

Paddle Europe Freestyle Championships 2026

Lieksa, Finland

Bulletin 3



Finnish
Canoeing
and
Rowing
Federation

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Website & WhatsApp Group for information sharing

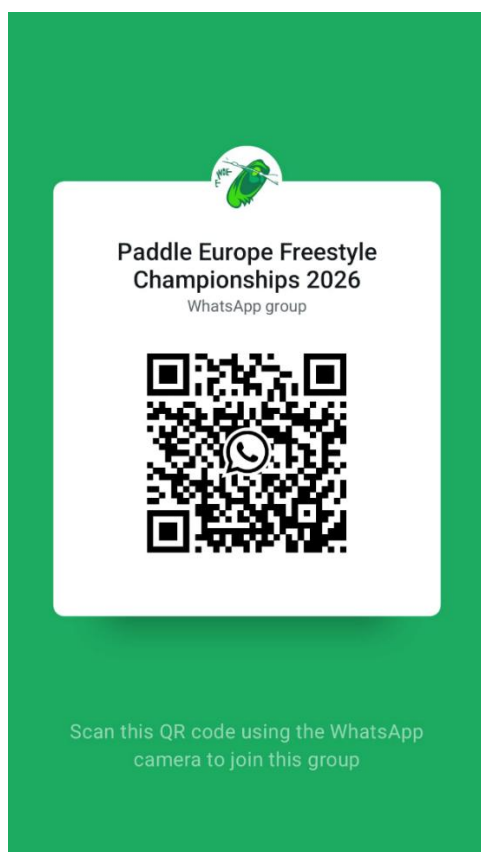
Follow the event website <https://canoefreestyle-lieksa.fi/> for any updates & additional information. We'll update it on regular basis and add information during spring.



Following the success of using the one-way WhatsApp group to share information at Graz Europeans, the same group will be used by the organizers to provide information in advance and during the 2026 European Championships.

To register for the WhatsApp group please use the following link:

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/Je4hBMALHxZCSEI9B1iZTY>



1. Welcome

Welcome by City of Lieksa



Greetings for the canoe freestyle competition

Welcome to Lieksa and Ruunaa Neitikoski, and to the Paddle Europe Freestyle Championships.

This is the first canoe freestyle European Championships competition organized in Finland and it is our great pleasure to welcome competitors from all over Europe to the city of Lieksa. Ruunaa and Neitikoski, with its stunning natural surroundings and demanding conditions, offers an excellent setting for top-level competition and memorable experiences.

Lieksa is known for its beautiful nature, clear waters, and warm hospitality. Surrounded by forests, rivers, lakes and landscapes, the area provides a peaceful yet inspiring environment for both competition and relaxation.

We hope you will enjoy not only the races, but also the unique atmosphere and beauty of our region.

We wish to all competitors fair and safe races, strong performances, and enjoyable days in Lieksa. May this competition be filled with sporting spirit, friendship, and unforgettable moments.

Best of luck to all teams!

Pirre Seppänen
Mayor, City of Lieksa

Welcome by Finnish Canoeing and Rowing Federation



Welcome to the Paddle Europe Freestyle Championships!

We are extremely proud to have this opportunity to host the European Championships in Lieksa, Finland. It is an honour to welcome Europe's best freestyle athletes, coaches, spectators, and guests to Lieksa — surrounded by the beauty of Finnish nature — to enjoy clean waters, untouched wilderness, and the natural whitewater atmosphere of Neitikoski.

I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the organizing committee and to all the volunteers who have been preparing this event and ensuring that it provides unforgettable experiences for everyone involved. Hosting the European Championships offers us a valuable opportunity to showcase Finnish expertise in competition organization, our strong sense of togetherness, and our deep passion for canoeing sports.

We hope that the European Championships will bring together a large number of athletes from across Europe, and that many members of the European Freestyle Canoe community will have the chance to experience the unique competition atmosphere here in Finland. I sincerely wish that these competitions will offer not only a high level of competition, but also memorable experiences, long-lasting memories, and new friendships that you will remember for years to come.

