Finland Essay, Research Paper

Finland

Finland has a common border with Sweden, Norway and Russia. The bedrock of Finland is over 1,5 billion years old, making it some of the oldest in the world. Three quarters of the area of Finland lies on granite, which breaks through the surface so often that the granite has become the symbol for the whole country. The total area of Finland is about 338 square km, and it is the fifth largest country in Europe. 306 square km of Finland is land and 32 square km is water. Finland lies between the 60th and 70th parallels, with a third of its area lying north of the Arctic Circle. It is the second most northern country in the world after Iceland. Most of the population of Finland live in the southern third of the country, either along the coast on the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland or around the edges of the numerous lakes. The highest point in Finland is Haltitunturi Fell in Northwest Lapland, which is 1.328 metres above the sea level. It is the Country of 187888 Lakes. The largest of which, Great Saimaa, has a total area of 4.4 square km and is the fourth largest in Europe. Finnish Lapland, with an area of 100 square km has the largest wilderness areas in the whole of Europe. Finland is rightly known as a land of forests as they cover roughly three quarters of the country’s surface area. Because Finland is sparsely populated area, there is lot of wild and unpolluted nature. Finland contains some of the last wilderness areas in Europe. In addition to the huge amount of lakes, Finland contains more islands than any other country in the world. In a recent count, the total number of islands in Finland was 179584. Forty-five percent are in the Baltic Sea, making the archipelago one of the densest in the world. The principal archipelago lies off the southwest coast.

Finland has four clearly distinguishable seasons, much alike Canada?s. One should not be misled by the northern position of Finland. Due to the closeness of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf Stream, but having a relatively dry climate, Finland often feels warmer than the actual temperature might suggest. The climate is marked by cold winters and warm summers. The summer lasts for 3 months, from June to August. On a warm day the temperature can be 25-30? C. The average summer temperature is 18? C. The first snowfall is usually in December and the heaviest snowfall occurs in March. The lakes and rivers may be frozen for nearly half a year. In the summer months, north of the Arctic circle, Lapland basks in 24 hours of daylight (known as the midnight sun, or white nights of summer), which lasts for about 73 days, while in winter a blue-tinged darkness falls, with the sun sinking below the horizon for 51 days. This sunless period is called “kaamos”, the Arctic night. At that time in Rovaniemi, the sun rises above the horizon for just a couple of hours. Although the sun is out of sight for weeks, Lapland does not fall into total darkness even in the deepest depths of winter. The snow on the ground enhances the light of the moon and the stars, and sometimes the or northern lights flicker across the sky. The frosts can be very severe in the heart of winter, but periods of extreme cold are usually brief, and for most of the winter all kinds of outdoor activities are possible. In the northernmost parts of Lapland, snow may still lie thick on the ground in late April or early May.

The population of Finland is approximately 5,132,000, and one of the most sparsely populated countries in Europe, with 16 inhabitants per square km. Population density is 16 people per square kilometer. The urban population is 62%, while about 38% remain in a rural environment. Although cities are never located far from a forest. Helsinki has a population of 525,031. The Helsinki metropolitan region is home to roughly a sixth of the country’s total population. Finland’s population has adapted to life under peripheral conditions in the north. Finns make up 35% of the world’s population north of latitude 60?N. In 1995 the average life expectancy for females was 80 years and for males 72 years. In 1995 there were 1.4 million families in Finland. Among families with children the average number of offspring was 1.8. Finland’s population figures increase very slowly. The contribution of natural population growth to the increase is falling and net migration is the strongest effect on population growth. Finland, formerly a source of emigrants, is now becoming a destination for immigrants. The birth rate and natural population growth is higher in the north of Finland than it is in the south.

