



Oulu2026
Euroopan kulttuuri-
pääkaupunki

Northern Finnish city of Oulu, Finland, shines as European Capital of Culture in 2026

The European Capitals of Culture have been designated since 1985, and Oulu is the third Finnish city to win the title. The internationally recognized title of European Capital of Culture brings unique events, artworks, and world-class performers to Oulu and its 39 partner municipalities.

"2026 is Finland's year as the European Capital of Culture. It holds special significance for Oulu and the Oulu2026 area, but also for the whole country. We anticipate 2.5 million visits to Oulu2026 events and a lasting impact on the region's cultural life. The European Capitals of Culture initiative aims to showcase the richness of European cultures and promote collaboration among European artists," states Oulu2026 CEO **Piia Rantala-Korhonen**.

The programme, created with more than 500 cultural organisations, festivals and creative professionals, will place the North firmly at the centre of Europe's cultural map. Already over 1,000 events are listed in the official calendar, with further additions to follow.

From Northern Lights to the Midnight Sun

The celebrations begin on 31 December 2025 with a spectacular televised [New Year's Eve show](#), followed in mid-January by the [Oulu2026 Opening Festival](#), a city-wide weekend of concerts, exhibitions and encounters. Early highlights include international exhibitions – for example, [Fotografiska Tallinn](#) and [Kiasma](#) presenting their exhibitions in Oulu – the world premiere of a new [Sámi opera](#), and winter gatherings that celebrate snow, ice and northern culture in striking settings.

February and March offer a series of winter events – from snow sculpting and ice swimming to electronic music and light experiences on frozen seas – creating an atmosphere where northern culture meets European creativity.

Permanent art projects include [Climate Clock](#), a new public route of works by renowned international artists where art, science and nature intertwine, inspiring environmental awareness and fresh reflections in the stunning regional landscape. Opening in June.

Food, music and community are also at the heart of the summer. A kilometre-long dinner table through the city centre will bring together locals and visitors in August, part of the [Arctic Food Lab](#) programme that celebrates northern cuisine. [Major festivals](#) across the region – from chamber music to jazz and circus – will present international premieres and unique site-specific experiences.

The summer will conclude with a major outdoor spectacle, [Delta Life](#), at Oulu's historic birthplace, weaving together the stories of local waterways and inviting audiences to experience it along the riverfront and across the city.

Art, Technology and Northern Magic

Autumn will highlight the synergy between art, science and technology. The much-loved Lumo Light Festival expands into the ten-day [Lumo Art & Tech Festival](#), combining international exper-

tise in visual art, light, and sound. Large-scale installations will transform public spaces, while immersive works in unexpected venues will challenge perceptions of nature, space and time. [Underground Clash](#) (working title) is an immersive art installation by Danish artist **Jakob Kudsk Steensen**, created from ecological fieldwork within Finland, and staged beneath central Oulu in the Kivisydän parking facility.

The year will conclude in December with the world premiere of [Snowball](#), a spectacular family musical set in the land of the Northern Lights. Combining northern legends, music and storytelling, *Snowball* promises to be an enchanting finale to Oulu's year as European Capital of Culture.

Oulu: The Heart of the North

Oulu, the largest and fastest-growing commercial, logistic, and cultural hub in Northern Europe, is ranked as the 13th happiest city in the world. Oulu has been proven to have the cleanest air in Europe. In a recent comparison by the European Environment Agency (EEA), Oulu ranked first among 858 European cities evaluated based on air quality.

Home to 220,000 residents, Oulu stands out as one of Europe's youngest cities, with an average age of just 39.6 years. The city's foundation is built on enterprise and education, with 25,000 students attending its two universities. With a highly educated population—every third resident holds an academic degree—Oulu thrives as a hub for innovations and talent, while maintaining a humane and inclusive approach to growth.

"Oulu is the largest hub for professional art and culture in Northern Europe, a growing centre with excellent accessibility via rail, road, and air connections to the rest of Europe. Geographically, it also covers the largest area of any European Capital of Culture region. The European Capital of Culture year in Oulu is a unique moment on the global art scene," says Piia Rantala-Korhonen, CEO of Oulu2026.

Oulu2026 is supported by the City of Oulu, Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture, and a wide range of regional and national partners.

For the event calendar, visit: www oulu2026.eu.

Experience in the beginning of the year 2026:

- Opening Festival 16.-18.1.2026 [Oulu2026 Opening Festival](#)
- Sámi Opera Ovlá - The world premiere 16.1.2026. Ovlá is an opera about the loss of truth and great loneliness. About when the roots of one's own past and culture are torn to pieces. [Ovlá Opera](#)
- Eanangiella - Voice of the land. A major exhibition of Sámi art and duodji explores the diversity, resilience and sustainability of Sámi culture. [Eanangiella - Voice of the land](#)
- Frozen People 28.2.-1.3.2026: Frozen People is an electronic music and northern art festival on the frozen sea. [Frozen People 2026](#)

And much more!