

SUOMI
FINLAND



LIVING THE FINNISH WAY



FINNS IN BRIEF

The Finns are a Northern European people who share values, traditions and qualities with the other Nordic peoples. They are proud of their national characteristics: honesty, openness, diligence, and a peculiarly Finnish trait known as *sisu*, best described as persistence in the face of adversity. *Sisu* enables a Finn to overcome almost anything.

The Finns are also particularly proud of their welfare state, where everyone has equal rights and the less fortunate are cared for. High-quality education and health

care are practically free of charge. The society ensures that day care is available for pre-school children and the elderly are looked after.

Finns may sometimes seem quiet. This is because they tend to enjoy time for themselves. Their large country, with its thousands of lakes and vast forests, gives everyone plenty of space for relaxation and reflection.

Today, most Finns are modern urbanites, just like other urban Europeans — but with a few distinct qualities.





JUSSI HELLSTEN / VISIT HELSINKI



JUSSI HELLSTEN / VISIT HELSINKI

The Finns make the most of their four distinct seasons.

FOUR GREAT SEASONS

Finns are fond of their four distinct seasons. They have a humorous saying about their climate: "The summer in Finland is short, but it seldom snows!"

Finland's northern location brings light summer nights and varied but generally warm summer weather. Musical and cultural festivals and other public events are enjoyed across the country. Finns love to spend the summer by the sea or by one of the country's 190,000 lakes, swimming, bathing in the sauna, barbecuing and just relaxing.

The autumn is an active time, as Finns return to work and school from their long summer holidays well-rested and

energised. The autumn colours of the forests gradually become more subdued towards the winter.

When the darkest time of the year approaches in November, Finns start hoping for snow and the cheering effect of its bright whiteness. Practically everyone in Finland knows how to ski cross-country style and skate on ice. In the winter, temperatures may fall to 30 degrees Celsius below zero, but homes are warm and energy-efficient.

The first signs of spring begin to appear in March as the snow melts. The ground is grey and bare after the winter, but the days lengthen rapidly, and the first yellow coltsfoot flowers soon emerge from the soil.

THE FINNISH IDENTITY

Finnishness has changed and evolved over the centuries. It is sometimes said that in our globalised world people living in major cities in two different countries may have more similar lifestyles than people living in the city and the countryside within the same country. This certainly applies to Finland today, as a multicultural country: there is not just one type of Finnishness.

In Finland, the spread of global urban culture has sometimes been humorously referred to as the “Tropic of Sushi”, meaning the northernmost location with a sushi bar. Today the Tropic of Sushi runs through Levi ski resort way up north in Finnish Lapland.

Most Finns live in cities and towns today, but they still maintain a close relationship with nature, and typically spend their summer holidays in their own holiday cottages in the countryside. Finland has more than 500,000 holiday homes, for a population of just 5.5 million. Around these rural retreats mushroom-picking and berry-picking skills are passed onto the next generation. Some youngsters may

not be so enthusiastic about such activities, but most of them will learn to appreciate these skills later in life – even though at the time they may feel that it takes forever to fill their buckets with bilberries.

Finland has a long coastline and abundant clean inland waters. Learning to swim is considered to be as important as learning to read and write. Experiences in natural surroundings capture the essence of the Finnish psyche: like spending a light summer evening in a rowboat on a calm lake, with only soft lapping of the water against the oars and the distant cry of a black-throated loon breaking the silence. If you discover on returning to check your fishing nets in the morning that you have caught nice-sized perches and perhaps even a pikeperch, the Finnish idyll is complete.

Finns greatly appreciate education, culture, expertise and professional skills. Although Finns are not ones to boast, they feel proud when Finns do well at sports or when

Finland is ranked among the top countries in terms of education or well-being. If you want to make a good impression on a Finn, you should mention a successful Finnish product, company, athlete or musician.

