

## **Cross-cultural journal to help in analyzing your reactions in a new culture**

### **A. What have you learned about Finnish lifestyle, culture, history, society, communication etc.**

Before coming to Finland I didn't have a very defined picture of the typical Finnish person in my mind. I put the country and its culture in the category of European and Scandinavian countries, so I expected similarities to my own, German culture and also to Sweden, Norway and Denmark. In the last two months I have experienced and noticed the following differences to what I expected or what was new to me.

First of all, the Finnish silence. There are exceptions, but in general Finnish people enjoy silence much more and don't feel awkward sitting beside each other and just not talk. Also there are no greetings or small talk towards strangers e.g. in the hallway of the house. In case they do start talk they might tell you their whole lifetime story though.

A Finnish person does rarely offer help themselves but when asked for help they will do their best and help very kindly.

Finnish people are somewhat crazy – crazy about their sauna, but also doing weird things like ice swimming and weird competitions (e.g. Crashed ice, air guitar, ...).

The university system and state has great offers for students – huge student discounts, lots of space to study and work on computers, affordable tasty food in a range of canteens and money by the state for every student. In university life there is less competition going on between the students as it is common in France and sometimes in Germany. Also, the students generally worry much less about their grades and exam outcome than in Germany, as the major step and hardest exam is to get into the university in the beginning at all.

In the traffic system the major differences I noticed were that one needs to wave to get the bus to stop and in the "normal" busses there is no information about the next bus stop coming up. When going on a new bus line for the first time apparently it's a normal thing to do to check the position of the bus with the cell phone. This is actually quite inconvenient, especially for tourists...

When I told people in Germany that I would be going to Helsinki, Finland in January, they asked me why I would do that – since it's dark and very, very cold all the time. Actually, it's not much darker in January than in northern Germany, and I would be happy about lower temperatures than +5°C as it wouldn't rain then as much as it does in Hamburg.

My favorite innovation from Finland: this really, really handy cupboard for washed dishes! It motivates to wash the dishes so the kitchen looks tidy – and that's without needing the dishes to dry with a towel. ☺

## **B. You observation /description and opinion / analysis on some event you saw**

### 1. Observation / Description:

Finnish people do not greet when meeting a stranger while hiking in the woods

### Opinion / Analysis:

When going hiking in Germany or Austria and you do not see a single soul for hours (or at least 15 minutes) but eventually you do, then you greet while continue walking. It feels very weird to me that when I even make some space on a very slim path for other hikers so they can pass by that they do not even thank me for giving them space. Their behavior even feels a little bit rude to me. My finnish friend explained to me that if I would be greeting they would wonder if I need help or anything.

### 2. Observation / Description:

Finnish students do not answer questions that may be asked by the teacher during a lecture.

### Opinion / Analysis:

When a teacher or professor in Germany asks a question to the students one should respond and normally the teacher just have to wait a minute or so and somebody will not be able to take the silence and then will answer. In Finland the students seem to feel much more comfortable with the silence after a question that has been put into the room, that they are fine with not answering but letting the teacher in the end answer the question himself or herself. I think it is somehow rude to letting the teacher down and on the other side I find it fascinating how long finnish students are able to resist – I always feel the urge to answer much quicker.