

# FINLAND FOR FAMILIES



## Step into family-friendly life!

The basic unit of Finnish society is still the family – in all its shapes and sizes.

What is family life like in Finland, the nation that has been continually ranked as the happiest in the world? Flexibility and equality are at the core.

When your child is born, or as your kids grow up, or when you have twists and turns in life, support and solutions are always available in this Nordic country.

Family-friendly working life is backed up by legislation, collective agreements and employers' positive attitudes and action. The parental leave reform that entered into force in 2022 supports equal and diverse parenthood, good work-life balance and the wellbeing of children.

Our high-quality education system and free school meals help parents keep everyday life rolling. On top of that, families find joy in the versatile cultural life and wide array of hobbies for children, not to mention the refreshing nature close to home.

Turn the page and get to know more about family life and experiences in Finland!

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*In Finland, families and children are supported, as well as the wellbeing of families and society as a whole.*

## The good family life in Finland

*The secret to happiness lies in the strong Nordic wellbeing infrastructure built over time.*

Finland has been named the World's Happiest Country each year since 2018 by the World Happiness Report.

The term "happiness" conjures up different ideas in different cultures. In some countries, outward displays of material wealth or career success may be used to symbolise joy. In the Nordic context, living a contented life is synonymous with equal opportunity, wellbeing, trust and safety.

It is the building blocks of society, the infrastructure that has been carefully built over time and through struggle, that aims to provide everyone living in Finland – regardless of their background, gender or income – equal access to resources ranging from healthcare to education and nature.

"One of Finland's strengths when it comes to family life is the safety and care of children, which is among the best in the world. Public services like maternity and child health clinics and the quality education system, as well

as fathers spending a lot of time with their kids, are all part of the recipe for a happy life," says **Markku Ojanen**, emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Tampere.

### EVERYDAY BASICS

In Finland, happiness starts with basic rights, the most fundamental being equality of opportunity. That means that every individual should have access to the tools that allow them to fulfil their potential and forge their own path in life regardless of socioeconomic status, gender or any other qualities.

"It's the daily things that comprise the quality of life and make a person happy," says Ojanen.

The quality of children's lives, their rights and their future are continually being invested in and improved to ensure the best possible foundations for life. Equality means equal access to education, which is why education is tuition-free for everyone in Finland from preschool through to university.

Back in 1906 Finland became the first European country to grant women the right to vote in national elections. In the 1940s the establishment of maternity and child health clinics became obligatory for municipalities, ensuring that all pregnant mothers, children and their families were provided with healthcare free-of-charge.

Today women make up 49 percent of the labour force in Finland, where working life includes parental leave, flexible hours and remote work to ensure that everyone can maintain a balance between work and personal life.

A high degree of trust in public institutions and fellow citizens, press freedom and low corruption help to ensure a system that works.

Behind the well-functioning infrastructure is a history of development, struggle and change.

"A long line of development, economic growth, as well as rising standards of living, relatively small income inequality, longer life expectancy (nutrition, health, changing nature of work), a belief in education and the future, an acceptance of general social security and cultural modesty have all contributed to the wellbeing of Finnish society," **Hanna Kuusi**, university lecturer in economic and social history at the University of Helsinki explains.

Photo: Jussi Hellsten

### WHAT MAKES FINLAND HAPPY?

According to the World Happiness Report, Finland was named the happiest nation in the world for the fifth year in a row in 2022.

The report ranks 156 countries by their happiness levels, with people in each country asked to rate their lives based on a range of quality-of-life indicators. These include GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, available social support, freedom to make decisions, confidence in government, quality of democracy, generosity in society and absence of corruption.

The formula for happiness starts with the basics in Finland, for example, healthcare, poverty prevention, income security and labour market access for everyone.

In international comparisons on a range of metrics, Finland fares well.

For example, Finland has the best governance in the world as measured by voter turnout, legislative independence and the number of women in Parliament.

When measured by political, social, economic and cohesion indicators, Finland is very stable.

When it comes to funding the Nordic model, 80 percent of Finns are happy to pay their taxes, 96 percent believe paying taxes is an important civic duty and 98 percent believe taxes are important for maintaining Finland.

*worldhappiness.report*



## How to fall in love with Finland - the French-Colombian way

**A**na Lucia Sallaberry, 37, hails from Colombia and Xavier Sallaberry, also 37, is from France. They met in Paris in 2016 and moved to Tampere, Finland, two years later. But what motivated this decidedly international couple to head north?

“I was working as a finance controller in Paris, when a job opening for finance director came up in our affiliate company in Tampere. We started thinking: what if we do this and move to Finland?” Xavier looks back.

At the same time, Ana Lucia – a telecommunications engineer by background – was feeling less than happy about her job. They were intrigued by the job opportunity in the North, to say the least. The only problem: the couple knew very little about Finland.

“Then we started investigating a bit and found out that Finland is a beautiful country, and many say it’s the best country in the world to raise a family,” says Ana Lucia.

### NORDIC TREASURE AWAITS

Soon enough, the couple learned that – in addition to family-friendly politics – Finland has an advanced social welfare system, a great education system and a vibrant business climate.

“We visited Tampere for a few days and certainly liked what we saw,” Xavier reports.

As a consequence, the couple moved to Tampere in September 2018. Xavier started work at the local company and Ana Lucia found part-time employment for a translation agency as transcriber. After workdays were over the couple took the time to get to know their new hometown.

Tampere – the largest inland city in Scandinavia – made an impression with its beautiful lakes and forests and the peaceful atmosphere.

“Certainly, after Paris, it was a change of pace. Also we quickly felt that Tampere is just about as safe as any city can be – and from the point of view of families, that is a huge thing,” says Xavier.

### FOUR SEASONS – WITH FLAVOUR!

Another thing they enjoyed was the changing seasons – during the next couple of years they came to understand that Finland is much more than the “Winter Wonderland” around Christmas time – spring, summer and autumn also have their distinct “personalities” and highlights for people to enjoy.

“In the summer we swim in the lake; in the winter we walk on it,” Ana Lucia laughs.

In addition to falling in love with the changing seasons, the couple also became a big fan of the



Finnish way of working. According to Xavier, it's just amazing when you can be home by five.

"The work-life balance has improved so much," he says.

### CRACKING THE CODE

How about the natives, then? Xavier and Ana Lucia admit that it took some time until they started to fully understand the Finns: the locals seemed a quiet, reserved bunch, at least at first.

"We come from more outgoing and extrovert cultures, so it was a learning experience. We discovered that it's helpful if we're the ones to break the ice in a conversation, and after we do everything will be just fine," Xavier says.