I am looking forward to seeing you in Finland.

Juho Allonen
General Secretary
Finnish Canoeing and Rowing Federation

Greetings from the organizers



It has been a truly exciting journey to arrange Europeans in Lieksa. Having an international competition Finland is something we have wanted for years already – and finally we are there. We didn't only want to organize unique Europeans but wanted to showcase where the Finnish freestylers come from. Neitikoski is our #1 playspot that pretty much defines Finnish freestyle – easy enough for advanced beginners but perfect spot for Europeans too. And anything in between. I promise also the surroundings will be different to the recent Europeans and you will be experiencing clean waters running 24/7 and can enjoy nature pure!

So, what can I do in Lieksa when not on the water? As said, it's mostly about nature. If you come by car, take your mountain bike with you – there are very nice trails in the area. Or at least take your hiking boots – the hiking trails start from your doorstep wherever you stay. There are also great fishing opportunities in the area and there will be one of us on site showing the spots & explaining practices. We have added a section about activities off water to our website.

Saunas are also an essential part of Finnish culture. If you don't have one in your cabin, we will have the large sauna available next to the lake for everyone to enjoy. Refreshing dip into the lake after sauna is something we Finns don't realize isn't necessarily common for everyone so make sure you give it a try.

Town of Lieksa has some nice opportunities to spend a rainy day – we are gathering some hints to our website. Make sure you don't miss the regional speciality Karelian Pie – Lieksa Bakery (Lieksan Leipomo) is famous for making one of the best ones in the region if not in the country. And if you are travelling via Helsinki, worth spending a day or two in our capital on the way in or out.

Can't wait to greet you all in Finland this June!

Jyri Hämäläinen

Head of Communications for Europeans & Head of Finnish Freestyle Committee

2. General information

Event title

Paddle Europe Freestyle Championships in Lieksa, Finland

Event dates

Official training period 8-9.6.2026

Competition 10-13.6.2026

Preliminary schedule

Until 07.06.2026 Open training

08-09.06.2026 Official training

09.06.2026 Opening ceremony at 6 p.m. downtown Lieksa

10-11.6.2026 Preliminaries

12.06.2026 Semi-finals

13.06.2026 Finals, medal ceremony at 6 p.m. Ruunaa Outdoor Center

Rules

The new ICF 2026 [rules appendix](#) will be followed, both for competition format and moves.

Venue location and address

Neitikoskentie 47, 81750 Lieksa, Finland ([Google map](#))

Key contacts

NF Contact: General Secretary	Juho Allonen	Juho.allonen@smsl.fi
HOC Event Manager	Kari Nykänen	kari.nykanen@wwcf.fi
HOC Coordinator	Tuomo Rautio	tuomo.rautio@wwcf.fi
HOC Head of Safety	Tomi Tuomasjukka	tomi.tuomasjukka@tyoluotsi.fi
HOC Communications	Jyri Hämäläinen	jyri.hamalainen@yahoo.com
PEU Chief Judge	Charlie Brackpool	charlie.brackpool@canoeicf.sport
Event website	https://canofreestyle-lieksa.fi/	
Event instagram	canofreestyle_lieksa	

3. Location

Arrival

Arrival to Finland by car & ferry

Via Stockholm (Sweden) to Turku harbour

By car to Ruunaa Outdoor center 7 h 40min / 680km

Ferries operated by [Tallink Silja](#) and [Viking Line](#).

Via Tallinn (Estonia) to Helsinki harbour

By car to Ruunaa Outdoor Center 6h 10min / 550km

Ferry operated by [Tallink Silja](#).

Via Travemunde (Germany) to Helsinki harbour

By car to Ruunaa Outdoor Center 6h 10min / 550km

Ferry operated by [Finnlines](#).