There are many language groups in Finland: the Finnish, the Finland Swedish (from the coastal area and the Aland islands), the Sami (spoken by the Samis of Lapland, a minority of 2,000 people with guaranteed rights to their own language and sources of livelihood) and the Romany. There are two official languages – Finnish and Swedish. 93.5% of the total population is Finnish speaking, 5.9% is Swedish speaking and 0.6% speak other languages. A very interesting aspect of the Finnish tongue is that everything is spelt just as it sounds. For example, photo in English is pronounced the same way in Finn, but is spelt foto. The Finnish language is a member of the Finno-Ugric linguistic family that includes, in one branch, Finnish, Estonian and a number of other Finnic tongues and, in the other, Hungarian, by far the biggest language of the Ugric group. The official standing of Swedish has historical roots in the period when Finland was part of the Swedish realm, a status that began at the beginning of the 13th century and lasted until 1809. The number of foreign citizens living permanently in Finland was about 69,000 in 1995, the biggest groups coming from the neighboring countries, Russia, Estonia and Sweden.

Finland first became an independent republic on Dec. 6, 1917. In 1918 a civil war broke out where the Reds fought against the Whites. The fierce civil war ended soon with the victory of the Whites and Finland became a Democratic Republic. The highest authority in Finland is the 200-member Parliament elected every four years. The Government and the President are the chief executives. The head of state is the President of the Republic who is elected for a period of six years at a time and may serve a maximum of only two consecutive terms. The present President is Martti Ahtisaari, who was elected in February 1994, and whose term in office lasts until the year 2000. The President is chosen by direct popular vote, with a run-off between the two leading candidates if no candidate wins an outright majority on the first ballot. The biggest parties are the Social Democrats, the Coalition Party and the Centre Party. As a result of a referendum Finland is a member of the European Community as of 1995. The semi-autonomous province of the Aland Islands occupies a special position because it has been declared a demilitarized area under international law. Finland was the second country in the world to grant women the right to vote and was one of the first countries to introduce the eight-hour working day. As elsewhere in Scandinavia, there is a highly developed social welfare system, like free medical care and education.

Finnish economy is on its way to recovery after the depression in the early 1990s. Unemployment is the most serious problem burdening the Finnish economy. As of January 31, 1997, the unemployment rate in Finland was 17.8%. Finland has embarked on the road to industrialization by harnessing its forest resources. Today, forests are still Finland’s most crucial raw material resource, although the metal and engineering industry has long been Finland’s leading branch of manufacturing both in terms of value added and as an employer. Today, Finland is a typical advanced industrial economy with two thirds of its total output is generated in the service sector. The net wealth of Finnish households is close to the average for the European Union. In 1994 Finland’s annual household income was $18,845 US while the average for other European Union countries was $19,529 US. More than ninety per cent of industrial establishments are in private Finnish ownership. The services employ 57% of the labour force, industry and construction 33%, and agriculture and forestry 10%. Finland’s most important trading partners are Germany, Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States. Finland used to be known as a high cost area, but the changes in economy has lowered costs. Prices for industrial electric energy are now among the lowest in Europe, and long distance calls within Finland are the third cheapest in Europe. The changes in currency rates have made Finland an attractive choice for travelers. Infrastructure (telecommunications, power supply, water supply, roads) are highly developed. The number of mobile phones per population is among highest in Europe. Finland is safe country to live or invest, thanks to stable social order, low rate of crimes and good relations to east

and west. Finland’s economy is modern and developed, based on free competition on markets.

Finnish banks are in a difficult situation because of the large number of credit losses resulting from the depression. The state has had to support the banks with tens of billions of markkas. The state economy is showing a large deficit and the state gets deeper and deeper in debt. Economy measures have been taken to reduce the state expenses. Joining the European Community has been considered to bring about a rapid development of economy, but the transition period will be very difficult for the countryside.

The currency in Finland is the markka, or Finnish mark (FIM) which is dividable into 100 pennies. There are 1000 mk, 500 mk, 100 mk, 50 mk and 20 mk notes and 10 mk, 5 mk, 1 mk, 50 p. and 10 p. coins. As of May 2nd, 1998 there were dollar equals 5.1 FIM. Currency can be changed in banks or in private currency exchange points.

