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Huom! Tämä on rinnakkaistalenne.

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Make yourself at home, far away from home: Reflection

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Movement of young people from one country to another for higher education is a common picture of the times. In order to continue education in the host country with ease and comfort international students should build their relationship with the surroundings, have their stake in nature and educate themselves to the host country culture as much as possible. Things may not be so favourable in the beginning, which may also affect learning outcomes. However, time passes and gradually it becomes easier.

Annually, over five million students move from one country to another for higher education. Some go to pursue a full degree programme to complete a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree; some go for a short-term exchange programme; and others go for research fellowship. There is a strong trend that a huge number of students from non-English-speaking countries go to universities in English-speaking countries. Australia alone hosts over half a million students from around the world in its universities. However, movement of students from around the world to Europe and especially Scandinavian countries including Finland for higher education is on the increase. Finland is becoming a popular higher education destination for students from Russia, Vietnam, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mexico, Nigeria, Kenya and South Korea. Other reasons which attract international higher education students to come to Finland are the high-tech education infrastructure, practical orientation of the education system, availability of English-medium degree programmes, high standard of living and safety. How students can make themselves at home here though they are far away from home is a hard question! Answering it is even harder.

Alongside education, you should do extra-curricular activities. Without them you may be bored and even feel depressed.

For many international students, Finland might feel as an exotic country in the very beginning. I still recollect my first month here in Tampere, Finland, when I was not so confident of continuing my studies and daily life here. Finland was so different and still is compared to Bangladesh where I was born. However, time passed and gradually I got used to the surroundings, the system and later, of course, the Finnish culture. When you come to study, like I came, at a Finnish university or university of applied sciences, your stay in Finland is not going to be a day, week, month or even a year but a few years at least. This is the reality if you come to a bachelor or a doctoral level programme. Be prepared for a long journey into the Finnish system, society and culture. The journey may not be so smooth and comfortable without your effort and willpower. To make your journey a comfortable, build your relationship with the surroundings, have your stake in Finnish nature and educate yourself to the Finnish culture as much as possible. Once you are stuck, remember what Woody Allen (2016) said, “I hate reality but it’s still the best place to get a good steak (cited in Krogerus & Tschäppeler, 2017, 58).” This text is an effort to provide you with hints which may be instrumental to your journey towards pursuing a higher education at Tampere universities with an ease. Moreover, this text may facilitate being an active part of the surroundings including the nature and educating yourself to the Finnish culture.



Tampere, among other Finnish cities, is one of the most favoured higher education destinations of native and foreign students. Tampere is called the education city of Finland. Tampere is also a city of young people because of the location of the Tampere higher education community. Tampere is one of the fastest growing cities in Finland. According to Jyrävä (2020), every year 3000 people from Finland and abroad settle in Tampere. If you have already chosen Tampere as your higher education destination, you have made a brilliant

decision. One of the success factors of the Finnish education system is the high standard of teachers' qualifications at all levels of the education chain. The qualification upholds professionalism at every stage of the teaching and learning process. Teacher-student relationships are very interactive and informal in the Finnish education system – do not hesitate to share your concerns and expectations with the teacher, tutor, coach or international coordinator. In such a sharing and caring context, your success in pursuing a higher education is heavily contingent on how actively you exert your effort in completing daily class activities and fulfilling upcoming commitments. At the beginning of the first academic year, everything may seem quite different and you may have difficulties in the adjustment process, which may also have a negative impact on your learning process – at least I did. However, do not give up. Krogerus & Tschäppeler state that innovative ideas usually emerge when we leave our comfort zone or when we break the rules (Krogerus & Tschäppeler, 2017, 40). Therefore, try ceaselessly to achieve your objective.

Studying in the Tampere higher education community: Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) and Tampere University (TAU) offer you much more than study opportunities. Therefore, alongside education you may be a member of the sports community SportUni of Tampere Universities. Apart from it, you may start other hobbies like going to swimming in a lake or walking / jogging in forest. From almost anywhere in Tampere, you can reach a forest by walking for five to ten minutes. Finland has quite an extreme weather and nature. Seasonal changes are strong especially from the autumn to the winter. Consequently, without extra-curricular activities, you may be bored and even feel depressed. Moreover, extra-curricular activities may pave the way to knowing the society and culture and developing relations with the surroundings. Outside the university campus, you may have difficulties in interacting with local people but if you start a hobby, it may open doors to interacting with them and thereby getting into the culture. Once abroad, feeling lonely is a common phenomenon to most. In order to break the loneliness, many students only mingle with their fellow citizens outside the campus. I think that it is a serious mistake! Of course, you contact your fellow citizens but interact with the locals (act locally, think globally) and other international students as well. Interaction with students from diverse cultural backgrounds may help you to develop a global outlook, which is very important in the era of internationalisation to find work and build a network – the bigger the network, the stronger you are in the globalised world.

Newcomer students in the Tampere higher education community should remember the main features of the Finnish culture when interacting with the society and host university. Among others, punctuality, equality and honesty are core values of the Finnish culture. Punctuality signifies that you do your stuff on time. The time shown on your watch rules your day. Consequently, stick to time – 10 am means 10 am not 10:15 am. Stick to your payment deadlines, stick to deadlines for returning your course projects and fulfil any promises you have made to someone. Fulfilling promises is very important in Finland. Commitments are to be kept. Another important Finnish value is equality. Discrimination by gender, age, religion or ethnic background is not allowed or even legal in Finland. A sense of gender equality and its practice are necessary preconditions for being a part of the Finnish society (Aamulehti, Hyvä elämä). Finns are quite straightforward by nature and honest by action. Honesty is the best policy here – try to be solid – words and deeds must correlate. As your journey into the Finnish society continues, you will come across more cultural values – you learn them gradually by trial and error. Be curious in learning – curiosity is more important than knowledge. Curiosity leads to continuous acquisition of knowledge.

Finland is a nice country to study, a peaceful place to live, has a relaxing working environment and offers a good ecosystem for upbringing offspring. For many, compared to other Finnish cities Tampere excels in all the said criteria. Considering these, your decision to settle here once graduated to work or open a company would be highly rational. The Study & Stay programme of the International Hub project Tampere along with Hidden Gems stand by you and your spouse for cooperation to these ends. When you speak the language of the locals, you speak the language of their heart – acceptance begins and opportunities start to open. Start to learn and boldly use the Finnish language in your daily life from the very beginning in the Tampere higher education community. At university, you can choose courses in the Finnish language – take them all. Try to read, write and use the language on a daily basis. Local students have their own stake in helping international students learn Finnish – talk Finnish to international students outside the class and don't change from Finnish into English. In addition, the university staff should encourage international students to speak Finnish by using Finnish as the medium of communication with them in general conversations. Furthermore, introduction of a reward system in the form of a scholarship or tuition fee reduction is a demand for boosting up motivation of non-Finnish-speaking students to learn the Finnish language.



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