visually stunning modern Finnish design. The 1,000-square-metre lounge's interior was designed by Finnish firm Isku Interior

[Finnair](#), which, following the opening of the first and second phases of the Terminal 2 extension during 2009 moved all of its domestic and international flights into Terminal 2, operates both the Via Lounge and the Via Spa. Its choice of the 'Via' name for the lounge and spa tells a lot about how Finnair sees their functions.

Both facilities are named to correspond with Finavia's and Finnair's 'Via Helsinki' marketing campaign that emphasizes Helsinki Airport's suitability as a connecting hub between many Asian cities and western and central European cities. The Finnish capital and its airport lie almost directly on the shortest-distance great circle routes between much of Europe and much of Asia. The two Finnish aviation companies are heavily marketing this fact through the Via Helsinki campaign and also through Finavia's choice to rename the airport – whose true name is Helsinki-Vantaa, for the dormitory town near which it is located – to the more easily remembered 'Helsinki Airport'.

Finnair's decision to allow any passenger to use either the Via Lounge or the Via Spa, or both, for a fee – unless they are Finnair or oneworld alliance premium-class passengers, or holders of Finnair Plus or oneworld tier cards, who get free entrance – means that economy-class passengers potentially have just as much access to the showpiece facilities as do first- or business-class passengers.

Entrance fees and qualification for free entry

That said, the entrance fees are not cheap. To obtain entrance to either facility, any passenger who doesn't qualify for free admission has to fork over €45. However, if you have a few hours and want to use both the Via Lounge and the Via Spa, the combined rate for entrance to both is a slightly discounted €70. Individual treatments within the spa by qualified masseurs and therapists also are not cheap, ranging up to more than €100 for relatively short sessions – but the cost of a treatment also includes the price of entry to the rest of the spa.

But many with an hour or two to kill – particularly when connecting on Finnair between European or North American destinations and Asian destinations – might regard the fairly stiff pricing scale as being worth it. The Via Lounge, open from 6:00 a.m. to midnight daily, offers both relaxation for the weary passenger and a place in which dedicated road warriors can be fully productive.

Given Finland's reputation as a world leader in modern architectural and interior design, it should come as little surprise that the new Via Lounge – and, to a slightly lesser degree, the softly lit Via Spa – are visually stunning.



The Via Lounge in the new Terminal 2 extension at Helsinki Airport has extremely eye-catching overhead and table-side lighting

Meanwhile, the spa's range of treatments (see below for a more complete description) is specifically designed to revive, soothe and refresh the long-haul traveller. The Via Spa is open from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. daily.

Also highly impressive is their sheer size. At approximately 1,000 square metres (10,763 square feet), the Via Lounge can handle up to 250 customers at a time in some comfort. Next door, the adults-only Via Spa offers a remarkable range of therapies and treatments in six treatment rooms, five different types of sauna spas and an expansive paddling pool that, together, take up 600 square meters (6,460 square feet) of space. Up to 100 people can use the Via Spa at one time.

The Via Lounge

Apart from its visual elegance, the large and airy Via Lounge offers passengers a variety of facilities that include free wireless Internet access – just ask for an access code at the front desk – and three PCs for passengers' temporary use. Chic workdesks also have power ports for laptops as well as individual lamps and – a very innovative touch – they feature state-of-the-art 'Powerkiss' plates that allow wireless recharging of cellphones and other small rechargeable-battery-powered devices. All you need to do is lay your cellphone on the Powerkiss plate and the phone begins recharging.



Among the facilities in the Via Lounge in the new Terminal 2 extension at Helsinki Airport are personal workdesks. Each desk has an individual lamp, a power port into which a laptop can be plugged and a 'Powerkiss' plate that allows wireless recharging of cellphones and other small, rechargeable-battery-powered electronic devices

While wines and spirits are not free – the Via Lounge has a bar at which it sells a range of high-quality premium drinks – the lounge has a wide range of soft drinks, juices, coffees/teas, snacks and even beer on tap freely available in a large section on one side.

The Via Lounge was designed with a lower, central level and mezzanine levels at each long end of the room and also on the shorter side opposite the main entrance. The central area of the Via Lounge, which was designed by Finnish firm Isku Interior, contains lots of comfy chairs arranged next to equally side-tables and elegant lamps that look like they're straight off the set of a futuristic sci-fi film.



