



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.

► EUROPE

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. Finland is a Scandinavian, or Nordic, country that borders Russia. Just smaller than the state of Montana, Finland covers 130,127 square miles (337,030 square kilometers). Finland is known as a land of lakes and forests. More than 187,800 lakes and other bodies of water dominate the landscape. Forests cover three-quarters of the country's surface area. Only 8 percent of the land is arable. The terrain is low and flat in the south but gives way to rolling plains and low hills in the north. A few minor mountains are found in the far north of Lapland and in Saariselkä. Finland has implemented tough environmental standards and initiatives to protect its environment.

Although Finland is located at about the same latitude as Alaska, Siberia, and southern Greenland, its climate is moderated by the warming North Atlantic current, the Baltic Sea, and Finland's lakes. Still, winters are long and cold, averaging temperatures below freezing. Summers are short and cool, averaging from 63°F to 68°F (17–20°C), but there are occasional warm spells. North of the Arctic Circle, the sun remains above the horizon day and night in the summer and below the horizon day and night in the winter. The aurora borealis lights up northern winter nights. South of the Arctic Circle, where most of the population lives, the summer day lasts 19 hours, and the nights are never completely dark. By contrast, midwinter daylight lasts only six hours, and the sun remains low on the horizon throughout the day.

History. Finnish people have lived in the area known as Finland since about 3000 B.C. Germanic peoples and other tribes, including the Tavasts, Lapps (also called Sami—pronounced “SAW-me”), and Karelians, also inhabited the area thousands of years ago. Eventually the Finno-Ugric tribe became domi-

nant. In 1155, a crusade from Sweden brought Catholicism and Swedish rule to the region. Finland remained a part of the Swedish kingdom for the next several hundred years, although Protestantism replaced Catholicism during the Reformation. Upon losing a war to Russia in 1809, Sweden ceded Finland to the conquering power.

Under Sweden's rule, Finland existed as a group of provinces, not a unified entity. After his victory, the Russian czar Alexander I fulfilled his promise to grant Finland extensive autonomy; Finland soon became a grand duchy of the Russian Empire with Alexander as its grand duke. The years spent under Alexander's command are considered one of the best periods in Finnish history. A national movement led to the switch from Swedish to Finnish as the official language in 1863, and the Finns had a semiautonomous legislature to administer local affairs. Russia's eventual resentment of this autonomy led to attempts to more fully integrate Finland into Russia in 1899. These Russification policies were resisted in Finland and eventually would have led to armed rebellion; however, the Bolshevik Revolution gripped Russia before that could happen. Finland declared its independence, which was recognized by the Bolsheviks, on 6 December 1917.

After a brief civil war, the Finns adopted a republican constitution in 1919. During World War II, Finland fought the Soviet Union twice: in the Winter War (1939–40) and then in the Continuation War (1941–44). Finland was forced to cede one-tenth of its territory (roughly the region of Karelia) to the Soviet Union but avoided Soviet occupation and preserved its independence.

The Finns signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in 1948, binding themselves to resist any attack on the Soviet

Finland

Union that involved Finnish territory. The treaty still allowed trade and good relations with the West but created a situation where the Soviet Union could influence Finnish foreign policy. In 1989, Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev officially recognized Finland's neutrality for the first time. In 1992, Russian president Boris Yeltsin and Finland's president signed a treaty voiding the 1948 agreement. The new treaty recognizes Russia's and Finland's equality, sovereignty, and positive economic relations. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Finland moved toward integration with Europe. Voters supported European Union membership in a 1994 referendum; the country officially joined in 1995.

The 1991 elections brought Finland its first nonsocialist government in years, sending the once-ruling Social Democrats into the Parliament's opposition. The new center-right coalition government took office during the global recession and suffered a loss of popularity when the economy weakened. Despite an economic rebound in 1994, fiscal concerns and other issues returned the Social Democratic Party to dominance in 1995. In April 1998, Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of joining the European Monetary Union and adopting the euro as the country's currency.

THE PEOPLE

Population. Finland has about 5.2 million people, and the population is growing at a rate of 0.14 percent annually. The majority (93 percent) of the people are Finns, although there is a significant Swedish-speaking minority (6 percent). Finland also has very small minorities of native Sami, Roma (Gypsies), Russians, and Somalis. The overall population density is only 40 people per square mile (15 per square kilometer), but most people live in southern Finland. More than 66 percent of Finns live in towns or cities. Urbanization is a relatively new trend, so most people still have roots in the countryside and their home villages.

