

DIGITALISATION

Digital public services
make life easier

CULTURE

Alli Haapasalo's movie
Girl Picture lets girls be girls

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Six cities as European
pioneers in climate neutrality

FUN

Happy moments
by the water

THIS IS FINLAND

Forest as a sanctuary

Photographer Meeri
Koutaniemi draws strength
from Finnish nature

2023–2024

ISSN 2343-2624



**SUOMI
FINLAND**

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By Päivi Brink
Photo Miika Kainu

WELLNESS FROM THE FOREST

In Finnish culture, the forest is perceived as shelter and protection, as a sanctuary for inner peace, joy and happiness. The forest is a source of inspiration and innovation: Finnish design and architecture often utilise wooden materials. According to a survey, most Finns feel they can really be themselves in the forest. More than 80 percent say that the forest is important to them.

Forest covers 70 percent of Finland's land area. Even if you live in a city, you are never more than a ten-minute walk from a park or forest. Most people love spending time in the fresh forest air. The concept of every person's right means that anyone can hike, camp and gather mushrooms and berries in any forest, regardless of who owns the land.

Researchers say spending time in nature is very good for your health: it lowers blood pressure, improves your state of mind and makes you feel more energetic. The mindfulness method The Forest Mind is based on these research findings. ●

 [visitfinland.com](https://www.visitfinland.com)





THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF HAPPINESS COMES WITH RESPONSIBILITIES



Photo: Sirpa Levonperä

DEAR READER,

The UN World Happiness Report has ranked Finland the happiest country in the world for five years in a row.

I like to say that the secret to our happiness is based on an uncomplicated way of living. Finland has an infrastructure of happiness; it's a country where life flows smoothly.

One part of that infrastructure of happiness is the proximity of everyday services.

In most places in Finland you can walk to your high-quality public school, the workplace and even the local health centre. No matter where you live, the closest park or forest is just a ten-minute walk away. Libraries are usually within easy reach, and so are the polling stations during elections.

Trust plays a vital part in our happiness too. Trust in the government, public institutions and media is consistently strong among people in Finland. We trust our fellow citizens and like to take pride in showing that we can be trusted in return.

A well-functioning service society lets people live their lives to the fullest. It also allows them to experiment and take risks: if you fall, society is there to catch you. Human rights and equality aren't just buzzwords.

But societal advantages always come with responsibility. For future generations to have a chance to experience a happy life, we need to prioritise sustainable development, clean energy, responsible consumption and climate action.

Being solution-oriented and innovative has long been engrained in Finnish culture. I trust my fellow Finns to help find the keys to an even better tomorrow. ●

Mika Pantzar is a professor at the University of Helsinki's Centre for Consumer Society Research. His research themes often have a common denominator, the dynamics of change.

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Stories illuminated

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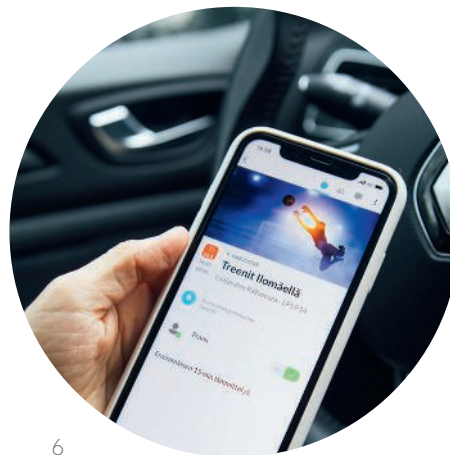
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FACTS ABOUT FINLAND

POPULATION: 5.56 million
TOTAL AREA: 338,472 km²
BIGGEST CITIES: Helsinki (capital), Espoo, Tampere, Vantaa, Oulu and Turku
OFFICIAL LANGUAGES: Finnish and Swedish
GOVERNMENT: Independent republic since 1917
CURRENCY: Euro
JOINED THE EU: 1995

GDP PER CAPITA: € 45 644 (2021)
TOP SECTORS FOR FOREIGN INVESTMENT: ICT, business services, bioeconomy & cleantech, retail, health
TOP AREAS OF EMPLOYMENT: Health and social work, manufacturing & engineering, trade, construction, science & technology, education

By Anne Ventelä
Photos Vilja Harala

SMOOTHER FAMILY LIFE

The Antila-Suurpää family from Helsinki leads a busy, fast-paced life. Digital services provide a lot of help in managing daily affairs.



Let's

get one thing straight: the Antila-Suurpää family is not too keen on IT. Or at least the grown-ups, **Petra Antila** and **Tuomas Suurpää**, feel that way.

And yet, Petra has more than a dozen useful applications on her phone, providing access to electronic services.

She has two banking apps, two parking apps and two medical centre apps. She also has applications for public healthcare, communicating with her child's football team, public transport, the library, museums, parcel tracking and many other things.

Although Petra and Tuomas say that they are not particularly well informed about the digital world, online services are a vital part of their family's life at work and school, during free time and when using public services.

"Digital services are an inseparable part of our society," Tuomas says.

ALL THE INFORMATION IN ONE PLACE

Where is the football match today? How do we get there? Petra asks these questions on a regular basis.

The family's youngest child, eight-year-old **Frans**, has football practice twice a week. During the competition season, he might also have one or two games a week.

Information about training sessions, matches and venues can all be found on the MyClub app, where Frans's team have their own group. This app is a Finnish innovation used by sports clubs and families.

Petra uses the app to inform coaches whether Frans is able to take part in the upcoming training sessions or not. The application can also be used to contact other parents and the team managers, and handle invoices for payments that are due.

The night before, she checks where the game will take place and how long the trip will take.

On the morning of a match day, Petra opens the app to check the football field's location. MyClub takes Petra to a GPS application which shows her a route from her front door to the venue.

"It makes things so very easy," she says. "Without it, transport would be a nightmare."

The fact that the family's eldest child, 11-year-old **Frida**, is in a competitive cheerleading team, also calls for scheduling and planning of spare time.

However, Tuomas is in charge of her training and competitions. The fact that each parent is only responsible for one child's hobbies makes things easier.

WILMA KEEPS PARENTS UP TO DATE ABOUT SCHOOL

Parents are not the only ones to manage daily life with online services. Frida uses her school's communications application, Wilma, every week. Wilma, first developed in Finland in the beginning of the 1980s, is nowadays used

Vero.fi is a familiar website for the family. Recently Tuomas used the service to check he had paid his real estate tax.



PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ONLINE

In Finland, nearly all communications between officials and citizens take place online. If you do not have the necessary equipment at home, you can use a computer at a library free of charge.

Online services are faster and more accessible. As they save paperwork and visits to offices, they are also environmentally friendly.

Another benefit is clear, easy-to-use archives. Previous communications and access history can quickly be viewed afterwards, anytime anywhere.

“This has saved us a lot in late fees,” Petra says.

Late fees only apply to loans from the adult section. If the kids forget to return or extend their own loans from the children’s section, there are no fees.

And talking of money, the couple rarely use cash, apart from when they withdraw some from an ATM for their children. This is because they can take care of a variety of financial matters without leaving their couch, from transactions to investments.

The same is true of communicating with various public authorities. Recently, Tuomas used the tax authority’s online service to check he had paid his real estate tax. The service can also be used to update a tax card or submit a tax return. In 2022,



Frida uses often Journey Planner -service that helps her choose the most suitable public transport route.

88 percent of Finns checked and corrected their tax return through the online service.

Petra confesses that sometimes she gets a bit lost in all the applications, like forgetting which app you were supposed to use to find laboratory results you are looking for.

The family use private, occupational and school health care services. Luckily, there is a nationwide service called Kanta, which connects all three and contains doctors’ reports, laboratory results and prescriptions.

Contacting public administration services is also made easier by the national suomi.fi service that lists all access channels in one place. Suomi.fi is the quickest way to discover which service you need.

ONLINE SERVICES ARE EASIER

Money, time, effort and paper – the family saves all of these things in their daily lives by using digital services.

There are still certain gaps in the online services available, as shown by a stack of bills and other documents on their mantelpiece.

“But the pile of paperwork is not what it used to be,” Petra says. “We seldom get anything by post anymore.” ●

by the majority of schools all over the country.

Wilma is used for messages between home and school, such as whether a child has been present or absent, what their homework is, when they have exams and what grades they have received.

Frida uses the very same app to view her homework for each week, what her PE teacher has planned for the following class, and so on.

Her mother also uses Wilma on a daily basis. She can follow her children’s daily school life and communicate with the teachers through the application. She also receives a summary of the following week’s events.

Frida’s teacher has recommended that pupils also use an application called Otso. This friendly app, named after a bear, is linked to a schoolbook publisher’s books and contains additional material to support learning. It is almost like a pocket-sized teaching assistant.

DATABASE SERVICES PROVIDE SUPPORT

Petra and Tuomas both feel that being able to manage their daily lives online saves them a lot of hassle.

For example, the loan periods of library books can be extended with a click of a button, instead of having to call or visit a library in person.

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

From online healthcare to e-taxation, Finland is a global pioneer in public digital services. For years it has been fertile ground for Information Age services driven by good governance, openness and innovative public-private partnerships.

A big part of the digital ease associated with Finnish public services comes from the tech-savvy people themselves, says **Timo Seppälä**, a professor of practice in digital operations at Aalto University. Finns have never been afraid to go digital, he says.

“We use more mobile data than any other country, and we’ve been concentrating on connectivity for a long time,” says Seppälä. The great quality and the reasonable prices of mobile connections have, naturally, a lot to do with this.

“Finns are accustomed to self-service and have embraced digital services.”

The high degree of digitalisation is often credited to Finland’s strong digital infrastructure – and the fact that the nation is highly educated and digitally literate. High-speed internet connections are available for everyone. Finland was the first country to deploy 5G mobile networks, and it’s also a front-runner in 5G research and development.

Overall, Finnish authorities see digitalisation as a tool to promote equal opportunities and make everyday life easier by saving time and effort. Finnish authorities and government agencies on all levels provide free digital services to citizens.

