



Finland

cultural note

scandinavians appreciate a foreigner's recognition of the differences among the countries of their region. Remember that the Finnish language is classified as a Finno-Ugric language, and thus is unrelated to the languages spoken by the Danes, the Norwegians, and the Swedes (which are all IndoEuropean languages, like English).

Country Background

History / Date of Origin

The Finnish people have maintained their separate cultural identity despite centuries of rule by foreigners. Sweden ruled the country for almost 500 years. By the eighteenth century, Sweden's military decline had led Finns to doubt whether Sweden could protect them. In 1808, a war between Sweden and Russia resulted in Sweden's defeat. Finland was ceded to Russia, an action most Finns did not object to, since the Russian czar, Alexander 1, promised to respect the laws and institutions of Finland. But, like Poland, the Grand Duchy of Finland was eventually subjugated. Russian governors stamped out emerging Finnish nationalism, and by the time of the First World War, many Finns were ready for armed rebellion against Russia.

Finland declared independence from Russia in 1917, but independence was marred by a civil war between Finnish socialists (Reds) and conservatives (Whites).

The interwar years saw Finland subjected to increased pressure from Russia. By 1939, the then-Soviet Union was demanding territorial concessions from Finland. When the Finns refused, Soviet troops invaded on November 30, 1939.

Finland put up an unexpectedly strong resistance in the Winter War, and much of the world cheered as tiny Finland battled the Soviet Goliath. While Finland could not defeat the Soviets, its stubbornness—plus the world's disapproval—made the U.S.S.R. settle for dismembering Finland rather than absorbing it, which was the fate of nearby Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Finland lost much land and 12 percent of its population, but remained independent.

Finland then turned to Nazi Germany for protection, and allowed German troops to be stationed in country. When Germany and the U.S.S.R. went to war against each other in 1941, Finland found itself drawn into the war on the Nazi side. However, the Finnish government remained in control, and the Nazis were not allowed to take action against the Finnish Jews.

At the end of World War II, Finland once again lost territory to the U.S.S.R. However, it was not occupied by the Red Army and did not become a member of the Warsaw Pact. Instead, Finland chose to remain neutral in the cold war, maintaining cordial relations with both the West and the Soviet Union.

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the Finnish economy was once based on lumber, Finland's principal resource, but has since diversified and is now highly industrial. Exports account for one-fourth of the GDP of Finland, with the United States as one of the main markets. The United States also ranks sixth among exporters to Finland. Finland's social welfare system, which includes health and child care allowances, is highly developed.

Type of Government

Finland is a constitutional republic. In the executive branch, the president is the head of state and shares power with the prime minister, who is chief of government. The president is elected and serves for six years. The prime minister and other members of the cabinet, or Council of State, are appointed by the president. They are not necessarily affiliated with a certain party. The legislative branch is made up of a unicameral 200-seat body called the *Eduskunta*. There have been many coalition governments in this century; rarely does a single party have a majority.

Women are very much accepted in high levels of government and business. In 1906, Finland was the first European country that granted women the right to vote, and now forty percent of the seats in parliament are occupied by women. Finland also boasts Europe's only female defense minister.

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Finland was a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) but not the European (EC) [now the European Union (EU)]. It was thought that membership in the EU would compromise Finnish neutrality. With the end of the cold war, Finland is now debating whether or not to become a member of the EU.

Language

Finland has two official languages: Finnish and Swedish.

English is the principal foreign language studied, and many Finns are multilingual. Business can be conducted in English. Older Finns usually speak German.

Religion

The principal religion of Finland is Lutheranism; 89 percent of the people belong to this group. Although freedom of religion has been in effect since 1923, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is still supported by state taxes.

Demographics

The population of Finland is almost 5 million. Helsinki, the capital, has about 485,000 people in its metropolitan area.

Cultural Orientation

Cognitive Styles: How Finns Organize and Process Information

In Finland, people feel that they have obtained what they need, and therefore they do not seek or accept information or help from others. Finnish higher education is becoming

more conceptual, and information is being processed from an analytical perspective rather than a subjective, associative one. Finns follow universalistic laws and rules of behavior rather than considering each situation as a unique problem.

Negotiation Strategies: What Finns Accept as Evidence

Faith in the ideology of social welfare is the basis for Finns' search for truth. They tend to use objective facts rather than subjective feelings in making their case.

Value Systems: The Basis for Behavior

Finland is a social welfare state with strong humanitarian and environmental concerns. The following three sections identify the Value Systems in the predominant culture—their methods of dividing right from wrong, good from evil, and so forth.

Locus of Decision Making

The individual is given the responsibility for decision making within the boundaries of the social welfare ideology. One has the dual obligation of developing a strong self-orientation and at the same time helping those who are not able to help themselves. One's ability is more important than one's station in life. Finns cherish their right to a private life and personal opinions.

Sources of Anxiety Reduction

The social welfare state and a strong nuclear family give Finns stability and security. This reduces life's uncertainties and the anxiety that comes with them. Finns are highly nationalistic, with a liberal philosophy of tolerance for dissent and deviation. However, anxieties develop between the need to have a strong self-image and being a member of a social welfare state.

Issues of Equality / Inequality

Finland has an egalitarian society in which those at all power levels have an inherent trust in people. The population is homogeneous, which minimizes ethnic strife. Finland is basically a middle-class society where the government helps with family needs. The minimizing of social differences also minimize the evidence of poverty and wealth. In this society husbands and wives share the responsibilities of child care.