Language. More than 93 percent of the population speaks Finnish, a Finno-Ugric language belonging to a different language family than other Scandinavian languages. It is most closely related to Estonian. Swedish is also officially recognized. While only the Sami minority speaks Sami, Finland recognizes the language (although not as an official one). English is a popular second language, especially among younger people and the educated. Those who speak Finnish as a native language must study Swedish for three years in school. Likewise, Swedish speakers learn Finnish. Finnish words often include many vowels. Changing the length of a vowel or consonant sound can also change the meaning of a word. Because it has a complex set of grammar rules, Finnish is often difficult for foreigners to learn.

Religion. Although about 89 percent of the population belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, the government has an official policy of religious neutrality. In fact, freedom of religion has been guaranteed since 1923. The Evangelical Lutheran Church still performs important functions as a state church, however, including population registration and cemetery maintenance, and it is supported by state taxes. The Finnish Orthodox Church, also supported by the state, claims the next largest following in Finland (1 percent). Several other Christian groups and other religions are active. As in many European nations, growing secularization has caused a decline in church attendance and membership. Approximately 9 percent of Finns are not affiliated with any religion.

General Attitudes. Finns maintain high ideals of loyalty and

reliability, taking promises and agreements seriously. People generally are reserved and appreciate etiquette and punctuality. They are proud of their Finnish heritage, especially since their language, culture, and national identity survived centuries of domination by other powers. Although Finland belongs to Europe, Europe is considered in some respects as a place one goes *to* as much as it is a place one is a part *of*; cultural identity is strong. Finns are especially proud of their small nation's status in the world; Finland has been a leading nation in peace conferences and initiatives. Finns are proud to have one of the cleanest environments in the world, and they stress values that maintain this. Enjoying nature (through activities such as berry picking in the forests) is an important part of their lives. Finland is also a leader in women's rights. Indeed, there is little talk of "feminism," because women expect to be involved in careers, politics, social issues, and motherhood, all as a matter of course.

Personal Appearance. Finnish dress is relatively casual. Young people follow trends, but Finns generally are not overly fashion oriented. Formal wear is popular on festive occasions. Hats are worn in winter when it is very cold. Colorful native Finnish costumes may be seen during festival times or weddings. The clothing varies from region to region but for women usually involves a layered dress (including apron) and bonnet or cap. Instead of caps, younger women wear ribbons as headbands. Men's costumes include trousers, a shirt, and a waist-length jacket or vest. They also usually wear a peaked cap, woolen cap, or felt hat. These costumes have their origins in the 18th and 19th centuries. Fabrics for the dresses and jackets are often striped, but there are hundreds of variations.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. Men and women customarily shake hands and make eye contact when greeting. Embracing when greeting is rare in Finland. Often the form of greeting is a nod of acknowledgment and a *Hei* (Hello). During introductions, Finns often use only one name: the first name in informal situations or the last name in more formal settings. Titles are reserved for formal occasions. Using first names on first meeting is now quite common, especially among the younger generation. A general greeting is *Hyvää päivää* (Good morning/afternoon), or even just *Päivää*. Another expression for "Good morning" is *Hyvää huomenta*. In recent years, both young and old have begun using the more informal *Moi* (Hi) in greeting. Finns tend to carefully consider what they say and expect others to do so as well; the ability to "make small talk" generally is not valued.

Gestures. Finns use few gestures when speaking. However, talking with one's hands in one's pockets is considered impolite. Maintaining eye contact is important during conversation. When yawns cannot be suppressed, one covers one's mouth.

Visiting. Finnish homes are private places. In a sense, one is invited into a friendship with the host when one is invited to a home. It is a meaningful gesture. Finns expect visitors to be punctual. Visitors usually take cut flowers, a bottle of wine, or chocolates as a gift to the hosts. Visits are nearly always an occasion for coffee and cakes or cookies. Guests wait until the host has taken a first sip before they drink. Most visits are informal and involve relaxing and socializing. On special occasions, guests may be invited to sit in a sauna with the hosts. Spending time in the sauna is a national pastime.

Eating. When invited to dinner, visitors sit where the hosts ask them to, and they do not begin eating until the hosts begin. Table conversation is usually light but may span a variety of

topics. Finns eat with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. Dress is conservative in restaurants. The check is presented on request and is paid at the table. While some people leave small change on the table, a 15 percent tip usually is included in the bill and is therefore not otherwise expected. However, porters, doormen, and coat checkers receive tips.

LIFESTYLE

Family. The average Finnish family has one or two children. Population growth is so low that the Finnish government is trying to increase the birthrate because the number of working people is declining compared to the number of people receiving retirement benefits. Women are offered paid maternity leave of up to 11 months, and their husbands can share a portion of that leave. In addition, families receive a small monthly allowance for each child under age 17. Day-care facilities are provided by the government free of charge. Both parents usually work outside the home. In fact, half of all Finnish wage earners are women. Women hold a substantial number of Parliament's two hundred seats, and many women hold important government and business positions. An increasing number of men expect to share household responsibilities with their wives.