REASON TO BELIEVE

Seppälä credits Finnish companies for most of the work in integrating e-processes over the years.

Nevertheless, Seppälä believes that the “secret sauce” in this development has nothing to do with technology.

“Finland has been able to develop

great public e-services because citizens trust the authorities with their information,” says Seppälä. “Trust is a key building block of a digital society.”

Transparency is another cornerstone of digital public services. It builds trust when combined with good governance, due process and a strong rule of law. Open digital records help make cheating even more difficult and rare.

Furthermore, Seppälä is impressed by the patience and attention that public actors have given to the user experience.

“These services are not developed with a technology focus,” he says. “Instead, the focus is on how easy they are to use.”

GOVERNMENT GOES DIGITAL

Even taxation runs smoothly. Thanks to the tax authority’s own site, vero.fi, the amount of administration that uses actual paper is minimal, and the taxation process has been largely automated.

The Social Insurance Institution, known by its Finnish abbreviation Kela, is another government agency racing full speed into the future. Kela is tasked with providing basic economic security for everyone in Finland – so all digital processes need to be well thought-out.

“We have learned to use a variety of automation tools to make the online experience as smooth as possible,” says Kela’s director, **Nina Nissilä**.

The crown jewel in the public sector is Kanta, an e-service for social welfare and healthcare. In 2021 alone the site received 42 million visits.

Kanta services benefit citizens as well as social welfare and healthcare service providers. It includes a prescription service and a patient data repository.

Automated public services save time and effort for citizens and companies, as well as for civil servants, since routine tasks are handled automatically. ●

FINLAND’S HIGH DEGREE OF DIGITALISATION STEMS FROM ITS STRONG DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE.



Timo Seppälä



Nina Nissilä



By Sami Anteroinen
 Photos Studioarustamo, iStock

SCARING AWAY CYBERVILLAINS

As digitalisation reaches deeper levels of society, cybersecurity issues become increasingly important. According to a recent study by Reboot, a British online marketing agency, Finland takes the crown when it comes to the safest cyber environment.

Reboot analysed such cybersecurity red flags as phishing sites, malware hosting sites and compromised computers. It found Finland to be number one in combating these threats.

Jarno Limnéll, professor of practice in cybersecurity at Aalto University, says that Finland does, indeed, have a lot of expertise in cybersecurity, but needs to work hard to stay on top.

“When everything from work to shopping is online, a lot of the criminal element goes online, too,” he says. For the most part, digitalisation is a positive force in the world, but one must be wary of the emerging risks.

ROOTED IN STRATEGY

The Finnish Government regards cybersecurity as a national priority. Under the government’s cybersecurity strategy, Finland seeks to identify cybersafety requirements and strengthen education and research. It states that society needs cybersecurity competence in both public administration and the business community. National cybersecurity will be built as a common effort among authorities, the business community, organisations and citizens. Everyone can contribute.

RESILIENCE WINS THE DAY

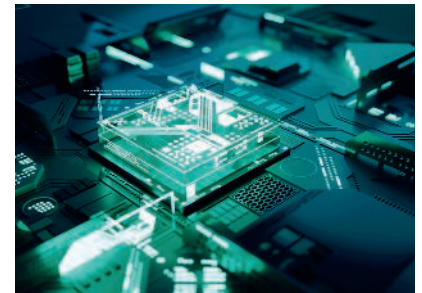
Limnéll heads an Aalto University research team currently devising an educational package on EU cybersecurity, with the objective of establishing cybersecurity as a civic skill across the European Union.

He agrees that cybersecurity is something that concerns us all. A nation

that is digitally savvy has a better shot at overcoming cyber challenges.

“Our cyber companies have very diverse know-how and we enjoy a great reputation as trustworthy partners.”

“There’s no such thing as total cybersafety, and there never will be,” he says. “Instead, you should concentrate on building resilience. If something happens, you must have the will and capability to fight back.” ●



GET READY FOR QUANTUM!

Quantum computing can solve extremely complex calculations in mere hours where classical computing would need years. The first wave of quantum computers is expected to arrive in the 2030s.

Unfortunately, they will also allow cybercriminals to crack the most secure digital encryption. There is an urgent need to build a common defence against quantum-era threats.

Finland has a head start in the race to create post-quantum cryptography technology, thanks to innovation funding from Business Finland, an organisation under the Ministry of Employment and the Economy. Some of the very first innovations in this field have already emerged from Finnish cybersecurity companies and research organisations.



WILD VISIONS OF THE FUTURE SEE HUMANS THRIVING IN A METAVERSE, WHERE ALL NEEDS ARE MET DIGITALLY.



Laura Halenius



Miikka Rosendahl



Urho Konttori

IMMERSIVE FINLAND

The internet is evolving towards the next stage. Blockchains, metaverses, virtual reality and decentralised innovations are all part of this. A metaverse involves different visions of the future internet, where a virtual world is built to complement the physical world and people can easily move from one service or environment to another.

Wild visions of the future see humans thriving in a metaverse, where all needs are met digitally and without delay. Project director **Laura Halenius** from Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund, says that the hype surrounding the metaverse is tremendous, but we're not quite there yet.

"First of all, there is not just one metaverse, but many metaverses," she says. "The second thing is interoperability: how do we make sure that all these digital

realities can somehow work in unison? The third issue concerns justice and inclusion: the metaverse needs to be fair for all."

Halenius believes Finnish companies are well placed to go "full meta". For example, the game cluster is in fine form and ready for the next level.

TO INFINITY & BEYOND

One meta-blazing company is Helsinki-based Varjo, which makes high-immersion virtual and mixed reality products and services for advanced VR users.

"Our retinal resolution devices are used for training, from astronauts to car designers," explains CEO **Urho Konttori**.

Konttori does not expect the shift towards metaverse to take place overnight,

but the transformation will be "very real," he predicts.

PHOTOREALISTIC PROWESS

ZOAN is a true pioneer in making the metaverse photorealistic. Founder and CEO **Miikka Rosendahl** says that the new virtual worlds are driven by next-gen users.

"Generation Z is already used to playing very advanced digital games, and the level of immersion is increasing all the time," he says.

But while games are important, they are only the starting point to virtual world-building: Rosendahl points out that leading global companies are now becoming convinced that their brands require a presence in the metaverse.

"The metaverse is just getting started, but it's clear that businesses see its potential." ●

By Päivi Brink

Photos Petri Anttila, Janita Autio, Bättre Folk Festival, Lassi Häkkinen/The City of Lahti, Malva

DIVE INTO THE ABSOLUTE FINLAND EXPERIENCE

Finland offers a treasure trove of museums, festivals and other gems waiting to be discovered. Get inspired by a carbon-neutral music festival and internationally acclaimed poster exhibition or learn about the island life in the world's largest archipelago.



Flow Festival in Helsinki
11–13 August 2023

CELEBRATING URBAN CULTURE

Flow Festival – one of the world's first carbon neutral festivals – takes place in Suvilahti, right in the centre of Helsinki. The festival's energy production needs are covered by renewable diesel, waste products are sorted and recycled, and all of the restaurants offer at least one vegan option.

Flow, also known for its stylish crowd, offers a broad music and arts program, including performers from experimental artists to international superstars.



flowfestival.com



Bättre Folk Festival in Hailuoto, 14–15 July 2023

ART IN THE MIDNIGHT SUN

A two-day festival of literature and music, Bättre Folk takes place on Hailuoto Island near Oulu in Northern Finland. Around 2,500 culture-loving people gather yearly on this beautiful island with stunning seaside views to celebrate the midnight sun and art. The festivalgoers can feel the thrill of going to sauna and hot tubs and

even taking a dip in the Baltic Sea.



battrefolk.fi

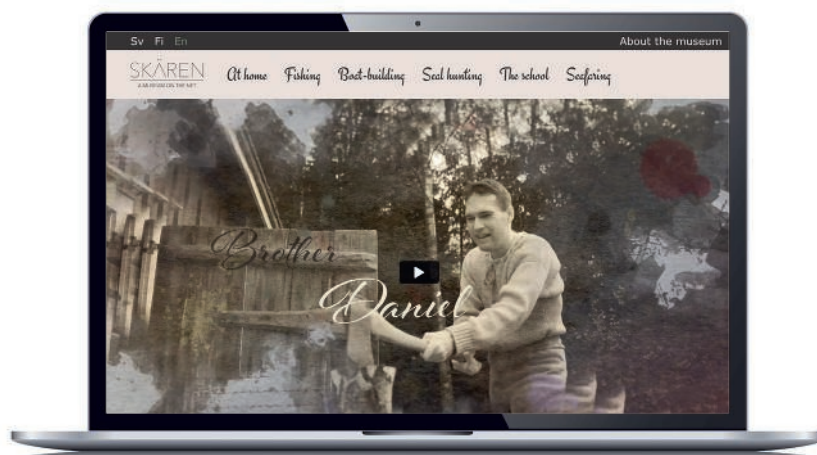
Skären – Finnish archipelago museum on-line

ISLAND HISTORY AND CULTURE

Finland has the world’s largest archipelago, consisting of over 50,000 islands. The archipelago has been populated since the late Stone Age. Today, over 70,000 Finnish people live on the islands.

Skären, the Finnish archipelago museum on-line, sheds light on island life a century ago. The museum is built around different themes, including fishing and the school, and contains films, interactive photographs and stories.

skarenmuseum.fi



Museum of Visual Arts Malva in Lahti

A THRILLING CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Malva is a new visual arts museum in Lahti, about an hour’s train ride from Helsinki. Malva is an exciting combination of two museums, the Lahti Art Museum and the Poster Museum, bringing together their content and exhibitions. One of the most anticipated events in the museum is the Lahti International Poster Triennial, an internationally recognised graphic art contest and exhibition. Malva is part of the Malski Centre, a cultural centre in an old industrial brewery building, where you can also find great restaurants.

malvamuseo.fi

By Päivi Brink

Photos iStock, Miikka Pirinen, Neste, Wärtsilä

RENEWABLE RULES

Finland is among the world leaders in using renewable energy sources. Renewable energy already represents over 40 percent of energy end consumption. It is one of the key tools for achieving the country's main climate goal of being carbon neutral by 2035. By the end of this decade the share of renewables is already expected to be above 50 percent.

