Cross–Cultural Journal

By: Derek Pitts

It may seem cliché to say exactly what those before you have said, but it’s true. The choice of traveling abroad and interning in Finland is one of the best decisions I have made in my life. I have learned an incredible amount in only the first of three months I am to be in Finland. I have learned about the Finnish mind-set, explored the old Island fortress of Suomenlinna, skipped rocks on the shore, hiked around the Island of Vasikkasaari and much more.

If I could give a single emotion to Finland it would be pleasantly moody. To start, Finland has extreme mood swings such as the roughly 24 hours of darkness in winter and sunlight in the summer. In addition, there seems to be no reasonable way to predict the weather. It could be sunny for the morning and, within minutes, we raining. It seems like I am criticizing Finland, but I did say ‘pleasantly’ moody. I said this because when it is raining it very light and actually nice to walk through when comparing to the United States. Finland also frequently has ‘Sunny Showers’ which is when the sun is shining while it is raining. In earnest, I have enjoyed the weather so far, even if it has not been that warm.

Before I left the States, I was told that silence is a highly regarded quality. This made me uneasy because, of the people I know in the States, I am probably the loudest. Although I was uneasy, I was actually exited because I realized that I could learn from the Finnish demeanor.

Although Fins have a reputation of being reserved relative to other cultures, they are the most genuine and helpful people you will ever meet. Even though I prefer a more outgoing way of life, if I had to choose one thing that I wish the United States would have, it would be Finnish morals.

Observation and Analysis of Events

One of the things that I noticed right away was that Fins are very responsible in their recycling habits. While on a visit to Pihlajasaari for Midsummer’s Eve I saw a woman with a shoulder bag that read: “RECYCLE OR DIE.” At the time, I laughed because it was so blunt. I poked a friend and pointed to the bag. A Finnish friend of mine saw what I was looking at and said, “It’s true, is it not?” I understood the implications but I was mostly startled by how bluntly it was put.

In the United States recycling is common but only if receptacles are readily accessible. However, Fins seems to put recycling as a very high priority relative to Americans. There are recycling stations at almost every grocery store I have been to. At our apartments the Fins have even more refined storing containers to recycle more efficiently. At cafeterias when cleaning trays off, there are always at least two trash bins, One for waste and one for paper products.

Cucumbers. Yes, that is correct. Cucumbers are everywhere in Finland. Relative to the United States, a person would have to pay extra to get cucumbers on mostly everything. In Finland, they are in salads and in condiments. My experience with Finnish food has been absolutely amazing. The differences between the Finnish and American meal, is that there is a salad included and free fresh bread with the meal. Also, I found it interesting that Fins drink a lot of milk with their meals. Milk is typically only a breakfast drink in the States.

I’ve also learned that if you are eating with a Fin, you have to eat VERY fast to keep up with them. I asked a Finnish friend of mine why Fins eat so fast and he related it to the fact that all Fins have to serve in the Military. He said that due to the harsh time schedules you are never allowed to ‘enjoy’ a meal and you must hurry to eat.

I had a hard time not littering this paper with the word amazing, but truly, my experience in Finland has been nothing short of amazing!

Derek Pitts

Derek, please take a look at Magdalena’s journal. She also commented on Finnish eating habits. I think that in general North West is doing pretty well with recycling (at least they are trying). But I have also noticed that in many households people are just too lazy to think a second to which pin they put the waste. Well it takes time to educate people. I’m happy to hear, that so far you have enjoyed your stay in Finland and perhaps you will return and stay a little longer and learn the language as well. Hope you make some good friends here too. If you get a Finnish friend, he/she will stay your friend forever. We take friendship very seriously.

best,

Aija