Finland Essay, Research Paper

Finland by :

Chris Stott World Geography

Your assignment: Pick one country in Eastern Europe. Give a brief history of the country before and after the break up of the Soviet Union. As you explore your country, consider the following:

What were the major political and economic forces at work when the Soviet Union wielded power in the region, and how have those forces played out over the last 10 years?

I have chosen to write about Finland for my trip. As you can see Finland is located at the far north of this map and it shares boarders with Russia, Sweden and Norway. Finland’s traces of human settlement date back to the thaw of the last Ice Age some 10,000 years ago. The Finns’ ancestors seem to have dominated half of northern Russia before arriving on the north of the Baltic coast well before the Christian era. By the end of the Viking Age, Swedish traders and chieftains had extended their interests throughout the Baltic region. Over the centuries, Finland has sat precariously between the Protestant Swedish empire and Eastern Orthodox Russia. For seven centuries, from the 12th century until 1809, it was part of Sweden.

Finland was blighted by constant battles with Russia, and severe famines. From 1696-97, famine killed a third of all Finns.

What are the ethnic, religious and cultural issues in that country, and how have they changed or been effected over time?

Tove Jansson, the author of the Moominland stories, probably has the highest international profile among contemporary Finns, although you cannot escape the design work of Alvar Aalto in public buildings, towns and furniture. Jean Sibelius, one of the greatest of modern composers, wrote recognisably Finnish pieces for the glorification of his people and in defiance of the Russian oppressors. Sibelius and the nationalistic painter Akseli Gall?n-Kallela fell under the spell of Karelianism, a movement going back to the folk songs Elias L?nnrot compiled for the national epic, the Kalevala in the 1830s. The Kalevala is an epic mythology that includes creation stories and the fight between good and evil. Aleksis Kivi founded modern Finnish literature with Seven Brothers, a story of brothers who try to escape education and civilisation in favour of the forest.

Finnish is a Uralic language and belongs to the Finno-Ugric group. It is closely related to Estonian and Karelian, and has common origins with Samoyed and the languages spoken in the Volga basin. The most widely spoken of the Finno-Ugric languages is Hungarian, but similarities with Finnish are few. With 6% of the population speaking Swedish, Finland is officially a bilingual country. Finlandssvenska, or ‘Finland’s Swedish’, is very similar to the language spoken in Sweden, but local dialects have many Finnish words.

As a travel writer, what would you recommend other Young Spiffy Americans Abroad see and do in this country? What precautions should they take when traveling?

Visas: Most western nationals, including Americans, citizens of EU countries, Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Malaysians, Singaporeans and most South Americans do not need a visa.

Health risks: Slippery pavements. If you’re mushroom picking, make sure you know what you’re eating.

Time: GMT/UTC plus two hours

Electricity: 220V, 50Hz

Weights & measures: Metric

Tourism: 2.5 million visitors per year

Currency: markka (mk), euro

Meals

? Budget: US$6-8

? Mid-range: US$8-22

? Top-end: US$22 and upwards

Lodging

? Budget: US$25-30

? Mid-range: US$30-90

? Top-end: US$90 and upwards

Finland was declared the world’s most expensive country in 1990, right before it was hit by recession. Since then the markka has been reasonably low and prices are much more bearable. If you’re travelling on a tight budget you should be able to get by on around $25 a day. This would cover hostel accommodation, self-catering and no alcohol or bottled drinks. If you want to have a slightly more user-friendly holiday, a budget of around $50 a day should do it, and for a few more luxuries, such as your own bathroom, taxis and a restaurant meal or two a day, you’ll need about US$100 a day.

Finland’s three national banks have offices all over the country, but they will charge you slightly more for exchanges than private exchange bureaux. Travellers cheques are expensive to change. Many Finnish ATMs will accept foreign cards on the Visa or Plus system, but if they don’t take your plastic rest assured that credit cards are accepted all over the country.

Tipping is generally not necessary anywhere. Service charge is usually included in restaurants’ listed price. Bargaining will get you nowhere in most shops, but could come in handy if you’re after trekking equipment or used bikes, when you might get a 10% discount if you ask nicely.

Things to Do in Finland?

Whatever time of year you visit Finland, there’s something happening. Most museums and galleries are open year-round, and there is as much to do in the depths of winter as there is at the height of summer. Nevertheless, you’ll probably have a better time if you come in the warmer months, either in summer or anytime from May to September. As well as the advantages of warm weather, summer is the time of the midnight sun. Winter north of the Arctic Circle is a chilly confluence of strange bluish light and encroaching melancholy. Despite snow falls from November, it stays pretty sludgy until late winter: skiing isn’t great until February, the coldest month, and you can ski in Lapland right through to June.

