

# SAYFC Exchange to Finland 25.06.19 – 30.07.19

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## Introduction

I am very grateful to all the organisations that made my exchange to Finland possible; it was a very special summer which I will never forget. The generosity and kindness of my host families was overwhelming and really inspired me to embrace similar opportunities in the future. It was fascinating to discover unique traditions and cultural differences alongside the many, many similarities between Scotland and Finland, with their salmon soup reminding me of Cullen Skink and Gaelic being likened to the Sami languages spoken across northern Scandinavia.



I was lucky to visit at the same time as many local festivals so could learn both through museum visits and first hand experiences. The adults in the families I stayed with also spoke fantastic English so, with a little help from Google Translate from time to time, we faced no communication barriers. Playing with the children also highlighted how easy it can be to get on with only a few common words and gave rise to hilarious Finnish lessons and impressive mime!



I had a fantastic experience and look forward to keeping in touch with the host families and perhaps meeting again in a few years. At the end of this document I have included the diary / blog I kept for my family while I was away with much more detail about what I got up to in Oulu, Turku and beyond!

I could not recommend the experience more highly and hope that many more young farmers will continue to travel to this beautiful country.

## Key Things To Know About Finland

- As an official country it is just over 100 years old! Until declaring independence in 1917 it had always been part of Sweden or Russia.
- Finns are very competitive with Sweden (think Scotland vs England)
- They joke that they are a nation of introverts with serious personal space requirements – a bus is 'full' if half the seats are taken.
- 'Noni' is an acceptable response or remark to literally everything. It can be translated as 'well', 'so' or 'really' but can express virtually anything.

- The most popular summer foods are makkara (a type of hotdog eaten several times a week), laatu (special pancakes), wild forest berries and pea pods.
- People are considered light sauna users if they only go twice a week – many people sauna every day and almost every family has a sauna in the house. Surprisingly, they are used much more in summer than in winter.
- In fact, historically communities used saunas to heat their water, cure and smoke meats and also as the most sterile place for childbirth.
- One Finnish proverb goes ‘if it can’t be cured by sauna, vodka or tar then it’s probably fatal!’ Add salted liquorice and you have all you could ever need!
- Finnish is one of the hardest languages in the world, related only to Estonian and Hungarian. One family taught me this tongue-twisting sentence: Kokoa koko kokko kokoon! Koko kokoko? Koko kokko!
- There is also no Finnish word for ‘please’ – they’re not rude, it simply doesn’t exist!

## Photos

The file size was too large to email with more photos included so please follow this link to the google album from my trip:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/Gi63ZRpn4mPsAait6>



## Blog

### 25/06 – 27/06 Helsinki orientation

It was lovely to be able to meet other exchanges from all over the world and learn about their countries and the organisations they represented. The 4H were fantastic hosts and as well as bringing us up to speed with Finnish cultural norms they whizzed us round Helsinki’s main sites including Suomenlinna (a UNESCO-protected fortress island), the Senate Square and the Russian Orthodox Cathedral.

### 27/06 - 05/07

#### Week 1 in Oulu

After the long train ride up north, I settled in really quickly with my first host family. My first evening we wandered through Ainola Park with its water jets and salmon runs. I was able to rest and unpack on the Friday while Suvi and Jukka were at work then we had cooked sausages on an open fire at Koitelinkoski Rapids. We had a busy weekend, learning lots and the local museum, a windy visit to Nallikari Beach, hiking and bbqing at Pilpasaou wetlands and going to a special concert played in canoes!

During the week I was able to explore the neighbourhood and cycle into the city for some sight-seeing. On Tuesday evening we went to a local tar - 'terva' - festival where they also demonstrated how to make vihta (bundles of birch used in the sauna), laatu (Finnish pancakes) and how to 'play' scythes! Of course the main event was setting fire to the logs to produce tar - historically a massive industry in this area with Oulu known as The Tar City!

We ate at Villa Eevila and Villa Hannala - famous for the best salmon soup in the area and in a building about twice as old as Finland itself! Then we spent an afternoon at friends of the family eating lots of laatu. On Friday we went out for pizza to celebrate the start of their holidays and then saw more Ferraris than we will probably see again in the rest of our lives thanks to the Rome to Rovaniemi Ferrari event stopping off in Oulu.

All in all a great first week!

## **06/07 - 15/07**

### **2nd Week in Oulu**

We went to a sailor's house museum then the next day to Turkansaari open air museum where farming, tar production and logging used to be very important. You can see the circular rye bread is still hung on the cafe rafters to dry just like in old times. After a family lunch we went out in the rain to go fishing, under the misapprehension that it's easier to catch fish when the weather isn't great - no luck!

On Monday we visited a logging plant which used to employ something like 1300 people in the area at its peak! We also stopped by Oulu's Shan Kulku sculpture 'The Passage of Time' trying to guess who all the important sculptures were. Lovely sunshine had us out playing frisbee golf (a very popular sport here!) and bbqing once more.

