

### Finland COUNTRY & CULTURE

#### Introduction to Finland

Finland is a republic located in northern Europe. It shares a border with Norway, Sweden, and Russia. It is one of the most northern countries in the world, with almost a third of the country located above the Arctic Circle.

**Population:** 5,487,308

**Languages:** Finnish and Swedish

**Capital:** Helsinki

**Currency:** Euro



Flag of Finland

#### History

The native people of Scandinavia, the Sami, may have lived in Finland as far back as 7000 BCE, when people were moving east after the Ice Age. Other settlers migrated to Finland from the Ural Mountains about 3,000 years ago.

Finland’s location directly between two of the strongest powers of the Baltic region, Sweden and Russia, made it a prize both nations wanted to win. In 1155, King Eric of Sweden invaded, and Finland became a part of the Kingdom of Sweden. In 1809, when Sweden was defeated by Russia, Finland became part of the Russian Empire.

After World War I severely weakened the Russian Empire, Finland declared its independence in 1917. However, Finns were divided into two groups about how the new country should be governed, the Whites and the Reds. The Whites wanted a return of a conservative government led by a monarch, while the Reds supported a socialist democracy. A civil war broke out between the two groups in 1918. The war only lasted a few months, but had a devastating impact, with 36,000 lives lost. While the Whites won the conflict and a King was briefly appointed, Finland moved instead to become a republic. Finland elected its first president as a new nation in 1919.

Finland fought the Soviet Union two more times during World War II, but has had peace since the war ended in 1945.



#### Geography and Climate

Finland can be divided into three geographical areas: lowlands along the southern coasts, lakes and forests in the center plateau, and arctic forests and tundra in the far north. Nearly 70% of Finland is covered in forests of pine, spruce, and birch trees. There are also more than 55,000 lakes, and many swamps, marshes, and bogs. Finland has almost 700 miles of coasts along the Gulf of Finland and the Gulf of Bothnia. These rocky, granite coasts have nearly 30,000 islands. In the southwest, Finland has an archipelago, a group of many islands clustered close together.

Finland is one of the world’s most northern countries, and almost one third of the country is located above the Arctic Circle. As a result, winter is the longest season, and it can be very cold—and dark! In the northernmost parts of the country, the sun never rises above the horizon for most of the winter months. In the summer, the opposite happens: the sun only dips below the horizon and never truly sets.

Finns have a short summer, and only get to experience this “midnight sun” for about two months.

#### People and Culture

Finland has two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. Since Finland was a part of Sweden for many hundreds of years, Swedish became the primary language, and was the official language of education, law, and government. When Finland was no longer a part of Sweden, Finnish slowly gained popularity. But it wasn’t until the *Kalevala*—a collection of Finnish folklore and mythology—was



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published in 1835 that more Finns grew interested in reviving the language. Today, although Swedish is still spoken in Finland, 93% of Finns speak Finnish.

One thing Finns are known for is their love of sauna baths. A sauna is a wooden structure (traditionally an outbuilding, but now often built as a room inside a building) that is heated by a stove. Water is splashed on hot stones to create a dry heat that Finns believe is healthy for both the mind and the body. If you get too warm, a quick roll in the snow outside will cool you off! There are over 1.5 million saunas in Finland.

Sports are also a popular pastime in Finland. Running, cycling, and cross-country skiing offer the chance to enjoy the outdoors while getting some exercise. When it comes to the sport most Finns watch, however, ice hockey wins by a long shot. Finland has won the most Olympic medals of any country in hockey. Many members of the Finnish National Hockey Team play on American teams as well—there are nearly 40 Finnish players in the National Hockey League, including Minnesota Wild team captain Mikko Koivu.

Nature is very important to Finns. Finnish music, literature, and art are often inspired by the landscape of trees and water. Though most Finns live in cities and towns, they feel a strong connection with nature and try to spend as much time as possible outdoors.

**Food**

Finland produces all of the meat, grains, and dairy products that the country needs. Because so little food needs to be imported, Finnish cuisine is known for its emphasis on fresh food that can be harvested from its own lands.

For example, Finland’s forests and marshes grow a wide variety of wild berries. Raspberries, cranberries, and strawberries are available for the picking, along with more unique berries like bilberries, lingonberries, and cloudberry. Finland’s forests are also home to many types of mushrooms, and the lakes and streams provide plenty of fresh fish, such as salmon and trout.

Finns are also fans of coffee—they drink the most coffee per person in the world! Finns drink coffee throughout the day, usually paired with *pulla*, a sweet bread flavored with cardamom. Rye bread, or *ruisleipä*, is also a popular baked good.

**Additional Resources**

**Finnish Rye Bread (*Ruisleipä*) Recipe**

<http://finnishfoodgirl.com/2013/05/finnish-rye-bread-ruisleipa>

**Easy Science for Kids: Finland and Scandinavia**

<http://easyscienceforkids.com/all-about-finland-and-scandinavia>

**Science Kids: Finland Facts for Kids**

[www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/countries/finland.html](http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/countries/finland.html)



The interior of a Finnish sauna.  
"Finnish sauna II" by Miika Silfverberg (CC BY-SA 2.0)



A bucket of freshly-picked cloudberry.  
"Cloudberry" by Ole Husby (CC BY-SA 2.0)



A loaf of *ruisleipä*, Finnish rye bread.



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