Young people tend to become independent fairly early in Finland, taking advantage of government assistance such as housing and education subsidies. About half of females have moved away from their parents' home by the age of 20. Males usually leave a few years later because of military obligations. At age 17, men serve from 8 to 11 months in the military but may choose to do civil service instead.

Although many families own their own homes, many people also rent. Traditionally, houses were made of Finland's plentiful wood; many dwellings are now made of brick. Today, most Finns live in apartments and row houses. Taxes are high and housing is expensive. Most families have access to summer cottages for vacations.

Dating and Marriage. Dating begins at about age 15, first in groups, then in couples. Movies and dances are popular activities. The marriage rate has dropped substantially since World War II. Many young couples choose to live together before or instead of marrying. This is called an "open marriage." Couples may live for years this way, sometimes waiting to marry until they have children or jointly purchase property. When two people marry, they both have the right to keep their original surname or to take that of their spouse. Their children may bear either surname. Finnish couples tend to marry in their late twenties.

Divorce ends more than 50 percent of marriages in Finland. The divorce rate has increased dramatically since the 1950s as people have adopted increasingly secular views of personal relationships. The welfare system also supports the trend, as parents can depend on the state rather than a spouse to help relieve the financial burdens of childrearing.

Diet. Finnish cuisine has been influenced by many cultures, from French to Russian, but it includes a wide variety of Finnish specialties using seafood, wild game, and vegetables. Reindeer steak is a traditional specialty, as is salmon. Wild berries (blueberries, cloudberries, strawberries, currants, and raspberries) are popular in desserts and liqueurs. Potatoes, cheeses, and a Finnish buffet (such as the *smörgåsbord*) are also popular. Rye bread is common, and open-faced sandwiches are eaten at breakfast and for snacks. Milk and coffee are the most common beverages for everyday drinking. Usually served

with coffee is *pulla*, a sweet bread that comes in many forms, often flavored with cardamom. Finland has many pastries. *Makkara* (sausage) is roasted over a fire and eaten with *sinappi* (mustard). Traditional Christmas foods include salmon, ham, herring, and various casseroles.

Recreation. Finns traditionally relate to the outdoors, and many of their favorite activities revolve around it, from picking wild berries and mushrooms to fishing, hiking, and boating. Favorite sports include skiing, track-and-field, basketball, *pesäpallo* (Finnish baseball), ice hockey, cycling, and boating. Golf is gaining popularity; some even play on the ice in the winter. The sauna is a traditional way for people of all ages to relax. During retreats to summer cottages, people like to run from their hot saunas for a swim in the cold, clear lakes nearby. Men and women usually use the sauna separately, but in families, both sexes may use it at the same time. Business meetings will sometimes end in a sauna. *Sauna* is a Finnish word that has been adopted by English and other languages. Finns love attending sporting events or watching them on television. Many enjoy watching car races. Tinkering with computers is a popular hobby, especially among boys.

The Arts. The performing arts are widely appreciated in Finland. Because the government subsidizes the theater, ticket prices are low, so many people can attend. Opera is popular, and many Finns also enjoy folk music. The national instrument of Finland is the *kantele*, a stringed instrument played with the fingers.

The *Kalevala*, Finland's national epic, is a compilation of folk songs and stories. Sculpture, often abstract, is a prominent art form. Modern Finnish architecture is considered innovative. Finnish textiles, glass, and porcelain have also gained worldwide recognition.

Holidays. The most important holidays include New Year's Day, Easter (two days), *Vappu* (1 May), Whitsunday (Pentecost), Midsummer (held on the Friday nearest 21 June, the summer solstice), Independence Day (6 Dec.), and Christmas (24–26 Dec.). The Finland Festivals (16 of them) are held around the country between June and September and include art, music, dance, opera, and theater.

At Easter, families decorate Easter eggs and grow grass on plates in their homes. On Palm Sunday (a week before Easter), children dress up as Easter witches and recite charms door to door; they receive sweets or money for their verses. *Vappu* is celebrated in honor of both springtime and laborers. Whether or not the weather is warm and spring-like, many students gather to party and picnic, dressed in overalls and their matriculation caps. The overalls are colored according to the student's field of study.

Finns celebrate Midsummer with huge bonfires by the lake; people usually leave cities and towns to go to the countryside for the day. The blue and white Finnish flag is also prominent on this holiday. Christmas is a time of peace, family, and gifts. Families eat the main meal on Christmas Eve after visiting local cemeteries and placing candles on the graves of soldiers and family members. Later, Father Christmas (who looks like Santa Claus) arrives with gifts for the children. Rural families also enjoy time in the sauna on Christmas Eve. Christmas Day and 26 December are days for visiting and relaxing.