Characteristics that Finns value in themselves and others include straightforwardness, honesty, punctuality and trustworthiness. If a Finn invites you over, they genuinely want and expect you to visit them — at the agreed time. If a Finn asks how you are, they want to hear an honest answer. Honesty and trustworthiness extend throughout society. Finns trust the authorities, as the authorities have earned their trust.

Functionality is also important to Finns, with regard to clothing and interior decoration, as well as urban planning and Finnish design.

Finnish humour is often understated, but Finns have a good sense of self-irony, and they love jokes and skits about their own national characteristics.



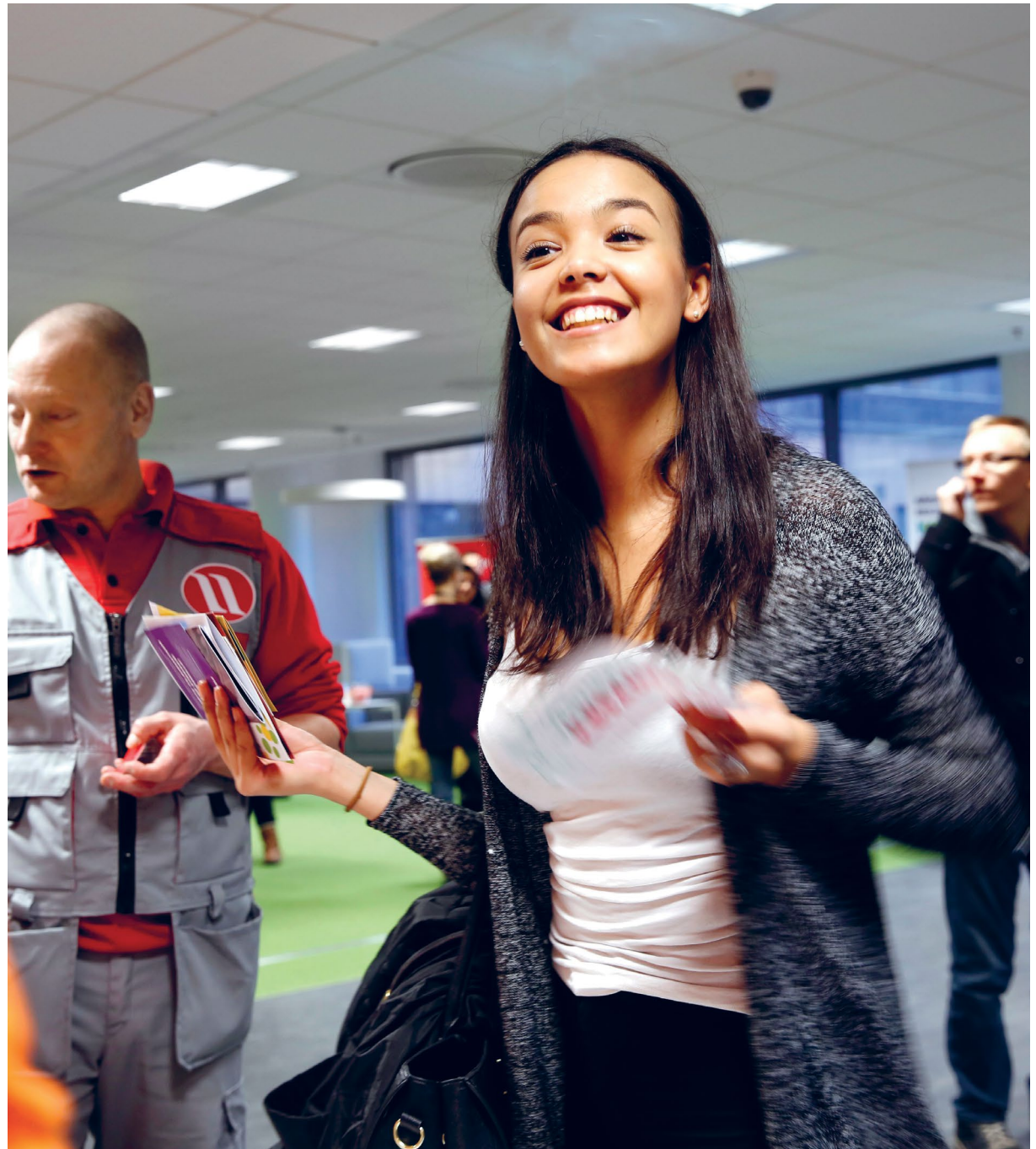
Pharmacy student Saba Adhana attended a recruitment event to find a summer job.