The Via Lounge in Helsinki Airport's new Terminal 2 extension contains a variety of seating and workdesk options. Among them are modern, upright chairs grouped round tables, suitable for individuals or groups having a drink or a meal

Meanwhile, the raised level on the short side of the room contains a variety of seating options, including several sets of upright chairs and tables, where people may potentially find it most convenient to eat and drink.

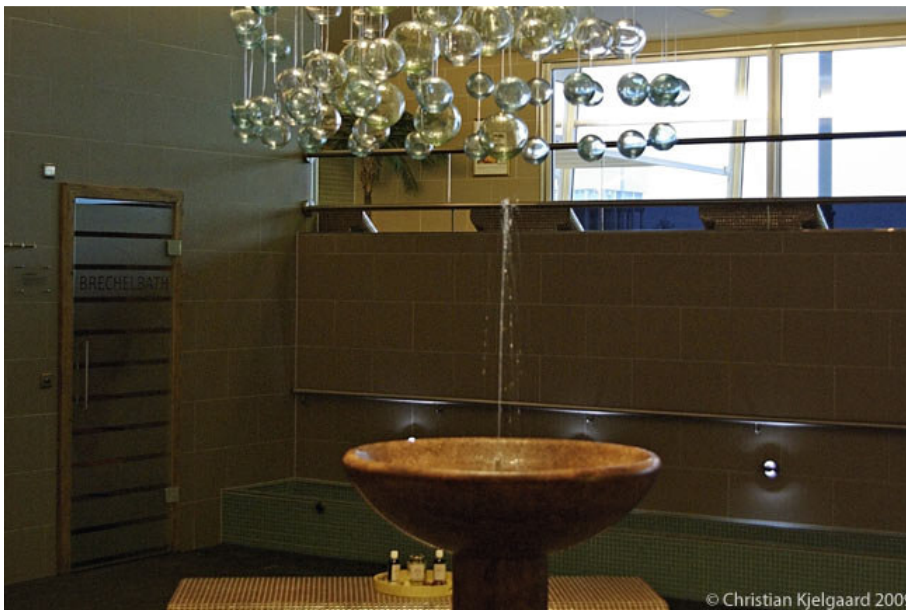


The front window of the Via Lounge in Helsinki Airport's Terminal 2 extension looks out on to the ramp. Semi-reclining, comfortable chairs and illuminated tables are relaxing places in which to sit, have a drink and watch aircraft being loaded and unloaded

The raised level against the back wall of the lounge contains the workdesks and computer equipment, while the mezzanine level at the front of the lounge features comfortable, semi-reclining chairs – each with its own futuristic table, complete with illuminated base – in which to relax. These chairs look out through two glass walls (between which a passageway runs) on to the terminal-extension’s ramp, where several of the widebody-aircraft gates are located.

The Via Spa

Next door to the Via Lounge, the Via Spa beckons. European spa guru Paul Haslauer designed the Via Spa, beginning his research to determine what facilities and treatments it should offer a year before construction of the spa actually began. The spa itself cost “several million” euros to build and fit out, according to Samuli Haapasalo, the president and CEO of Finnair, which operates Helsinki Airport.



The Via Spa in Helsinki Airport's new Terminal 2 extension has an eye-catching central area, where therapies can be performed. Leading off from the central area are the spa's six treatment rooms, five saunas of different types and a large paddling pool with a view over the airport ramp

Helsinki Airport’s marketing ethos, expressed succinctly by Kimmo Ruotsalainen, Finnair’s senior vice president of marketing, is that “We’re not moving the masses – we’re offering friendly, personalized, face-to-face service”. The Via Spa aims to adopt this philosophy entirely in offering treatments and therapies to its customers.

“We make recommendations for the individual,” after thoroughly evaluating each spa customer’s physical and mental wellbeing before, after or during the between-flight break in his or her journey, says Haslauer. Treatments and therapies are designed specifically to be relatively short to suit the times that passengers have before their next flights.

The range of treatments and therapies is nothing short of phenomenal for an airport spa – in fact, Haslauer and Finnair claim the Via Spa offers the most comprehensive range of sauna and spa treatments of any airport spa in the world.