Finnish sauna traditions go back over 2000 years and nowadays there are about 2 million saunas in the country. For a Finn it means an elementary part of everyday life. Ever since childhood, Finnish people learn to bathe in sauna, usually at least once a week. The Sauna is a significant part of the Finnish heritage. A traditional Finnish sauna is a wooden room, which is heated to 75-100? C. A Finnish sauna is like this : The basic parts are the stove (”kiuas”), filled with fist-sized stones, and the benches or platforms (”lauteet”), made of wood. There are usually two benches, one of which is higher and the other one lower, placed to rest your feet on. The stove is traditionally fueled by wood, but electrically heated saunas are common due to their safe, easy and clean use. The average sauna has room for 3-6 people at a time. The air is not particularly humid, there is no steam. and when you feel like it, you throw some water on the stones to increase humidity. This causes the water to vaporize very quickly, and it makes the bathers feel a momentary breath of hot air in their backs. Anyone who has any amount of Fin in their blood can complain about “fake saunas”. So-called ?saunas that are heated just by a wood stove. Those are heated rooms, and any attempt of passing them off as a sauna will result in utter contempt by the Finnish society. People do not wear any clothes in sauna. There is also a separate washing and a dressing room. There are tens of thousands of saunas in Finland that are located at lakesides. In this case you can also go swimming in the lake and cool off on the porch. Some Finns jump naked into the snow and roll around in winter time. During the Depression, especially through the winter, Finnish settlers in Thunder Bay took in other Finns who couldn?t afford their own places to stay. These men would stay in the sauna and do odd jobs around the house or farms. Women used to give birth in saunas a long time ago, but not any more.

There has been complete freedom of worship in Finland since 1923. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the country’s biggest denomination – 88% of the people are baptized as Lutherans while just under 1% belong to the Finnish Orthodox Church. Both denominations are designated as state churches. Although Christianity had probably reached Finland before the end of the first millennium, it was not until the 12th century that the Roman Catholic Church became established.

Finland is committed to the values of freedom, democracy and human rights. Since the second World War it is not a member of any military alliance and therefore maintains an independent defense capability. But Finland has also signed a Partnership for Peace agreement with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and has observer status in the Western European Union (the initial defense arm of the European Union) and in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. Cooperation within the Nordic Council covers a wide range of social, cultural and technical matters of interest to its five members: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. After a lengthy period of involvement in the process of European integration Finland applied to join the European Economic Community in 1992 and on January 1st 1995 became a member of the European Union. Since becoming a member of the United Nations in 1955 Finland has taken part in many of the world organization?s peacekeeping operations. There is no passport requirement for citizens of the five Nordic countries traveling within Scandinavia.

Finland has 56 newspapers that are published 4 to 7 times a week and 172 with 1 to 3 issues per week. The total circulation of all newspapers is 3.6 million. In terms of total circulation relative to population Finland ranks second in Europe and third in the world, after Norway and Japan. Most newspapers are bought on subscription rather than from newsstands. There are 2,585 registered periodicals with a total circulation of approximately 17.4 million. There is also The Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE, which is the biggest national radio and television service provider. YLE is a non-commercial public service broadcaster. It operates two television channels with full national coverage. The second biggest television broadcaster, the privately owned Commercial MTV3, has one nationwide channel. There are also some thirty local TV stations, that mainly relay foreign and domestic programs over cable and radio waves in addition to locally produced material.

In Finland, compulsory school attendance requires the completion of an education which starts at the age of 7 and continues for 10 years or until the pupil has finished school. All children must attend between the ages of 7 and 16. Education beyond the age of 16 is voluntary, taking the form of either a three-year course in upper secondary school or a 2 to 5 year course at a vocational school. There are 20 universities or other institutes of higher education, with a total student population of 130,865, of whom 52% are women. Compulsory education also applies to handicapped children. For children who are unable to study at a normal comprehensive school, compulsory education begins at the age of 6 and lasts for 11 years. Handicapped children receive special teaching, or attend special classes or special schools, depending on the nature of their disability. The entire age group completes compulsory education, only 0.04% fail to receive a graduating certificate.

Comprehensive school education lasts for 9 years. It is divided into a six-year lower stage, identical internationally to primary education, and a three-year upper stage, similar to lower secondary education. After their comprehensive school pupils have the option to take an extra tenth grade to improve their chances for further education. All comprehensive school graduates are equally eligible for further studies. Teachers must hold a master’s degree from a university. The class teachers, who teach most of the subjects at the lower stage, takes a degree in education. The subject teachers must have a degree in their special subject and their degree course must have included teacher training.