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A long-time battleground between Sweden and Russia, Finland has gone from strength to strength since WWII.

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A byword for excellence, Finnish design has its roots in practicality and the natural landscape.

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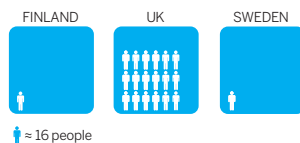
From epic bards' tales and the Golden Age of Finnish painting to the symphonic metal of Nightwish.

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Snow-blanketed spruces under the Northern Lights, nightless summer days and autumn's glorious forest colours.



population per sq km



Finland Today

Century of Success

Remote, forested, cold, sparsely populated Finland has had a hell of a last hundred years. It's propelled itself from agricultural backwater of the Russian empire to one of the world's most prosperous nations, with great standards of living and education, low crime, a practical, deep-rooted sense of environmentalism and a booming technology industry.

In Europe only Iceland and Norway are more sparsely populated than Finland's 16 people per square kilometre. In much of Lapland, this falls to under one person per square kilometre.

Shadows Within

Devastating school and college shootings in 2007 and 2008 horrified peaceful Suomi. Always keen for a bit of introspection, Finns wondered if it revealed something rotten at their society's core, some hangover from the war years, or a dramatic manifestation of those seasonal depressive tendencies that seem to boost alcoholism and suicide stats. Did people feel alienated in the occasionally impersonal Nordic social democracy? Or was it just too easy for angry youths to buy a gun? As usual there were no clear answers.

External Relations

Ever since the 12th century, Russia has loomed large over Finland. Long experience with the Bear has stood Suomi in good stead, and the two countries have a strong relationship, with much exchange of commerce and tourism. Nevertheless, Finns on the street are understandably nervous of a nationalistic Moscow. Memories of the bitter fights for freedom are too painful for national service and the army not to be taken seriously here.

The 2011 parliamentary elections in Finland sent a shockwave through Europe as the nationalistic, populist True Finns party came from nowhere to seize 19% of the vote. Their absolute rejection of bailouts of other EU economies meant that rather than compromise their principles by entering a coalition government, they opted to become the major

Top Films

Man Without a Past (2002)
One of Aki Kaurismäki's best.

Miesten Vuoro (Steam of Life; 2010) Documentary of men sharing their lives in the sauna.

Tuntematon Sotilas (1955)
Considered Finland's greatest film about the Winter War.

Dos & Don'ts

- » Do take shoes off in people's homes.
- » Do shake hands with men and women.
- » Don't wear a swimsuit in the sauna unless it's mixed.
- » Don't wait for table service in cafes.

Top Books

Kalevala (Elias Lönnrot) Epic compiled from the songs of bards.

The Year of the Hare (Arto Paasilinna) Offbeat tale of hare-y travels.

Seven Brothers (Aleksis Kivi) A Finnish classic.