The

most important forms of renewable energy used in Finland are bioenergy, hydropower, wind power, ground heat and solar power. Bioenergy consists mainly of fuels from forest industry side streams and other wood-based fuels.

Mariko Landström, leading specialist, sustainability solutions for the economy at the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra, notes that until now, bioenergy has been the main tool to replace fossil energy. In 2020 three quarters of renewable energy used was bioenergy.

"Right now, however, it is the share of wind power that is growing very rapidly."



Mariko Landström

DRIVEN BY GREEN POLICY

In addition to having favorable natural resources, a strong policy has been key in the rise of the renewables.

"Back in 1990, we put a price on fossil carbon through taxes and we are part of the EU emission trading system. Initially we supported renewable power generation with feed-in tariffs, but that support is no longer needed," Landström says. The transport sector has also been steadily pushed to use more biofuels.

Many things will contribute to achieving the goal of being carbon neutral by 2035, she says. The starting point is a stable and ambitious policy environment and highly educated people. Strong cooperation between industries and the government is showcased by the low carbon road maps drawn up by industry.

"In addition, we have strong existing infrastructure – namely power grids and district heating networks – and good conditions for some renewables. Finland is a country with large forest resources which offer wood side streams for energy. And we have a lot of space for wind power."

HYDROGEN HEROES

What innovations are waiting in the wings to hit the scene in 1–5 years? Landström says that various sectors are currently piloting ambitious technologies and systems. One hot topic is hydrogen:

"For example, Neste and P2X Solutions are developing the production and use of clean hydrogen in synthetic fuels and SSAB is piloting the use of hydrogen to produce fossil free steel."

TAKING CHARGE

Neste, a global leader in producing biofuels for transport, is a great example of a world-class cleantech company.

“Neste’s success was made possible by the Finnish mandate to use biofuels. This created a lead market for the fuels, which made a large investment in their development viable.”

Landström notes that several Finnish companies have the skill and readiness to shape future markets, often together with international partners. Some markets do not even exist yet and infrastructure is lacking, so this is a challenging task where forerunners have an important role to play.

PHASING OUT COAL

Presently, Finnish energy companies are investing heavily in efficiency and clean energy. In 2020, they estimated that district heating emissions would fall 60 percent by 2030, but by the following year they were expecting the drop to be 80 percent. Helen, the energy company that provides district heating in Helsinki, has decided to shut down its last coal


power plant as soon as 2024, five years before the original deadline.

“Helen is looking into multiple technologies to replace coal, such as new heat pump facilities, seawater heat pumps and industry waste heat use.”

MAKE IT DIGITAL!

Landström perceives digitalisation to be important in the green energy game, because it can optimise the use of energy in a smart way. Digitalisation allows more decentralised small resources – such as the waste heat of buildings – and can schedule power consumption to take advantage of renewable energy available, thus avoiding demand peaks.

“This will improve cost efficiency and energy security, allowing intermittent renewables to cover a larger share of energy demand.” ●



“RIGHT NOW IT IS THE SHARE OF WIND POWER THAT IS GROWING VERY RAPIDLY.”

ENERGY EFFICIENCY EDGE

Finland has always lived energy-efficiently, largely because of the cool climate. Early industries faced a similar dilemma of dealing with limited resources – energy was scarce, expensive or both.

“Not having great energy sources of our own, we always had to think ahead and conserve energy,” says Director **Joona Turtiainen** from Finnish Energy Industries.

Since 1995, Finland has been operating a voluntary system of energy efficiency agreements. Over the years, they have evolved into a unique success story that is not found anywhere else in the world. It is one of the few European countries where voluntary agreements on energy efficiency are shown to work and yield profits.

“This model, where companies and municipalities set goals for themselves

to cut down on their use of energy, has worked out very well indeed,” says Turtiainen.

Presently, Energy Efficiency Agreements cover more than 60 percent of Finland’s total energy use. More than 700 companies (with their thousands of sites) and over 120 municipalities and joint municipalities have committed to the energy efficiency objectives set in the agreements.



HOMES TO ENERGY SOURCES

Most Finnish houses and apartment buildings are well insulated, which makes a huge difference in heating expenses and comfort of living. Even when it is -30°C outside, homes generally have an indoor temperature of $+20^{\circ}\text{C}$. The state of Finland has promoted energy efficiency in private housing for decades. As a new way to cut CO₂ emissions, it is now encouraging the use of renewable energy at home.



“Regardless of their current heating systems, private house owners who install solar panels or a geothermal heat pump receive state support,” says **Peter Lund**, professor of advanced energy systems at Aalto University. “You can either get 40 percent off from the installation costs as a tax relief or alternatively use a support mechanism to cover up to a quarter of the costs of heat pumps and solar panels and related equipment. This is an important subsidy for pensioners and other low-income families. Now everyone can participate in the energy transition and help tackle the energy crisis.”

Power companies are also willing to buy surplus energy produced by the solar panels during the summer months.

“The law was changed recently in order to let individuals sell electricity to the grid for a fair price,” Lund says. “Now that energy prices are very high, people have actually been able to earn money with their solar panels. The yearly amount of sunshine in Finland is similar to Germany, for example. In fact, solar panels work more efficiently in colder climates.” ●

CASE

100 PERCENT RENEWABLE ENERGY FUTURE

Soon, all our energy will be renewable. Wärtsilä works towards this with power storage and balancing power plants that can use future fuels.

"We have invested in developing technologies and services that improve flexibility in power systems," says Wärtsilä's director of growth & development **Ville Rimali**. His company provides future-fuel enabled balancing power plants and is one of the three biggest utility-scale energy storage optimisers in the world.

"In our view, carbon-neutral fuels will be the last mile required to fully decarbonise power systems, and Wärtsilä has the know-how, technologies and products to enable this. Wärtsilä launched its first BioLNG power plant as early as 2003. In 2015, it introduced green methanol in its solutions.

"We have developed power plants that can use the carbon neutral fuels of the future, such as green ammonia and green hydrogen. Our aim is that on average 80 percent of energy will come from wind and solar power plants, 10 percent shifted via batteries and the last 10 percent from balancing power plants using future fuels." ●



CASE

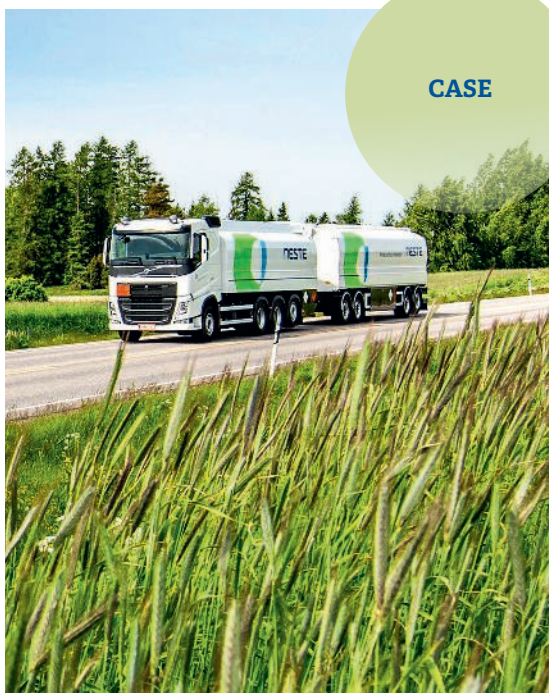
REFINING WASTE INTO RENEWABLE FUELS

Neste, once a regional oil refiner, is today the world's leading producer of renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuel. The company converts waste, residues and innovative raw materials into renewable fuels and sustainable feedstock for plastics and other materials.

"Neste MY Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) is available and in use worldwide. It produces up to 80 percent less greenhouse gas emissions than fossil jet fuel. In addition, using SAF significantly lowers non-CO2 emissions", says **Lars Peter Lindfors**, Senior Vice President in Innovation of Neste.

In road transport, Neste's renewable diesel results in up to 90 percent less greenhouse gas emissions than fossil diesel.

"We continue to develop new raw materials and technologies to diversify our portfolio. Renewable hydrogen, Power-to-X, lignocellulosic waste and residues, algae, municipal solid waste and liquefied waste plastic are all viable alternatives to provide sustainable raw materials." ●



By Sami Anteroinen
Photos Vilja Harala



MEERI KOUTANIEMI

- Finnish photographer and photojournalist
- Focuses on the humanitarian aspect of conflicts, displacement and discrimination
- Celebrates our universal ability of empowerment and resilience
- Has reported on human rights and the situations of minorities
- Has won numerous awards for her work

GO TO THE SOURCE

Wherever she roams, award-winning photographer Meeri Koutaniemi draws strength from Finnish nature – and never stops looking for that perfect tree to climb.

M

Meeri Koutaniemi, 35, stands motionless in a lake in mid-winter, concentrating on breathing and keeping her mind calm. After a few minutes, she climbs out of the freezing water and steps into a hot sauna.

This home-made ritual takes place in Kuusamo, northern Finland, where Koutaniemi grew up and where she longs to go whenever she gets a break from her travels around the world.

“Being in the ice cold water, the sensation is so intense that I can connect with that feeling no matter where I am.”

GLOBAL REACH

For Koutaniemi, the “where” might be the tribal lands of Kenya’s Masai people or a women’s prison in El Salvador. Armed with curiosity and a camera, she has the knack of finding projects of no small significance – work that deals with hefty themes such as human rights, equality and defiance in the face of overwhelming odds.

“No matter where I go, I’m inspired by the resilience shown by the people I meet.”

Her longest-running project – already ten years in – deals with female genital mutilation on different continents. “I’ve been to 12 countries documenting the topic and will continue the research,” she says. The focus of the project is on local activism.

