

Some like it hot

From sizzling saunas to lovely lakes and marvellous museums, the Finnish city of Tampere is great for a break

RUSSIAN HOUSE...
Tampere Orthodox Church

TAKING THE PLUNGE...
Neil braves the icy lake.
Pic: Roger Norum



BY NEIL MURRAY

You can't go to Finland without having a sauna. So after getting nice and hot – and as tradition dictates, beating myself with birch leaves – next up was plunging into an icy lake.

I didn't really fancy that bit. But that's what Finns do, so, when in Finland and all that. In I went and, after the initial shock, found I loved the experience so much that I went through it all over again!

Crayfish Manor, an hour north of the Finnish city of Tampere, overlooks Vuohiselkä lake, which was where I took the plunge.

Tampere, a city of around 200,000 people which is just over 100 miles from Helsinki, is now linked to Edinburgh by Ryanair flights three times a week.

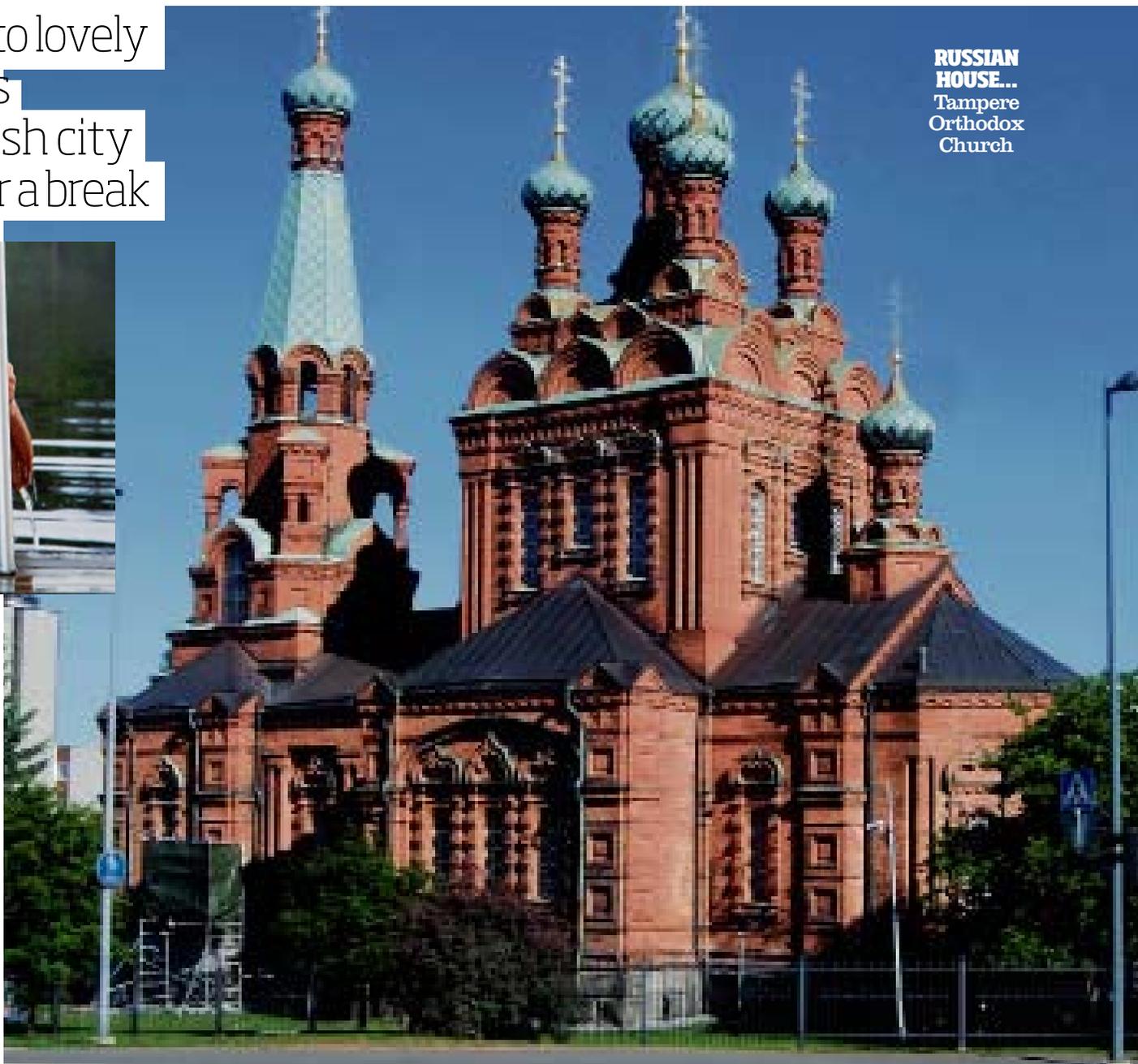
The city is easy to get around, either walking or, in our case, with bikes hired from Hertz at 15 euros for 24 hours. It also has an area called Finlayson, which marks the impact Glasgow-born Quaker James Finlayson had in the 1820s when he set up a textile factory which also had its own church, school and hospital for the staff.

