

Finland

Public Transportation:

I took the train from Tikkurila to Joensuu and was speechless when I saw a little playground for kids in the back of the train. Slide, something to climb, a little cave, everything. In another part of the train was a restaurant with chairs and tables to sit down. The train in general is really tidy, each seat has its own garbage bag too.

Bus connections in Joensuu are similar to the ones in Gleisdorf there is one every other hour.

Host family and housing:

Arriving at the Joensuu railway station was kind of stressful since I didn't really know what Esa (my host dad aka principal) looks like. He was very welcoming and even had his kleinspitz Nemo with him – I think it was to loosen up the tension – it worked tho. During the car ride he asked tons of questions which was a great distraction.

His house is really cosy, there is a huge difference to Austrian homes...Looking at the buildings they all look the same. Most of them consist of crimson-painted wood, each and every house has some kind of porch and the garden is behind the house rather than in the front.

An odd thing is that they usually just don't lock the door, like never. Plus the television is on 24/7 even though nobody's watching. I've got to admit that that could quite as well be an exception and an oddity of my host-family.

He was really nice, showing me around, eating with me, telling me that I should feel at home. He also mentioned that the „dresscode is really free, so I shouldn't be surprised seeing them in underwear“, I've never showered in a larger shower than this one (it's like triple the size of a regular shower in Austria) in addition there is a little sauna – the dog likes to be in the sauna too apparently. Not just big houses have a sauna, they can even be found in the smallest apartments.

I don't know if it's just my host family but they all seem so chill. The dog jumps on the table, gets fed sweet things („but not too much cause his eyes start bleeding “). The doors usually stay open throughout the night, Nemo (the dog) storms into the room if you have the audacity to close it for one second.

Let me tell you, I was shocked when Esa told me that his youngest son (16) moved to his girlfriend's house. After talking to a few Finnish people I realized that it's quite common. With permission of their parents most kids move out at such a young age -18 being quite late to move out. The reason for that is the great support of the government, young people get funded a lot and often pay a fraction of the original price.

I went to a hockey game with other exchange students and we discussed some differences we've noticed. Finns don't touch each other a lot, whereas it is normal in Chile or Austria to hug or touch the other's arm occasionally. I talked to some Finns about saying “I love you” and they looked at me and said “just on special occasions, otherwise the meaning would get lost.” Another thing is the huge shower rooms -that's the only way to properly describe them- in that room would literally fit 4 regular showers. Also, Finns don't shower every day and usually wear the same set of clothes multiple days in a row.

Oh and Finns barf a lot and eat quite displeasingly ngl. Maybe it's just my family haha

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School (system):

Going to school today was nerve-racking, I got lucky that there are 2 more exchange students. One from Canada and the other one from Chile. We got shown around by two students who were quite funny to be frank, however the myth is true: Finns don't come to you to chit-chat, if you want a conversation you got to go up to them and start it. (Still figuring out that part)

I don't really get the school system yet, but they told us that every student has one teacher who is „responsible“ for them and whom they can consult. If you are sick or below average on your studies you inform that specific teacher whom you address by their first name without any titles btw.

Some lessons are mandatory, for example Swedish. During your years you must reach 150 points in order to be able to graduate. Yesterday a girl surprised me by saying that you can decide how long you want to study. She for example is planning on finishing in 3 ½ years instead of the regular 3 years. Crazy that that's possible. They also offer fun classes like Street dance or theatre for which they have specific rooms with stages and large mirrors.

They have 13 different sports like Ice hockey or basketball in which they even have national championships. In Finland it is typically the students going to the teacher's room and not the other way around. Another thing worth mentioning is that students can actually choose their teacher if you don't like the teaching methods of one you can easily switch teachers without further struggle.

Special things in this school are for example the free warm meal you can get between 10 and 12 o'clock. Esa told me that – if you have sports - you can get food before and after your practice. They have a gym and a living room for students with TV and a kitchen. The huge lunchroom also serves as an event hall, with lights and stuff like that.

Everywhere you go there are seating options, but really comfortable ones in which I fell asleep more than once. Sometimes a guy runs around with an instrument or whatever. It's kind of strange ngl. The toilets are for all genders and teachers use the same toilets as the students.

On my second day I've noticed that – in contrast to Austrians- the Finns don't really treat the principal any different, they ignore him most of the time actually, one of my friends didn't even know it was the principal when he walked past us.

Around the school building there is a huge park which I strolled through with Josefa (the one from Chile) or took naps or studied or watched squirrels...

It was very interesting to be part of the psychology lessons. They dealt with a topic we've finished a long time ago. The teacher was super kind and translated the most important parts for me. Additionally a student tried explaining stuff to me, however it was more confusing than helpful really – I appreciate the effort tho. The English skill varies, just like in our school. Some are fluent, some struggle finding the right words – which I get, I mean have you SEEN the endless amount of letters they seem to randomly put together in their language.

I love my psychology classes; the teaching methods are quite refreshing. We learned about Stereotypes and social perception. In small groups we told either a lie or the truth and the others had to guess and make a remark on how they found out the other person was lying. There are also lots of experiments being discussed. Plus, the teacher went the extra mile and created an English powerpoint for me, really sweet 😊

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I asked Esa about celebrations similar to Prom and he told me that they had some traditions. One being for the 2nd graders becoming the oldest in the building. They drive around with their car, honking, drinking...Kind of a parade. For the students who have just graduated there is a huge party with old dances like waltz or disco fox with 5.000 people watching – no pressure. In February they dress up in Halloween costumes.

Typically finish food/drinks:

On my first day my host dad gave me some kind of Gin Longdrink. It's really tasty – there are various sorts with watermelon or cherry and stuff like that. Solid 8/10

Next I got to try sweets called „Salmiakki“ – really disgusting black things, salty but sweet and uagh hell no. The daughter told me that the Finns can't go a week without it, it goes as far as them taking it with them on vacation. Plus it helps when you're hungover. 1/10 cause uagh!

To swallow these nasty little shitheads down I got to taste rum or some kind of high percentage alcohol. It tastes similar to Jägermeister just a lot sweeter. 5/10, would drink when drunk.

When watching the football game last night Esa made us Finnish pancakes, the dough is super sweet. It gets put in the oven so when it's done the rims are crunchy and the further you work your way to the center the softer the pancake gets. 10/10 would eat again!

I don't like fish, however I'd change my opinion for Finnish salmon soup any time! So delicious and creamy. Fish is really good in Finland. 9/10

After that he gave me berries called „Laaka“ mostly found in Lapland. They are really expensive and picking them involves lots of mosquito bites, luckily Esa's parents are retired and bored. Try them with Sugar and I swear you see the light on the other side of the tunnel. 7/10

Language and History:

Today -on our way to school- Esa and I were talking about Feminism and that there is a discussion of changing the word „history“ to „her-story“ in England. Then he told me that there was no such thing as male/female/neutral in the finnish language, however depending on the context you're using the word there are 16 possible endings...That's why it's known to be that difficult

Conclusion:

This experience was one of the most fun and thrilling ones I've ever had!! I loved the people I met, especially my host-family since they have shown me so much kindness. I already made arrangements to meet again next year 😊 The Finns are a great folk and I am beyond grateful for this opportunity, I can only recommend it to literally anybody. The landscapes, the food, the traditions,...I loved every second of it.