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In the spirit of sisu

If you feel like spicing up your sports routine with a little sleet, mud or midnight sun in the seasonal glory of Finnish nature, the four-race event Tour de Pirkka might be just the thing for you.

By: Anna Taipale | Photos: Tour de Pirkka

Tour de Pirkka is a year-round sporting happening in the Tampere area, consisting of four separate events in line with the seasons: a ski race held in the winter, cycling and rowing stretches in the summer, and a jogging race in the autumn. Participation is open to anybody regardless of age, athletic background or gender, and there are stretches for the advanced as well as elementary levels. Over 10,000 people from all over the world take part in the tour every year. "The main stretches are arduous, the ski one, for instance, being 90 kilometres. Many consider this an extreme sport and attend to challenge themselves," says coordinator Outi Kartano.

The roots of the event extend to the individual races held for decades by local

sports clubs, but in 1979 the sports were unified to encourage the locals to exercise all year round. Along came Tour de Pirkka, which, according to the organisers, is now the epitome of Finnish sisu, the gutsy and gritty attitude so characteristic of the Finns. "The main goal is not winning the race but having fun with fellow athletes from different backgrounds. The same stretches are attended by teenagers and those who have done the race 50 times," Kartano says.

None of the separate events has ever been cancelled. "One year there was a hailstorm during the cycling race at Midsummer. The event continued after we had gathered every single extra piece of clothing from the staff for the athletes,"

Kartano recalls, laughing. Another memorable event was the ski race in the beginning of the 1990s, when there was hardly any snow. "There was no way anybody could get lost on that stretch – everything was green except for the tiny track we managed to maintain," says Kartano, adding: "But the most-loved and recalled races are, of course, the hardest ones."



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