

Finland

The Finnish standard of living is one of the highest in the world



About Finland

Finland (Finnish name Suomi) is situated in northern Europe between the 60th and 70th parallels of latitude. A quarter of its total area lies north of the Arctic Circle. Finland's neighbouring countries are Sweden, Norway, and Russia, which have land borders with Finland, and Estonia across the Gulf of Finland.

Finland is a republic which became a member of the European Union in 1995. Its population is 5.3 million. The capital Helsinki has 561 000 residents. Finland is an advanced industrial economy: the metal, engineering and electronics industries account for about 60 % of export revenues, the forest products industry for about 20 %. Finland is one of the leading countries in Internet use. Today, there are more mobile phone than fixed network subscriptions.

Forest cover about 75 per cent of Finland, while bodies of water - mainly lakes - cover almost 10 per cent. Finland is the most heavily forested country in Europe, with 23 million hectares under forest cover. There are approximately 190,000 lakes and about 180,000 islands. Europe's largest archipelago, which includes the self-governing province of the Ålands Islands, lies off the south-west coast.

Culture in short

The poignancy of Finnish art is in the beauty of simplicity, which approaches the austere. Stone Age peoples drew minimalist symbols of nature on cliffs, medieval church buildres gave granite blocks a divine sensitivity, national romantics captured the Finnish soul in art and music, modern rationalists breathe life into glass and wooden objects. Wisdom in Finland is never complex.

This active world of art has been made possible in part by the successful grant policies of the government and private donors. Public support for culture is part of Finnish welfare and basic services.

Innovation

Finnish researchers are at the leading edge of developments in a number of fields, including forest improvement, new materials, the environment, neural networks, low-temperature physics, brain research, biotechnology, genetic technology and of course communications.

International evaluations of Finnish innovation, research and development, technology and competitiveness have

shown that Finland is among the leading countries in the world in these areas.

The main fields of Finnish industry are metal and engineering, forest products, and information and communications technology. Inventions and product development have spawned numerous important and innovative products.

Finnish engineers and scientists have made an international mark in diverse fields and products. The list includes mobile phones, icebreakers, cruise liners, lifts, paper machines, environment-friendly paper manufacturing processes, diesel engines, sailing yachts, compasses, fishing lures, frequency transformers, rock drills, tree harvesters, contraceptives, pipettes, and scissors and axes, together with Internet encryption systems and numerous other products of forestry, engineering, and information and communications technology.

Lifestyle

The Finnish standard of living is one of the highest in the world. The Finns enjoy extensive and affordable public transport as well as efficiently heated accommodation in the depths of winter. Innovative high technology infiltrates every home and the Finns stay in touch with the simple joys of their natural environment of enormous, unspoiled lakes and forests.

Four seasons

In Finland, seasons mark the progress of the year with striking conspicuousness. Summer is so important that almost the entire country 'shuts down' for the five or six weeks that follow Midsummer, in late June. Finns move en masse to their vacation homes in the countryside and they can be found outdoors, in street cafés and bars, in parks and on beaches, being social and feeling positive.

When winter starts, Finns close their summer dwellings, store their boats in dry dock, put snow tyres on their cars, stash their golf gear in the basement and check their skis. Whereas the rural ancestors of today's Finns whiled away the long winter days by making and repairing tools for summer, their descendants labour in offices to make their country an increasingly efficient and modern high-tech marvel.

Food influences

Food culture is deeply rooted in tradition, but Finnish cuisine constantly reflects new trends. Good taste is the foundation of

Finnish food where freshness and safety in food production is valued.

Finns are skilful at combining pure natural raw ingredients and natural Finnish flavour. The national cuisine has adopted rye bread, quark, sour cream, blinnis, buckwheat and beetroot salad from the East. From the West it has incorporated salted fish, meatballs, sweet bread and German beer-brewing techniques.

Finnish ingredients have the imprint of the unspoiled Northern nature in their aromas. Finnish food is clean, genuine and uncomplicated. Finnish ingredients and raw materials are produced in the cleanest soil and environment in Europe.

Over the centuries, species have been cultivated that are suitable for cool, light summers and able to produce a crop during our short summer. Long nightless summer days give vegetables, berries and other raw ingredients a distinctive aroma.

The sauna

A nation of five million people boasting 1.5 million saunas has no need to acquire a formal sauna education - learning to sauna is as natural as learning to speak. Visitors would do well to have their first sauna with a Finnish friend or acquaintance, rather than following a mechanical instructions that can spoil the occasion of sauna bathing.

The sauna is no place for anyone in a hurry. When the bathing is over, it is customary to mark the occasion with conversation, drinks and perhaps a light meal. A guest's comments on the sauna experience will be listened to with interest: this is a subject that Finns never tire of.

Fat to fit

Thirty years ago, Finland was one of the world's unhealthiest nations. Diet was poor, people were inactive and heart disease was at record levels. Present-day Finland is a very different place.

The number of men dying from cardiovascular heart disease has dropped by at least 65% and deaths from lung cancer are down by a similar margin. Physical activity has risen and Finnish men can expect to live seven years longer and women six years longer than before measures were introduced.

Finland achieved this by changing the national diet. Starting with a project in the region of North Karelia 30 years ago, the community was encouraged to cut down on butter and salt in meals, and to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables.