# An Introduction to Finland & Helsinki

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. HISTORY</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief history of Finland and its capital</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates to remember</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. THE CITY</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting around</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting people?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tap water</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. CUSTOMS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting &amp; greeting</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tipping</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. CULTURE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauna</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV International Sauna Congress</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tango</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Christmas</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema &amp; TV</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. POPULATION</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major cities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who’s in charge?</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU presidency</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. DANGERS &amp; HAZARDS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickpockets</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking habits</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. MISCELLANEOUS</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major exports</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash points and currency-exchange</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. SOURCES</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. History

Brief history of Finland and its capital

The town of Helsinki was founded by King Gustavus Vasa of Sweden (which Finland belonged to for many centuries) as a new trading post in southern Finland and a competitor to Tallinn in Estonia, the hanseatic city on the opposite shore of the Gulf of Finland. The King then ordered the reluctant burghers of Rauma, Ulvila, Porvoo and Tammisaari to move to Helsinki. The date on which this order was issued, 12.6.1550, is regarded as the date on which the city was founded.

Growth was slow, for despite the King's order, the medieval trading traditions were slow to change.

In 1748, construction of the sea-fortress of Suomenlinna, built on an outlying island, was begun, creating what was described by a historian of the time as the "Gibraltar of the North." The building of Suomenlinna marked a turning point in the history of Helsinki, bringing prosperity to the town. Seafaring also grew to new proportions.

In 1808 Sweden declared a war on Russia as a result of the power politics of Napoleon and Tsar Alexander I. Helsinki was occupied in the early days of the war and the Suomenlinna fortress surrendered. Finland was annexed to Russia as an Autonomous Grand Duchy in 1809.

Helsinki was proclaimed the Finnish capital in 1812 and Finland's only university, which had been founded in Turku in 1640, was transferred to Helsinki in 1828.

Helsinki soon became an administrative, university and garrison town, and the biggest industrial city in the land. By the beginning of the 20th century it had a population of 100,000.

Finland declared its independence from Russia in 1917. This was immediately followed by civil war. At the end of January 1918, the government was forced to flee from Helsinki. In May 1918 the war ended with victory for the government troops.

Finland developed briskly during the 1920s.
The Soviet Union attacked Finland on November 30, 1939. During the Winter War of 1939-40 and the Continuation War of 1941-44 Helsinki was attacked from the air but suffered relatively little damage. Although ending up on the losing side after the II World War Finland was never occupied by foreign forces.

The war indemnities took away a big part of Finland’s export potential but on the other hand hastened the process of industrialization. In the post-war years agrarian Finland was rapidly transformed in only a few decades into a modern industrial land. People left the rural regions in large numbers to settle abroad and in the towns of Southern Finland and the Helsinki Region.

The rapid economic growth made it possible for Finland to develop a strong welfare system following the examples of neighbouring Denmark, Norway and Sweden. By the 1980s Finland had become one of the wealthiest nations in the world.

The great depression at the beginning of the 1990s took its toll from the welfare state. After the depression, although still among the most egalitarian countries in the world, the gap between the wealthy and the less well-off has begun to slowly widen in Finland.

Finland became a member of the European Union in 1995, once again marking the start of a new era for the country as well as for its capital. In 1999 Finland joined the European Economic and Monetary Union and in 2002 gave up its currency – the markka – in exchange for the euro. This year, 2006, Finland holds the EU presidency for the second time.

Source: http://www.hel2.fi/english/info/

Dates to remember

98 A.D.
The Roman historian Tacitus writes about the Fenni, a people of the north. This is the first reference to the Finns in recorded history. (In reality he is thought to have meant the Lapps).

1543
Bishop Mikael Agricola produces the first Finnish-language book, a volume of Finnish grammar.
1640
Queen Christina of Sweden establishes Finland's first university, the Swedish-language The Royal Academy of Turku.

1765
The Finnish-born clergyman and politician Anders Chydenius publishes his book The National Gain in which he proposes free trade, eleven years before the publication of Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations.

1809
Finland is part of the Swedish realm for some 600 years up to 1809 when it becomes attached to the Russian empire.

1860
Finland acquires its own currency, the markka or Finnish mark.

1860s
Sawmilling begins to flourish and the paper industry starts to develop.

1882
Emma Irene Åström becomes the first Finnish woman to receive a university degree

1906
Finland acquires its own national parliament, elected by equal and universal suffrage, a development that makes Finnish women the first in the world to be granted full national political rights, that is to say suffrage and eligibility to stand for election to their national Parliament.

1917
After the revolutions in Russia, the parliament of Finland declares the country independent.

1947
The Peace Treaty of Paris. Finland, after fighting the II World War in coalition with Germany, ends up rejecting Marshall Aid, following Soviet pressure to do so.

1955
Finland joins the United Nations and the Nordic Council.
1961
Finland becomes an associate member of the European Free Trade Association, Efta.

1970
Finland adopts a 40-hour working week.

1973
Finland signs a free-trade agreement with the EEC.

1991-1993
The Finnish economy is in deep recession.

1995
Finland becomes a member of the European Union.

1999
Finland adopts European Economic and Monetary Union and serves for the first time as President of the Council of the European Union.

2002
January 1, Finland and 11 other member states of the European Union began using Euro coins and banknotes and phasing out their own currencies, in Finland's case the markka.


2. The city

Language
Almost everyone in Helsinki speaks English and many of them quite fluently, so asking directions or advice from passers by is no problem. Though Finns are sometimes regarded as being reserved, they are usually polite and glad to help foreign visitors.

Finland is officially bilingual, and people are constitutionally entitled to transact their business with the authorities in Finnish or Swedish as they choose. Swedish-speakers represent less than six per
cent of the national population and about seven per cent of the population of Helsinki. Sami (Lappish) is the mother tongue of about 1,700 people.

**Getting around**

The city’s underground, or as it is called in Helsinki, the metro network is very simple: it looks like a two spiked fork with only sixteen stops. Another popular way of getting around in Helsinki is by tram. The line 3B/3T is considered a good sightseeing route. You can purchase a ticket that’s valid in both metros and trams from an automat, from the driver or by sending an SMS on your mobile. Unfortunately the SMS ticket works only with Finnish telephone subscriptions. For more distant visits to the city outskirts it is advisable to take a bus or a commuter train.

**Connecting people?**

There are very few phone boxes or slot telephones left in Helsinki City area. That is because almost everyone carries a mobile phone. The number of mobile telephone subscriptions just surpassed the population (5.2 million) this spring.

**Tap water**

The quality of Finnish tap water is excellent and you can drink it without any concern. If you order water in a restaurant it is not uncommon that you get a jug of tap water carried to your table. Helsinki water comes from the lake Päijänne. It is led through a 120 kilometre long rock tunnel from Päijänne Asikkalanselkä. The water is taken from a depth of 26 meters at a distance of 350 meters from the shore. Annually over 70 million cubic meters of water is taken from Päijänne amounting to only one-hundredth of its natural discharge.

**3. Customs**

Finland is an easy country to visit. Finnish customs and manners are clearly European, with only a few national variations, and attitudes are liberal. There is very little chance of a visitor committing fundamental social faux pas or breaches of etiquette that would fatally damage relations between himself and his hosts.
Meeting & greeting

When introducing themselves, Finns will give their first name followed by their surname. Although Finns are very particular about any honorary, academic or professional titles they may have, they rarely mention these when introducing themselves.

When greeting, the parties shake hands and make eye contact. A full bow denotes special respect — in normal circumstances, a nod of the head is enough. A Finnish handshake is brief and firm, and involves no supporting gestures such as touching the shoulder or upper arm. Children are greeted by shaking hands too. Embracing or kissing people when greeting them is rare in Finland.

Dining

Finns eat breakfast between 7.00 and 10.00 and the lunch period is from 11.00 to 14.00. Dinner is eaten at around 17.00 to 18.00 at home; in restaurants, dinner sittings may begin at around 19.00 to 20.00. Many restaurants stop serving some time before they actually close, so it is worthwhile checking the opening hours when booking a table.

Tipping

Tipping in restaurants is unnecessary, unless you found the service especially good. This general rule can be applied to other services as well, for example taxi drivers, hotel staff (tipping at hotels is fairly rare) and so on.

Smoking

Smoking has decreased in recent years, and attitudes towards it have become more negative. The law prohibits smoking in public buildings and workplaces; and being generally law-abiding, Finns have adapted to this legislation and only smoke in areas specially designated for this purpose. Nevertheless, smoking is still quite common.

4. Culture

Sauna

Finns are famous for their saunas. There are roughly 1,5 million saunas in Finland (approximately 1,5 saunas per every five Finns). Both men and women bathe in the sauna, but rarely together except within the family. There are no mixed public saunas in Finland. When friends and
acquaintances decide to bathe, it is customary to agree who goes first, men or women. Because Finns bathe in the sauna relatively often — up to several times a week, especially at a summer cottage — there is nothing strange about a guest (even a Finn) politely declining the sauna.

Most hotels provide a sauna for their guests. All of the gyms and public swimming pools have their own customer saunas too. There are also a couple of old wood-heated public saunas in Helsinki. See for example the Kotiharjun sauna: http://www.aatos.fi/sauna/press/Kotiharjunsauna_web_eng.pdf.

**XIV International Sauna Congress**

The International Sauna Society has its XIV International Sauna Congress in Helsinki from 6th to 9th of August, just few weeks before the opening of the XIV International Economic History Congress! A link to the congress website can be found here: http://www.sauna.fi/index.html.

**Tango**

The fashionable new dance was introduced to the Finns in 1913, at a demonstration by a Danish couple at the Börs Hotel in Helsinki. Most of the tangos performed in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s were of foreign origin. The repertoires of the Finnish dance bands featured numbers borrowed in particular from Germany. After the Second World War the ties with Germany were broken. This affected both the recording industry and the music itself, with the result that the tango became increasingly Finnish.

