

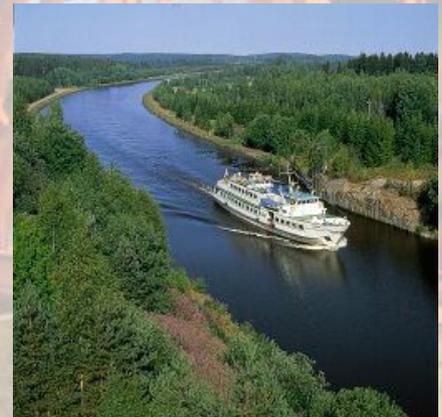
VYBORG



Vyborg is a town with 78,800 inhabitants on the Karelian Isthmus in Russia, near the head of the Bay of Vyborg, 58 km from the city of Lappeenranta and 38 km south from Russia's border with Finland, where the Saimaa Canal enters the Gulf of Finland.

Facts about the Saimaa Canal

Construction of the Saimaa Canal began in the early 19th century and it was inaugurated in 1856. In true Karelian fashion, the celebrations were so intense that the Vyborg Castle's tower caught fire. The canal was widened and deepened in the early 20th century when it proved to be too small for larger ships. The present canal is about 43km long, half of it in Finnish and the other half in Russian territory. The difference in water levels between Lake Saimaa and the Gulf of Finland is 76 metres, and there are 8 locks. Each lock chamber is 85 m long and 13.2 wide, the locks' heights vary from 5.5 to 12.7 metres. The Saimaa Canal will celebrate its 150 jubileum 2006!



In the mid-war decades, the town, now officially known as Viipuri, was the second biggest city in Finland. In 1939 Viipuri had some 80,000 inhabitants, including sizable minorities of Russians, Germans and Swedes. During this time, Alvar Aalto built a masterpiece of modernist architecture - the Viipuri Library.

Nowadays Vyborg is a popular tourist destination among Finnish and you can get there easily by bus or by ship via Saimaa Canal.



There are old Finnish buildings in the town which are in considerable bad shape such as Alvar Aalto's designed library. The town's position, near the border, has affected its character – inhabitants are mostly border guards and industry workers. There are over 20 factories working in Vyborg.

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More information: <http://www.alvaraalto.fi/viipuri/>

Sights

The most conspicuous landmark of Vyborg is the Swedish castle, started in the 13th century and extensively reconstructed in 1891-94. The Round Tower and the Rathaus Tower date from the mid-16th century.

There are also Russian fortifications, completed by 1740, a monument to Peter I (1910), and the Lenin house, where the Russian revolutionary prepared the Bolshevik revolution during his stay in Vyborg in September-October of 1917.

Sprawling along the heights adjacent to the Gulf of Finland is Mon Repos, one of the most spacious English parks in Eastern Europe. The park was laid out on behest of its owner, Baron Ludwig Heinrich von Nikolay, at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Most of the garden structures were designed by the architect Giuseppe Antonio Martinelli. Previously, the estate belonged to Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Wurtemberg, who called it Charlottendahl.



The Russian Film Festival "Window to Europe" takes place in the town each year.

History

The area where Vyborg is located used to be a trading center on River Vuoksi's western branch, which has been dried up. The area used to be inhabited by the Karelians, a Finnic tribe which gradually came under the domination of Novgorod and Sweden.

The first castle of Viborg was founded during the third Swedish crusade in 1293 by the marshal Torkel Knutsson. The castle was fought over for centuries between Sweden and the Republic of Novgorod. By the treaty of Nöteborg in 1323 Viborg was finally recognized as a part of Sweden.

The town's trade privileges were chartered by King Eric of Pomerania in 1403. Viborg remained in Swedish hands until its storm by Peter the Great in the Great Northern War (1710). The Treaty of Nystad (1721), which concluded the war, assigned the town to Russia. After the rest of Finland was ceded to Russia in 1809, Alexander I of Russia incorporated the town and county into the newly-created Grand Duchy of Finland in 1812.

In the course of the 19th century, the town developed as the center of administration for the eastern part of Finland. The inauguration of the Saimaa Canal in 1856 benefitted the local economy.



Following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the fall of the Russian Empire, Finland declared itself independent. During the Finnish Civil War Viipuri was in the hands of the Reds, until it was captured by the Whites on 29 April 1918.

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During the Winter War some 31,000 people were evacuated from Viipuri to western Finland. The Winter War was concluded by the Peace of Moscow, which stipulated transfer of Viipuri and the whole Karelian Isthmus to the Soviet sovereignty. As the town was still held by the Finns, the remaining Finnish population had to be evacuated in haste. The evacuees from Finnish Karelia came to be a vociferous political force, and their wish to return to their homes was an important incentive when Finland sought support from Nazi Germany against the Soviet threat; a support that resulted in Finland and Germany ending up on the same side in World War II.

On 29 August 1941, Viipuri was recaptured by Finnish troops, whose advance elsewhere had cut the railroads going to Leningrad by the northwestern shore of Lake Ladoga. A consequence of this was the prevention of relief aid during the Siege of Leningrad, one of the deadliest in history. At first the Finnish Army didn't allow civilians into the town. Of the 6287 buildings 3807 were destroyed. The first civilians started to arrive at the end of September and by the end of the year Viipuri had a population of about 9700. By 1942 it has risen to 16 000. About 70% of the evacuees from Finnish Karelia returned after the re-conquest to rebuild their looted homes, but were again evacuated after the Red Army's 1944 Karelian offensive, timed with the Battle of Normandy. By the time of the Soviet offensive the town had a population of nearly 28 000. The town was evacuated by June 19 and the defence of Viipuri was entrusted the 20th Brigade. The town fell to the Red Army on 20 June 1944 but the Finns managed to stop the Soviet offensive at the Battle of Tali-Ihantala, the largest battle fought in the Nordic countries.