Midsummer’s Day (Juhannus) is the most important annual event for Finns. People leave cities and towns for summer cottages to celebrate the longest day of the year. Bonfires are lit and lakeside merrymakers swim and row boats. Enthusiastic alcohol consumption is also a feature of midsummer partying. The Pori Jazz Festival in July is one of the country’s most popular festivals, but the Savonlinna Opera Festival, held at medieval Olavinnlinna Castle, is the most famous. Some of the best (and the most international) festivals are the most remote: check out chamber music in Kuhmo, or folk music in Kaustinen (near Kokkola). For rock, there are big festivals during the Midsummer weekend, and big annual events, such as Ruisrock, the longest-running of rock festivals, at Turku in July. On the lighter side, check out the Sleepyhead Day, where on 27 July the laziest person in the towns of Naantali and Hanko is thrown into the sea. Finland’s strangest event is the annual wife-carrying championship held every July in tiny Sonkaj?rvi.

Other Interesting Facts

Finland (Finnish name Suomi) is a republic which became a member of the European Union in 1995. Its population is 5.2 million. The capital Helsinki has 555 500 residents. Finland is an advanced industrial economy: the metal, engineering and electronics industries account for 50 % of export revenues, the forest products industry for 30 %. Finland is said to be ‘the most on-line nation in the world’, with more mobile phones and Internet connections per capita than any other country.

Forests cover three quarters of the country’s surface area of 338 000 sq. km. Other outstanding features of Finland’s scenery are some 190 000 lakes and approximately as many islands. The principal archipelago and the self-governing province of the ?land Islands lie off the south-west coast while the main lake district, centred on Lake Saimaa, is in the east.

Geography

Finland is situated in northern Europe between the 60th and 70th parallels of latitude. A quarter of its total area lies north of the Arctic Circle. Finland’s neighbouring countries are Sweden, Norway and Russia, which have land borders with Finland, and Estonia across the Gulf of Finland. Much of the country is a gently undulating plateau of worn bedrock and boreal forests, presenting a striking mixture of wooded hills and waters. High rounded fells form the landscape in Finnish Lapland, the most northerly part of the country.

Climate

The climate is marked by cold winters and warm summers. The mean annual temperature in the capital, Helsinki, is 5.3 degrees Celsius. The highest daytime temperature in southern Finland during the summer occasionally rises to almost 30 degrees. During the winter months, particularly in January and February, temperatures of minus 20 Celsius are not uncommon. In the far north, beyond the Arctic Circle, the sun does not set for about 73 days, producing the white nights of summer. In the same region, during the dark winter period, the sun remains below the horizon for 51 days, creating the polar night known in Finnish as kaamos.

The People

The population of Finland is approximately 5 200 000. Finland is the sixth largest country in Europe in area, with a low population density of 17 persons per square kilometre. Most Finns, some 65 %, now live in urban areas, while 35 % remain in a rural environment. The three cities of Helsinki, the capital, population 555 500, Espoo, 213 300, and Vantaa, 178 500, form the fast growing Helsinki metropolitan region, which is now home to roughly a sixth of the country’s total population. Other important cities are Tampere, 195 500, Turku, 172 500, and in the north Oulu, 120 800.

There are about 1.5 million families in Finland. Among families with children the average number of offspring is 1.8. In 1960 the figure was 2.27. In 1998 women made up 48% of the total work force of 2.5 million. Their average earnings were 81 % of average male earnings. Women on average outlive men in Finland. Average life expectancy for females is 81 years and for males 74 years. In the parliamentary elections of 1999 women won 73 of the 200 seats.

Languages

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 languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish, the latter spoken as a mother tongue by about 6 % of the people. Another indigenous minority language is Sami, spoken by the Sami people (also known as Lapps) of Lapland. The official status of Swedish has historical roots in the period when Finland was a part of the Swedish realm, a period that lasted from the beginning of the 13th century until 1809.

The number of foreign citizens living permanently in Finland was about

85 000 in 1999. The biggest groups were from the neighbouring countries Russia, Estonia and Sweden.

Religion

There has been complete freedom of worship in Finland since 1923. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the country’s biggest denomination : 89 % of the people are baptised as Lutherans while 1 % belong to the Finnish Orthodox Church. Christianity, represented by the Roman Catholic Church, reached Finland before the end of the first millennium but the Church was not firmly established in the country until the 12th century. This followed a missionary expedition to south-west Finland led by King Erik of Sweden accompanied by the English-born bishop Henry. The influence of the Orthodox faith spread into the country from the east.

Some important dates in the history of Finland:

1155 The first missionaries arrive in Finland from Sweden. Finland becomes part of the Swedish realm.

1809 Sweden surrenders Finland to Russia. The Czar declares Finland a semi-autonomous Grand Duchy with himself as constitutional monarch represented by a governor general.

1917 Finland declares independence from Russia on December 6.

1919 The constitution is adopted and Finland becomes a republic with a president as head of state.

1939 – 40 The Soviet Union attacks Finland and the Winter War is fought.