Business Practices

Appointments



punctuality

- Always be punctual for business appointments.
- Punctuality is also expected at social occasions.
- Remember that many Europeans and South Americans write the day first, then the month, then the year (e.g., December 3, 1999, is written 3.12.99). This is the case in Finland.
- Make appointments several weeks in advance.
- The workweek is 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., Monday through Friday. During the winter (September to May), some businesses operate from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

- Government offices operate from 8:00 A.M. to 4:15 P.M. in the winter, and from 8:00 A.M. to 3:15 P.M. in the summer.
- Stores are open until 4:00 or 5:00 P.M., Monday through Friday. On Saturday they close somewhere between 1:00 and 3:00 P.M.
- Many businesses close the afternoon before a holiday.
- Finns take four or five weeks of vacation per year.
- Avoid business travel to Finland in July, August, and early September, when most people will be away on vacation.



Negotiating

- You will find a mix of British English and American English spoken. Titles are British style, so the CEO is known as the managing director and the corporate vice president as deputy. Try to do your negotiating with the managing director, who will be the decision maker.
- The Finns often begin business right away, without small talk.
- Avoid any attitude of superiority.
- Finns can be very quiet. Do not be put off by long silences.
- Business cards are important in Finland. They may be presented as an introduction or during the course of the meeting.
- Look people directly in the eye when conversing.
- Finns tend to be fairly quiet and unemotional in public.
- The Finns enjoy discussing politics; there are many political views in this country with its multiparty system, so keep this in mind.
- Good topics of discussion are hobbies, travel, sports, and politics.
- Personal questions should be avoided.
- The Finns appreciate nature and are concerned about the environment.



Business Entertaining

- For casual lunches, milk and coffee are the usual beverages. Finns love coffee, and cafes are everywhere.
- Finns tend to appreciate a knowledge of good wines.
- You may be taken out for dinner by a business associate. Spouses are generally invited to dinners.

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you may be invited to take a sauna with your host. Indeed, the consummation of a business deal is often celebrated with an expansive meal followed by a sauna.

- The sauna is a quasi-religious experience to Finns; treat an invitation to a sauna as a great honor.
- Saunas are usually segregated by sex. Where only one sauna is available, the women use it first.
- Finns are usually nude in a sauna, except when they intend to go swimming in a public place immediately afterwards (for that they wear a bathing suit). However, they will not mind if you prefer to wear a swimsuit or a towel in a sauna.

- Saunas are usually followed by a snack of bread, sausage, and fish. Expect the fish to be salty; it is intended to replace body salt lost in the heat of the sauna.
- Always write a thank-you note the next day to your host.
- It is not appropriate to be "fashionably late" to a meal.
- When invited to a Finnish home for dinner, take flowers for the hostess.
- The Scandinavians are known to be heavy drinkers at mealtime so, if you drink, pace yourself. Drunk driving laws are very strict in Finland.
- A toast is usually proposed at the beginning of a meal.
- The fork is held in the left hand, and the knife remains in the right.
- The cold table (buffet) is known as *voileipapoyta*.

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an evening's entertainment often ends in dancing. Surprisingly, the most popular dance among the somber, quiet Finns is the tango!

Time

- Finnish time is two hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T. + 2) or seven hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time (E.S.T. + 7).

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when using a Finnish telephone book, remember that names beginning with those uniquely Scandinavian letters (they look like "a" and "o" but with diacritical marks) are alphabetized at the end of the book.

Protocol



Greetings

- A firm handshake is the standard greeting for men and women. Even children are encouraged to shake hands.
- When greeting a group, it is proper to shake hands with the women first.
- For introductions, people use both names, or a title and last name.
- Only close friends and family greet with hugs or kisses.



Titles / Forms of Address

- The order of Finnish names is the same as in the United States: first name followed by last name.

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when pronouncing Finnish names or words, pronounce double letters twice as slowly as single ones (e.g., "aa" is twice as long as "a"). The stress always falls on the first vowel in a word.

- Do not use first names unless you are invited to do so.

- Executives prefer to be addressed by their titles followed by their surnames. (This is especially important when writing.)
- Anyone without a title should be addressed as Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms. plus surname.



Gestures

- It is not appropriate to fold one's arms; this signifies arrogance.
- A toss of the head is a motion for "come here."
- Finns are not comfortable with physical contact such as backslapping.
- It is not polite to talk with one's hands in one's pockets.
- Sitting with the ankle resting on the knee is too casual.
- A warm smile is appreciated.
- A man should remove his hat when speaking with another person or when entering a building.



Gifts

- A bottle of wine is a good token of appreciation when you go to a Finnish home (along with the flowers for the hostess).
- Business gifts should not be too extravagant or too skimpy, and should not be given at a first meeting.
- A personalized gift, such as a book on a topic of interest to your client, is appreciated.
- Fiskars scissors (with the orange handles) are the most commonly imitated Finnish product. Avoid giving any type of gift that may compete with them.



Dress

- Although Finns are very stylish, business clothing remains fairly conservative.
- Finnish men wear suits constantly, both to business and to social events. You may remove your suit jacket in the summer if you see Finns doing likewise.
- Men may need a tuxedo for formal engagements.
- Businesswomen should wear a dress or suit. Bring a cocktail dress for social functions.
- In winter, women usually wear snow boots to work, then change into shoes once they get inside.