That's not to say that the Finns aren't helpful or considerate – in fact, the couple finds Finns to be very friendly indeed. Xavier offers an example: a couple of years ago, he was using the elevator in their home building and talking to a neighbor about a heatwave that had just hit Tampere.



"My neighbor didn't say much, but he did ask me if I had used the air conditioning machine in our apartment to cool the apartment down a bit. I said that I hadn't, but that I would look into it," Xavier tells the story.

"Then a couple of days later, in our mailbox there was an air conditioning manual – in French – that had been printed by somebody's computer."

At that moment, Xavier understood something important about the Finns. "The guy that I was talking to didn't seem very engaged in our discussion, but he clearly went out of his way to solve our problem," he says. "That was really a nice thing for him to do."

### ALL HAIL THE PRINCE!

After living in Tampere for three years, the couple's first child, Lucas, was born. Receiving amazing care at the Tampere hospital, the couple is still awed by the experience.

"If you're giving birth, I don't think there's any place better than Finland. We had a really great experience," Ana Lucia says.

After coming home from the hospital with the new family member, the couple found that there's a tremendous support system in place. "For example, the baby box that they give to all the parents of a newborn is just a beautiful idea and so practical for all new parents that are only starting to figure things out," says Ana Lucia.

Distributed to all mothers courtesy of the Finnish government, this "starter kit" is packed with daily necessities, ranging from clothes to toys, to help take care of the newborn.

"When we learned that everybody, rich or poor, gets one of these, we thought that was

a sign of a society where equality really means something," says Xavier.

### BUILT FOR BABIES

Life with a baby in Tampere has been great – public transportation accommodates a baby stroller and there's always parks nearby. "I feel that you're never more than five minutes away from nature in the city," Ana Lucia says.

At the time of the interview, the couple is expecting their second child. This time around, they already know that they will get the best possible care as a family.

"In Finland, there is emphasis on the well-being of the whole family, and we feel that is really important," Xavier says.

And what does the future hold for this growing French-Colombian family? Ana Lucia and Xavier report that they're fully happy and content to be living in Tampere, at least for the time being.

"We do miss our families in France and Colombia and may one day move to be closer to them. But you never know."



Watch a video where Ana Lucia and Xavier talk about the best aspects of combining work life and family life in Finland.

### DID YOU KNOW THIS ABOUT FINLAND?



- 1 Finland offers free prenatal care for mothers and nearly a year of paid parental leave when the child is born.
- 2 Affordable childcare and strong maternity rights make it easy for mothers to have a career in Finland. As a consequence, women make up 49% of the Finnish labour force.
- 3 All children and their families are provided with healthcare and practical advice free of charge at neuvola, a national network of maternity and child health clinics.
- 4 Finland has the best work-life balance in the world (Kisi Work-Life Balance Index 2021).
- 5 Women and men are equal – both at work and at home. 80% of Finnish dads take paid parental leave.
- 6 Finland is 3rd in children's rights in the world (KidsRights Index 2021).

## Public transportation is world-class in Finland

Public transportation is valued in Finland: especially in big cities like Helsinki, Tampere and Oulu, it is extremely easy getting around. Buses, trains, trams and metro serve people with speed and convenience.

Public transport in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area has been ranked in the top three in the international BEST survey (Benchmarking in European Service of Public Transport) several consecutive times.

According to the nationwide transport system survey by the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency Traficom, as many as 73 percent of Finns are satisfied with the general functionality and safety of travel. Furthermore, public transportation is constantly being developed and it supports the national 2035 carbon neutrality goal.

It is quite common for Finnish schoolchildren to travel to school independently by walking, cycling or using public transport. Traffic in Finland is smooth even in winter, thanks to street maintenance and the mandatory use of winter tires.

Finland is also in the forefront of sustainable, digital traffic tools – from the use of electric vehicles to online route guides for urban public transport.

### CHAMPIONING GREEN TRAFFIC

Finland promotes sustainable, reliable and smooth public transport rooted on smart land use planning. Innovative solutions to improve the energy efficiency of transport systems and vehicles have a key role in this effort. Finland aims to reduce traffic emissions by 50 percent by 2030.

Illustration: iStock

### LIGHT TRAFFIC RULES!

The national Pedestrian and Cycling Promotion Program aims to increase the amount of walking and cycling by 30 percent by 2030 through a wide range of measures.

### LET'S TAKE A WALK

In Finland, a significant part of everyday trips to, for instance, school, the grocery store or the park are made on foot. Even in urban environments, the conditions for moving around on foot are very solid indeed. According to a 2021 study, a clear majority of Finns are satisfied with the pedestrian conditions in their own neighbourhood.

### GET ON YOUR BIKE!

Bicycling is a big hit in Finland. Cycle paths are common around the country and many Finns go to school, work and hobbies by bike. Especially bicycling to work is on the rise, and many employers are accommodating bikers with workplace showers. Employer-provided electric bikes are getting more popular, too.

### TRAFFIC FACTS:

In Finland, kids learn to ride a bike when they're, on average,

## 4.8 years old.

In Finland, Belgium and the Netherlands this learning threshold is considerably lower than elsewhere in Europe.



**65%** of short trips (less than one kilometre) are taken on foot.

The average commuting time (one-way) in Finland is

## 23 minutes.

In Finland, it's not unusual to see a member of parliament or a cabinet minister bicycling to work.

Rent-a-bike operations are popular in big cities such as Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Turku, Lahti, Tampere and Oulu. Riding a bike is a summer-time must!



Photos: Markus Sommers / Visit Finland and Sami Perttälä

## Children and youth are valued in Finland

“My role is to protect and promote the rights and best interests of children,” says **Elina Pekkarinen**, ombudsman for children. “We use soft diplomacy to advocate and take into account the rights of children in a range of areas from legislation to social decision-making.”



An autonomous and independent government authority, the Ombudsman for Children promotes and evaluates the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Finland ratified in 1991. The Convention’s four cornerstones are non-discrimination, the right to a good life, the right to participation and to be heard, and the best interests of the child.

“Our resources are small, but we work efficiently and are taken seriously,” says Pekkarinen, who has held the important post since 2019.

In practice, the Ombudsman’s work highlights the best interests of children in society through a number of measures including initiatives, public statements, guidance and advice, and keeping in touch with children and young people to relay

their voices to decision-makers. “For example, our annual Child Barometer investigates the experiences of 6- to 7-year-olds on topics relevant to them in their everyday lives,” says Pekkarinen.

Another popular Ombudsman initiative is “Children’s Day at Work,” when workplaces open up to daycare and school age children – and their stuffed animals – for an official yet fun visit. With more than 800 Finnish workplaces participating, the annual event offers young people the opportunity to find out more about different types of jobs.