Arrival to Finland by plane

Plane – Car Rental; HOC recommendation if arriving by plane

Arrival to Helsinki-Vantaa (HEL) international airport.

Rental car from Helsinki airport to Ruunaa outdoor center:

6 h 0 min, 550km

Plane – Train – Car Rental

Arrival to Helsinki-Vantaa (HEL) international airport.

Train from Helsinki airport to Joensuu 4h 50 min,

Rental car from Joensuu to Ruunaa outdoor center 120km/1h 35min

Plane – Domestic plane – Car Rental

NOTE: There are issues getting kayaks onboard between Helsinki and Joensuu due to small planes – only suitable if you don't have your boat with you.

Arrival to Helsinki-Vantaa (HEL) international airport.

Flight from Helsinki-Vantaa international airport to Joensuu domestic airport 1h 5 min

Rental car from Joensuu to Ruunaa outdoor center 120km/1h 35min

Plane – Train – Taxi

Arrival to Helsinki-Vantaa (HEL) international airport.

Train from Helsinki airport to Lieksa 6h

Taxi from Lieksa to Neitikoski 30 min.

Weather

Average June daytime temperature in the region is around 16 to 20 C°. However, on some occasions daytime temperature has been up to 30 C°, and close to 0 C° during the night. So worth preparing for cool and varying temperatures. If you come to train in May, make sure to prepare also for chilly river water.

[Local weather – Lieksa/Ruunaa](#)

Currency

The currency in Finland is euro. Credit cards (Visa, Mastercard) are very widely accepted and you may encounter some outlets don't take cash at all. However, it is recommended to have a small amount of cash in hand.

4. Venue

Neitikoski rapids in Ruunaa recreational area, City of Lieksa

Description of the playspot

The competition site is located at the heart of the 100-metre-long Neitikoski rapid. This unique venue offers reliable conditions throughout the paddling season, which runs from May to November. In June, the midnight sun makes it possible to paddle in daylight around the clock. The Lieksanjoki River flows freely into Neitikoski with no upstream dams, while surrounding lakes and swamps naturally regulate water levels, preventing sudden changes in volume.

Depending on the flow, Neitikoski forms either a mid-sized hole, a mid-sized wave, or a versatile mix of both. The feature consistently delivers world-class conditions for paddlers of all levels—from beginners to seasoned experts. At flows below 100 m³/s, it behaves more like a hole; above 100 m³/s, it develops into a wave. Almost every water level, however, allows for both hole and wave moves.

In mid-June, the median flow is about 120 m³/s. The feature works reliably up to 200 m³/s and exceeding that flow happens more seldom than every 10 years. The feature spans 10–15 metres in width, depending on the flow, with a large eddy conveniently positioned on the lake side. The water is deep and safe, with contact with rocks possibly only when flows drop below 60 m³/s.

Paddling at Neitikoski is free of charge.

Water level: <https://wwwi2.ymparisto.fi/i2/04/q0400600y/wqfi.html>

Rules for the surrounding area

The competition site is part of protected Ruunaa Recreational Area run by Finnish Forest Administration and the competitions held there are subject to their approval. Waste disposal is limited to dedicated spots so please always take the rubbish with you and don't leave anything behind. Finnish freestyle community has an excellent relationship with the Administration and we want to keep it as is so please help us in keeping the site tidy. Please

also leave space to the other users of the area such as fishermen (they shouldn't fish at the playspot however) and most importantly respect the wild nature around us.

Open fire: In Finland making open fire is by law allowed only by explicit permission of the landowner. At Ruunaa area making fire is allowed only on dedicated fireplaces and the landowner Finnish Forest Administration is very strict on that due to high risk of wildfires. Violating this rule will in worst case lead them withdrawing our permit to arrange this competition on very short notice. Respectively, please make fire only on dedicated fireplaces and do not transport the offered firewood anywhere. Also, please only use the firewood provided and do not collect any wood from the nature.