By the end of the 1940s, virtually every other popular hit was a tango. In 1964, for example, the two best-selling records in Finland were the Beatles' "All my loving" and Reijo Taipale's rendering of a tango called "Tähdet meren yllä". Since its days of glory in the 1960s, the Finnish tango has been most at home in restaurants and open-air dance pavilions. Most popular tangos today are the evergreens of past decades.

The annual Tango Festival in Seinäjoki is very popular; an audience of 100,000 people attend the 5-day festival yearly. http://www.tangomarkkinat.fi/english/at/etusivu.htm

You can still experience the Finnish tango in many places in the Helsinki area: For example at the open-air dance pavilion Pavi in Vantaa (map: http://nyt.hs.fi/menot/ravintola?id=loc_103389), or in the Helsinki city centre at Wanhan Tanssikellari (http://nyt.hs.fi/menot/ravintola?id=loc_105104).

Father Christmas

Despite the persistent rumours claiming that Father Christmas lives on the North Pole, his home is really in Lapland Finland, on the Korvatunturi fell. If you don’t believe it, check it for yourselves: http://www.santatelevision.com/santaclaus/index.html

Cinema & TV

If you enjoy going to the cinema it is quite easy for an English speaker to find a suitable theatre and a movie, since instead of voice-overs, films are usually translated into Finnish through subtitles (except in children’s movies). This goes for imported TV-programs as well.

5. Population

Finland’s population is about 5,2 million. Population density is 17 inhabitants per square kilometre. 62 % of the population lives in towns and cities.

Major cities

The five biggest cities in Finland are: Helsinki (population of approximately 555,000), Espoo (213,000), Tampere (195,000), Vantaa (178,000), Turku (172,000) and Oulu (120,800). Approximately one million people live in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area.

6. Governmental system

Parliament

Finland has a unicameral parliament with 200 members. The members are elected for a four-year term by direct popular vote under a system of proportional representation. The president is empowered to dissolve the Parliament. The parliament, “Eduskunta” in Finnish, celebrates its centenary this year.

Who’s in charge?

The Council of State is the Government, comprising the Prime Minister (Mr Matti Vanhanen) and up to 17 ministers. The Centre Party and the Social Democratic party have eight ministerial posts
each and the Swedish People's Party has two posts. The leader of the opposition is the National Coalition Party. Other notable parties are the Green League, the Christian Democrats, the Left Alliance and the True Finns party

**EU presidency**

Finland holds the EU presidency for the latter part of the year 2006. During the six months long presidency Finland will host a total of 130 meetings. The main events take place in the cities of Helsinki, Lahti and Tampere. More information on the subject: [http://www.eu2006.fi/en_GB/](http://www.eu2006.fi/en_GB/)

**7. Dangers & Hazards**

On the whole, Helsinki is a safe place, especially when compared to other metropolises. The public transport system is good: buses, trams, commuter trains and the metro get you where you want to go – safely and inexpensively. It is still advisable to remember that Helsinki is a big city and one should exercise due caution.

**Pickpockets**

It is advisable to hold on to your wallet when visiting the popular Kauppatori market square. But the pickpockets aren’t the only problem there. If you happen to by an ice-cream or perhaps a traditional Finnish meat pastry “lihapiirakka”, hold on to them as well: the seagulls can be sometimes very audacious.

**Drinking habits**

The Finns have a reputation for drinking. Drinking habits follow mainly Scandinavian and European practises. The most conspicuous national characteristic is the relatively high rate of consumption of spirits and the related tendency of drinking to excess. To a visitor public drunkenness is more of an inconvenience than a real danger.

**8. Miscellaneous**
**Major exports**

Major exports are electronic and electrical products, pulp and paper, machinery and equipment, metal products, transport vehicles, timber and wood, chemicals.

**Climate**

The climate in Finland is marked by distinctive seasonal variations. Winters are cold and summers relatively warm. In summer the temperature often rises to +20 centigrade or more and occasionally goes close to +30 in southern and eastern parts of the country. In winter, temperatures of -20 Celsius are not uncommon in many areas. The mean temperature in Helsinki in July is +17 centigrade and in February -5.7 centigrade.

**Time**

Finland is two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). The 24–hour clock is usually followed, and shop signs might read as follows: 9.00–21.00 (from 9.00 a.m. to 9.00 p.m.).

**Cash points and currency-exchange**

Cash points (ATMs) are marked with a yellow sign Otto. They are available at several locations throughout the airport and in the city centre, and they accept major credit cards.

Foreign currency can be exchanged at several currency offices at the airport (e.g. Sampo Bank) and in the centre of Helsinki (e.g. Forex at the Central Railway Station).

**9. Sources**


Wikipedia on Finland’s economy http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Finland

Virtual Finland http://virtual.finland.fi/