ACTIVIST STORYTELLER

The rights of women and girls light the activist fire in Koutaniemi’s eyes. Simply by providing girls with

access to education, you can combat vast problems such as overpopulation, economic inequality and climate change. Studies show that better educated women tend to be more informed about things like nutrition and healthcare and have fewer, healthier children; also, they’re more likely to participate in the labour market and earn higher incomes.

“We need to support change on the local level,” she says. Equality issues rarely improve without a fight.

“For example, women’s right to vote didn’t just happen. It took years and years of effort and determination.” Koutaniemi is proud of the fact that Finnish women were the first in the world to gain unrestricted rights both to vote and to stand for parliament, back in 1906.

ROOTS RUN DEEP

The globe-trotting Koutaniemi – 60 countries and counting – says that she always carries her homeland with her. “I am empowered by my roots in Kuusamo, where I grew up basically amidst the forest.”

To this day, visiting a Finnish forest, with its pines, spruces and the odd birch, gives her all the sanctuary she needs from the pressures and burdens of daily toil.

“The forest, for me, is a place where I can be reenergised and where I can catch my breath,” she says. “When I am walking in nature, I feel powerful gratitude.” She has a strong bond with the northern forests.

“Occasionally you just need some trees to climb,” she says with a grin.

She admits that the “green link” was not always as clear in her mind as it is today. But as photography took her to the farthest reaches of the earth, she sensed something stirring inside her: a powerful longing to reconnect with the nature of her home country.

“I had to travel pretty far before I could really grasp what the woods mean to me,” she says.

Recently, she also purchased five hectares of forest in Kuusamo, with a clear agenda in mind. “Now that I have those woods, I can make sure that nobody can ever chop them down,” she says.

DRIVEN BY INSTINCT

Koutaniemi has been prone to independent thinking since she was a teenager.

“I felt that I needed to be the one in charge of deciding where I find my calling,” says Koutaniemi, having become a freelance photographer at the age of 19.

More than 15 years down the road, she hasn’t stopped feeling that way.

“I choose my projects very intuitively, but I also consider the social and political side of the theme.”

At the same time, she doesn’t mind taking risks and falling flat on her face.

“Part of the journey is being incomplete and experiencing failure,” she says. “Having your foundations shaken is usually a good thing.”

HUMAN TOUCH

In the past, she has visited conflict zones, witnessing the full scale of oppression and survival. But how does a photographer relate to subjects who have seen unspeakable things, and not get swept up in emotion? She replies that taking pictures of people is very much about human interaction:

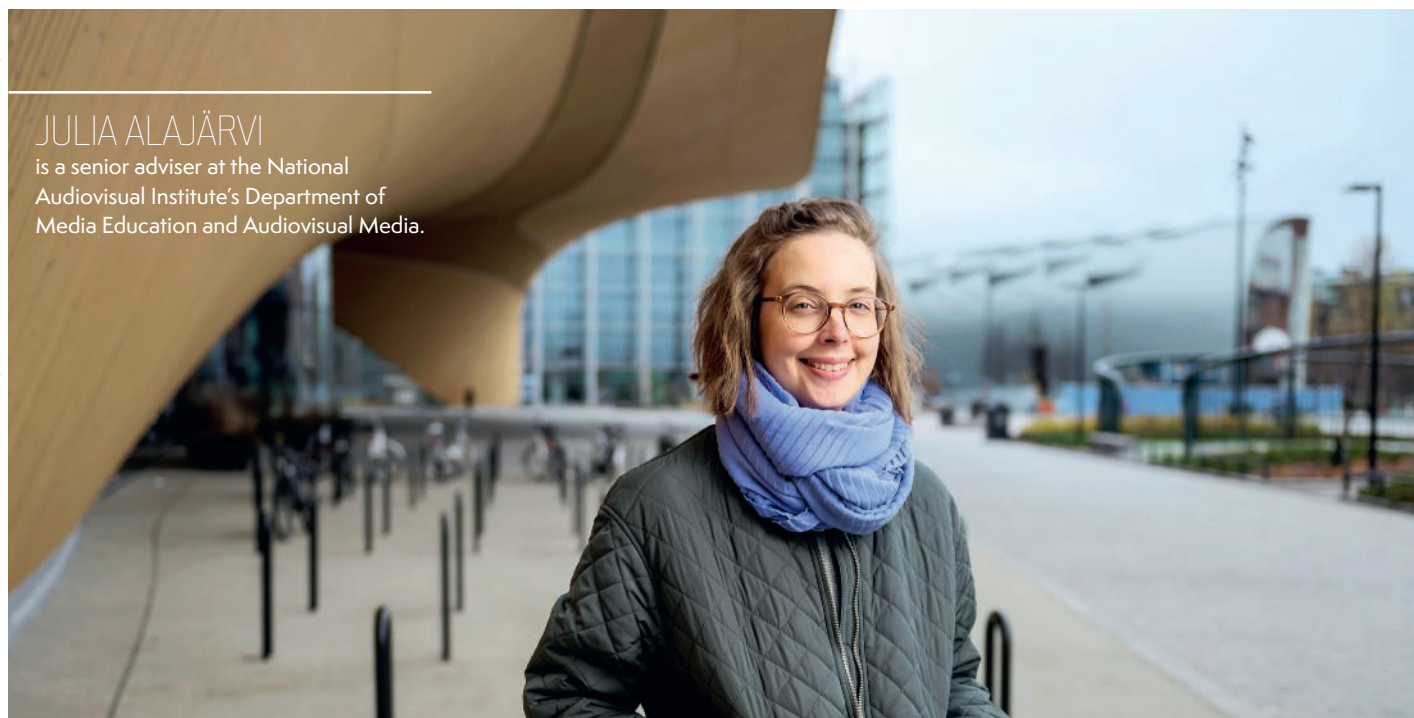
“Mutual respect is always the cornerstone.”

Koutaniemi says that her craft is all about the softer side of storytelling: how you can learn something from others and, ultimately, realise something about yourself, too.

“We have our differences, but there are more things that unite us than separate us,” she says. “What matters is how we work together.” ●

“THE FOREST, FOR ME, IS
A PLACE WHERE I CAN BE
REENERGISED AND WHERE
I CAN CATCH MY BREATH.”





JULIA ALAJÄRVI

is a senior adviser at the National Audiovisual Institute's Department of Media Education and Audiovisual Media.

MEDIA LITERACY IS A CIVIC SKILL

The world has never before been as interconnected as it is today, but communities are still experiencing polarisation and uncertainty. The internet and social media in particular offer us endless possibilities, but also challenges we should be aware of and address. People need up-to-date media knowledge and skills in order to fully participate in their societies.

When people have good media literacy skills, it is more difficult to influence them with disinformation or make them act against their own best interests. Without media literacy, people

have much less power to influence the things that matter to them, and there is significantly less trust in their society.

In Finland, there is a long history of promoting media literacy. In the 1950s, some schools were already offering mass communication education which focused on newspapers and radio. Around 25 years ago, the first university-level media education programme was established. Today, media education includes all forms of media, both offline and online. Part of media literacy is to learn how to navigate social media in a healthy way.

In 2022, Finland was ranked at the top of the Media Literacy Index comparing 41 European

countries. The index assesses the ability to resist fake news using media freedom, education and trust in people. In Finland, media literacy is part of curricula from early childhood education to upper secondary level and it is integrated in all subjects. It is also part of teachers' education. There are several themes teachers choose from, for example evaluating and analysing media, operating in media environments and producing your own media. There is multi-sectorial cooperation: early childhood education and schools work together with NGOs, libraries, youth centres and parents.

Finland has its own policy on media literacy and media education, which the National Audiovisual Institute is responsible for implementing. ●

PEOPLE NEED UP-TO-DATE MEDIA KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN ORDER TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THEIR SOCIETIES.

Finland is a pioneer in highlighting the challenges and solutions of digitalisation and data. Check out The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra's project Digipower Investigation: sitra.fi

By Sami Anteroinen

Photo iStock



AGRITECH RISING

Finnish companies are disrupting the food and agricultural industries with their expertise in vertical farming, plant-based food production and the use of agricultural side streams – as well as groundbreaking food and agricultural technology.

For instance, the Finnish Environment Institute (Syke) has developed an intriguing solution that uses gypsum, a by-product of the chemicals industry. Syke’s solution improves agricultural soil and reduces the likelihood of phosphate and organic carbon ending up in waterways – tackling challenges such as fish mortality and toxic algae blooms head on. ●

Photo SRV/Libeskind/Tomorrow



TRAVEL INDUSTRY GOES CARBON-NEUTRAL

In June 2022, Visit Finland and 60 other Finnish tourism companies and regions signed the Glasgow Declaration for Climate Action in Tourism. The Glasgow Declaration signatories commit to cutting their CO₂ emissions in half during this decade and working to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

The Glasgow Declaration is the most comprehensive climate change statement in the tourism sector. For the first time, all operators are brought together in four different ways: measuring and reducing CO₂ emissions, reforming policies, increasing cooperation, and securing funding needed for development. ●



Photo iStock



NOKIA ARENA OFF TO A WORLD-CLASS START

Nokia Arena is hosting the World Hockey Championships again in 2023 – having done this in 2022, too. The arena – with architect Daniel Libeskind as one of the designers – has been a runaway success with more than 750,000 visits already. Furthermore, the location in downtown Tampere makes it easily accessible by public transport.

In addition to hockey and other sports events, Nokia Arena offers a great setting for large productions required by international artists and entertainment events, transforming from a concert stage to a venue for a dinner gala, a corporate event or an exhibition space. ●

Photo Sulapac



FINNOVATION USES TOUCH TO FIGHT ADDICTION

Researchers at Aalto University are developing a groundbreaking device that has the potential to impact the parts of the brain associated with addictions. The Aalto research team is studying how the device could conceivably suppress craving for alcohol and other addictive behaviors by stroking the skin gently.

The device is designed to be worn discreetly under clothing, attached to the back or forearm, for example. The development work is ongoing, with the researchers exploring the possibility of using the device to address other addictive behavior, such as gambling, too. ●



Photo Aalto University



BEAUTY INDUSTRY KEEPS IT NATURAL

The Finnish beauty industry is driven by a shift towards greener values – namely, eco-friendly packaging, highly personalised customer experience, sustainable raw materials, ingredient traceability and brand-new product categories. At present, the global beauty and personal care industry produces over 120 billion units of packaging annually – yet most of this volume is not truly recyclable.