At dry weather, there will be limitations on open fires even on dedicated fireplaces if an official wildfire warning is given. The area around Neitikoski is protected old forest which has very high risk for wildfires. Feel free to ask advice from any organizer or Team Finland member before igniting!

More information:

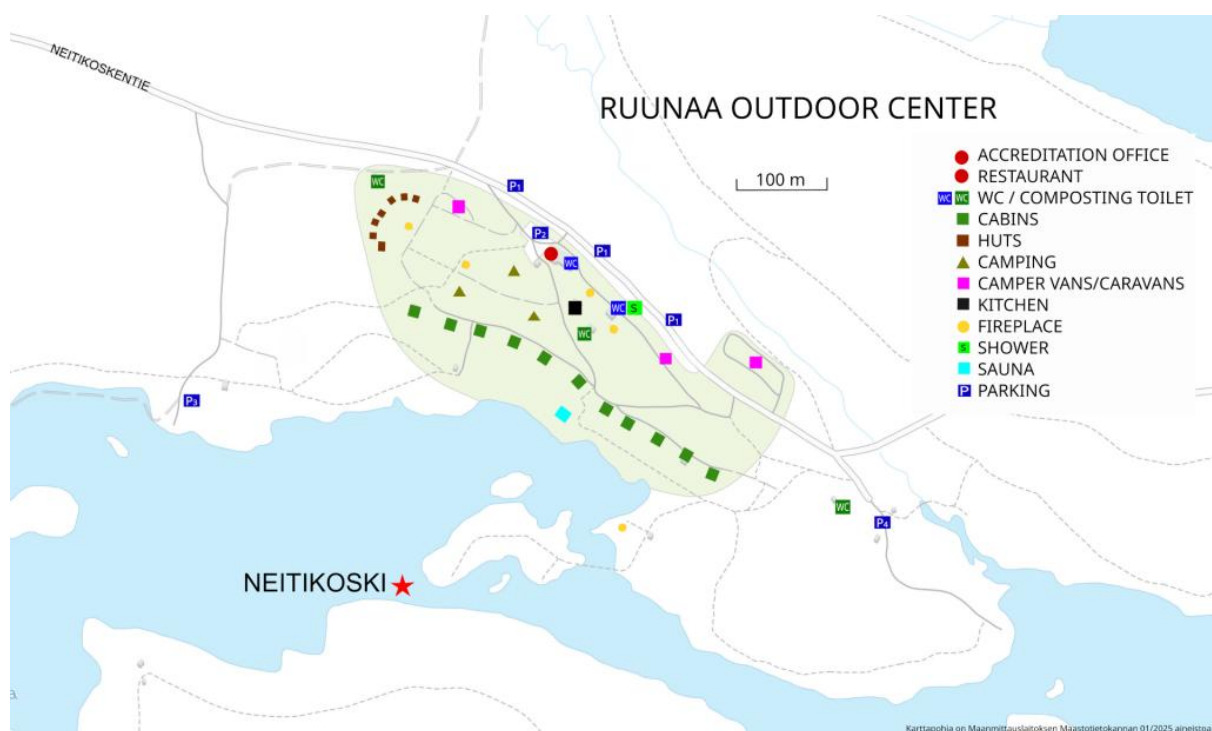
<https://www.luontoon.fi/en/destinations/ruunaa-hiking-area/instructions-and-rules>

Spectators

Spectator information can be found on the webpage

<https://canoefreestyle-lieksa.fi/spectators/>

Map



Proximity to the border

The proximity to the EU outer border has very limited impact to Ruunaa area. The most visible limitations are related to the use of any drones in the area. Finnish Border Guard is also occasionally patrolling in the region. If you are hiking/biking closer to the border, please make sure not to enter the border zone that is clearly marked to the maps and even in the forest.

5. Event & competition program

Competition has the following classes:

Class	Max team size per country
K-1 Surface Men	5
K-1 Surface Women	5
K-1 Surface Junior Men	5
K-1 Surface Junior Women	5
C-1 Surface Men	5
C-1 Surface Women	5

The last year an athlete can compete in the junior age group is the year of their 18th birthday.

