

lonely planet

≡ *Fast Talk*

Finnish

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Before You Go

Outside the large towns, few people speak fluent English in Finland, so it's advisable to learn some phrases in Finnish to make your visit more rewarding. Finns appreciate any effort made by a non-native speaker. Finnish is not an easy language to master, but the phonetics are not difficult – and mistakes made by foreigners are usually disregarded.

Finnish is almost unique. It's not closely related to any language other than Estonian and Karelian and a handful of other rare languages. There is also a notable Swedish-speaking minority in Finland, and all Finns learn Swedish in school, so you may need your Swedish vocabulary in Finland from time to time.

PRONUNCIATION TIPS

★ Finnish divides vowels into two groups: those formed 'in the front of the mouth' (*e, i, y, ä, ö*) and those formed 'in the back of the mouth' (*a, o, u*). This distinction is very important when forming

words with suffixes, because the vowels in the suffixes must be of the same type as the vowels in the root word. For example, *koulussa*, 'in school', is formed by adding *-ssa*, not *-ssä*, to the root.

★ You'll find further pronunciation tips on p10.

MUST-KNOW GRAMMAR

★ The main difficulties with Finnish are the suffixes (endings) added to noun and verb roots, which often alter in this process, and the habit of constructing long words by putting several small words together.

SMALL TALK

★ When you ask for a favour, use the most polite word: *Te* ('you' in the plural).

★ *Minä* means 'I', *sinä* is 'you'. Not everyone uses these words, however. In southern Finland, especially in Helsinki, most people say *mä* and *sä*. In Turku, Tampere and Oulu it's *mää*, for 'I', and *sää* for 'you' (*nää* in Oulu). In southern Savo they say *mie* and *sie*. In Helsinki it would be better to use *mä* instead of *minä*, to express that you don't place yourself above the other person. In northern Savo and places in Karelia, people still use *minä* – elsewhere you may sound rather egoistic if you use it. An asterisk (*) indicates where you could consider using some other form as you tour Finland.

SOUNDS FAMILIAR?

Finnish isn't related to any Indo-European languages. There are, however, many loan words from Baltic, Slavonic and Germanic languages, and many words deriving from French and, especially, English.

Fast Talk Finnish

Don't worry if you've never learnt Finnish (*suomi su-o-mi*) before – it's all about confidence. You don't need to memorise endless grammatical details or long lists of vocabulary – you just need to start speaking. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain when the locals hear you making an effort. And remember that body language and a sense of humour have a role to play in every culture.

“you just need to start speaking”

Even if you use the very basics, such as greetings and civilities, your travel experience will be the better for it. Once you start, you'll be amazed how many prompts you'll get to help you build on those first words. You'll hear people speaking, pick up sounds and expressions from the locals, catch a word or two that you know from TV already, see something on a billboard – all these things help to build your understanding.

5.

Phrases to Learn Before You Go

1. What are the opening hours?

Mitkä ovat aukioloajat?

mit-ka o-vuht ow-ki-o-lo-uh-yuht?

It's always a good idea to check before you make plans.

2. I'd like the set lunch, please.

Saisinko päivän lounaan?

sai-sin-ko pa-i-van loh-nahn?

Restaurants in Finland often offer set menus at lunchtime.

3. A cold beer please.

Yksi kylmä olut, kiitos.

ük-si kül-ma o-lut kee-toss

Finnish beer can be light, medium strong or strong.

4. What's the local speciality?

Mikä on paikallinen erikoisuus?

mi-ka on pai-kuhl-li-nehn eh-ri-koy-suus?

Finnish menus often feature regional dishes.

5. Do you have plans for tonight?

Onko sinulla suunnitelmia täksi illaksi?

on-ko si-nul-uh soon-ni-tehl-mi-uh tahk-si ill-uhk-si?

To arrange to meet up without sounding pushy, ask friends if they're available rather than inviting them directly.

10. Phrases to Sound Like a Local

Cool! Siistiä! sees-ti-ah

No worries. Ei se mitään. ay seh mi-taan

Sure. Toki. to-ki

No way! Eikä! ay-kah

Just joking! Ei nyt sentään! ay nüt seh-n-taan

Too bad. Ikävää i-ka-vaa

What a shame. Sääli. saa-li

What's up? Mitä kuuluu? mi-ta koo-loo?

Well done! Hyvin tehty! hü-vin teh-tü

Not bad. Ei hassumpaa. ay huhs-sum-pah

10. Phrases to Start a Sentence

**When is
(the tour)?**

Milloin (kierros) alkaa?
mil-loyn (kiehrr-ros) uhl-kuh?

**Where is
(the station)?**

Missä on (asema)?
mis-sa on (uh-seh-muh)?

**Where can I
(buy a ticket)?**

Mistä voi ostaa (lipun)?
mis-ta voy os-tah li-pun?

**Do you have
(a map)?**

Onko sinulla (karttaa)?
on-ko si-nul-luh (kuhrrt-tuh)?

**Is there
(a lift) here?**

Onko täällä (hissiä)?
on-ko taal-la (his-si-a)?

**I'd like (some
stamps).**

Haluaisin (postimerkkejä).
huh-lu-ai-sin (pos-ti-mehrrk-keh-ja)

**I'd like to
(return this).**

Haluaisin (palauttaa tämän).
huh-lu-ai-sin (puh-lowt-tuh ta-man)

Can I (sit here)?

Voinko (istua tähän)?
voyn-ko (is-tu-uh ta-han)?

**Do I have to
(book)?**

Pitääkö minun (varata)?
pi-taa-ker mi-nun (vuh-ruh-tuh)?

**Can you (write
down the price)?**

Voitko (kirjoittaa hinnan)?
voyt-ko (kirr-yoyt-tah hin-nuhn)?

Chatting & Basics

≡ Fast Phrases

Hello.	Hei/Terve pol Moi. inf <i>hay/tehr-veh/moy</i>
Goodbye..	Näkemiin pol /Moi. inf <i>na-keh-meen/moy</i>
Do you speak English?	Puhutko englantia? <i>pu-hut-ko ehng-luhn-ti-uh?</i>

Essentials

Yes.	Kyllä pol /Joo. inf <i>kül-lah/yoo</i>
No.	Ei. <i>ay</i>
Excuse me.	Anteeksi. <i>uhn-teehk-si</i>
Thank you.	Kiitos/Kiitti. inf <i>kee-toss/keet-ti</i>
Many thanks.	Paljon kiitoksia. <i>puhl-yon kee-tok-si-uh</i>
Sorry.	Olen pahoillani/Sori. inf <i>o-lehn puh-hoyl-luh-ni/so-rri</i>
That's fine. You're welcome.	Ei se mitään. Ole hyvä/eipä kestä inf . <i>ay seh mi-tahn. o-leh hü-va/ay-pa kehs-ta</i>