“We never say no” to a therapy or treatment possibility, says Haslauer – “We have to be very elastic and offer all kinds of treatment.”



Spa designer Paul Haslauer shows of the central room in the huge Via Spa in Helsinki Airport's new Terminal 2 extension. Haslauer designed the spa and its treatment regime and says it has the widest range of sauna and spa treatments and therapies of any airport spa in the world

Given the fact that many of its customers are coming straight off long-haul flights – on which they have been sitting almost immobile for many hours – and are about to embark on further flights (some of them long-haul), the Via Spa particularly aims to stimulate blood circulation in its customers.

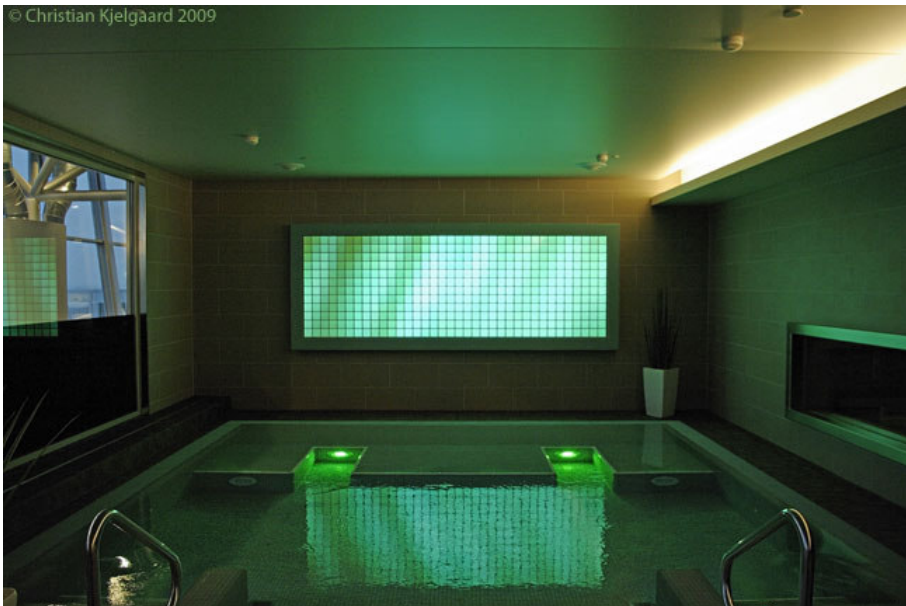
“We specialize in heavy legs,” says Haslauer. “We have developed special treatments that are done nowhere else in the world like here.”

In its six treatment rooms, the Via Spa offers therapies such as the “dry float” – using special equipment on which the individual floats, to create a sensation similar to being back in the womb – as well as aromatherapies, special footbaths with vibrating bells applied to the reflecting zones of the foot and leg, and herbal peels and rose-petal balms applied by hand by the spa’s highly trained and certified therapists.



One of the five different spas and sauna facilities in the Via Spa in the new Terminal 2 extension at Helsinki Airport is an oriental-style Rasul spa

The Via Spa offers much more. It has a traditional oriental Rasul spa that offers what Haslauer calls “a whole-body detox”. The spa also has a traditional steambath; an Alpine-style Brechelbad sauna; a dry (and very hot) stone bath; a Finnish sauna, with birch twigs and buckets of post-sauna ice freely available; and a large paddling pool in which footsore travelers can soothe their feet and relax.



The Via Spa in Helsinki Airport's Terminal 2 extension has a large paddling pool where weary travelers can dip their feet to refresh themselves or cool off after a sauna. Above a line of discreetly blacked-out windows at pool level, the paddling-pool area has

windows that look out directly on to the airport ramp, so spa customers using the pool can watch the bustle of ramp activity at their leisure

The paddling pool and one of the saunas are remarkable in that they actually have views out through discreetly shaded glass directly on to the terminal extension's ramp. Accordingly, as they refresh and detox themselves, spa-users can watch aircraft coming and going and observe all the loading and unloading activity on the ramp.

It's an unusual way to go aircraft-spotting, but for those with a bundle of discretionary euros to hand, Helsinki Airport's Via Spa – and the Via Lounge next door – offer a nice pre-flight or between-flights option.