EQUALITY AND WORKING LIFE

Finland has always pioneered gender equality. Finns are used to seeing women in top positions in government, business life and the church. The public day care system in Finland was created decades ago to ensure equal employment opportunities for women and men. Much like the other Nordic countries, Finland has long parental leaves. The government pays earnings-related parental allowances to enable mothers or fathers to stay at home until their child is around one year old. Child home care allowances are paid for children aged under three. Parental leaves are partly allocated to fathers, who are increasingly making use of this opportunity.

Women generally have a strong position in working life and society in Finland, although there is still room for improvement in terms of equal pay, career opportunities and responsibility for child care.

Hard work is highly valued in Finland. Jobs and working culture are undergoing a transition, with jobs increasingly involving specialist tasks. Most Finns work in industry or the public sector, and employment relationships are traditionally long.





Only around two per cent of Finns work in agriculture. Finns, however, have close links to the countryside: there are hundreds of thousands of second homes or summer cottages, and approximately one in every four Finnish families has a countryside residence.

Workplaces usually have an informal atmosphere, though dedication and decision-making skills are appreciated. Finnish employees are expected to show initiative and interest in their tasks. Finnish working life is also known for its long annual leaves. Employees generally take a four-week summer holiday and a one-week winter holiday. Relatively few people work part-time.

MANY TYPES OF FAMILY

In recent decades the nuclear family has been regarded as the basic family model in Finland. The Finnish nuclear family consists of a mother, a father and two children — and a dog and a car. However, families are evolving, and there are also many families of other types, such as same-sex parent families, one-parent families, dual-residence families and stepfamilies.

Finland supports parenthood and encourages a good work-family balance. Child benefit is paid until children turn 17.

Finnish families also include grandparents and other close relatives, though the word “family” usually refers to people who live under the same roof.



A handshake is the most common greeting in Finland, suitable for all occasions.

A CULTURE OF

Finns are not particularly interested in fancy titles, and seldom use them. People are usually addressed by their first names, though the elderly are often addressed more politely. No one will be offended if you accidentally address them informally in a formal context. They probably won't even notice it.

In any case, it is usually easy to tell if an occasion is so official that it calls for formal behaviour.

Finns usually shake hands when they meet someone or introduce themselves, and even when saying goodbye. A handshake is a basic greeting suitable for all occasions.

What? A Finn hugging? It is not that unusual any longer. In fact, hugging is very common, particularly among young people.

INFORMALITY

Children are taught to shake hands, look the other person in the eye and say their own name clearly. Hugging is a more common greeting among friends, particularly for young people. Kissing on the cheek is rare in Finland, and may confuse Finns who are not familiar with the custom. With the exception of handshakes, greetings in Finland do not generally involve touching.

Finns often poke fun at their lack of small talk skills. They appreciate straightforwardness and silence, and do not consider themselves to be good at small talk. However, Finns do love to talk about the weather, often at length.



*Finns are eager to
provide advice if asked.*

FRIENDLY SERVICE

Finns are eager to provide advice if asked, and they keep their promises. If you ask a Finn for directions and they do not speak your language, they might well lead you by the hand to your destination.

On the other hand, Finland has a strong culture of self-service. Table service is rare in cafés, and Finns become anxious if they feel that a shop assistant is too enthusiastic. They would rather look after themselves, and only find a shop assistant and ask for help if needed.

