

Sponsor club report - May

Okay I'm really horrible at writing reports or blogs or anything in general so this is going to be horribly formatted and difficult to read but you'll have to bear with me because I'm kinda new to this.

Let me introduce you to Finland (Suomi).

Finland has a population of 5.3 million or so people. Melbourne has a population of around 4.2 million. It's a relatively small country and the capital Helsinki (district) has a population of around 1 million although the city is kind of more like 4 cities grouped into one (it's complicated).

Finland is a Nordic country along with Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. It kinda is a Scandinavian country by location but isn't officially.

Finland is very far north if you didn't know and can get very cold (tops -30 where I live) although it does have all 4 seasons like any other country. Winter is the longest season and the Summers are very short. Winter is very beautiful with all the snow and all the great activities you can do with it such as: Skiing, snowboarding, ice-skating, ice-hockey, sledding, snow fights, cross-country skiing and more that I can't think of right now.

Most of the Finns aren't fond of early Spring or late Autumn because there is a lot of slushy snow, but it can be very beautiful in Spring because of the flowers and I have heard (I haven't experienced yet) Autumn because of all the different colours.

The most popular sport in Finland is ice-hockey although the national sport is pesäpallo which is like a Finnish baseball. Link for those interested:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmGHiwpzDtE>

Other sports played are: Cross country skiing, soccer, ski jumping, etc.

Finland has a lot of saunas (pronounced saona but quick). Think about how many saunas you think Finland has and then times it by 5. Almost all houses and hotels and summer cottages have saunas. There are more saunas per capita in Finland than cars. And don't get me wrong saunas are great though they take getting used to. They are also pretty hot and get to around 100 degrees Celsius so they take some getting used to.

I live in Hämeenlinna (Häm is pronounced like the pork ham). Hämeenlinna has a population of 68,000 people and is the 14th largest town in Finland. I actually live off of Hämeenlinna in Miemala which is 5 minutes by car from Hämeenlinna town but I live in Hämeenlinna city. Hämeenlinna is named after the 14th century castle literally meaning Häme (place) linna (castle) in Finnish. Hämeenlinna or Hämtown as I like to call it is pretty big for a Finnish town. It has a shopping centre called Goodman that a lot of people go shopping to which is maybe one fifth the size of southland. Most people get around Hämtown by bus, bike, car or moped car or moped bikes. Basically in Finland when you're 16 you can drive or ride miniature bikes or cars that go slower than normal.

The school I go to is Kauriala Lukio. It's like upper secondary school and has 3 year levels. There are around 200 or so students that go to Kauriala. I'm technically a second year but I'm able to join first or third year classes too. Finnish schools are great because you get free warm food at lunch and its just wonderful. It's usually traditional Finnish food which has a lot of potatoes and can be: beef stew, porridge, meatballs and mashed potato, curry, finnish pasta a few days a year has special food like pizza and hamburgers. It always comes with salad and ruisleipa (finnish bread) and finnish crackers. In Finnish schools the year is divided in to 5 jaksos. Before each jakso you can choose your courses and each course has a

selected time in the timetable and the course number/level. All classes are an hour and fifteen minutes long with a 15-minute break in-between. In Finland after middle school you can choose between lukio or a vocational school. It's kind of hard to explain how each works.

Here's been going on with me.

I first arrived here in Finland I think on the 21st of January and stayed in a hotel for the night and then to the language camp in Karkku with the other 14 rotary exchange students who were a part of the January group. Basically if you didn't know there are two groups that arrive in any given country over the year (I'm pretty sure it's the same in other countries). The January group has South-Africans, Australians and we had Brazilians this time but only because they were too old or something to go with the other group and this was their last change. The other group comes in the middle of the year with around ~100 or so and its like a cycle of oldies (the group that has already been in Finland for half a year) and newbies (the group that has either just arrived or haven't been in Finland for half a year yet). Anyways at the language camp or "Karkku" as we all like to call it we learnt about Finland along with the culture and language. I can honestly say that Karkku was one of the best weeks of my life. It only lasted 5 days but it was great. After that we met our first host families for the first time when they came to pick us up. I found it rather funny how most of us went up to hug our new host families but they weren't at all used to it and were super uncomfortable or didn't really go in for a hug. The drive to the new home was quiet but we were told Finnish people are okay with silence so it was fine. Oh by the way I have 2 host brothers, a fifteen-year-old and a ten-year-old. I also have a host sister who is currently on exchange to Australia at the moment. I remember on the first day out of Karkku we went to pick up my host brother and then that night we went ice-skating at the local school. That was pretty cool. Fast forward to my first day of school. I was quite nervous and had no idea what was going on but I arrived at the school and met the principal (he is really chill) and he kind of told me what was going on. I had no idea what was going on it was all super crazy for me. My first lesson was a sport lesson and we played ping-pong. It was crazy at the start but it got less and less crazy. Okay next was the St. Petersburg trip. St Petersburg was %!@#&@ amazing. I don't know why but I enjoyed the trip so much. Basically we had a big bus ride for maybe 5-8 or so hours I can't remember for the life of me and then we arrived in Russia. It was super cool to meet most of my oldies for the first time and see my friends from Karkku again. They are like a second family. Then we arrived at our hotels and walked a tiny bit (can't remember if it was that night or the night after) then slept. Next day we went to the hermitage museum which had so many beautiful painting and artefacts and art pieces and sculptures. It had so many that apparently if you spent 1 minute looking at each thing you would spend something like a year or something just looking at stuff (actually maybe it was 27 hours or something I can't remember). That was pretty cool. Then we went to a downtown restaurant and had delicious Russian food. Then we did a bus tour and took plenty of photos and bought some souvenirs. Okay writing about St. Petersburg is going to take up another 1000 words so I'll leave it at that for now.

Okay I've written a lot but to sum it up Finland's really great and thankyou so much for sponsoring me! This has been and will be one of the greatest experiences of my life.

PHOTOS



Helsinki pillow fight on international pillow fight day



Vanhat tanssit
Finnish traditional dance ball



In front of the blood church in St. Petersburg