“Many children really look forward to the day,” says Pekkarinen. “It can also be beneficial for employers and employees to see things from a child’s perspective.”

### THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

In Finland, children have individual rights regardless of what their parents or guardians can or want to provide for them. Everyone below the age of 18 years is considered a child.

One of the biggest challenges facing children is ensuring their mental health and

wellbeing, says Pekkarinen. This is a pressing issue facing children and youth around the world.

When it comes to the overall picture, children in Finland prosper in international comparisons, says Pekkarinen: “They are healthy, enjoy a high standard of living and learn well at school.”



Photo: Lehtikuva

## Democracy in action

“Young people are the future,” says **Caterina Kettunen**, 16, who recently participated in Finland’s Youth Parliament programme.

“We are interested in issues that affect us. When you have the opportunity to see and understand how everything works in the political system, you realise you can influence important issues such as sustainability. That’s very powerful,” says Kettunen.

Another 16-year-old, **Noora Nygrén**, also took part in the spring 2022 session of Youth Parliament.

“Participating gave me the courage and confidence to voice my opinion and know that it matters,” she says. “Issues such as the wellbeing of nature affect us. We’re going to be living on this planet in the future and we need to take care of it now.”

Nygrén says that in addition to facts and information, she gained valuable insight from people she met through the programme, including real-life MPs.

“I learned a lot from working with people of different ages from different backgrounds,” she says.

### TOGETHER IS BETTER

Finland’s Youth Parliament is a cooperative effort of the Parliament of Finland and Opinkirjo Development Centre, a non-profit organisation that acts in national educational policy by taking part in legislative work and creation of national curricula.

“We develop activities that promote the inclusion of children and young people and create ways to strengthen democratic education,” says **Tiina Karhuvirta**, senior specialist with Opinkirjo Development Centre.

One of Opinkirjo’s key activities is the parliamentary club for students in the final years of comprehensive school that includes the plenary session of the Youth Parliament, which takes place every two years and gives young people a hands-on experience.

“Our goal is to encourage students to get involved and have their say on matters important to young people,” says Karhuvirta.

And for one of those participants, Caterina Kettunen, getting involved has opened up a potential career path: “I would love to be a Member of Parliament one day!” she says.

The Youth Parliament has been operating in Finland since 1998.



Photo: Jussi Hellsten / Visit Finland

## Playing a role in the decision-making process

Many forums such as the UN Youth Agenda 2030 Group enable young people in Finland to participate in society by being active members in the democratic process.

The Youth Agenda 2030 Group was started in 2017 as part of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development. The goal is to ensure that the voices of democratically elected members between the ages of 15 and 29 are heard. Young people are an important part of sustainable development by helping Finland find solutions to reach its goal of carbon neutrality by 2035.

Active on social media such as Instagram, group members regularly post about their activities, which include meetings with the prime minister and the representatives of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Youth Group participates in national planning and implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. It also issues statements on topics such as COP, the annual United Nations climate change conference, with lively explainers on what it is and why it matters to Finland’s biodiversity strategy.

Photo: Maarit Høhteri / City of Helsinki



Photo: Lehtikuva

### CAPITAL PARTICIPATION

“Come make Helsinki a better place for everyone! By participating, you can change the world,” reads the upbeat online call to action for the capital’s Youth Council.

Comprised of thirty young people between the ages of 13 and 17, the Helsinki Youth Council is democratically elected every two years. The group is tasked with ensuring that the voices of

young people are heard in the city’s operative planning and decision-making.

In Helsinki, other inclusive local initiatives include the OmaStadi (“Own City”) participatory budgeting system, which has allocated 8.8 million euros for realising residents’ ideas. Citizens’ initiatives are developed into proposals that all Helsinki residents

aged 12 and up can vote on. Then, the city implements the proposals that receive the most votes.

And for comprehensive school and secondary education students, the city’s Ruuti funding programme is earmarked for groups of pupils who want to improve the comfort and functionality of their study environment.



## How Finland supports families with children



When a woman becomes pregnant, care and practical guidance starts at public maternity health clinics that monitor the health and wellbeing of child and mother.

Maternity hospitals in Finland are high quality and giving birth at a local hospital is inexpensive.

The maternity package, a starter kit with necessities from clothing to accessories to help care for a newborn, arrives before the baby is born.

At public maternity and child health clinics, a baby's health and wellbeing is provided for from pre-birth through the preschool years.



Parental leave to care for the baby is granted to both mothers and fathers.

During parental leave, parental allowance for 320 working days (160 days per parent) is paid.

Flexible working hours make it easy to care for young children by being able to adjust hours and work remotely, for example.



Child benefit, a monthly sum of money to help with childcare costs, continues until a child turns 17.

Education is free from preschool through primary and secondary school.

Photos: Jussi Hellsten, Sakari Pippo, Mikko Huotari and Emilia Hoisko / Visit Finland, Kela



*Finnish Mother's Day is celebrated in May and Father's Day in November.*



### TAKING GOOD CARE

Finland's child mortality rate is among the lowest in the world. The healthcare path for kids starts well before birth with public maternity health clinics and it continues with child health clinics after birth until child goes to school. Through primary and secondary school, regular health checks are carried out by school nurses and doctors.

A number of organisations complement the healthcare system such as the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare (MLL), founded in 1920, whose slogan is "Every child is entitled to a good and happy childhood."

[mll.fi](http://mll.fi)

## Early education and care sets the foundations for lifelong learning

On Father's Day in Finland, the Dimulescu family are marking the occasion by spending time together on the special Sunday in mid-November.

**Kaisa Dimulescu**, her husband **Florin Dimulescu**, and their two children **Lara**, 12, and **Teo**, 10, are gathered around the kitchen table at their home in Kangasala, a city about 16 kilometres east of Tampere. They're sharing their experiences of Finnish daycare and primary school.

"The best thing that I remember about daycare was the morning porridge," says Teo. "Rice porridge was my favourite," he says.

Throughout Finland, public daycares serve meals including breakfast, a warm lunch and snacks to all children, which ensures they are nourished for a day of activities.

Both Dimulescu children have attended public daycare in Finland.

Lara, when she was one and two years old, spent time at a family daycare, arranged at a professional childcare-giver's home with a small number of kids.

After her younger brother Teo was born, Lara spent time in another family daycare until she started preschool at age six. Teo spent two years in a regular daycare before attending preschool.

"We gained a lot from the children's daycare experiences," says Kaisa. "On my own, I couldn't have done everything that the kids got to do with other children from playing outside every day to crafts, baking, singing and other group activities," she says.

An added bonus was the nearby locations, which made travel to and from childcare easy, says Kaisa.