On Wednesday we drove north to Ranua and the Arctic Zoo of Lapland, seeing reindeer both in the zoo and in the wild beside the road on the journey! I tried local specialties from tar flavoured candy to Resupotto - a soup only eaten in Oulu made from something similar to black pudding but with rye flour in it. The next day we took the ferry to Hailuoto Island which is continuously growing as the land level rises each year, still bouncing back after the last ice age. On Friday I took the family out for lunch as a thank you to De Gamlas Hem, a very old building which used to be an old folks home and is now a hotel and restaurant with great smoked reindeer soup!

For my last weekend we spent a day hiking in Rokua Geo Park, a beautiful nature reserve with lots of special geological features. Then 11-year-old Julia and I went for a late night swim in the lake near their house! To finish off my stay we cooked a Scottish dinner of steak pie and sticky toffee pudding.

## **15/07 – 22/07**

### **1<sup>st</sup> week in Turku**

There was a lovely contrast going from a household of teenagers to one filled with excited younger kids – my second family had 3 children aged 8, 6, and 1 so life was

always busy and loud! Atte and Fiia quickly mastered the only crucial English vocabulary: “GOAL!” and “Ellie, trampoline, let’s go!”. The day after I arrived, we went into Turku to explore the riverside sights and the great city cathedral. I had my first trip on the family’s boat to visit friends whose summer house is like a museum, beautifully preserved to reflect its late 19<sup>th</sup> century beginnings and décor. After a comprehensive tour and a *traditional* Finnish lunch – pizza! – we became locked in a highly competitive football tournament.

Next we headed to the family’s own ‘mökki’ near Rauma where we spent the majority of my stay, letting me get very comfortable with the lovely Finnish summer culture of escaping back to the countryside and relaxing by the water. We spent many days sailing to various islands, meeting friends for lunch (more salmon soup!) and exploring their unique walks and history; a highlight was Kuuskajaskari, a former army base with stunning views from disused watch towers. We also had lots of their family over, from cousins visiting to a joint birthday celebration for Marko’s brother Miko, his mum and myself with lots of cake and some Scottish shortbread!

On my birthday we went into Rauma’s beautiful old town (another of Finland’s UNESCO World Heritage Sites) full of colourful wooden houses and buzzing with the annual lace festival. Lace was once an important industry in this part of Finland and seeing intricate samples and demonstrations of how they were made it extremely impressive. Later in the week we went out with Miko and his partner Elia for a picnic BBQ on a small island, then as the sun was setting sailed to Kylmapihlaja for drinks / ice cream at the lighthouse on the edge of the archipelago looking out on the open sea – truly magical!

**23/07-30/07**

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Week in Turku**

Before returning to the city I was able to meet up with a former Finnish exchange called Minna and attend the main evening of the lace festival, with stages set up all over the town and a coinciding international food festival stretching down street after street. The atmosphere was great and as well as dipping into a few flea markets and back yard sales (many people open up their gardens for the public during the festival) we were able to enjoy live music and the best of Finnish street food.

Back in Turku the family kindly arranged for me to meet up with two other girls around the same age as me – the first toured me round Turku Castle and showed me how to use the city’s electric scooters – the best mode of transport during a heatwave weekend! The 2<sup>nd</sup> introduced me to her group of friends and we had a lovely afternoon at the beach then later had a few drinks at the popular Samppalinna. Finally, the neighbour’s son kindly showed me round Naantali, a beautiful coastal village equally famous as the home of Moomin World – a beloved cartoon character seen on mugs, bowls and towels in every single Finnish household.

One evening Annkia baked pula, delicious sweet rolls, and 6-year-old Atte did his best to shape one into the outline of Finland for me! On my last day we decided to make scones but had a debacle with the first batch after I confused the Finnish words for baking soda and powder!! Luckily there was time to make them again

before the kids and friends came back from a water park and we shared them around in the evening sun. I had a very happy time with their family and was delighted that my stay overlapped with 1-year-old Ilona's first steps!

### **30/07 – 09/08**

I was very lucky I didn't have to rush home so after my exchange ended I was able to spend in a few days in Estonia (beautiful Tallinn and Tartu) visiting friends then got involved with an international Global Challenges for Youth project and spent 5 days working and receiving lectures at Helsinki University's Kumpula Science Campus.

This gave me the opportunity to stay with a 3<sup>rd</sup> host family, friends of Annika and Marko who live in Espoo, not far from the capital. Whilst I only really spent time with them and their two daughters in the evenings, I had a lovely stay and hope to welcome them to my university city in the future. I left Finland overjoyed to have good friends in several cities and hope that one day I will be able to return there, or to repay the favour by hosting them here in Scotland.