The Finnish company Sulapac seeks to rectify the situation with their wood-based material that biodegrades fully, without leaving permanent microplastics behind. The multi-award-winning innovation is suitable for both oil- and water-based cosmetics. ●

Photo Laine Publishing



KNIT YOUR FOLKLORE!



An unusual hobby hit emerged in Finland as designer Jenna Kostet released her book with knitting patterns based on the Finnish national epic Kalevala. With 18 patterns out there – all drawing their inspiration from the ancient Northern tales – it has become apparent that you can, indeed, stay warm and celebrate the Age of Heroes at the same time!

Kostet upped the ante by designing a knitted sweater pattern for the University of Turku as well. The most central symbol of the University's logo and emblem, the torch, served as Kostet's inspiration when designing the pattern. A great fit for University's students, staff and alumni alike! ●

By Sami Anteroinen
Photo Roope Permanto



RECENT CAMPAIGNS IN FINLAND

THE HELMI HABITATS PROGRAMME 2021–2030

Launched by the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. It seeks to strengthen biodiversity by conserving and restoring swamps, traditional biotopes, forested habitats, small bodies of water and coastal nature.

“SAVE THE BEES” CAMPAIGN

The campaign by the Finnish Broadcasting Company led to almost 76,000 concrete actions to save bees, nature’s master pollinators, in 2020. The campaign encouraged people to build insect hotels, establish meadows and plant bee-friendly flowers.

Outi Haanperä is an economist with a passion for applying economic tools to enhance our natural capital. Like many Finns, she feels empowered by nature: “Walking into a forest, and just being in natural surroundings, I feel infinite wonder and gratitude,” she says.

FINNS GET TOUGH ON CARBON WHILE BOOSTING BIODIVERSITY

The world needs to be ambitious in fighting against climate change. Finland plans to be carbon neutral by 2035 and carbon negative soon after that.



Finland seeks to provide climate and biodiversity solutions for the world.

“For example, in seeking to cut greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80 percent from the levels in 1990, we are now trying to accomplish it by 2040 instead of 2050,” says **Outi Haanperä**, Project Director at the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra.

The key pillar of Finland’s national climate policy is the Climate Change Act of 2015, which was just updated in July 2022. The revised law enhances the country’s climate targets including carbon neutrality by 2035.

GREEN TOOLS FOR THE JOB

How will Finland achieve such tough climate targets? Haanperä says that the solutions start with productivity and efficiency. These two themes deal with a range of issues, from improving the energy efficiency of factories and homes to embracing a lower-carbon diet – with, say, more vegetables and plant-based proteins.

“The second set of solutions involves replacing fuels and materials with better, low-carbon alternatives,” says Haanperä. “The continuing

electrification of society plays a key role here, too.”

The third set of solutions comes from Finland’s abundant forests. “We need to protect and enhance our carbon sinks by offering economic incentives to forest owners.”

Finns have long taken the conservation and protection of forests seriously. A recent survey found that 87 percent of Finns regard nature as a key factor in their everyday lives.

THE ULTIMATE TEAM PLAYERS?

Another big issue also comes into play when talking about Finland and the environment: namely, the desire to achieve results via collaboration.

“Finland is a relatively small country which has always sought international cooperation with others to get things done,” says Haanperä.

“The same mindset exists domestically. We have a long history of public and private sectors working together, with companies, universities and the government all contributing.”

BIODIVERSITY LOSS LOOMING

Nevertheless, there’s a new challenge looming on the horizon that may yet eclipse even that of climate change. Biodiversity – the diversity of life on

Earth – is threatened all around the world, and Finland is no exception. Nature is in danger.

Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra has been very vocal in discussing this issue and raising awareness among citizens and companies alike. In order to implement efficient measures to tackle biodiversity loss, organisations need to understand their nature footprint. Some innovative tools are currently being developed to measure organizations’ nature footprint.

THREE PRINCIPLES

Haanperä says that, in addition to conservation, the general framework for addressing biodiversity loss consists of three principles.

“First of all, if you can avoid harming the environment, then you should,” she says.

“Second, if you can’t avoid it altogether, you must decrease the negative impact – minimise it to the extent possible. Third, you must compensate the environmental damage that you do.”

This framework is already becoming more common, if only on a voluntary basis. “It’s not a mandatory model yet, but we feel that it is still an important step in the right direction.” ●

By Katja Alaja

Photos Elias Metsämaa / City of Espoo, Matti Pyykkö, Mikko Lemola, Lassi Häkkinen, Terri Vahtera / Visit Turku, Laura Vanzo / Visit Tampere

SIX PIONEERS IN CARBON-NEUTRALITY

Six Finnish cities have received recognition from the European Commission as pioneers in climate neutrality efforts. We look at ambitious projects in Espoo, Helsinki, Lahti, Lappeenranta, Tampere and Turku.



ESPOO

The city of Espoo is prioritising energy and traffic solutions in its plans to become carbon neutral. It recently launched the “Espoo Climate Watch” website, which compiles the city’s climate actions, monitors their progress and evaluates their impact.

Fortum, a state-owned energy company headquartered in Espoo, is developing a next-generation district heating system. The production will largely be based on waste heat, heat pumps and electric boilers,

including excess heat from Microsoft’s new data centres nearby.

Raide-Jokeri, a new light-rail line, is set to connect Espoo directly with northern and eastern Helsinki starting in January 2024. In 2022, Länsimetro, the capital region’s underground metro line, opened five new stations in western Espoo. Steps like these continue to make public transport a smart choice for locals.

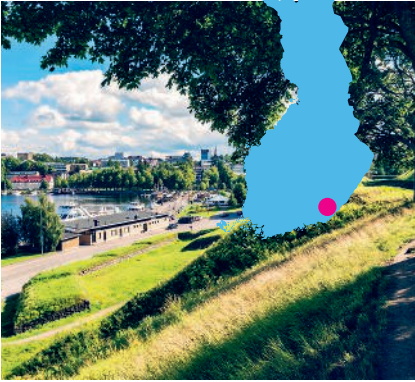


HELSINKI

The city of Helsinki is focusing its efforts on energy, construction and transport to become carbon neutral. Only buildings with top energy efficiency can be built on plots owned by the city. Soon, low-carbon concrete will be required in infrastructure projects.

Helen Ltd, the local energy company, is closing its coal-fired plants by 2024. Geothermal wells for private properties are allowed also in public areas – a special allowance nationally. The city advises housing companies on energy-saving renovations.

Helsinki is being developed as a polycentric network, where most journeys are made by public transport, bike or on foot. Helsinki has a goal to transform its bicycle network with best-practice infrastructure in the Danish and Dutch-style. The city aims to further reduce emissions from transport by conducting an analysis to find new means.



LAPPEENRANTA

The city of Lappeenranta is a testbed for global carbon-neutral solutions and cooperates closely with the Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology and local companies.

The city stopped using natural gas for district heating in 2010 and is using side streams of the forest industry instead. Every city service from education to sports facilities uses green electricity. Lappeenranta is located on the shore of lake Saimaa so almost every citizen has less than 100 meters to green areas.

St1, a fuel company, plans to base Finland's first green methanol production plant in Lappeenranta. Green methanol is a sustainable raw material for fuels and plastics. Forus, a company that finances energy investments, has plans to construct a 250 MVA solar power plant in Lappeenranta, producing enough electricity for 150,000 apartments.

LAHTI

Decision-makers in the city of Lahti have a long tradition of climate awareness. The local power company, Lahti Energy, has replaced coal with biomass. Residents favour heat pumps over oil heating.

In transport, Lahti Energy and Nordic Ren-Gas are studying the feasibility of a Power-to-Gas project that will include the production of green hydrogen and renewable methane that can be used by heavy road vehicles.

Lahti has a significant electric transportation cluster with more than 30 businesses developing technologies for decarbonising transport. Lahti also encourages residents to cycle and walk by highlighting their health benefits and developing the main cycling network. The city has already launched a city bike system.



TURKU

The city of Turku encourages locals to make climate-friendly choices by offering them carbon-neutral district heating and electricity, public transport and climate-friendly rental housing.

Coal has already been replaced with renewables. A large proportion of district heating is produced by heat recovery from wastewater. The city is turning the Student Village District and Campus into an energy-positive area with solar power plants, geothermal fields and heat pumps.

As an example, the city cooperates closely with all five local universities and companies. *The Promise*, a movie made in Turku in 2020 was one of the world's first carbon-negative productions. In the production, travelling was limited to Finland, costume design was based on recycled clothes and materials, and only electric and hybrid cars were used.

TAMPERE

The city of Tampere showcases its climate actions and their impact on the "Tampere Climate Watch" website, making it easy for locals, partners and others to follow up.

Tampereen Sähkölaitos, the city-owned power company, is continuing to invest in renewable energy. It recently inaugurated Naistenlahti 3, a bioenergy plant producing heat and electricity mainly out of wood chips and other side streams of the forest industry.

The city encourages residents to adapt their traffic and consumption habits according to the opportunities in their residential areas.

Developments include the Tampere Tram and new cycle lanes.

The city is trying to stimulate a circular economy in cooperation with local companies. An example is the procurement guidelines for road work, which include using recycled materials.



By Päivi Brink

A WARM WELCOME FOR INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONALS

Finland is looking for international talents to join its workforce, especially for positions in the health and ICT sectors. Professors of practice Jamie Hyneman and Jorma Turunen talk about their experiences working in Finland.



When I first went to Finland in 2017, I didn't know much about the country, but I immediately liked the people I met at

Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology LUT," says **Jamie Hyneman**, who is famous for his work on the TV show *MythBusters* between 2002 and 2016.

"I like the Finnish work culture. People have *sisu* and honesty is a very important value." *Sisu* is Finnish and means a combination of courage and perseverance.

