

Finnish Friend Programme

-Guidebook for students-

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BASICS

One of the things that make Finnish Lapland unique is its friendly people and diverse cultures. The local Universities are committed to giving their international students first hand experiences of life in Lapland by pairing participating students with friends from the local area. The Finnish Friend Programme not only offers students an opportunity to experience everyday Finnish life and culture, but also helps them adapt to their new surroundings by connecting them with a welcoming Finnish friend.

There are a number of families, couples and people living alone in the Rovaniemi region who are interested in meeting international students in a casual setting. They are often interested in inviting a student to see how they live and are curious about different cultures in return.

The idea of the programme is to introduce Finland, Lapland, and Finnish culture to international students. In doing so, the local friends also have the chance to learn about the home country of the student and about his/her language and culture. The Finnish friends and the students will be matched according to their language skills, interests, hobbies, etc.

Finnish friends are not always stereotypical families with two parents, two children and a dog. Families can have one only parent and some may not have children. Your Finnish friend can be just a one person household. They are not only young students, but from all different ages in all different phases of life. Some can be retired. Some members of family are not natively Finnish. There is as various Finnish friends as there are Finnish people!

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

As an international student, you are having the opportunity of a lifetime to make new friends around the world, widen your perspective, and have fun. At the university and in student parties you might get to know a few Finnish students, but still, it is often hard to make real contact with local people.

The Finnish friend programme is a way to meet Finns. You get to know local people living here and see life outside of the campus, student housing, and local pubs. You can learn a bit about Finns and their everyday life and maybe you even like the culture and would like to learn a few nice phrases in Finnish. On the other hand, you have the opportunity to be an ambassador of your own country and cultures. People that are taking part in the Finnish friend programme are open minded and interested in foreign cultures and languages. They are happy to meet new people from around the world.

“I had a great experience with my friend family. We did normal things and we shared a lot of talks, which for me were the richest during all the times we met each other. I felt really at home and our relation still continuous. I can say they are like my second family.”

“I got to know about typical Finnish family life through them. Also they tried the best to let me experience valuable things in Finland as many as possible. I am totally satisfied with my Friend Family programme and would not hesitate to recommend my friend to join this programme hoping that my friend is lucky enough to meet a very nice family as I was.”

GOOD PRACTISES

A first meeting is arranged on behalf of the program. After that it is up to you two to develop your friendship.

So what to do with new friend or family? This really depends on what kind of people you are as everybody has their own interests and it depends a lot about the common interests both sides have. Usually, normal every day activities are the best ones to do with your friend such as having coffee and having nice conversations about cultural differences or other “obvious” topics. Of course, the idea is not that your family or friend is trying to think of events just to amuse you - it is about spending time together as friends do.

There are various ways of spending time together. If your family has children it is natural to play with kids or go sledding with them. On the other hand your friend might be student as well and it could be nice to party together. Sometimes it can feel like your friends interests are very different from your own, but keeping an open mind enables you to see things an opportunity to try something new. Just as well you can suggest something new you would like to do with your family. Maybe you would like to cook some traditional food from your country, play board games or ask them to join you in going to an interesting art exhibition. As many Finns tend to be outdoors people and trips to fireplaces or summer cottages are a common activity, this can also be a great opportunity to you visit a place completely new.

"We did some typical activities from Lapland like ice fishing, some barbeques, reindeer races but still we spent a lot of time as a family at home, watching some movies, going to supermarket, cooking, eating... I could say normal things from a family, drink coffee and stay in the sofa."

"Food, walks, horse back riding, talking."

"We went together to the swimming pool. They invited me to dinner and I could taste first reindeer meat. We went out together few times (vappu, Tivoli, home parties)."

"Dinner at the same table, some table games afterwards"