### INTERNATIONAL ROOTS

The bilingual Dimulescu family speaks Finnish and Romanian at home, as Florin is originally from Romania and Kaisa is from Finland. Kaisa works as a sourcing manager, while Florin is an IT professional who has also published a Finnish easy reading book series to help those learning the language.

Cultural and linguistic diversity adds richness to their lives, and Florin also speaks Finnish, German



Photos: Laura Vesa

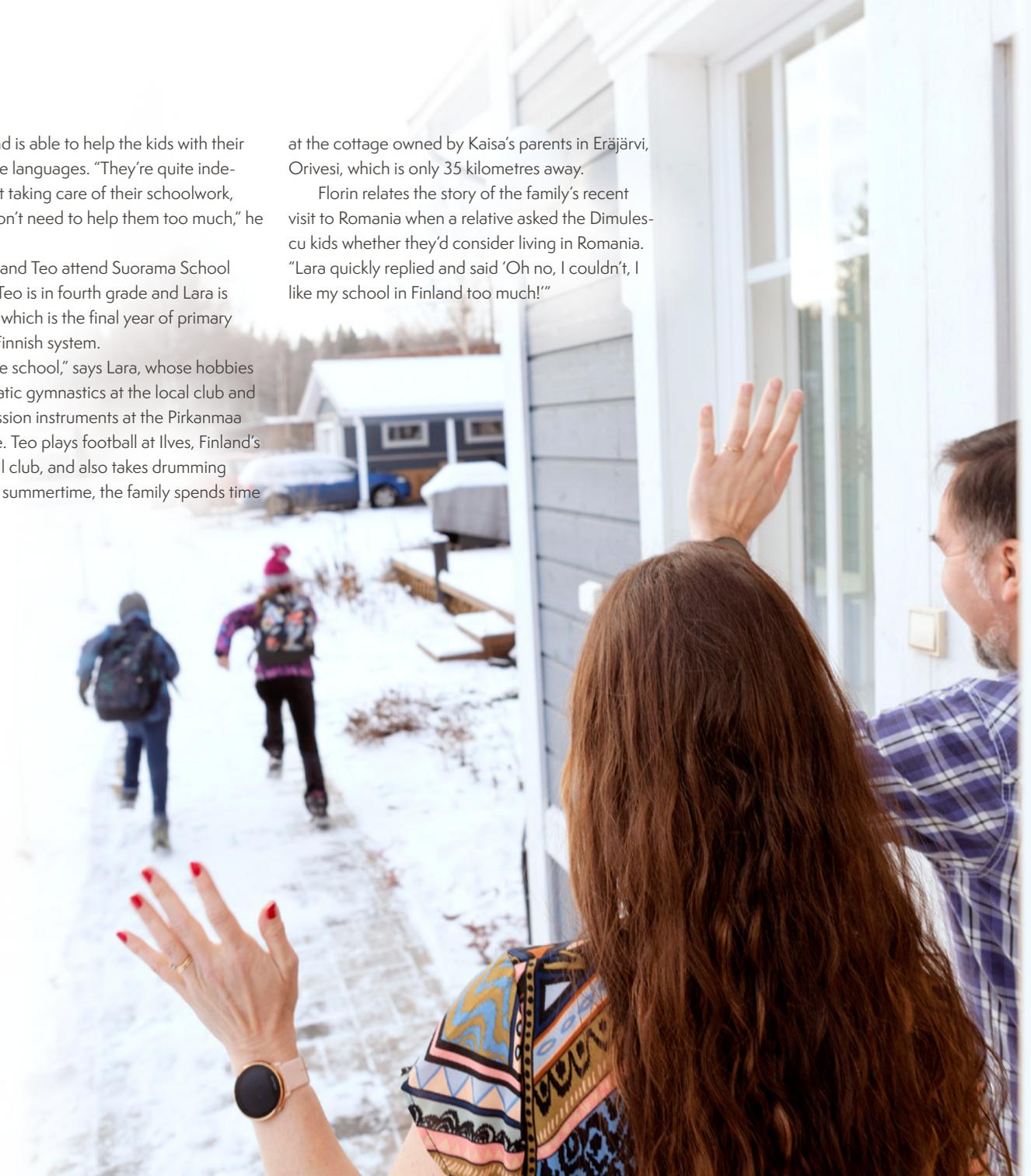
and English and is able to help the kids with their studies in those languages. "They're quite independent about taking care of their schoolwork, though, so I don't need to help them too much," he says, smiling.

Both Lara and Teo attend Suorama School in Kangasala. Teo is in fourth grade and Lara is in sixth grade, which is the final year of primary school in the Finnish system.

"I really like school," says Lara, whose hobbies include acrobatic gymnastics at the local club and playing percussion instruments at the Pirkanmaa Music Institute. Teo plays football at Ilves, Finland's largest football club, and also takes drumming lessons. In the summertime, the family spends time

at the cottage owned by Kaisa's parents in Eräjärvi, Orivesi, which is only 35 kilometres away.

Florin relates the story of the family's recent visit to Romania when a relative asked the Dimulescu kids whether they'd consider living in Romania. "Lara quickly replied and said 'Oh no, I couldn't, I like my school in Finland too much!'"



# Finland's education system starts with equality

One of the secrets behind the success of the Finnish education system, which is ranked among the best in the world, is investing in people. Quite simply, human beings are viewed as the nation's most important asset.

Comprehensive school education runs from school years 1 to 9, and is free-of-charge for children between the ages of 7 and 17. It is compulsory for all children who reside permanently in Finland.

## HOW IT WORKS

There's a strong belief in Finland that everyone should have the opportunity to study and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for a good life. Early childhood and primary education services are organised so that children can attend



school close to their own home. At no cost, children also receive study materials and supplies and school meals.

Based on scientific research, the Finnish education system starts with early childhood education and care that supports the development, learning and wellbeing of children.

At daycare, young children are encouraged to focus on their inherent strengths in lieu of competition. They are supported in their individual needs, while social emotional skills and a sense of safety and community are nurtured.

There is a small monthly fee for daycare. However, low-income earners can receive subsidies to cover costs.



Since 1948, Finland has provided meals free-of-charge to all pupils.



The comprehensive education system starts at the age of seven, preceded by a mandatory year of pre-primary education to help prepare young children for school.

Teachers are highly educated and have university-level degrees. The sought-out profession is held in high regard. Teachers motivate pupils with encouragement, and performance is not graded until later on during school years.

Photos: Jussi Hellsten, Laura Dove / Visit Helsinki and Elina Manninen / Visit Finland

As school ends relatively early for children in the first and second years, afternoon clubs on the school premises are organised to ensure these young children don't have to spend time alone while their parents or guardians are still at work.

Following comprehensive school, each student must apply for post-comprehensive school education. This can be general upper secondary education, vocational education and training, or university.