In 2021, Hyneman became professor of practice at LUT, in the southeastern Finnish town of Lappeenranta. He'd already received an honorary doctorate there in 2017. He started his career in movies as a special effects expert. Today, he has a product development company, M5 Industries, based in California.

"The engineers in Finland are like me: straightforward characters with plenty of creativity," he says. "They tell me the typical attitude is to keep their heads down, drink a lot of coffee and get the work done. I can relate to that."

ENGLISH AS A WORKING LANGUAGE

Hyneman lives in San Francisco and visits Finland once a year. "Remote lecturing is more environmentally friendly than flying from the USA to Finland," he says.

"I have developed tools for remote work; for example, my avatar robot can

move around the lecture hall and let me interact with the students face-to-face. Finns are generally ready to adapt to technical innovations, and the students at LUT have an impressive technical vocabulary in English."

In Finland, it is easy to work in English. **Jorma Turunen** is a professor of practice at the University of Turku in southwestern Finland. He has been a board member in more than 30 Finnish tech companies. Before academia, he was the CEO of Technology Industries of Finland, a central organisation for public relations and collective agreements.

"English is often used as a company language, especially in technology companies who are looking for international talents to work in expert positions," says Turunen.



Jamie Hyneman

"I LIKE THE FINNISH
WORK CULTURE.
PEOPLE HAVE SISU
AND HONESTY IS A
VERY IMPORTANT
VALUE."

MEANINGFUL WORK, CONVENIENT LIFE
Finnish work life reflects the equality of the society.

"Managers are generally not authoritarian, and everyone is expected to take responsibility for their own work," says Turunen. "You are valued as a colleague if you are honest and reliable. Mutual trust increases work productivity and quality, and it is easy to find your work



Jorma Turunen

“FINLAND IS KNOWN FOR GENDER EQUALITY, AND EVERY PERSON HAS THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE THEIR CAREER.”

meaningful. Finland is known for gender equality, and every person has the same opportunities to advance their career.”

Turunen has mentored young researchers who have moved to Finland from abroad.

“Many of them have praised how convenient family life is here. For example, those famous free Finnish schools with amazing learning results.”

INNOVATION ACCELERATES GROWTH
Finland was ranked in the top 10 most innovative countries in the Bloomberg Innovation Index 2021, as they have been for many years in a row.

Innovative Finnish startup companies have attracted the interest of international investors. Of the 1.2 billion euros funding they received in 2021, 71 percent came from abroad.

There are numerous services available in Finland for international talents looking for work opportunities or wanting to start their own business. ●

 lut.fi
migri.fi/en/fast-track

Photo A Capture Media



Iranthi Gomes:

FINLAND IS A PERFECT BASE FOR AN INTERNATIONAL STARTUP

One of the brightest young entrepreneurs in the European tech industry, Gomes made the Forbes’ 30 Under 30 Europe list in 2022. She is a cofounder and CEO of Finland-based Serviceform.

Hailing from Sri Lanka, **Iranthi Gomes** met her Finnish husband **Jarkko Oksanen** in Australia, where she was studying business and IT. In 2018, they founded the B2B software company Serviceform and based the new company in Finland.

“It is easy to start a company in Finland and the process is fast,” Gomes says. “You can even do some of the paperwork in English. The location is great for us, because we aim to expand our market to other European countries.”

Serviceform offers tools that companies can use to convert their website traffic into qualified leads, communicate with customers, run email marketing campaigns and manage them all in one place. Today Serviceform employs 60 people in Finland, Sweden, Spain and Sri Lanka.

“Half of our employees are in Finland,” says Gomes. “Our six foreign employees were already living in Finland when we recruited them. In my experience, the local business culture is open and friendly towards foreigners.”

 serviceform.com

By Päivi Brink
Photo Sampo Korhonen

CASE



THE FUTURE OF WORK IS INTERNATIONAL

Ilkka Paananen, cofounder and CEO of mobile game developer Supercell, shares his ideas about future working environments.

Supercell was founded in 2010 and has offices in Helsinki, San Francisco, Seoul and Shanghai. The company is profoundly international and multicultural. Among its over 400 employees are more than 45 nationalities. Every month, 250 million people around the world play Supercell's games: Hay Day, Clash of Clans, Boom Beach, Clash Royale and Brawl Stars.

"We want to create global games for diverse players," says CEO **Ilkka Paananen**. "Multiculturalism and diversity are part of everything we do. Interacting with colleagues from different

backgrounds is important business-wise, but it also enriches our lives and makes our work more interesting. We have seen that diversity makes our teams better. Future workplaces will be fundamentally international."

Supercell believes in independent teams that take responsibility for their work. The company slogan is: The best teams make the best games.

"We want our teams to be the best in the world," says Paananen. "We start with two to three people who complement each other perfectly and continue growing the team from there."

"Supercell was founded on the principle that every team works as a cell inside the company. This means that we trust the team and the people in it to make their own decisions, organise their own work and take responsibility for creating a game that they believe in. I do not want to tell people how to do their work. Trust is the fundamental value that keeps Supercell together."

Paananen thinks that future employees will be even more independent.

"There will be less micromanagement, and employees will take even more responsibility for their work," he says. "With various remote working tools, we are not always in our offices anymore, and this requires trust. Our teams can choose for themselves if they work at the office or not. We want the best people to work for us, and sometimes it can mean that they work remotely

CASE

STARTUPS GET
PLENTY OF SUPPORT

“WE WANT THE BEST PEOPLE TO WORK FOR US, AND SOMETIMES IT CAN MEAN THAT THEY WORK REMOTELY FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD.”

from different parts of the world. In the years to come, we will definitely get more technical tools to help us do this.”

He expects to see many individuals with international networks working together in the future.

“Societies should be more supportive of the different ways of working,” he says. “Some people like freelancing and others like having stable employment. Diversity is key here as well. All work should be valued and properly paid, but we should not limit its structures too much.”

Another important value at Supercell is supporting work-life balance.

“We make sure everyone takes their holidays and remembers to look after themselves,” says Paananen. “We discuss coping at work and the importance of private life and work-life balance. You do not build good games if you burn yourself out. With remote working, it is very easy to slip into working from morning until evening. As a CEO, I take my full month’s summer holiday and go home in the evenings. I know sometimes creating games is so much fun it’s hard to stop, but you have to take a break.” He smiles. ●

 supercell.com



Anna Fatima Sambou, founder and CEO of MunKamu, talks about starting a tech company in Finland.

“MunKamu is a startup that provides an online platform for on-demand assistance for elderly people,” **Anna Fatima Sambou** says. “We are based in Oulu, in northern Finland, which is a tech hub. We launched pilots in Oulu and Helsinki, and both cities have been helpful.”

Sambou comes from The Gambia and has worked in Africa and Asia. She was looking for information about startups and found the University of Oulu’s Business Corner (then Business Kitchen) where students can develop business ideas. She moved to Oulu in

2018 and earned a master’s degree from Oulu Business School.

“The University of Oulu and Business Oulu helped me to refine my business ideas,” she says. “I also learned about Finland’s business culture while working as an intern in a health tech company. I am part of the mentoring programme Helsinki Female Tech Founder Frontrunner, which has helped me to build my network and get access to investors.”

There is plenty of help for startups in Finland. For example, Business Finland has helpful services and nine different types of funding available especially for startups.

“One group, Startup Refugees, offers support to immigrants who want to start a business,” Sambou says. Their aim is to integrate newcomers in Finland to the labour market. “Startup Refugees connected me with mentors and helped me with business strategy, product development and market research. In 2021, they helped me participate in the biggest startup event in Finland, Slush.” ●

 businessoulu.com
startuprefugees.com
businessfinland.fi

Photo Juho Kuva / Visit Finland



Text and photos by Sami Turunen, Ville Rinne, Kati Jalagin, Päivi Rucker, Petra Antila, Erno Pellinen



FOREST AS AN INSPIRATION

Forests are close to the hearts of Finns and have also served as a source of inspiration for many designers. We asked Finns about their relationship with forest-themed designer products.



**EEVA NORKAMAA,
PENSIONER, ESPOO**

I think wood is a beautiful and living furniture material. Our round dinner table is from Artek, and we have had it for over 40 years. It used to belong to my parents. We also have two coffee tables from the same brand in our living room. The desk in our study is from Muurame, and it used to be in my childhood home as well.

**PETRI SALORINNE,
DATA TECHNICIAN, HELSINKI**

Wood from a Finnish forest is a versatile material that has a lot of applications, but we should keep in mind that a forest takes a long time to regenerate. When I was younger, a friend and I had a wooden boat. In addition to wooden boats, I like Finnish log cabins and wooden jewellery.



**KYLLIKKI ARKKOLA,
PENSIONER, TAMPERE**

I have a cabin in Viitasaari, designed by Lapponia. The dinner table in my cabin was made in 1873. I like old wooden furniture that shows the passage of time. In my experience, wood is still being used today to make beautiful and timeless objects for everyday use.



**KARI KAUKINEN,
CLASS TEACHER, LAHTI**

Finnish design that stems from the forest is fantastic. For example, we have a set of Mademoiselle chairs by Ilmari Tapiovaara at home. When a birch tree was felled in our garden, I wanted it to carry on living and turned it into bracelets and rings. I try to teach future generations about creating things with their hands.



**SANNA GRAV,
VIDEO PRODUCER, PORVOO**



I love wood as a material. Our home has wooden furniture, lamps and kitchenware designed in Finland. I also have a large number of wooden necklaces and earrings, and my sunglasses and watch are Finnish wood designs as well. I particularly enjoy designer and illustrator Klaus Haapaniemi's and textile artist Sini Villi's designs, and can clearly see the influence of forest nature on their work.

**CAI-ERIC RÜCKER,
CARPENTER, KAARINA**



My home features furniture that I have built myself, textiles ranging from Marimekko to Mum's hand-woven rugs, and a few pieces from Artek. Due to my professional background, I value Finnish woodcraft, particularly solid wood tables created with traditional methods.