Nowadays, the area is a modern complex of restaurants, bars and shops – and the world's first spy museum. Visitors are encouraged to take a test to find out how good a spy they'd be. After finding a hidden door, firing a gun at a human target and identifying a fellow spy, I passed with flying colours.

Nearby, the Lenin Museum provides a fascinating glimpse into Finland's past and tells – if you can get your hands on the book with the English translation – how Lenin lived in the country for two years and met Stalin for the first time in Tampere in 1905.

Tampere isn't all about museums, although it has a fair number, including the Moomin Valley Museum – based on the children's books about the Moomin trolls – a Boxing Museum, an Ice Hockey Museum and the modern art Sara Hilden Museum.

The latter is based at the foot of the 550ft Näsinneula Observation Tower, which is the highest of its kind in Scandinavia. We headed up there for lunch in the revolving



Factfile

- Ryanair (www.ryanair.com) flies to Tampere three times a week from Edinburgh.
- To check out the Sokos Hotel Ilves in Tampere, visit www.sokoshotels.fi/en/hotels/tampere/ilves.
- For more on Tampere, see www.visitfinland.com/uk, or get the new Rough Guide to Finland (£14.99).

Restaurant Näsinneula (not cheap, but classy and a superb way to pass an hour or two) and got a wonderful view of the Nasjärvi and Pyhäjärvi lakes on either side of Tampere. We could also see the thrill rides in the Särkänniemi Adventure Park below.

Tampere's Orthodox Church, built in a Russian romantic style is also worth a look. The previous day, we'd had a close-up view of the Pyhäjärvi lake as we cruised on MS Tampere past Viikinsaari island.

When we flew into Tampere, I could see why there are said to be nearly 190,000 lakes in Finland. So it was no surprise that there was a lakeside setting when we stepped up to try the Finnish Tango.

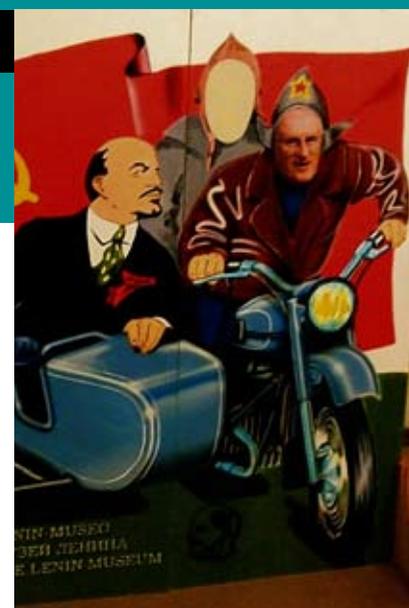
Even if you can't get your feet to work out the right rhythm – and I struggled – you can

at least revel in the view after your efforts. Visiting last month, we had hoped to see the Midnight Sun, but in fact it was more like the Land of the Midnight Cloud. It was still a bizarre experience, though, as we rowed across a lake at 2am in almost broad daylight en route to our first sauna experience.

We went for another sauna on our last night, in Hämeenkyrö, 30 miles from Tampere. In the smoke sauna – unlike the first one, which was a steam sauna – we heated up and then were covered in liquid peat from head to toe, which is said to make your skin soft and firm, as well as help a range of skin ailments.

I had the option of a plunge into the nearby freezing river or have a pleasant wash down with scoops of warm water.

Guess which I chose this time.



ON YER BIKE... Fun at Lenin Museum