Vocational colleges are an attractive choice, with roughly half of students finishing lower secondary education applying to vocational



colleges, which is exceptional in international comparison.

Compulsory education ends when the learner reaches the age of 18, or when they complete an upper secondary qualification or a vocational qualification.

At every step of the way, life-long learning is encouraged. There are numerous options for adult education, continuing education and occupational re-training in the knowledge-based society.

## SCHOOLING IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE

For newcomers, it's relatively easy to make friends as Finns are among the world's best speakers of English as a foreign language. Studying a foreign language at school starts as early as first grade, with English being the most popular language choice.

You can also study in a language other than Finnish or Swedish, one of the two official languages of the country. In English-language schools the instruction is completely in English, and in bilingual options the languages of instruction can be Finnish and a second language, like French, German, Spanish.



## WELCOME TO STUDY IN FINLAND IN ENGLISH!

Finland's higher education system offers more than 500 English-taught undergraduate and graduate degree programmes at 13 universities and 22 universities of applied sciences. These universities also offer English-taught doctoral degree options.

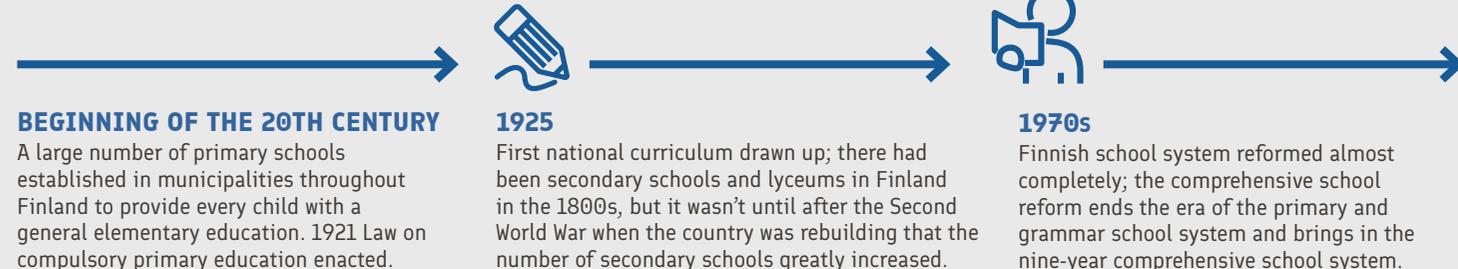
There are more than 20,000 international students studying in Finland.

All universities and universities of applied sciences have scholarship opportunities for international students.

With new 2022 legislation, international students may now be granted residence permits for the entire duration of their studies. Students and researchers will also be eligible for a two-year permit to look for work after graduating.

[studyinfinland.fi](http://studyinfinland.fi)

## HISTORY LESSONS





## Taking care of employees with children is part of the formula for wellbeing

Light streams in through the skylight windows of the top floor offices of CHAOS Architects in Helsinki's hip Punavuori district. Nestled in a historic building from the late 1800s that once headquartered a sweets factory, the welcoming space is now home to a diverse team of 15 people representing 8 different nationalities: Armenian, Finnish, Georgian, German, Mexican, Spanish, Pakistani and Vietnamese.

**Natalia Rincón** and **Juha Puotila** are sitting on a couch amidst a pile of colourful cushions and laughing, as they exchange stories about what movies their kids like.

"Anything animated works!" says Puotila, the chief revenue officer, who has three children between the ages of 8 months and 8 years old. Rincón, who is stepmother to an 11-year-old, laughs and nods in agreement. She is the CEO and co-founder of the company that specialises in urban real estate forecasting.

Entertainment is a relevant topic to work at CHAOS, as one of the company's social activities

is allowing employees to use the cosy office space for movie nights.

"Our team is very involved every step of the way from teambuilding activities to how we carry out our work," says Rincón. "There's little hierarchy, and whether it's meeting with shareholders or problem-solving, responsibility comes from understanding what everyone does and respecting each person and their role."

Rincón, who moved from Mexico to Finland in 2011 for love, says the down-to-earth quality of Finnish work life is an asset. "It's very grounded, there's almost no class system here, which means we can talk openly and directly with one other and that makes the work flow better."

### THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF WELLBEING

A working life that includes parental leave, flexible hours and remote work makes it easy for parents – and everyone – to combine work with personal life.



"If I need to pick up one of my children from daycare or school, or take care of something else, I can leave the office and then continue working from home later in the afternoon," says Puotila.

Finland is the only country in the developed world where fathers spend more time with their school-aged children than mothers do, according to the OECD.

Puotila sees many great advantages to raising a family in Finland. "For example, we have public maternity and child health clinics, daycare and free education, which are all set up to provide the best services for children while enabling parents to work," he says. It's common Finnish practice for employers to provide the tools needed for working from home, for example,

mobile phones, laptops, extra monitors and high-speed internet access.

The focus on care extends to ensuring work-life balance to maintain and foster overall wellbeing.

“Even the government recommends taking breaks and holidays for wellbeing, and one month vacation a year is considered standard, which is quite generous,” says Rincón.

### TRUST-BASED SOCIETY

While good governance is one of the keys to a happy, functioning society, trust in institutions and other people is also a key component of Finland’s social capital.

“There’s a high level of trust among people,” says Rincón.

“And that translates into freedom and flexibility,” says Puotila.

With an international team, orienting new employees goes beyond the office.

When one of CHAOS Architects’ new employees who had recently moved to Finland was considering purchasing a flat, several people from the work team went to check it out for him.

In terms of the business ecosystem, Rincón listens to what her employees want when it comes to work benefits, whether it’s subsidised lunches, museum or gym tickets, or electric bikes for commuting to work.

The only area where there’s room for improvement is integration, says Rincón. “As a foreigner you lose your network when you move abroad. At times, it can be a challenge to figure everything out and find your way,” she says.



## Building the foundations for a resilient work-life balance

“**F**inland is quite flexible with regards to working life for families. Satisfaction among workers with their working conditions is among the highest in the EU,” says **Markku Sippola**, senior lecturer at the University of Helsinki. Sippola’s area of academic expertise is labour studies.

Flexible working has been strongly rooted in Finland for many decades, dating back to

milestones such as the 1996 Working Hours Act that granted employees the right to adjust their hours, says Sippola.

As early as 2010, Finland was seen as offering the world’s most flexible working schedules. In 2011, a study by global accounting firm Grant Thornton found that 92 percent of companies in Finland allowed workers to adapt their hours.

New legislation that stepped into effect in 2020 allows employees to agree with their employer on when and where they work for up to half of their working hours. These developments helped Finland clinch its role as “the promised land for working life development,” says Sippola.