In Finland you can pay by card practically everywhere, including taxis and ice cream kiosks. However, you will still need change for local buses, in case you do not have the bus card. Finland does not have a culture of tipping, and people working in service jobs are not dependent on tips. Tipping is however becoming more common in restaurants if the customer feels that the food and service were excellent. There are no rules with regard to the amount of the tip.





Finns usually dress informally, in a laid-back style.

CLOTHING

Functionality and the seasons determine how Finns dress. Finns have separate wardrobes for the summer and the winter, as well as the intervening seasons, and many items of clothing are transferred from the hallway to storage cellars and back twice a year.

In winter, functionality means warm outer garments and shoes with good grip. In the spring and autumn, Finns choose clothes that protect them from the wind and rain. As soon as Finns begin to feel the warmth of the sun in the early summer they eagerly put on their summer clothes, even if the actual temperatures would not yet justify this.

Most Finns are fond of outdoor exercise such as walking, jogging, cycling, gardening and simply spending time in the great outdoors. This is reflected in the high popularity of leisure clothing. Small children are dressed in practical coveralls that allow them to sit in the snow or a sandbox, or even in a muddy puddle.

Only a few Finnish workplaces have official dress codes, with the exception of jobs that require a specific type of clothing. Any dress codes for parties are mentioned on the invitation, and such rules comply with standard international practices. Gala dinners are not common in Finland.

Finns do not wear shoes at home, so it is polite to leave your shoes in the hallway when visiting someone. Finns take their shoes off immediately when they come home.



SAKARI PIIPPO / TEAM FINLAND

For children Christmas is one of the high points of the year.

Below:

Shrove Tuesday in Finland coincides with carnivals in southern Europe. The weather is usually wintry and everyone traditionally gets out to enjoy sledding and traditional Shrove buns.

May Day is celebrated in carnival style in Finland on the last day of April and the first day of May. May Day is particularly important for students and workers, though almost everyone has the day off.

FINNISH FESTIVITIES

Finns love their public holidays. Festivities are largely based on European cultural traditions, with some distinctive Finnish features. The four major national holidays are Christmas, Easter, May Day and Midsummer. Other important public holidays include Independence Day, on 6 December, and New Year. At Christmas, Midsummer, New Year and May Day the eve of the main holiday tends to be the main day for partying.

On Christmas Eve nearly all restaurants are closed, and people celebrate with their families or friends around the Christmas tree at home. The main streets in cities and towns are largely deserted, though Santa Clauses may be seen delivering gifts to families with children. In Finland, Santa Claus pays a personal visit to homes on Christmas Eve. In other words, a friend or a freelancer is hired to deliver the gifts. There is a wide selection of Santas for hire.

Christmas is still celebrated in accordance with Christian traditions. Finns are not frequent churchgoers, but Christmas carol services in churches are still popular. Families spend Christmas Day together at home, wearing new wool-

len socks, eating chocolates and reading new books given as Christmas presents. On Boxing Day, many Finns visit friends. Traditional Christmas foods include roast ham and root vegetable casseroles.

New Year's Eve is celebrated more boisterously. Finns go out to celebrate the midnight hour outdoors watching fireworks, even if the temperature is well below freezing.

Easter is a much-awaited four-day weekend in the spring. It remains an important celebration for Christians, though Christmas is more important to most Finnish families. The timing of Easter varies, so people may spend the long Easter weekend cross-country skiing on the late-winter snow, or enjoying the first rays of the sun on a terrace. To celebrate the spring, many Finns grow Easter grass in bowls filled with soil, and decorate the grass with Easter chicks and painted or chocolate eggs. One distinctly Finnish traditional Easter dish is mämmi, a malty oven-baked porridge made of rye.





Midsummer's Eve celebrations often centre on small bonfires made by families or larger bonfires built in public places.

May Day, observed on 1 May, is a celebration of spring for students and for workers, when most Finns have a day off. The revelling begins on the previous day, though students may start partying several weeks earlier. Around May Day their attire typically includes colourful overalls with sewn-on patches, often with the top half tied around the waist.

