



Pilotage

in Finland





■ Pilotage in Finland

The state of Finland has sole responsibility for pilotage into ports on the main fairways and in harbour areas. Experts on navigation holding master's license pilot vessels into port. Pilotage in Finland is currently arranged by the Finnish Maritime Administration, and in the future it will be handled by a state-owned pilotage institution.

In Finland the help of a pilot for a vessel is particularly important as our coast is difficult to navigate. Even a small grounding or collision can have a severe impact on the fragile ecosystems of the archipelago. Our climate, with ice packs forming every year even on the open sea, is a particular problem for foreign vessels. A pilot is familiar with the local fairways and special conditions. He advises the shipmaster and helps to monitor compliance with regulations on maritime safety and environmental protection. Pilot station personnel are also part of the sea rescue and maritime monitoring system.



■ The pilot helps ships safely into port

King Charles XI of Sweden promulgated the first decree on pilotage affecting Finland in 1696. Although pilotage has been regulated by decrees for more than 300 years, Finland's first Pilotage Act came into force in spring 1998.

According to the Pilotage Act and the updated decree, vessels of more than a particular size must, as a general rule, always use a pilot when navigating fairways within Finnish territorial waters. A pilot is always required on vessels carrying hazardous substances or materials harmful to the sea. The obligation to use a pilot does not depend on the nationality of the vessel.

■ Pilot exemption certificate

The use of a pilot is compulsory in Finnish territorial waters, depending on the vessel's size, cargo or intended use. It is possible to be exempted from the obligation to use a pilot with a pilot exemption certificate or with a general exemption for small vessels in Finnish waters. A pilot exemption certificate may be granted to the vessel's master or mate and it is valid only for the specified vessel and route.

Exemption from obligatory pilotage may, according to current legislation, be granted to cargo ships' masters and mates and to all masters and mates of passenger vessels. The requirements are practical knowledge of the fairway, a pass in the practical and theory test, and knowledge of the Finnish or Swedish language.

Finnish ports are visited by some 35,000 vessels a year, of which 40 per cent use a pilot. Use of pilots has declined since the new Pilotage Act and Decree came into force.

Pilotage is also compulsory on the Saimaa waterway and the Saimaa Canal. The pilot accompanies the vessel the whole time, from the first lock on the canal to the destination and back. A Russian pilot accompanies the vessel from the sea, from Vihrevoi to the Brusnitchnoe lock and back.



■ Pilots helping vessels into 60 harbours

A pilot can be ordered in Finland to all the 60 or so maritime ports in the country. Finland is divided into 14 pilot districts. The shortest piloted routes on the Finnish coast are four miles (e.g., at Pori Mäntyluoto), and the longest are 120 miles through the winter fairway in the Gulf of Finland. The maximum piloted route on Saimaa is 210 miles.

Pilots are ordered in Finland from the service desks at the VTS stations. The pilot is taken out to the boarding point (marked PILOT on the chart) by a fast pilot boat or cutter. In winter, when there is a thick ice sheet, pilots are also carried by hydrocopter.



■ Pilotage and icebreaking

In Finland, pilotage is augmented by VTS stations and icebreakers. All vessels have to use the assistance of icebreakers in harsh ice conditions. In these circumstances, icebreakers can give binding instructions on the route for the vessel.

■ VTS covers the whole coastline

The entire Finnish coastline has been covered by VTS monitoring since 2002. The deepwater channels in Saimaa are also VTS-monitored. There are five VTS stations on the coast and one on Saimaa (see map).

Ships are under an obligation to report in all areas. VTS informs, advises and guides shipping. The status of VTS varies slightly from area to area. The most stringent control is in the Gulf of Finland and in the Archipelago Sea. VTS facilitates the increasingly widespread AIS ship identification system. An AIS network built on the Finnish coast is close to completion.



Pilotage and VTS services in Finland



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