Given the changes in the labour market and working life, the new possibility is thought to be optimal for knowledge workers and the growing popularity of time- and location-independent working.

The new 2020 legislation allows employees flexibility – for whom it is an option – on when and where they put in their average 40 hours a week. They could start and finish work earlier in order to take care of children, for example. As well, it’s possible to work select fixed days or hours from a remote location such as a cottage. “Banking” time off by working longer hours in order to earn a larger chunk of time off is also an option.

As many people have jobs that can be taken care of remotely with a laptop and good network access, the availability of affordable, reliable, high-speed Wi-Fi throughout Finland is a major asset.

### CULTURE OF RELIABILITY

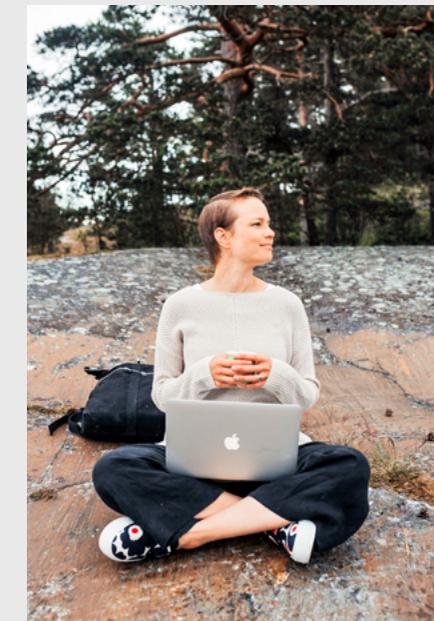
One of the reasons flexible working succeeds is the strong culture of trust, according to Sippola. “A Eurobarometer study found that Finns’ trust in fellow citizens and institutions is higher than anywhere else in Europe,” he says.

Sippola stresses that the role of strong unions, labour agreement mediation, a high level of workplace training and education, and a government that listens to both researchers and citizens, have greatly contributed to labour market developments in Finland.

For newcomers, another strength is that English is widely spoken in many workplaces. It’s relatively easy to take care of everything from healthcare to banking in English without speaking either of Finland’s official languages, Finnish or Swedish.

“Finland ranks sixth in English skills in a survey of 80 countries,” says Sippola, “which means that Finns are among the world’s best speakers of English as a foreign language.”

And while he is quick to point out that there is still work to be done – some industries are still very male- or female-dominated – Finland does rank third in the *Economist’s* Glass Ceiling Index, which measures the role and influence of women in the workforce across the OECD.



### WORLD’S BEST WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The Finnish capital, Helsinki, was chosen as the best place in the world for work-life balance in a comparison of 40 cities worldwide. The Kisi Work-Life Balance Index 2022 measured 20 factors with data on work intensity, institutional support, legislation and liveability. The Index recognises that cities who encourage a healthy balance do so both directly and indirectly through policies and urban infrastructure.



## Four distinct seasons offer up a world of leisure activities

For many people, Finnish Lapland conjures up images of winter wonderland, reindeer, the Northern Lights and Santa Claus.

With four distinct seasons, the diverse region at the top of Finland is home to 180,000 people who live above the Arctic Circle year-round.

“Our family lives close to nature and we spend a lot of our free time enjoying the outdoors,” says

**Maria Huhmarniemi**, a Finnish visual artist, researcher and teacher. Her British husband **Oliver Coey** is a web developer and the couple has two sons, **Oskar**, 6, and **Hugo**, 9.

The Huhmarniemi-Coey family is one of the international families living in Rovaniemi, the capital of Finnish Lapland. Their home is in the Korkalovaara neighbourhood, a

collection of townhouses and apartments originally designed by architectural legend Alvar Aalto.

“It’s so safe that the kids can play on their own in the yard with their friends from the neighbourhood,” says Maria, adding that there happens to also be several other British-Finnish families in their complex.

Photos: Miikka Kainu and Kaisa Sirén

### A RANGE OF OPTIONS

Each member of the family has their own favourite leisure activities.

“I really like fishing,” says Hugo, whose catch has included pike and perch from the nearby lakes and rivers.

His younger brother Oskar has decided that he’d like to be a naturalist when he grows up.

“My parents live nearby,” says Maria, “so they’ve helped to instil a love of nature in the boys by spending time with them foraging for mushrooms in the forests.”

As throughout much of Finland, there’s a network of well-marked and maintained cycling paths in Rovaniemi.

“The boys and I bicycle just about everywhere, as it’s easy and accessible,” says Oliver, adding that Hugo, who’s in second grade, pedals to and from school every day.

From the outdoors to the indoors, the active family has a range of hobbies. Hugo is keen on crocheting and woodworking and has carved many items from wood, including a small car. Oskar attends circus school, where he’s mastered a range of tricks.

During the winter months, cross-country skiing is a popular pastime for all four members of the family.

When it comes to living in Santa’s hometown, it also has other advantages.

“Rovaniemi city centre is busy during the Christmas season – it’s nice to see the international visitors – and then it’s calmer again during the summer months,” says Oliver.



Watch a video in which Maria and Oliver talk about their family’s special connection with Lapland’s nature.





#### ARTS & CULTURE ON OFFER

A range of options and programmes nurture children to experience and participate in the arts from very early on.

Helsinki's Culture Kids programme is for all children born in the Finnish capital in and after 2020. Kids receive invitations to two events every year until they start school. The idea is that infants, toddlers and small children can enjoy a range of cultural experiences with their parents, other family members or friends. These events are free-of-charge and run the gamut from opera to theatre, circus and the visual arts.

Throughout Finland, there are more than 1,000 museums ranging from those specialised in photography to those with a focus on design, art, handicrafts and natural history. The majority are accessible by pram or stroller.

Numerous annual festivals and concerts take place throughout Finland on a range of themes from light to food and music.

[kummilapset.hel.fi](http://kummilapset.hel.fi)  
[festivals.fi/en](http://festivals.fi/en)

skiing to indoor and outdoor climbing on ladders, walkways and ziplines.

A range of well-maintained outdoor options for skiing – downhill and cross country – ice skating, tour skating on frozen lakes and the sea, winter swimming and snow shoeing round out the winter offerings.

Photo: Vesa Laitinen / Visit Helsinki

## Pastimes for every member of the family

Equal leisure opportunities for everyone are part of the formula for wellbeing in Finland.

One of the main goals is to ensure that children and young people can participate in sports and other hobbies free-of-charge in connection with the school day.

Public funding makes it possible to organise thousands of groups for various leisure activities in schools throughout Finland. Almost half a million children and young people participate in these organised activities, according to the Ministry of Education and Culture.