May Day is celebrated in carnival style, with balloons, sparkling wine, streamers, loud whistles and horns, funny wigs, masks and painted faces. Finns who have passed the matriculation examination proudly wear the white caps they each receive on graduating from upper secondary school. Unlike at Christmas or Midsummer, the streets swarm with people. Other May Day traditions include morning picnics in parks, parades organised by labour unions and political parties, and festive speeches by their representatives.

Midsummer's Day is the main celebration of the summer, observed on the Saturday closest to the summer solstice. As with other major holidays, the eve is the main day for organised celebrations. Most Finns celebrate Midsummer's Eve at their holiday cottages or elsewhere in the countryside, so streets in cities and towns tend to be deserted. Bonfires are lit by families and in public places as an essential part of Midsum-

Fireworks, sparkling beverages and boisterous parties are all part of New Year festivities. The menu is not too fussy: frankfurters and potato salad.

mer festivities. The night between Midsummer's Eve and Midsummer's Day is the shortest of the summer, and the smoke from the bonfire keeps mosquitoes away.

Dances are traditionally held on Midsummer's Eve, ideally with an accordionist playing for dancers on an outdoor stage among birch trees by a lake. Add sausages grilled over an open fire, and you have a perfect Finnish Midsummer celebration. Midsummer festivals have also gained popularity in recent years.

Finland's Independence Day is celebrated on 6 December as an important public holiday. Most Finns gather round their television sets to watch a live broadcast from the President's annual Independence Day ball. The show opens with the presidential couple shaking hands with nearly 2,000 guests. The viewers watching at home love to spot celebrities and exchange their opinions on the guests' evening gowns.

War veterans are particularly honoured on Independence Day, and the President awards medals to worthy citizens. To mark the occasion some Finns also hold private parties, with decorations in blue and white, the colours of Finland's flag.







PHOTOGRAPHS: TOP ROW: 1 NIKLAS SÖDBLOM, 2 JUSSI HELLSTEN / VISIT HELSINKI, 3 JONNE TAPONEN / VISIT FINLAND BOTTOM ROW: 1 KIMMO METSÄRANTA / FLOW FESTIVAL, 2 JENNI VIRTA / VISIT TURKU, 3 HEIDI KJELLMAN / VISIT HELSINKI

CITY CULTURE

With its hustle and bustle, cafés, parks and shopping centres, city life in Finland is similar to that elsewhere in Europe, with the exception that the peace and quiet of nature are always only a few kilometres away.

Finnish urban culture is at its liveliest in the summer. After a day at work, people gather to enjoy picnics in parks, and cities and towns come to life with outdoor events: music, theatre, dance, jumble sales, street food and the summer terraces that appear outside restaurants and cafés.

After a picnic, Finns take their rubbish to a bin and return bottles and cans to automatic recycling machines at shops to claim back a deposit. Littering is frowned upon in Finland.

Finnish cities and towns are mostly very safe. Children walk or cycle to school, and jogging on public tracks is safe even after nightfall. Pickpocketing is rare.



When Finns raise a toast, they say “kippis!” Summer terraces at bars and restaurants are popular throughout the summer, rain or shine. Smoking is prohibited indoors practically everywhere.

FINNS' VICES

High consumption of alcohol is probably the best known of Finns' vices — at least in stereotypical jokes that portray the archetypal Finn as a quiet backwoodsman holding a bottle of spirits.

However, consumption of alcohol — and particularly spirits — has been decreasing in Finland for nearly a decade. These days Finns mainly drink beer and wine. Alcoholic drinks form part of festive meals, celebrations and many social situations. The onset of summer, or another world championship in ice hockey, is a good reason for a Finn to raise a toast.

Smoking is strictly regulated in Finland and prohibited practically everywhere. Finns do not usually smoke inside their homes or cars.