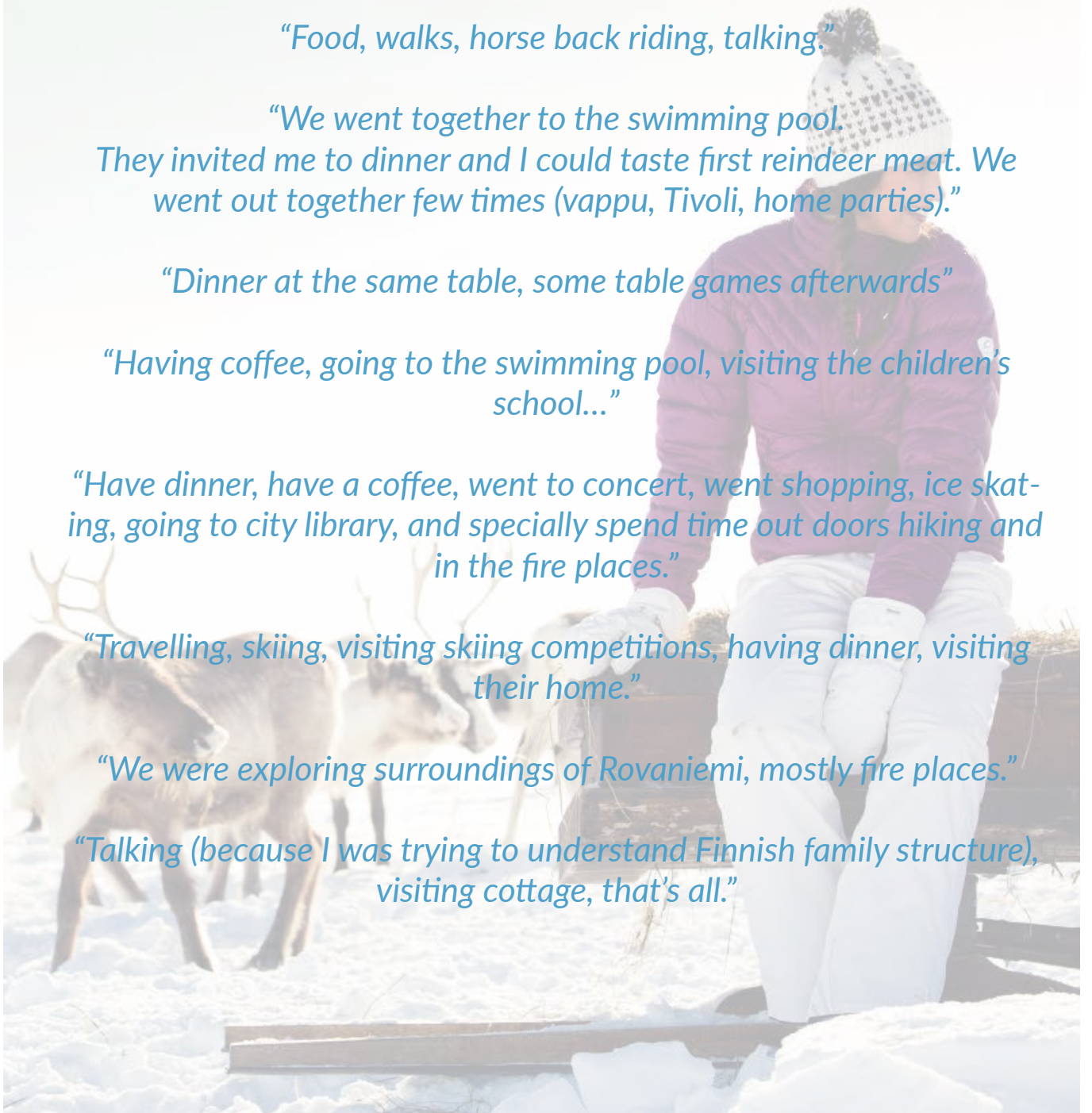
"Having coffee, going to the swimming pool, visiting the children's school..."

"Have dinner, have a coffee, went to concert, went shopping, ice skating, going to city library, and specially spend time out doors hiking and in the fire places."

"Travelling, skiing, visiting skiing competitions, having dinner, visiting their home."

"We were exploring surroundings of Rovaniemi, mostly fire places."

"Talking (because I was trying to understand Finnish family structure), visiting cottage, that's all."



KEEPING IN TOUCH

You should exchange contact information with your new friends as soon as possible. Make sure you have a common way to communicate as especially non-students might prefer traditional email or calling over Whatsapp or Facebook.

“I stayed in contact with my mobile phone, some mails and facebook.”

“We usually arranged meeting by phone.”

It may be easy to simply agree on a new date to meet when you are together. When you check your calendars at the same time, there won't be so many misunderstandings that could happen. Being active and understanding works for your benefit in any form of communication.

KEEPING IN MIND

All participants are volunteers and you are also an independent young adult. It goes without a saying that a Finnish friend will not be your mom or dad, or give you money, or be your taxi driver or guest house. They are also not responsible for your overall amusement in Rovaniemi. Normal, polite Finnish social borders apply to them as to your other equal friends in Finland.

Sometimes magic happens and a student will make a second family for a lifetime, but it is not the direct the purpose of this programm.

COMMON CHALLENGES

As in life in general, things don't always go as planned. Situations can change and maybe you or your friend face some moments when it is hard to keep in touch or find time for meeting. If something unexpected happens, make sure to inform your new friend about your situation. If you are planning to drop out the program, please contact the program leaders instead of vanishing into thin air.

Spending time with a Finnish friend is nice and all, but sometimes feelings of hesitation emerge. This is very normal and will usually pass with some time and patience, much like a culture shock does.

Some common challenges:

- The language barrier feels impossible to overcome.
- Only one person in the family is seemingly excited and willing to use the foreign language in the beginning.
- Long distances: In Lapland, distances are always long and people are used to that. 1 to 2 hours drive is not a dealbreaker to locals, but might feel heavy for you.
- Sudden lack of time. After spending some time in Finland and getting engaged with studies and other friends, you might realise that there are lot of things you need to do and a limited amount of time. In these moments, try to remember your Finnish friend and initiate you do something together - usually activities mix surprisingly well.

Challenges exist to be overcome and there is no adventure without a little dare! Take on this chance to find new friends and have fun in Finland!

CONTACT INFORMATION

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