**JOHANNA ROTKO,
VISUAL ARTIST, LAHTI**

A scarf by Inari Handicrafts gets its inspiration from the nature in Lapland, and its green colour is the shade of a birch tree in spring. Lahti has a beautiful old spruce tree forest close to the centre, and I am compelled to go there regularly. The best thing about a Finnish forest is the way it smells after rain in the summer.



**VILLE RINNE,
PHOTOGRAPHER, ROVANIEMI**

My wife and I like sustainable Finnish design. Objects must be enjoyable to look at, and able to endure time and use. Our home has old pieces of furniture by Artek and, for example, a '50s linen cupboard from Lahden Puutyö. All of these pieces have the same raw material, Finnish birch.



By Päivi Brink
Photo Marica Rosengård



RADICAL LIBERTY

ALLI HAAPASALO'S
MOVIE GIRL PICTURE
LETS GIRLS BE GIRLS

From left Rönkkö (Eleonoora Kauhanen), Mimmi (Aamu Milonoff) and Emma (Linnea Leino) play the lead roles in *Girl Picture*.



In *Girl Picture*, three teenage girls say and do what they want – without suffering any retribution. While directing the film, Alli Haapasalo realised how incredibly rare that kind of freedom is in movie plots. We talk with her about making films in Finland.

D

irector **Alli Haapasalo's** movie *Girl Picture* (Tytöt tytöt tytöt, 2022) is a positive story about over 16-years old teenage girls.

“The film is a portrait of what it is like to be a girl today,” Haapasalo says. “I would not describe it as a coming-of-age movie, because I don't think the girls become adults or reach a new stage of development. I wanted to emphasise that we are all unfinished and imperfect. These girls explore their own identity without anyone defining them from the outside. We have received a lot of positive feedback from the audience about this.”

The movie has been an international success, especially after winning the Audience Award at Sundance Film Festival 2022. The movie is suitable for anyone over 12 years old.

“I wasn't sure if the film would run into language or cultural barriers,” says Haapasalo. “Luckily, neither has been a problem for international audiences. People coming from different cultures and speaking different languages have related to the characters strongly.”

LOVE IS LOVE

Girl Picture seeks to challenge how people traditionally perceive girls. In the movie, three girls spend three Fridays together, and two of them fall in love with each other.

“The love affair is about two people in love, regardless of their gender,” says Haapasalo. “Their sexual orientation is a complete non-issue. The third girl is looking for pleasure, but not feeling it. We do not know if she is asexual or simply has not found her sexuality yet – and that is OK. They are just exploring themselves and their sexuality. These girls see sexuality as something fluid, not fixed. They ask permission to touch and respect each other's space.”

Even though these girls are brave, active young people, they come to no harm because of it.

“Our world is full of stories where girls get pregnant, raped or murdered because they dare to be free,” Haapasalo says. “The screenwriters, **Daniela Hakulinen** and **Ilona Ahti**, and I wanted to do the opposite and not punish girls for their freedom.”

FINNISH FILM FOUNDATION'S SUPPORT GIVES EQUAL CHANCES TO FILM MAKERS

After studies in journalism, Haapasalo studied directing in both Helsinki and New York. She lived in the US for ten years and enjoyed her time abroad.

"I returned to Finland with my family, and I have been enjoying comfortable, functional Finnish society and the well-organised childcare system," she says. "My everyday life is logistically very easy and it is easy to travel from one place to another. For example, I do not live close to the airport, but I can get to it in 20 minutes."

At work on her film projects, Haapasalo has found support and funding in the Finnish Film Foundation.

"As an aspiring filmmaker, you don't have to be wealthy and fund your own projects, or well-connected just to talk

"THESE GIRLS EXPLORE THEIR OWN IDENTITY WITHOUT ANYONE DEFINING THEM FROM THE OUTSIDE."

to the right people," she says. She believes this increases access to the film industry and contributes to increased social, ethnic and gender diversity. "It makes quite a difference to have public money supporting filmmaking."

International film production companies can apply for a cash rebate from Business Finland for the costs involved in all the production phases conducted in Finland. More foreign films are shot in Finland.

"I can recommend filming in Finland for foreign productions, too," Haapasalo says. "The people who work in the Finnish film industry are well educated and skilful, they take safety issues seriously, and you can trust them. I have found them very easy to work with."

Girl Picture (Tytöt tytöt tytöt) was the winner of Audience Award (World Cinema – Dramatic) at Sundance Film Festival 2022, and was nominated for the Grand Jury Award. The 2022 Berlin International Film Festival nominated the film for a Crystal Bear (Generation 14plus – Best Film) and a Teddy Award (Best Feature Film). Girl Picture is also the Finnish contender for the Academy Award (= The Oscars) for the Best International Feature Film in 2023. In the UK, the movie is titled Girls Girls Girls.

NORDIC NOIR SHOWS REGULAR PEOPLE IN IRREGULAR CIRCUMSTANCES

The term Nordic Noir describes Nordic crime fiction in literature and on television. This genre typically includes attributes such as realistic crimes, strong women and rainy November weather. We hear from a producer about why it is special.

In recent years, Finnish films and series have captivated international audiences. For example, the crime series *Deadwind* with **Pihla Viitala** as the leading star and *Bullets* starring **Krista Kosonen** have attracted attention on TV. *Bordertown* was one of the first Finnish Nordic Noir series.

"Even if the Nordic genre of socially topical crime novels was born back in the 1960s, the name Nordic Noir is only about ten years old," says showrunner **Miikko Oikonen**, the creator of *Bordertown*, an internationally popular TV series from Finland. "When we started making *Bordertown* in 2010, the term was not yet in use. The popularity of the books has shown that people keep finding Nordic Noir interesting."

Typically, Nordic Noir deals with regular middle-class people who become entangled in crime by unusual circumstances.

"When we make Nordic Noir, we have to dare to see people as they are," Oikonen says. "Everyone has a dark side, and we try to understand why people commit crime. The characters are easy to relate to and the viewers grow very close to them."

The narration style is much slower than that of most TV productions.

"We have long takes showing an aerial view of a city landscape or countryside," says Oikonen. "It's important to show how much space and unspoilt nature we have around us." ●

Bordertown (called *Sorjonen* in Finnish) is available on Netflix in 180 countries. Many international TV channels and streaming services have bought the rights to the Finnish Nordic Noir series below. Check online to find which ones are available in your area.

Photo Vertigo



Bullets (Kosto)

Photo Fisher King Oy



Bordertown (Sorjonen)

Photo Dionysos Films



Deadwind (Karppi)

Photo Hannele Majaniemi /
Manila Röhr Productions



All the Sins (Kaikki synnit)

Photo Yellow Film



Arctic Circle (Ivalo)

Making of
Arctic Circle

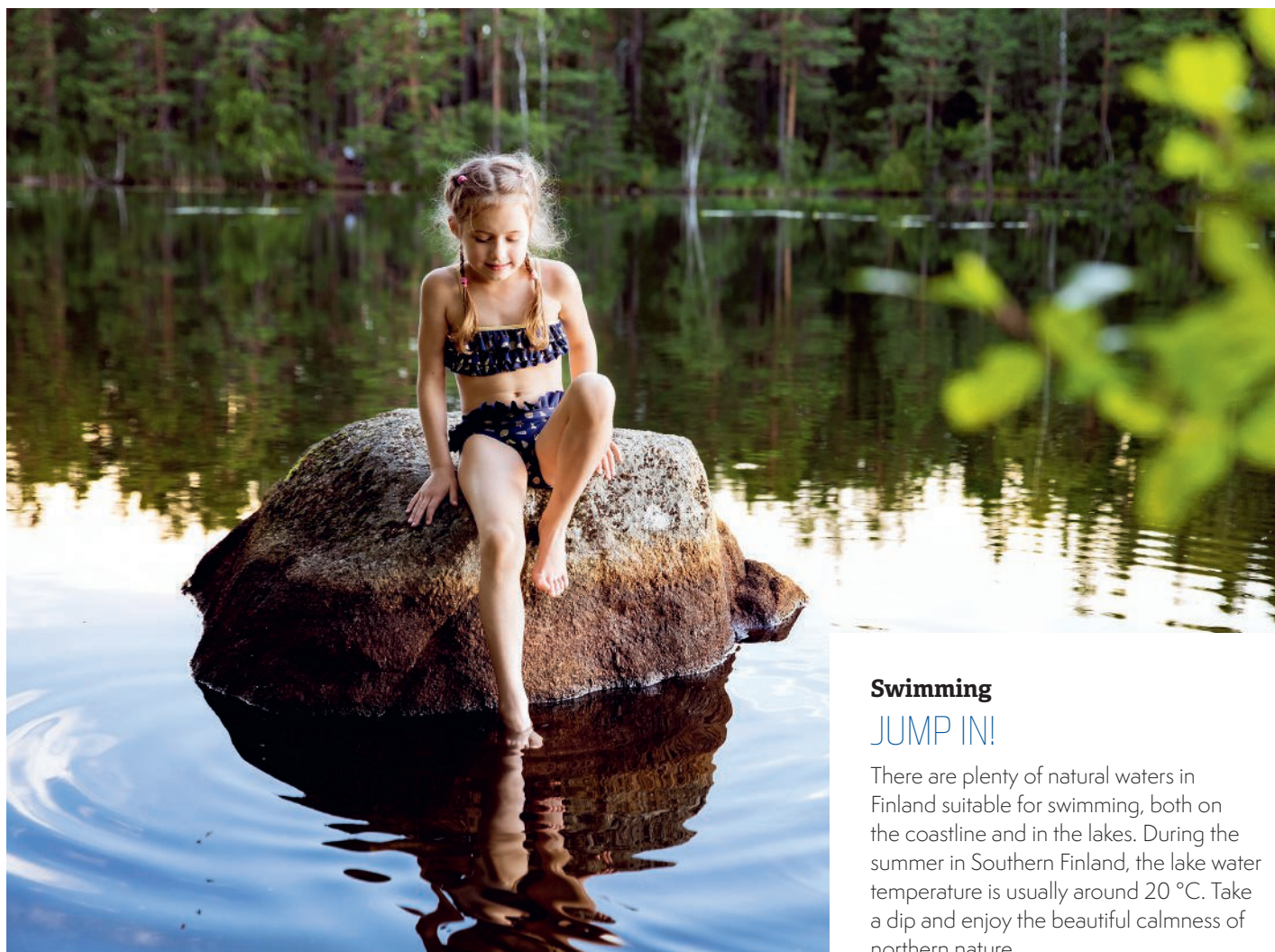


Photo Yellow Film

HAVE FUN BY THE WATER

The Finns love spending time outdoors. The 188,000 lakes, hundreds of rivers and long coastline offer plenty of opportunities to enjoy nature. The Finnish Lakeland is the largest lake district in Europe. Come and join the activities by the water all year round.