By international comparison, sugar consumption levels in Finland are average — which may be difficult to believe in hypermarkets with huge sweets sections. Salmiakki, salty liquorice, is probably the most distinctive Finnish sweet. It tastes sweet and salty at the same time — meaning that it is bad for both your teeth and your blood pressure.

Finns enjoy ice cream around the year. Finland has the highest consumption of ice cream per capita in Europe and the fourth highest in the world.

Most Finns love coffee, and Finland is among the top countries in the world in terms of coffee consumption per capita. Finns typically drink several cups of coffee per day, including mildly roasted filter coffee as well as special coffees. Coffee is enjoyed in the morning, in the evening, during meetings at work, with friends, and at celebrations from christenings to weddings and funerals.



The sauna is an important place of relaxation for Finns, whether it's a public sauna like Löyly, the new architectural gem of Helsinki, or a sauna at a summer cottage beside a Finnish lake.

SAUNA

Finns love their saunas. The country has more than three million saunas, meaning that there are more saunas than cars.

The sauna is a Finnish invention, at least according to Finns. Its international name is a Finnish word — so what more proof do you need? A sauna is fundamentally a space that is heated to a temperature of nearly 100 °C using fire-wood or electricity. Water is thrown onto a stove, and the resulting steam causes the temperature to rise temporarily. The right way to heat a sauna — and even the right way to throw water onto the stove — is a topic of never-ending discussion. There is no right way, of course, but there are countless opinions.

Children get used to bathing in the sauna from an early age. Even small babies enjoy being with the family in a sauna, sitting in a bowlful of water. Most people enjoy saunas naked. Family members of different sexes often bathe together, though otherwise men and women usually bathe separately.

After a sauna, Finns typically wash in the shower, put on clean clothes and have a drink to ensure they do not feel dehydrated.

Sitting in a hot room can become something of a passion. Some Finns take a sauna on a daily basis, and most bathe at least once a week. In the summer, many Finns take a shower or a dip in a lake several times during a pro-

longed sauna. In the winter, some hardy souls cool off by rolling in the snow or taking a dip through a hole in the ice. Winter swimming is an increasingly popular hobby in Finland. A dip in ice-cold water is believed to have many beneficial health effects.

Most Finns have saunas in their own homes, and hotels and public swimming pools have saunas as well. During Sauna Day saunas in family homes and other locations are widely opened to guests.

The sauna is particularly a place for relaxing after a long day. For many people, enjoying a beer outside on a summer evening after a sauna is the best moment of the day.

FINLAND LIVING THE FINNISH WAY

TOP RANKING FOR FINLAND ON SEVERAL INDICATORS

The most stable country in the world

The Fragile States Index 2015, Fund for Peace.

Finland is the most stable and least vulnerable to collapse or conflict of the 178 nations listed on this index.

The happiest country

worldhappiness.report/

According to the UN World Happiness Report 2016 Finland is among the five happiest countries in the world.

The Good Country

www.goodcountry.org

What a country contributes to the common good and what it takes away? Finland is sixth in the world.

EU Social Justice Index

Social Justice in the EU — Index Report 2015

A cross-national comparison places Finland third in the EU.

Greenest country in the world

Yale University

According to the Environmental Performance Index, Finland is the greenest country in the world.

Criminal justice: Number one

worldjusticeproject.org

The Finnish criminal justice has achieved the global top spot.



PUBLISHED BY

Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 2016

Department for Communications,
Unit for Public Diplomacy
PO Box 481, FI-00023 Valtioneuvosto, Finland
E-mail: VIE-50@formin.fi

PRODUCED BY

Advertising Agency Kitchen
Virpi Salmi, Rik Poppius

TRANSLATED BY

AAC

PRINTED BY


Lönnberg Oy

COVER PHOTO

Jussi Hellsten / Visit Helsinki

The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors.

For more information about Finland:

 **this is
FINLAND.fi**
things you should and shouldn't know
ISSN 1238-173X
FOR FREE REFERENCE USE

