



# Welcome to Finland!

*As an exchange student, you are about to discover the fascinating and beautiful country of Finland. The nation encompasses such varieties of climates, nature, and ethnic groups; your exchange experience will look different from one day to another. You have a wonderful time ahead of you.*

*Regardless of where your host family lives, you will have the opportunity to discover the country's interesting history both in class and through your own explorations. You will gain a true understanding of what it means to be Finnish through your relationships with your host family and new friends, found at school and in the community. Prepare for an exchange experience filled with emotions, events, friendships, and high school life. Welcome to Finland!*

## **Expectations meet reality**

### **– get to know your host country!**

Many of your opinions about Finland and Finns may be based on stereotypes or preconceptions. Soon you will be experiencing the reality behind those ideas, and it may be vastly different from what you were expecting. The key to success is to keep an open mind and begin preparing for your exchange experience now while you are awaiting placement and departure.

**1. Finnish sisu.** Finns have a word to describe themselves called “sisu,” which roughly translates to a combination of courage, strength, and determination. Sisu is a vital part of the Finnish self-image and maybe their most known characteristic. They considered themselves as hard-working people with a fighting spirit.

**2. Sauna.** Saunas are a vital part of the Finnish culture. This hot room, heated with woods in an oven covered with stones, relaxes and relieves tension. You find more than three million saunas in Finland, an average of one per household. The sauna is a place for relaxation, often in groups. This procedure might feel unusual in the beginning, but you will soon learn to appreciate it, if not, to love it.

**3. Socialising and connecting.** Coming to Finland can be an emotional roller coaster. In Finland, you might have to put an extra level to your socialising efforts. Finnish teenagers can be quite withdrawn and do not talk to people they do not know. When attending your Finnish high school, you are doing the right thing in showing initiatives and starting talking to your fellow classmates. Even though they can appear quite reserved at a beginning, Finns make great friends as soon as you get to know them.

## **Schools in Finland**

The high school system in Finland differs from the rest of the Nordic school systems. In Finland, students choose the pace of their studies. This meaning they can finish high school already in two years, or in four years if they feel like they need more time. The school system in Finland places a lot of responsibility in the hands of the students. As an exchange student, you will have a lot of freedom and independence while having a relaxed relationship with your teachers. With this freedom, comes a lot of responsibility for the students to finish their work on time without strict supervision.

Typically the school day begins no earlier than 8 p.m. and finishes no later than 4 p.m. There are no requirements for school uniforms, with students wearing whatever they feel comfortable in.

In Finland, students are encouraged to combine academic achievements with a variety of activities and sports. The most common advice from our previous exchange students might be to get involved in activities as soon as you arrive. Finnish schools, however, do not always offer a wide range of after-school activities. In this case, you can join clubs around town.



## Free time activities

The free time activities in Finland vary depending on where in the country you live. Up north, we recommend you to take part in a wide range of outdoor activities, such as skiing and hiking. Orienteering and fishing are popular outdoor activities, throughout whole Finland. Besides being a country with a long coastline, Finland, known as the “country of thousand lakes”, offers plenty of beautiful lakes where you can enjoy a picknick or go for a run.

Due to the weather conditions, there are many indoor activities offered in Finland. This can be sports such as dancing, football, floorball and ice-hockey. You can sign up for theatre or singing classes or basically anything you are interested in!

Besides immersing in different sports and activities, Finnish teenagers often spend time at cafés after school, catching up, or studying together. They also like to spend a lot of time outdoors together, even during the cold winter months. Make sure to bring warm clothes suitable for all weather conditions.

## Staying with a Finnish host family

As a member of a host family, you will experience what it means to live like a Finn. Whether you are catching up with your host parents over dinner or watching series with your host siblings, you will enjoy a daily life filled with laughter and love.

Every family has their own unwritten rules for daily routines. We ask prospective host families about these routines before your arrival so that they understand that it is crucial for them to highlight and go through them with you. It is your responsibility to adapt to the family’s lifestyle and follow the rules of your host family – just like you do at home. You will be expected to keep your room tidy, as well as pick up after yourself around the house. Your host family’s lifestyle may be very different from what you are used to in your home country, and you have a lot to win on being open-minded, join their activities, and try new things. It is always a good idea to let your host parents in on your plans. If you know you will be going to the movies on Friday, tell them so they too can plan their time. If you would like to have a friend coming over, you should

ask first. At the beginning of your exchange, there might arise confusions and misunderstandings between you and your family. This is totally normal. The more you communicate and get to know each other, the more frictionless your life together will be. Finnish families are very loving, and many of our families have been hosting students several times before. They will soon see you as a part of their family.

As a member of the family, spending money is intended to cover personal needs such as toiletries and occasional treats like eating out, movies, shopping, and other activities. Host families are not expected to supply you with personal items. If you are going to make long-distance calls, we recommend you to connect to Wi-Fi and call through apps such as FaceTime or WhatsApp.

Your host family will take care of your meals while you are home, but feel free to take initiatives and prepare food from your home country every now and then. Your host family are as curious about your culture, as you are on theirs.

## Language

Spending your high school exchange in Finland is obviously a great way to learn how to speak Finnish. You have probably already begun to study a bit of Finnish, and we highly recommend you to keep studying before your exchange starts. This for you to be able to understand the basics and to adapt to the society as quickly as possible. You should always try to speak Finnish during your time in Finland. You may be uncomfortable with your skills in the beginning, but you will quickly notice how you become more and more fluent for each day. Your language abilities will improve through your mistakes, and people may correct them in a positive way. Everyone will appreciate your willingness and desire to improve. Before you know it, you will be able to have smooth conversations in the language.

Approximately 5 % of the Finnish population speak Swedish, so there is a chance that you improve your Swedish skills a bit as well during your high school exchange. This, especially, if your host family is bilingual, and if you study the language in school.