Additionally, there will be a cadet camp for junior freestylers under 15: **2026 Euro Freestyle Cadets**. This event provides young athletes under the age of 15 the opportunity to showcase their skills in canoe freestyle and gain valuable competitive experience in an international setting. [Register here](#) by June 1st

An ICF Canoe **Freestyle Judges Seminar** will be held before competition June 3-5, 2026 at Ruunaa Outdoor Centre. For further details see [Application Form](#) & [Selection Criteria & GDPR Policy](#)

6. Training

Official training

Dates: 8-9.6.2026

Detailed schedule to be announced later. Please wear your bib at the official trainings.

Unofficial training

You are free to train 24/7 during the paddling season.

Water quality

Water quality is excellent for swimming but not for drinking so take your own water bottle with you.

7. Safety

Water safety

The Lieksanjoki River is not dangerous at any water level during paddling season. The rapid flows into a lake after the playspot, making it a very safe location, but make sure to wear your personal safety equipment while being on the water! During winter months (November to April) when the lake below the rapid is frozen, paddling may however be dangerous. During the competition and official training a safety crew will be available.

Watch out for rafts!

Local companies in the Ruunaa area organize rafting trips daily, normally around mid day. The program also includes running the Neitikoski rapids, either with a raft or a wooden boat.

Never enter to the feature if you see the raft or boat approaching. You should always observe upstream before entering to the feature and it is your duty to yield downstream traffic, is it rafts, boats or canoes. Use your paddle to show the “stop” sign if someone is in the feature – or “all clear” sign if the feature is free for rafts. Normally after shooting through the rapid they make loop back to the rapid and head downstream for the second time.



Safe space documentation

Principles for a Safe Space: Link to the [documentation](#) .

8. Accommodation

Venue is located in Ruunaa Outdoor Center which has a number of options for accommodation. Since the location is in the middle of nature, the nearest accommodation is mainly in cabins.

Hotel level accommodation is available at the city of Lieksa, 30 km (30 min by car) from the Neitikoski.

Nearest HOC recommended accommodation options:

[Ruunaa Outdoor Centre](#) (Ruunaan Retkeilykeskus)

Distance: 0 km / Driving time: 0 min

Cabins (max 6 persons), cost 150 €/day or 950 €/week, heating, kitchen, shower, toilet, sauna, sheets and towels with extra fee.

Huts (max 3-4 persons), 45 €/day or 295 €/week, bunk beds, microwave oven, water cooker, heating,

Tents: 5 €/day/person + 5 €/day/tent, shared kitchen, toilets and showers

Caravans, with electricity (220VAC)

Sheets and towels: 25€/set

If you are camping, please sign in at the reception. If the reception is already closed at your arrival time feel free to pitch your tent and sign in next morning. If you have booked a hut

and are planning to arrive after reception opening hours, please give them a call the same day and they will arrange the key for you.

[Ruunaan Metsäkoti](#)

Distance: 5.3 km / Driving time: 8 min

11 rooms in total. 2-4 person rooms with shared kitchen, wc and shower.

Price starts from 75€/day/2 person room, sheets included.

Ruunaan Metsäkoti originally served as Ruunaa's school and student dormitory. After the school was closed, the premises functioned as a home for forestry workers. Now the beautiful buildings and the charming yard in the middle of the forest have found a new life and purpose, offering visitors of Ruunaa peaceful and nature-friendly accommodation surrounded by its stunning wilderness.