#### ACTIVE KIDS

In addition to services offered by cities and municipalities, children in Finland are also avid participants in hobbies and sports from badminton to ballet and piano lessons on weeknights and weekends – many of which families pay for themselves.

Libraries in Finland lend sports equipment, musical instruments and have digital gaming spaces that can be booked. Youth centres throughout the country offer a place to participate in recreational activities.

Adventure and activity parks highlight themes from aquatics, trampolining, virtual gaming and

#### GROWING AN EDIBLE FEAST

Urban gardening is a popular trend with a long history in Finland. In addition to allowing gardeners to grow vegetables, berries and flowers, it also offers a sustainable way to produce food.

Active organisations include the non-profit Finnish Federation of Allotment Gardens, established in 1930, which represents 3,700 allotment gardeners from Helsinki to Rovaniemi, above the Arctic Circle.

Another, Dodo's Urban Farmers, is a Finnish environmental NGO with the motto: "Environmental problems are solved in cities." Dodo initially started by growing vegetables on a strip of land between railway tracks in Pasila, Helsinki, and has since expanded to include many other sites and urban bee-keeping.

[siirtolapuutarhaliitto.fi](http://siirtolapuutarhaliitto.fi)  
[dodo.org](http://dodo.org)

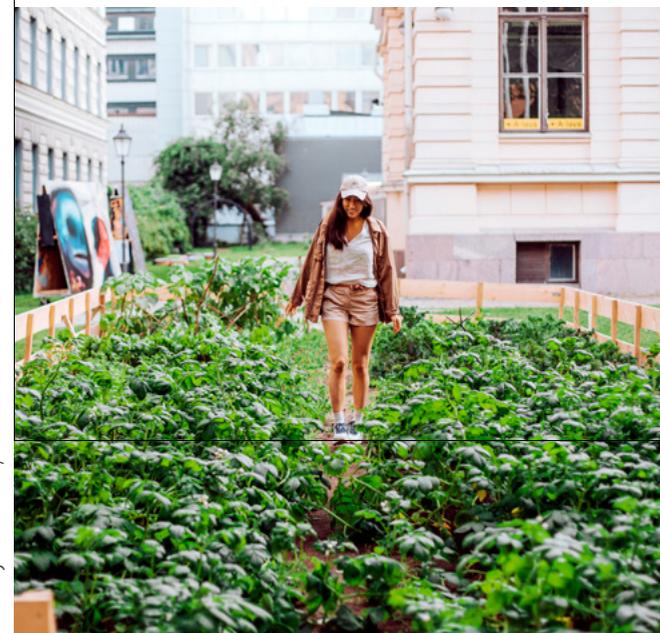


Photo: Julia Kivelä / Visit Finland



#### FINNISH PHENOMENON: THE MOOMINS AT PLAY

The beloved Moomins created by world-renowned Finnish writer and artist Tove Jansson are everywhere from museums to theme parks and coffee tables. Mugs adorned with the cherished characters are a collector's item.

Moominworld is a popular summer theme park where kids of all ages can meet their favourite characters on an island in the scenic archipelago of southwestern Finland next to the Old Town of Naantali.

The world's only Moomin museum is in Tampere, while the

Moomin Ice Caves in Leppävirta offer an icy underground adventure.

Throughout the capital, there are many places to get acquainted with Tove Jansson's Helsinki and see the places where she lived, worked and spent time, including the Katajanokka neighbourhood which has a park named after the prolific creator.

[moominworld.fi](http://moominworld.fi)  
[muumimuseo.fi/en](http://muumimuseo.fi/en)  
[icecave.fi](http://icecave.fi)  
[moomin.com](http://moomin.com)

Photo: Moomin Characters Tm & Dennis Livson / Visit Finland

## Pure, clean nature everywhere

“Nature is our essential lifeline,” says **Petri Ahlroth**, former director of the Biodiversity Centre at SYKE, the Finnish Environment Institute, for a decade before recently returning to the Ministry of the Environment as an expert adviser.

More than 70 percent of Finland is covered by trees and almost 10 percent by lakes.

The majority of Finnish people – 80 percent – say that

the forest is important to them. Spending time in nature with family and friends makes them happy.

“In Finland, nature is close at hand, which means it’s easy for just about every member of the family to access it,” says Ahlroth.

City and municipal planning ensure that homes are built near green and blue spaces so that everybody can live close to nature.

### A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

“Good air quality is essential to our health and wellbeing,” says **Outi Väkevä**, air quality expert with Helsinki Region Environmental Services HSY.

Air pollutants are harmful to human health. The goal of Finland’s air pollution control policy is to improve people’s wellbeing by safeguarding the environment and good air quality, which also safeguards biodiversity.

Air quality in Finland is good by international standards and monitored through a range of measures.

In the Helsinki metropolitan area it’s possible to monitor air quality in real-time. Air quality is affected by street dust, traffic exhaust, air pollutants transported from elsewhere and dust from construction sites, for example.

“The Helsinki metropolitan area is one of the cleanest areas in Europe in terms of air quality,” says Väkevä. “Concentrations of air pollutants have generally decreased or remained stable over the long term, despite factors including growth in population, traffic and energy production.”

Photo: Jussi Hellsten / Visit Helsinki

### FORAGING FROM FOREST TO TABLE

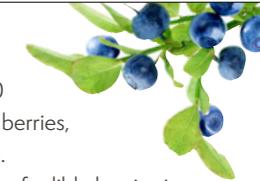
Two-thirds of Finnish forests are owned by ordinary families. Yet the concept of Every Person’s Right means that anyone may hike, camp, or forage for mushrooms or berries in any forest, regardless of who owns it.

Picking berries or mushrooms is a popular pastime. It is also an excellent way to gather ingredients to supplement a healthy meal, as many mushrooms and berries are loaded with essential nutrients and vitamins.

There are about 50 different types of wild berries, 37 of which are edible.

“We have a bounty of edible berries in Finland, which is relatively sparsely populated,” says **Petri Ahlroth**, environmental expert.

“As a mere two percent of what nature yields in edible berries is picked each year, there’s more than enough for everyone,” he says.



### NEARBY NATURE

Finland has an extensive network of city parks, national parks and forests, many of which are near lakes, rivers or the sea.

From the capital region to Lapland, there are 41 national parks. Each of these nature conservation areas are tasked to ensure biodiversity and to provide a place for everyone to enjoy nature.

For example, Nuksio National Park, about 35 kilometres from Helsinki, offers a range of hiking trails and camping options from tenting to spending the night in a traditional wooden lean-to.

Many central parks and forested areas are near cities and suburbs and can be easily reached on foot, by bicycle, car or public transport.



