

## Day 09 – The Finland Adventure – Helsinki

Dear Fellow Travelers:

Day Nine was a wonderful day.

First, I must apologize for my delay in reporting. No adventure would be fun or complete without hiccups. And unfortunately, that occurred with me.

After Finland, I have been out of commission for the next two days.

As many of you know, about ten years ago, I was diagnosed as a rather serious diabetic.

Due to the talent of my exceptional Doctor, Colleen Dibble, I have been successfully treated with a series of medications that keep this rather maleficent disease at bay.

One of the drugs that really helps, is called metformin. A derivative of the lilac bush, it is basically a miracle drug. Indeed, there are now long term trials of this medication showing signs that it has the potential to extend longevity of all human beings significantly.

All wonder drugs, however, have some side effects. Metformin is no exception.

I take four, 500 mg metformin pills every day. Once in a while, this plant based medication, can not be the proper strength, and can cause serious, pronounced, stomach effects.

After Helsinki, at least one of my metformin pills, caused such a problem, and I was down for the count for two straight days. Luckily, during this time, which I was sadly confined to my stateroom bed, were days at sea. AmazingHugh and Geddi Master were still, thankfully able to still enjoy the shipboard activities, while I stayed in bed feeling like some mean person attacked my tummy with a baseball bat.

As soon as I was afflicted however, I have recovered.

My misfortune thereby has caused my delay in reporting, so please forgive me.

So, now onto the wonderful land for the Fins.

Finland is a country as amazing as its people. Beautiful, clean, active, exciting and interesting.

Another Nordic nation, with a Viking heritage, Finland has 5.6 million people in a nation of 130,678 square miles, which makes it slightly larger than the State of New Mexico in land size, and slightly smaller in population than the state of Minnesota.

Finland's largest city is its Capital, Helsinki, which we visited, which has a population of nearly 670,000 people.

A beautiful, active seaport city, Helsinki is illustrative of the maritime nature of the entire country.

Finnish and Swedish are the official languages of the country, but in like most of the countries we have visited on this adventure, our very non scientific observations, seem to demonstrate that nearly everyone in this beautiful country of Finland also speaks very fluent English.

We were up early, around 5 am, and after showering, shaving and breakfast, we left the ship and boarded the tour bus.

Our tour guide, Ilona, was a lovely 70 year old lady, with very short hair and a dry sense of humor.

Knowledgeable, focused and funny, Ilona said her name mean "Fairy Tale" in Finish, so that we could not really believe anything she said.

Helsinki, like all of Finland, is a modern, beautiful city.

From the late 13th century, Finland became a part of Sweden, and in 1809, as a result of the Finnish War, Finland became part of the Russian Empire as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland, during which the idea of independence began to take hold.

In 1906, Finland became the first European state to grant universal suffrage, and the first in the world to give all adult citizens the right to run for public office.

After the 1917 Russian Revolution, Finland declared independence from Russia.

At the outset of World War II, Finland was invaded by the Soviet Union, and then later by Nazi Germany. It fought both invasions ferociously, and subsequently lost parts of its territory, but maintained its independence and freedom, earning a well earned reputation as a freedom loving, tough people.

Finland largely remained an agrarian country until the 1950s, but after World War II, it rapidly industrialized and developed an advanced economy, while building an extensive welfare state based on the Nordic model.

Since this development and diversification of its economy, the country soon enjoyed widespread prosperity and a high per capita income.

During the Cold War, Finland adopted an official policy of neutrality.

Finland joined the European Union in 1995, and NATO just this year.

It is also a member of the United Nations, the Nordic Council, and the World Trade Organization.

It consistently performs highly in metrics of national performance, including education, economic competitiveness, civil liberties, quality of life and human development. Perhaps most importantly, surveys on Fins rank them as the happiest people in the world.

Our tour guide took us on a wonderful tour of this beautiful city. Although it was a rainy day, you could not hide the glow and magnetism of this town.

We saw dozens of interesting locations including their parliament building, their president's house, their court buildings, their Olympic stadium, dozens of apartment houses, individual homes and schools, two universities, and several shops, businesses, stores and factories.

One of the more interesting sites we got to visit was the municipal power plant. Not only does it produce electricity, but it also heats hot water which it pushes through pipes for heating to hundreds of thousands of Helsinki residents.

How that exactly works, especially in Finland's cold winter climate, I don't exactly know.

An innovative idea nonetheless.

After touring the city, we were treated to the highlight of the trip.

We took the bus up a narrow dirt road, to the Helsinki countryside, to visit an authentic Finnish lakefront summer home.

Finland, like Minnesota, is the land of lakes, sporting over 180,000. Accordingly, Fins love and cherish their summer homes.