Commerce. Stores are usually open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday through Friday, and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Some shops and department stores are open until 9 p.m. on weekdays and 6 p.m. on Saturdays. Shops in Helsinki's subway stay open even later. Banks are open on weekdays until

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4:15 p.m. They do not open on weekends. The Finnish work-week averages 37.5 hours.

SOCIETY

Government. The republic's constitution provides for a directly elected president (currently Tarja Halonen) who serves as head of state for a six-year term. However, recently approved constitutional reforms limit presidential power in favor of a stronger Parliament. Members of Finland's unicameral Parliament (*Eduskunta*) and the prime minister (currently Matti Vanhanen) serve four-year terms. The prime minister and the *Valtioneuvosto* (cabinet) are chosen by the president, but the selections must be approved by the *Eduskunta*. The voting age is 18.

Economy. Finland has a large free-market economy that is highly industrialized. A skilled and well-educated workforce has contributed to Finland's global competitiveness, with the country's per capita output equaling that of large European economies. Natural resources include timber, silver, iron ore, and copper. Manufacturing and trade are essential; exports represent more than 30 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Timber and timber-related products are the most important exports, followed by shipbuilding, chemicals, and textiles. The country relies heavily on imports for many raw materials, energy, and other important goods. In grains, dairy products, and some meats, the country is self-sufficient. High-technology industries such as communications are quickly becoming mainstays. Mobile phone-maker Nokia is responsible for about a quarter of exports.

Finns enjoy a high standard of living. Most people have access to economic prosperity in spite of a high cost of living. The economy recovered from a severe recession in the early 1990s that was caused by depressed foreign markets and weakened trade with Russia. Inflation is low. Integration and trade with western Europe will continue to impact the economy's future. In 2002, the euro replaced the *markka*, or *Finmark* (FIM), as Finland's national currency.

Transportation and Communications. Most Finnish families own at least one car. Overall, the roads are in good condition. Public transports such as railways, buses, a good domestic air service, taxis, and ferries (for lake, river, and ocean crossings) are excellent. Ferries cross regularly to Stockholm, Sweden, and other locations. Helsinki has a subway.

Finland's modern communications network includes numerous television and radio stations, an efficient phone system, and more than 250 newspapers. Roughly 80 percent of the population owns a mobile phone; users are asked to turn them off in places like cinemas and theaters. Most Finns are well acquainted with the internet and e-mail; the country has a large number of web servers.

Education. Education is a major priority for the Finnish government. Beginning at age seven, children are required to attend a free comprehensive school for at least nine years, after which they may attend a vocational school or complete three years of senior secondary school. Finland has a high rate of enrollment in secondary schools. Many students go on to further studies at one of Finland's several university-level institutions. The Åbo Academy in Turku was founded in 1640, but

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	14 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	10 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$24,430
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 99 (female)
Infant mortality rate	4 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	74 (male); 81 (female)

the University of Helsinki is the national university. Not only do university students not pay tuition, they receive a generous *opintotuki* (stipend) for up to four years and can qualify for further financial aid for housing. Finns like to read, and public libraries are well used.

Health. Finland takes great pride in its health programs. Health care is socialized, reliable, and modern. It is funded by national and local taxes. Citizens receive basic health care from municipal health centers for a minimal fee, but they can also pay to visit a private doctor if they choose. Public and private hospitals provide specialized care. Finland has one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. This is due in part to an extensive network of maternity clinics. Finland has high rates of alcoholism and suicide. Most festivities and celebrations are accompanied by liberal alcohol use.

AT A GLANCE

Events and Trends.

- In March 2003, Finland became the first European country to be led by a female prime minister and president. Anneli Jäätteenmäki's became the country's first female prime minister just two years after Tarja Halonen was elected as Finland's first female president. However, Jäätteenmäki was forced to resign two months after taking office as a scandal erupted about her alleged use of secret documents during the elections. In December 2003, charges were filed and an investigation into the allegations began.
- In 2003, Finland beat out countries such as the United States, Sweden and Taiwan to be ranked the most competitive economy in the world.
- Sauna use was one of the reasons for record-high electricity consumption in 2003. Finns retreated more frequently to their saunas to escape one of the coldest winters in decades; temperatures dropped below -40°F (-40°C) in the north-east.
- In 2002, the Finnish government approved plans to build a fifth nuclear reactor to help meet the country's growing energy needs. Although Finland relies on Russia for 70 percent of its energy, the decision is controversial; the Green Party left the government coalition over the decision, and several EU countries have voiced disapproval.

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