Photo: Suvi Mansikkasalo / Visit Finland



### A GREEN EDUCATION

Experiencing forests, fields, lakes and the sea starts early as families and caregivers introduce babies and toddlers to the outdoors.

During the daycare and school years, environmental education offers children and youth groups a range of programmes. The aim is to promote an ecologically sustainable future through learning.

Nature and environmental school activities are based on a national plan for early childhood education in the national curriculum.

About 200,000 children and young people participate in programmes organised yearly.

Activities take place year-round outdoors, as well as indoors in the classroom, at nature centres and museums.

Photo: Jussi Hellsten / Visit Helsinki



## Good housing cares for and caters to families

The winter's first snow has just started as soft white flakes gently fall from the sky. Inside a cosy modern townhouse in Helsinki's Jätkäsaari district, the Linja family is getting ready to head outdoors and meet up with their neighbours in the shared courtyard.

Parents **Sohvi Linja** and **Markus Linja** are sitting in the open-space kitchen and living room area, while **Peppi**, 9, and **Alvar**, 7, play on the wooden gymnastics rings that hang near the sofa. Upstairs, the youngest member of the family, **Amos**, 1, is waking up from his nap.

"Many of our neighbours are also good friends, as we've known each other since we first met during the initial planning stages for building our apartment complex ten years ago," says Sohvi.

### CO-CREATED HOME

The Linja family lives on the central seaside island of Jätkäsaari in a modern block of apartments and townhouses that was built by group construction and completed eight years ago. This form of joint building means the homeowners began working together with their future neighbours and the architects and builders well before the first foundations were laid in the ground.

Sohvi and Markus were able to influence factors ranging from the size and number of rooms to what type of materials would be used for

kitchen counter tops in their 90-sq metre, three-storey townhouse.

"You get what you want!" says Markus, with a laugh when asked about the benefits of group building.

"We'd been searching for a new home and when this option came up, it seemed like a very good hybrid solution to living in an apartment or a house," he says.

In the complex, there are several shared communal spaces including the sauna, that quintessential Finnish steam bath, and a community room which has hosted many children's birthday parties over the years.

Nearby, within walking distance, there are essential services ranging from a daycare and primary school to playgrounds, sports halls, a well-stocked children's library and a grocery store. Add to that the feeling of security that comes from being able to rely on neighbours when, for example, an emergency babysitter is needed.

"The biggest positive surprise with group building has been the strong sense of community we enjoy here," says Sohvi.



*What makes an apartment a home?  
What is quality living in Finland like?  
Watch the video!*



## Laying the foundations for high-quality housing

When it comes to urban planning, one of Finland's assets is its engineer-oriented culture.

"The overall quality of Finnish housing is high," says professor **Mari Vaattovaara**, director of the Helsinki Institute of Urban and Regional Studies Urbaria. "These are the fruits of living in a wonderland of engineers."

According to Vaattovaara, other important contributing factors include a strong state and cities, and solid regulations that ensure everything from clean tap water to good indoor air quality.

### GENERAL HOUSING TRENDS

About one-half of Finland's population of 5.5 million people lives in detached or semi-detached houses, according to infoFinland.fi, a useful source of reliable information published by the City of Helsinki. Close to one-third live in a flat or apartment, especially those residing in or near large urban centres. The average size of a Finnish home is about 40 m<sup>2</sup> per person.

Roughly 50 percent of the population lives in buildings that use district heating, with other common heating methods being geothermal and electric. The typical indoor temperature in Finland is 21°C, in part due to well-built and properly insulated buildings.

Finnish terraced houses and detached houses usually have a private sauna, as do homes in

new blocks of flats. In older apartment buildings a communal sauna is often located in shared spaces.

About two-thirds of people in Finland live in their own homes.

### NEARBY NATURE

As in the seaside district of Jätkäsaari, extensive networks of pedestrian paths and cycling lanes snake throughout most of the country where green spaces play a strong part in urban planning.

Jätkäsaari, built during the past two decades on the southwestern tip of Helsinki as an extension of the city centre, has utilised many of the best principles of city planning. These include listening to the needs and desires of residents and allowing them to participate in the process, says Vaattovaara.

"In Finland, there's low hierarchy so everyone's voice can be heard," she says.

As the world changes, one of the challenges in urban planning is finding the right pitch between global and local needs, says Vaattovaara.

"Diversity, cultural and political change, different lifestyles, and remote working all impact urban planning," she says. "For example, single

people who live alone are not necessarily alone – it doesn't mean they don't have family. They may want or need to live in a small studio apartment. As there are numerous different definitions of what makes family, good urban planning embraces multi-diversity."



Photo: Sabrina Bqain

## Working in Finland – what do I need to know?

When you apply for a residence permit to work in Finland, you should notice that there are specific residence permit applications for certain types of work.

If you are not sure what application form you should use, use the Application Finder to find out! [migri.fi](https://migri.fi)



The easiest way to apply is via the Enter Finland online service ([enterfinland.fi](https://enterfinland.fi)). Using Enter Finland, you get updates about the status of your application throughout the process.

### THE FINNISH APPLICATION PROCESS when you are applying for your first residence permit on the basis of work:

1. Submit the application for a residence permit.
2. Prove your identity in a Finnish mission, embassy or consulate.
3. Processing of the application.
4. Supplement your application, if needed.
5. Receive the decision.
6. Get your residence permit card and move to Finland!

### EXTRA QUESTIONS:

*Citizen of an EU Member State, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway or Switzerland?*

You do not need a residence permit for Finland. You must nonetheless register your right of residence.

*What about my family?*

If you have been granted a residence permit for work, your family may usually apply for a residence permit on the basis of family ties.

*How about fast-track processing? Do I qualify?*

You can fast-track your residence permit application if you are coming to Finland to work:

- as a specialist
- as a specialist or manager in intra-corporate transfer (ICT residence permit)
- with an EU Blue Card
- as a start-up entrepreneur
- as a person working in top or middle management.



Your family members' applications can also be fast-tracked if they apply at the same time with you. By using the fast-track service, you can get a residence permit in two weeks.

### NEED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

More inspiration to live and work in Finland: [workinfinland.com](https://workinfinland.com)



## Did you know?

Salmon soup is a Finnish classic. It is a dish to be enjoyed with family at home but can also often be found on restaurant menus.

The soup can be made with cream or water, and in addition to the salmon its ingredients typically include potatoes. Seasoned with dill, salmon soup is served with rye bread or sweet Finnish archipelago bread made with molasses and malt.

In the Finnish national epic *Kalevala* salmon was eaten all day long. These days, the National Fish Soup Day is celebrated on the second Tuesday of February.

The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors. E-mail: [vie-50@formin.fi](mailto:vie-50@formin.fi)  
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**SUOMI  
FINLAND**

