

#LIFEINHEL Final report – experience and a review of Helsinki Airport

Between October 10th and November 11th 2017, I had the opportunity to live in a small cabin in Helsinki Airport's non-Schengen terminal. My task was to test the different functions and services of the airport. The goal was to find out whether Helsinki Airport is the best airport in the world.

During the month, I formed a comprehensive view on the entire airport. I was positively surprised by many things, yet there is always room for improvement. You can find my thoughts and development ideas below. I have given my rating on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = poor and 5 = excellent).

The Helsinki Airport staff certainly made me feel at home and I made some new friends. Therefore, I cannot give a grade for them.

So - is Helsinki Airport the best in the world? Undoubtedly, for me it is. I have been deeply touched by the enthusiasm and warmth of the staff. I consider the Finns to be more introvert than the Chinese, but very sincere people. Although the weather is very cold, the heart of the Finns is warm. They are kind, hospitable people.

Yours Sincerely,
Ryan Zhu

Infrastructure

1. Security & Check-in: 5/5

Security plays a key role in any airport. At Helsinki Airport, the Security Control is strict and smooth. Before you enter Security Control, there are several self-service check-in kiosks. You can also find a dedicated security control lane for families with kids, and for disabled or handicapped people. When you get to the Passport Control by the Border Control, there might be a bit of a queue during rush hour. Overall, compared to many other airports, I feel that the general feeling of safety in Helsinki Airport is really high.

2. Transfer time: 5/5

It took me 35 minutes to go from one side to the airport to the other, including Passport Control, even though I walked slowly on purpose. All of the terminals are connected and under the same roof. Thus, in Helsinki Airport, transit is very smooth.

3. Washrooms, showers and sauna: 5/5

Toilets are relatively clean and they play nature sounds, such as birds singing and rivers flowing. There are also showers and a sauna at the airport, but they are only available for lounge customers. For this reason, I strongly feel it is worth buying a lounge access.

4. Places to sit: 4/5

The airport not only provides normal types of chairs, but also some very big ones, where you can lie down and sleep. While there is a lot of room in the recently renewed Non-Schengen area, there could be more places to sit. The Schengen area is very busy during rush hour. This is perhaps the biggest issue at the moment.

5. Places to work: 4/5

There are many areas where you can focus on work. Even small cubicles, which block the noise, are available for free and there is no need to worry that your devices run out of battery power, since you can charge them in nearby sockets. There are a lot of sockets and USB ports available around the whole airport, even on standing tables and near the chairs. Unfortunately, some of the sockets were out of use when I tested them all.

6. Kids areas: 4/5

There are four different play areas for children in the airport, which is more than anywhere I know. They make waiting times more convenient for families. However, in my opinion, some of the areas could benefit from a little facelift.

7. Sleeping and relaxing facilities: 5/5

You can spend a comfortable night at the airport, especially in the Non-Schengen area, in which there are many lounge chairs to lay down and sleep. There is also a massage parlour and hotels in the airport. Sleeping pods are available to rent, in which you can really block off all noise and sleep in peace.

Services

8. Food and drink: 5/5

I have tried all 29 restaurants at the airport. Depending on your choice, you can really have a healthy and local meal – like salmon, reindeer, and blueberry smoothie – every day. This was actually a thing I was a bit worried about beforehand and Helsinki Airport proved me wrong. However, although many of the passengers are Asians, there is only one Asian restaurant. I am sure there will be more in the future.

9. Shopping: 4/5

There are shops that sell both Finnish design and international luxury brands and the staff are very helpful. There are also Chinese shopping guides and e-translators, which is great. However, I would like to see more shops and to make local Finnish products even more visible.

10. Mobile Application: 3/5

I have downloaded the Helsinki Airport App, the mobile application. It has a lot of useful information.

11. Services for Chinese people: 5/5

At Helsinki Airport, signs everywhere are written also in Chinese. The airport is equipped with warm water dispensers (Chinese drink their water warm), which was a great surprise. When I called to the Customer Service, it was lovely to hear fluent Chinese. There are also Chinese-speaking Service Guides, and in many shops Chinese-Speaking staff and/or e-translators that helps overcoming the language barriers between the passenger and sales personnel. Using AliPay and UnionPay to pay for your shopping with your phone makes things so much easier. The Chinese can also benefit from Helsinki Airport's free unlimited Wi-Fi, WeChat and Weibo accounts, in addition to the homepages in Chinese. Overall, the travel experience for a Chinese passenger is great and I have not seen this level of expertise anywhere else.

Overall grade: 4.5/5.0