



Quest Program FINLAND



The republic of **Finland** is located in northern Europe next to Sweden, Norway and Russia. It is widely known for its peacefulness and breathtaking landscape, featuring vast forests, a unique archipelago and thousands of lakes. In addition to its captivating natural beauty, Finland is also a modern society with a high standard of living, advanced technology and a developed economy.

Finland, the land of winter snow and endless summer nights, is renowned for its four unique seasons. The delightful summertime is blue and green with sunlight almost 24 hours a day. During the fall, the green vanishes and the nature changes colors into yellow, red and orange. When winter approaches, snow starts falling and the hours of sunlight quickly diminish.

Spring rapidly follows, melting snow and ice. The migrant birds return and nature wakes up from its winter sleep.

Most of Finland's 5.3 million inhabitants speak Finnish as their mother tongue. However, Finland is a bilingual country, where 92% of the population speaks Finnish as a first language and 5.5% speak Swedish as a first language. The Finnish language has a reputation for being difficult. Exchange students should therefore be prepared to struggle with the language barrier, especially in the beginning of their stay. The language is related to Estonian and Hungarian. There are also about 1,700 people in Lapland who speak Sami (Lapp) languages.

The Finns are usually warm and genuine. Equality is very important and people are respectful of one another. Finland was the first country in Europe to give women the right to vote, in 1902. Finns may seem a bit shy at first, but after getting to know them, their friendliness and special sense of humor, or even eccentricity, comes out. Some examples of Finnish eccentricity are the numerous festivals and events that are annually arranged throughout the country. Some of the festivals are the "Wife Carrying World Championships," "Sauna Bathing Contest" and "Mosquito Swatting Event."

Finland Statistics

Finland
Area: 130,596 square miles
Population: 5,372,621
Capital: Helsinki
Official Languages: Finnish, Swedish
Government: Parliamentary Republic

Quest International Office 1314 8th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94122
info@questexchange.org www.questexchange.org Skype Quest.International
(415) 665-3900 (415) 665-3902 Fax



A nonprofit corporation committed to advancing intercultural educational student exchange.

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The most famous Finn is probably Santa Claus, who has been living in Lapland for hundreds of years. The Finns are also very proud of Nokia cell phones, which were developed in their country. Some famous Finnish athletes and musicians include hockey players Teemu Selänne and Saku Koivu, Formula 1 champions Kimi Räikkönen and Mika Häkkinen, and the bands HIM, Nightwish and The Rasmus.

Finnish cuisine is rather similar to other Nordic cuisines, with its own special twist. Most Finnish specialties contain salmon or reindeer, but vegetables and meat are also commonly used. Quality, natural foods are very important to Finns, so most dishes are prepared with fresh ingredients. Of course, Finns also like to go out for pizza or grab a hamburger from time to time.

School Life

Finnish children begin comprehensive school at the age of seven and continue until they reach the ninth grade, after which, students can decide between high school (upper secondary school) and vocational school. High school students work hard to prepare for a demanding exam at the end of their studies, the matriculation exam. After graduation from high school, students can choose to enter higher education at a University or to enter Polytechnic. High school (lukio) is voluntary in Finland and it consists of three grades. Nowadays, almost all high schools have a flexible “classless system” meaning that students can finish school at their own speed, within 2 to 4 years.

The school days usually start between 8 and 10 am and end between 2 and 4 pm. Classes are held from Monday to Friday. Lunch breaks are approximately 45 minutes and school lunches are free of charge for all students. Students usually go to school by foot, bicycle or bus.

Finnish schools have no official dress code and teachers are not as authoritarian as teachers in other countries. The relationship between teachers and students is more relaxed and open. The school year starts in August and ends in late May. The school year is divided into five or six periods, which have separate schedules and concentrate on particular subjects. Each period ends with a “test week,” when students are tested on the subjects studied during that particular period.

The school year is broken up by a few vacations including fall break in October, one or two weeks in winter and a few days for Easter. Exchange students in Finland have a lot of freedom when choosing their classes. However, some schools may want exchange students to study Finnish, math and physical education. Although attending Finnish classes may be difficult for exchange students, due to the language barrier, schools are often very supportive and understanding of the situation. Schools recommend that exchange students attend extra Finnish language courses outside of school in order to make the transition easier.

Host Family Life

All Quest families voluntarily welcome exchange students into their homes. Families look forward to hosting students and enjoy sharing the Finnish way of living. Exchange students are expected to take part in family activities and to help with chores. Curfews are not very strict in Finland, however, with this freedom comes a lot of responsibility. Parents trust their children to inform them of their plans and whereabouts, and to come home when promised.

Host families live in houses all around the country and often also have summer cottages in the countryside. Finnish families usually eat dinner

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together, spend evenings at home together, and have many hobbies. In most families, both parents work and share household chores. Children are expected to help with household chores such as washing dishes, tidying rooms and grocery shopping. On average, Finnish families have one to three children. Divorces have become more common over time, which is why a host family might consist of just a mother or father with children. Regardless of a child's gender, children are treated rather equally.

Finnish family members are usually quite honest about matters, so people will openly discuss many subjects. Finns generally maintain high ideals of loyalty and take promises and agreements very seriously. Any visitor should be careful to keep promises, as that is the norm in Finland.

Most Finns love sports and outdoor activities, which vary depending on the season. During the summer, people from the city head to their cottages by the lake. Weekends and holidays are usually spent relaxing, swimming, fishing and enjoying the sauna. Other popular activities are cycling, jogging, water sports and "pesäpallo," a national Finnish game similar to baseball. For many Finns, the winter is the high season for sports because of cross-country and downhill skiing. Fishing and swimming in ice holes is becoming more and more popular. Still, the most popular sport of all is ice-hockey. The larger Finnish cities have their own team and their games are followed quite intensely.

Exchange students are strongly encouraged to seek out opportunities for extra-curricular activities and sports, since the schools do not usually offer them.

Popular activities are sports teams, clubs, social events, art, music and drama. Getting involved with activities is a good way to meet new friends and enrich the Finnish experience.

Program Extras

Quest arranges various trips throughout the school year. We usually offer a trip to Lapland, St Petersburg in Russia and Helsinki, the capital of Finland. Since the number of exchange students in Finland is rather small, students often attend the optional trips and have the opportunity to become very close with other exchange students. We strive to keep the budget low, so that as many students as possible can participate.

European Tour

At the end of June, Quest offers a three-week bus tour around Europe. Students get to visit 10 countries together with other students from all over the world. The price includes accommodations, half board, sightseeing, most entrances and activities, Disneyland in Paris and more. Please ask for more detailed information regarding the tour.

About Quest

Quest International was founded in 1999. We are a nonprofit organization committed to international, educational student exchange. Our goal is to promote cultural awareness and international understanding by offering quality, educational and cultural programs for students, host families and schools. Our staff is dedicated to creating a positive exchange experience for all program participants.