

Here are Riccardo's considerations before leaving - May 2021



Thoughts, fears and cries of help from a person about to spend one year in a desolate and inhospitable land

Great, now that I grabbed your attention with that title, let me explain why I'm sure that this will be the best decision I could've taken in my entire life; and how the meetings of the project "Views from the world" have helped me reconfirm this assumption.

I am a year 12 student and not too long from now, I will go away, to Finland, which many think to be an inhospitable and desolate land, like the title jokingly suggests, but in reality it is a country full of beautiful nature and interesting people, to say the least; people with a world-renowned education system and sense of privacy that might be mistaken for rudeness but is actually one of the many ways the Finns have of being respectful of other people's space.

They say that Finns are difficult to befriend but once they are your friends, they're friends for life, and this peculiar culture, alongside its isolated language and the overall uniqueness of this great nation are all reasons why I chose this land to spend my next year in and these meetings, part of the Views from the World project, have reassured me that the decision to go away is the right one.

Listening to all the accounts by those who spent a year abroad or are currently abroad, I understood that one foreign student can change a community for the better and bring a new way for locals to see our country and for us to share our culture with others; bringing a slice of our own world into theirs.

I thoroughly enjoyed every single one of these meetings and can say that I took in some new input and lessons from each and every one of them. I liked them so much that I will look forward to reading some of the books mentioned in them, as soon as I have some time to do so, but I can say that this project has been a great addition not only to my school curriculum but also to my life experience in general.

R. C., 3E1

*Finland: the best time of my life – What a southerner thinks of northern lands
September - October 2021*



Hi everyone!

Today I'm going to share with you all my so far amazing experience in Finland.

I'm Riccardo, a 4th year exchange student currently living in Hyvinkää, Uusimaa, Finland. This quiet town situated in the south of Finland, just 45 minutes or so by train away from Helsinki, has given me the best and happiest two months I've ever lived.

I came here expecting to find an amazing school system, beautiful and colourful nordic style houses, a lot of nature, a wonderfully cold climate and equally cold people and my experience has so far met my expectations except for one big difference; the people.

Before coming here I envisioned my first months of life here as pretty solitary, given Finnish people's reputation as closed and introverted, coupled with me not speaking the language and being a total outsider to the culture, I didn't expect to make any friends for some time; but I've been proven wrong so many times!

The view from my ...house



Why I like Finns

This first period has been going pretty fast for me, as every day there is something new to do in company of the many wonderful people I met here! In my school it's just 5 exchange students; of course I met others, but still the people who I hang out with the most are the Finns. Their reputation doesn't do them justice; they're amazing people! Of course they're not as extroverted, loud and (excessively) talkative as Italians, who often like to push personal barriers and be too curious about one's business; but this isn't a problem at all here!

The only thing that I must often do is simply start the conversation. Many Finns are very shy about establishing contact, especially if in English, even though their English skills are on average the best I've seen so far; it's rare to find a Finn that doesn't speak English; but nonetheless, they're shy about it, but are otherwise enthusiastic to talk if the other person establishes contact. Of course there are many extroverted Finns as well, but the general rule of thumb is to speak first!

I'm putting a lot of emphasis on the Finns because so far they're the people who I can recognise myself in the most; they have an amazing respect of one's personal boundaries, privacy and ideologies, which are never talked about in public. They're also extremely non-judgemental and tend not to criticise someone if not in a constructive way; an attribute that most Italians definitely lack.

... and their relaxed school system

Their work ethic is also impeccable, the Finns are a hardworking people; even though their school system might seem more relaxed, with relax rooms at school, couches, jump hours, freedom to leave class, freedom to choose whichever courses you like based on what university or job you'd like to have in the future and an extreme focus on the individual student; the Finns always give all they can when it comes to their tasks, and often criticise themselves if it's not done in the best way. It's practically impossible to see them cheat on a test; even if, during examination week, the professors are hardly ever in the class to monitor students; they don't cheat because they don't feel the need to; the pressure put on them is present but not extreme, rarely are they overworked and they never spend entire afternoons on books, the figure is often closer to 30 minutes to 1 hour a day.

The Finnish school system deserves an essay in and of itself, and Italians should definitely read it, because when I hear the accounts of my classmates back home I realise just how much we're lagging behind in terms of general quality of life, especially if considering school.

All this quality is given by the fact that the Finns are very critical of their country; they complain about a lot of things which could be done better; and even though us Italians might see it as perfect, they see potential for improvement, and it's this discontent that drives change, and improves things constantly. The Finns are a people of initiatives and actions, not just words.

Here is my school. Extremely modern of course, solar panels, plenty of covered parking for bikes, ample nearby parking for cars and drop-off place; as well as a bridge that directly links the school with the rest of the town for easier access to students that have bikes



*Here is a picture of the canteen; yes, food is free for all students and not even that bad...
actually kinda good most of the time!*



But what about the weather?

Personally, I haven't had any negative experience here yet, or any day when I missed Italy at all! The weather is often the centre of many complaints, especially by Finns themselves, and I recognise that the winter has yet to come; but so far I love cold temperatures, wind and rain with the many days of sunshine in the summer, which are getting rarer as autumn starts to arrive, giving way to a calm, cosy atmosphere with the increasing dark and grey skies, which means seasons are changing.

As we pass from 40° degrees in the summer to 28° in autumn and a “freezing”- 25° in the winter, Finland completely transforms itself, giving Finns the full 4 seasons experience, facilitated by the massive presence of nature even in the most urban areas; just a distant dream for people who, like me, have always been used to the grey, industrial and soulless Po Valley, where nature is hard to find, especially near home and without waves of tourists.

Overall, Finland is an amazing country with an amazing people that never fails to amaze and impress, in the most positive and sometimes bizarre ways.