1941 – 44 Fighting between Finnish and Soviet forces resumes in the Continuation War. Some territory is ceded to the Soviet Union but Finland is never occupied and preserves its independence and sovereignty.

1955 Finland joins the United Nations and in 1956 the Nordic Council.

1995 Finland becomes a member of the European Union.

2000 New constitution of Finland entered into force on March 1.

Government

The head of state is the President of the Republic who is elected for a period of six years and may serve a maximum of two consecutive terms. President Tarja Halonen was elected in 2000, prior to which she was Minister for Foreign Affairs. The President is chosen by direct popular vote, with a run-off between the two leading candidates to emerge after the first round of voting. The government must enjoy the confidence of parliament (the Eduskunta) which has 200 members elected by universal suffrage every four years. After the elections of 1999 the Social Democratic Party had 51 parliamentary seats, the Centre Party 48, the National Coalition 46, the Left Wing Alliance 20, the Swedish People’s Party 12, the Greens 11 and the Christian League 10. The Rural Party and the Reform Party had one each.

The multiparty coalition government formed in 1999 is headed by Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen, the leader of the Social Democratic Party.

Foreign Policy

As a member of the European Union since 1995, Finland is part of an influential body in world politics. Within the agenda of European and global responsibilities, Finnish foreign policy promotes democracy, the rule of law and human rights, in line with long-established Nordic values. To benefit from solidarity and common security, Finland is adhering to the core of the EU and advocates improvements in its efficiency. Finland joined the Third Phase of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and adopted the common currency, the euro, in 1999. While remaining militarily non-allied, Finland works actively for the strengthening of the EU’s common foreign and security policy and its capability to act in crisis management.

Finland supports enlargement of the EU. Based on the principles of the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, the EU’s policy of partnership and assistance is supporting reform and extending stability throughout Europe.

On Finland’s initiative, the Union is pursuing a Northern Dimension policy whose aim is to enhance cooperation with Russia and other partners in economic management, energy, the environment and other fields. Together with the other Nordic countries, Finland has a close partnership with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and contributes to the Baltic Sea, Barents Sea and Arctic collaborative forums.

Finland is a leading participant in UN peacekeeping activities. To accomplish new tasks, Finland is upgrading the capacity of its forces for crisis management and cooperation within NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme. Challenges to security range from ethnic conflicts to environmental hazards. Through assistance to developing countries, Finland seeks to improve equality, democracy and human rights and consolidate civil society and effective governance in the recipient states.

The Media

Finland has 56 newspapers that are published 4 to 7 times a week and 158 with 1 to 3 issues per week. The total circulation of all newspapers is 3.3 million. In terms of total circulation related to population Finland ranks second in Europe and third in the world. Most newspapers are bought on subscription rather than from news-stands. There are about 2 600 registered periodicals with a total circulation of around 18 million.

The best selling newspaper is Helsingin Sanomat, circulation 473 000 and in the Swedish language Hufvudstadsbladet with 59 000.

The Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE, is the biggest national radio and television provider. YLE is a non-commercial public service broadcaster that operates two television channels with full national coverage. There are two privately owned TV channels with national coverage and some thirty local TV stations. The only radio broadcaster with full nationwide coverage is YLE. It transmits on four national channels in Finnish and two in Swedish and on various regional channels, including one in the Sami language in Lapland. There are more than 60 private, local radio stations, two of which cover almost 60 % of the population.

YLE’s TV Finland is broadcast to most of Europe by satellite. Radio Finland can be heard all around the world.

The importance of electronic media is growing fast. Internet connections per capita in Finland were the highest in the world in 1999 with 25 Internet users per 100 inhabitants.

Education and Research

All children receive compulsory basic education between the ages of 7 and 16. Education beyond the age of 16 is voluntary, taking the form of either a three to four-year course in upper secondary school or 2 to 5 years at a vocational school. There are 21 universities or institutes of higher education, with a total student population of around 135 000, of whom 52 % are women. 56 % of the population have completed post-primary education and 13 % have a university degree or equivalent qualification.

In recent years there has been national focus on research and product development, with special emphasis on information technology. R&D expenditure in relation to GNP has risen continuously and reached 2.9 % of GNP in 1999.

Industry and the Economy

Finland’s road to industrialisation started in the 19th century with the harnessing of forest resources. Forests are still Finland’s most crucial raw material resource, although the engineering and high technology industries, led by Nokia, have long been the leading branches of manufacturing. The most important export product today is the mobile phone and Finland is one of the few European countries whose exports exceed imports in data and communications technology. Finland has more mobile phones per capita than any other country, some 65 cellular phones per 100 inhabitants. Today, Finland is a typical advanced industrial economy. The net wealth of Finnish households is at the average level for member states of the European Union. In 2000, Finland’s GNP per capita was around 25 500 euros (ca. 22 600 USD).

Some Maps of finland:

A 500 year old symbol map of Finland:

Finlands boarder:

Bibliography

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