See the pictures of the rooms on the [website](#). Contact information ruunaanmetsakoti@gmail.com , phone [+358 40 525 9017](tel:+358405259017)

[Ruunaan Matkailu](#)

Distance: 14 km / Driving time: 17 min

Cabins: 8 cabins for 4-10 persons, 54 person in total

Caravans: 10

Tents: 10

Other options:

[Hotel Puustelli](#) ***

Distance: 29 km / Driving time: 30 min

30 rooms for 64 persons

[Hotel Kaatrahovi](#) ***

Distance: 30 km / Driving time: 31 min

15 rooms for 40 persons

[Airbnb](#)

Distance: < 35 km / Driving time:< 36 min

10 private apartments/houses

[Sokos Hotel Koli](#) ****

Distance: 116 km / Driving time: 1 h 30 min

[Hotels in city of Joensuu](#) ****

Distance: > 120 km / Driving time: 1 h 40 min

9. Entry

Entry process & deadlines

Entries and accreditation requests must be made by the National Federation using the ICF's online entries system (SDP): <https://icf.msl.es/icf/icf.jsp>

For detailed instructions on how to submit entries, please read the SDP user guide. Any questions or issues relating access to SDP should be sent to events@paddle-europe.eu and prior to the respective deadline.

Numerical Entries

Numerical entries close: May 10th, 2026

- You must submit through SDP the number of athletes you will enter into each event.
- Please also give indicative numbers for the overall number of athletes and team personnel who will attend the event with your delegation.

Nominal Entries

- Nominal entries close: May 31st, 2026
- Each athlete competing must be entered by name.
- Team personnel must also be submitted for accreditation at this time.

These entries will be used to produce the accreditation cards for all teams. Entries or accreditation requests sent directly to the committee or the event organiser will NOT be accepted.

The champions from European Championships 2024 in Graz will have the right to sign up on top of their national quotas. In case you want to take advantage of this, please contact directly Terry Best, tbest@canoe-eca.eu

Participation fee

Participation fee is 240€. Athletes that compete in two classes (e.g. K1W and C1W) will only have to pay the participation fee once. PEU will additionally charge a 15€ participation fee per participant directly from National Federations.

Payment

Whitewater Canoeing Finland ry

Bank account:

BIC/SWIFT: DABAFIHH

IBAN: FI49 8146 9710 3811 37

When making payments please quote "Entry fee" followed by your country code. Payments must be made in EUR €. Bank and currency charges must be paid by national federations in addition to the accreditation fee. If you require an invoice, please contact

tuomas.pantsar@wwcf.fi

Proof of payment must be available at the time of signing up.

10. Visa requirements

Individuals from EU nations and Schengen area do not need visa to visit Finland. However, you always need an official travel document.

Check if you need the visa, or what type of travel document is accepted, by visiting

<https://um.fi/visa-requirement-and-travel-documents-accepted-by-finland/>

11. Medical services

First aid experts from Finnish Red Cross are on site during official trainings and competition. Any incidents shall be reported immediately to HOC Head of Safety and Security Tomi Tuomasjukka +358504339049.

General emergency number in Finland: 112

Nearest 24/7 hospital:

North Karelia Central Hospital

Tikkamäentie 16

80210 JOENSUU

<https://www.siunsote.fi/en/service/emergency-care/>

12. Doping control

Doping control will be performed in accordance with the Paddle Europe anti-doping requirements and WADA standards

Every athlete and team staff member must have the ADT Training completed at the time of registration: <https://www.canoeicf.com/anti-doping-education>

13. Media

Media

There is a separate media page on our website where we will add media releases (both in Finnish and English) and media images for free use: <https://canoefreestyle-lieksa.fi/media/> .

Streaming

A competition YouTube stream and on-line results service will be provided. Links will be added to the website

Drones

Area is located close to EU outer border and thus flying with drone is strictly forbidden without special permission. See more at sky.fintraffic.fi

14. Event partners & sponsors

The logo for LIEKSA, featuring the word in a stylized red font with a white outline.

Welhonpesa.fi
Kanootit ja kajakit

The logo for NELO, featuring the word in a bold, black, rounded font with a white outline.The logo for PEI SHENG, featuring a stylized red and white graphic above the text "PEI SHENG" in red.

PLASTEX boats for champions