Photo iStock



Swimming

JUMP IN!

There are plenty of natural waters in Finland suitable for swimming, both on the coastline and in the lakes. During the summer in Southern Finland, the lake water temperature is usually around 20 °C. Take a dip and enjoy the beautiful calmness of northern nature.

Fishing and ice fishing

CATCH SOME FISH

Almost a third of Finnish people have fishing as a hobby and there are plenty of options available for fishing tourists. You can make a fishing trip of a lifetime to the fly fishing paradise in Lapland to catch salmon in the rivers. Or how about heading to the Lakeland, to catch pike, perch and pike perch. If you are staying in Helsinki, take a look at the opportunities on the coast. Try ice fishing through a small hole in the ice when the sun glitters on the snow and you will never forget the experience.

fishinginfinland.fi

Get your permits online: eraluvat.fi



Photo Asko Kuitinen / Visit Finland



Photo Juha Valkaejoki / Visit Helsinki



Photo iStock

Canoeing and kayaking

CALM DOWN OR SPEED UP

Enjoy the tranquility of the lakes, explore the islands of the archipelago or challenge yourself with white water rafting in the rivers. Immerse yourself in the silence on the wilderness lake or ask for guided river-rafting excursions. No permit is required, but it is essential to have appropriate clothing, life jacket, a map and a compass.

nationalparks.fi/canoeing

Sailboats, motorboats & rowing boats

TAKE A BOAT TRIP

Finland is a great boating destination, whether you like sailing, motor boating or rowing. You can rent a boat with or without a captain in many lakeside and coastal towns. You can row in the lakes, rivers and the sea and there are plenty of scenic routes to take. Whichever boat type you choose, you can explore the water routes or do island hopping. Either way there are nice guest harbours to enjoy on your way too.

sail-in-finland.info



Photo Mikka Saareila

Diving
INTO THE DEEP

The archipelago of the Baltic Sea is stunningly beautiful and its many islands give great opportunities for diving. For long, deep dives, you need a full regalia of wet suit with hood, socks and gloves. Many divers also enjoy diving in lakes that have clear waters and great visibility. Contact the local diving clubs for more information.

 *Finnish Divers' Federation: sukeltaja.fi*

Wakeboarding
PERFORM TRICKS
WHILE RIDING THE WAVES

Finnish coastlines and lakes are sure to provide plenty of fun for wakeboarders. You find rental equipment in many towns around the country.

The more ecological version of the sport, cable wakeboarding, is growing. No boat is needed: the riders are connected to a cable system that pulls them around the area. The more seasoned riders can try their tricks on tracks that resemble skateparks with their ramps and other obstacles.

Wakepark Vuokatti has one of Finland's longest zip line wakeboard tracks: 280 metres long.



Photo Ville Pääkkönen



Photo Jussi Hellsten / Visit Helsinki

SUP
WALK ON THE WATER

Standup paddleboarding may be the closest you will ever come to walking on water. Lakes, rivers and the archipelago are all suited for this hobby. There are rarely strong currents in the Baltic Sea. You can rent SUP boards and paddles in many towns, and enjoy the city views from new angles.



Photo Marko Seuranen

Ice hockey & pond hockey

FAST-PACED ACTION ON ICE: #SAVEPONDHOCKEY!

In Finland, there are hundreds of outdoor ice hockey fields where children learn to play and adults keep up their skills. Some even enjoy playing on natural ice, mainly on lakes. You can join them and experience playing this fast and exciting sport outdoors. The organisation and movement Save Pond Hockey was established in Finland. It is uniting the global hockey community against climate change. The profits from Save Pond hockey tournaments go to projects tackling the climate crisis.

 savepondhockey.org



Photo iStock

Winter surfing

LET THE WIND BE YOUR MOTOR

How about surfing on ice? No waves, just gliding on solid ice across a lake or the sea. Winter surfing (or ice surfing) is done with a sail either on skis, ski sleds or skate sleds. You can book a course and rent the equipment. All you need to bring with you is very warm clothing. What a lovely way to spend some hours on ice, travelling with the wind.

Ice swimming

DIP YOURSELF IN THE ICY WATER

Finnish lakes and the Baltic Sea usually freeze during the winter depending on weather conditions. Ice swimmers enter the icy water (about 3 °C, 37 °F) through a hole in the ice, usually a couple of meters in diameter. Most swimmers spend less than a minute in the water before they head to the sauna. All you need is a swimming suit, a towel, a beanie and a lot of courage. Afterwards, you feel super relaxed and a bit euphoric. Finland's first official ice swimming community was founded in 1924 in Helsinki, and ice swimming remains a popular hobby among people of all ages. The communities make sure that the hole in the ice stays open and the sauna is heated.



Photo Aku Pöläinen / Visit Finland

By Päivi Brink
Photo Santeri Stenvall

SET YOUR CREATIVITY FREE WITH PLANT- BASED FOOD

The food that chef Kim Mikkola offers in his Michelin star restaurant Inari is 95 percent vegetarian. Traditional Finnish preserves, like jams, pickles, dried foods and fermented vegetables can be used to achieve interesting layers for plant-based meals.

For a tasty plant-based
curry recipe by chef
Kim Mikkola, visit
ThisisFINLAND.fi:



“IN

our kitchen, there is hardly any food waste. The main ingredients in my kitchen are local vegetables,” chef **Kim Mikkola** explains.

Mikkola speaks highly of the value of paying careful attention when selecting ingredients.

“I encourage my staff to heighten all their senses when they cook. You need to use various flavour profiles and be creative and innovative. I often pickle or ferment some of the vegetables in order to get different layers for the meals.”

Finns appreciate local, seasonal produce.

Summer brings a variety of green vegetables and autumn is a time for foraging.

“We pick berries, mushrooms and many herbs in the forests and the offering is very rich,” says Mikkola. “I believe it is our fantastic air and water quality that makes the food healthy and tasty.”

Many Finnish people associate winter with root vegetables that can be stored for long periods, such as rutabagas, beets, turnips, parsnips and potatoes. Winter is also a time to enjoy berry jams, pickled vegetables and dried mushrooms that are prepared in the summer and autumn.

“Nowadays, many vegetables are grown in greenhouses throughout the year, so we

have more local options available during the winter,” says Mikkola. “Even so, these old preserving methods – making jams, pickling, salting and drying food – are still used to achieve interesting textures and flavours.

The restaurant Inari is Helsinki-based, but the name refers to a town in Lapland. Today, the restaurant’s name stands for the exceptional staff who surround Mikkola. His restaurant has become nomadic, opening in different places and finding new customers wherever it goes.

kimmikkola.com
restaurantinari.com

PLANT-BASED INNOVATIONS FROM FINLAND

Since 2020, the Technical Research Centre of Finland has managed an innovation cluster to develop and commercialise plant-based proteins. The aim is to support change in society toward a more sustainable food system. A cool climate, clean water and great air quality make Finnish plant-based food tasty and healthy.

vttresearch.com

OATS

Finnish oats are used as the basis for many plant-based products. Internationally, there is growing interest in gluten-free pure oats. There are also more oat products available that are alternatives to dairy. Oats contain a lot of protein, fibre and beneficial beta-glucans, which help manage blood cholesterol levels. Finnish oats have a very low carbon footprint.



Mö oat products

Mö is a family company founded by two sisters who grew up on a dairy farm in Ostrobothnia. They produce sustainable, carbon-neutral alternatives to dairy products like yoghurt and cheese using oat milk.

en.mokaurameijeri.fi

Arctic blue beverage: Arctic Blue Oat, gin-based oat liqueur with bilberries

The world's first gin-based oat liqueur Arctic Blue Oat is dairy-free, gluten-free and vegan friendly. Bilberries are wild arctic blueberries from Finnish forests. Arctic Blue Oat tastes like blueberry pie served with vanilla sauce and topped with cardamom.

arcticbluebeverages.com



Fazer: Oat-based Willja products

Oat-based veggie bites combine oats with various vegetables to form a complete meal. Willja Spread & Dip is similar to hummus. Together with Willja oat creams, these products make cooking plant-based food at home easy.

fazerwillja.com

HEMP

Hemp is a valuable source of plant-based protein. It is commonly used as a powder that can be added to smoothies. Hemp oil is among the most nutritious vegetable oils in the world.

Murtola Hemp Farm

Ecological hemp is suitable to the Nordic climate. Organic Hemp Farm Murtola in southwestern Finland makes hemp oil and other hemp products like hemp crackers.

hampufarmi.fi



FAVA BEAN (BROAD BEAN)

Even though fava beans have long been a part of Finnish cuisine, they were forgotten for decades. Now they've made a remarkable comeback.

Raisio: Beanit fava bean products

Handy Beanit products can replace minced meat in many familiar dishes, and they have become popular in Finland. The products contain 15–25 percent protein.

beanit.fi

Meeat Food Tech: Meeat products

Meeat products are based on easily digestible fermented fava beans and peas. The products include sausages, mince alternatives, burger patties and nuggets.

meeat.co





More things
you should and
shouldn't know:
 finland.fi

BENGTSKÄR – THE TALLEST LIGHTHOUSE IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Bengtskär is the southernmost travel destination in Finland, located 25 kilometers southwest from Hanko in the Gulf of Finland. On the island you can explore the lighthouse building, visit a café, stay in a hotel room and admire the seaview.

 bengtskar.fi