This lovely, single story, red, summer home (in which our hostess Andretta lived all year long) could not have proven more charming.

As the 54 of us filled off the bus and into her home, by way of a modest, but well appointed, kitchen, we were greeted by a fabulous layout of coffee, tea, pastries, pie, fresh fruit and ice cream.

After taking a china cup of tea, and a plate of pie, and some home made iced cream, a bunch of us retired to the back porch, and a large wooden table.

Everything was more delicious than I could possibly describe, and the hospitality offered by hostess Andretta could not have been more warm or gracious.

She was a beautiful, cultured, spirited, friendly grandmother, who is as proud of her home as she was of her Finish heritage.

After our wonderful treats and tea, we were next taken on a tour of this home, built in two stages, by scratch, in 1959 and then 1969.

A model of class, efficiency and style, it was as comfortable as it was elegant.

With four bedrooms, eat in kitchen, two bathrooms and a study, this house was built for family and for company.

We then descended into the walk out, downstairs, basement, which now served as a large playroom and workshop.

Interestingly, it used to be an indoor swimming pool, which after her race car driver had passed away, Andretta had filled in, to make this room.

She next said that the most important attribute of the house was yet to come, whereupon she opened the door of the walk out, and led us outside along a wooden deck, to the sauna.

One note here. The Finish people are absolutely wild about their saunas.

They are everywhere. Along the public streets, in every house and apartment, and even workplaces.

One couldn't turn around on our tour, without seeing a bunch of naked or nearly naked people standing in line waiting to enter one.

And next to nearly every sauna, is a pool, or some body of water, for their users to jump into, after their steaming.

Andretta's was no exception.

Her large, multi level, sauna had two long rows of wooden seating, and an enormous fire pit in one corner to heat it.

And of course, it also had a bucket of water to make the steam, and a bunch of birch branches to wack each other with.

Right outside the sauna door, was a large man made pond, with a large spray fountain in its center, designed so that the water would be constantly moving, as not to get funky.

(All that said, I don't believe I'd be overly excited about jumping into the pond, as it was far from a chlorinated swimming pool).

Andretta told us her family (all ages) uses the sauna and pond every day, including in the winter.

Again, maybe not my choice, but good for her.

After the house tour, we were all invited to take a walk around the property, and visit a nearby lake.

Isolated, rustic and beautiful, it really did remind me so much of our own Adirondack mountains.

My Dad grew up in the Adirondack town of Indian Lake, and since the AmazingHugh and Geddi Master decided to decline the walk invitation, as it was raining, when I returned and was asked by him, what he had missed, I simply replied Indian Lake.

Lovely, picturesque and rustic. Many more birch trees however.

After enjoying Andretta's home, grounds and hospitality, we all piled back on the bus and were driven to a local art museum.

As I am not really much of an art fan, nor is my Dad nor Bob, we simply walked around, tried to appear politely impressed, and then spent most of our time on the covered front porch of the building, enjoying the scenery.

We really did get to see a great deal on our four hour tour.

But most of all, we really got to do a first hand, deep dive, into the Finish people and their lives.

The Fins are an amazing, courageous, independent, lovely people.

They, like the Estonians, truly hate the Russians.

As was mentioned previously, at the outbreak of World War Two, Stalin tried to invade Finland.

Despite every disadvantage, the Fins fought them basically to a standstill.

When Hitler did the same thing a little later, invading their northern province of Lapland, he met the same result.

Quite impressive for this little, but wonderful country.

Their bravery and toughness became their trademark.

On the way back to the boat, one lady on the bus, asked a rather odd question to our tour guide, saying if there was one thing she could change about her country.

Ilona didn't skip a beat, responding, "the climate and our neighbors to the East" (the Russians).

It seems like the Russians aren't held in pretty much high regard, anywhere we went.

After returning to the ship, and enjoying an attentive meal from David, our delightful waiter, who came from India, we ventured over to the theater to watch a wonderful singer by the name of Lisa Marie Holmes.

Named after Elvis' daughter, she had a wonderful and powerful voice, and sang everything from pop to Broadway and classical.

She was really magnificent.

From Finland, we would start to sail west, with our next destination being the northern most seaside fishing village of Skagen Denmark.

Thanks so much for joining us.

Please be well, and know you are in our thoughts each day.

My Warmest Personal Regards,

*Bob*

Robert T. Farley, Esq., JD/LLM  
The Excited Traveler  
7 Glenwood Drive, Scotia, NY 12302  
Tel: (518) 986-2037 Email: [bobfarley@bobfarley.us](mailto:bobfarley@bobfarley.us)