

## FINLAND CUSTOMS

### Greetings:

Men and women customarily shake hands and make eye contact when greeting. The most common form of greeting is a nod of acknowledgment and a *Hei* (Hello), though young women often embrace upon greeting each other.

A general greeting is *Hyvää päivää* (Good morning/afternoon), or even just *Päivää*. Another expression for “Good morning” is *Hyvää huomenta*, or just *Huomenta*.

In recent years, both young and old have begun using the more informal *Moi* (Hi) in greeting.

### Gestures:

Finns use few gestures when speaking. However, talking with one's hands in one's pockets is considered impolite. Maintaining eye contact is important during conversation. When yawns cannot be suppressed, one covers one's mouth.

### Holidays:

The most important holidays include New Year's Day, Easter (two days), *Vappu* (1 May), Whitsunday (Pentecost), Midsummer (held on the Friday nearest 21 June, the summer solstice), Independence Day (6 Dec.), and Christmas (24–26 Dec.). At least 80 festivals are held around the country during the year (usually in the summer months) and include art, music, dance, opera, and theater.

At Easter, families decorate Easter eggs and grow grass on plates in their homes. On Palm Sunday (a week before Easter), children dress up as Easter witches and recite charms door to door; they receive sweets or money for their verses.

*Vappu* is celebrated in honor of both springtime and laborers.

Finns celebrate Midsummer with huge bonfires by the lake; people usually leave cities and towns to go to the countryside for the day. The blue and white Finnish flag is also prominent on this holiday. Christmas is a time of peace, family, and gifts. Families eat the main meal on Christmas Eve after visiting local cemeteries and placing candles on the graves of soldiers and family members. Later, *Joulupukki*, also known as Santa Claus, arrives with gifts for the children. Families also enjoy time in the sauna on Christmas Eve. Christmas Day and 26 December are days for visiting and relaxing.