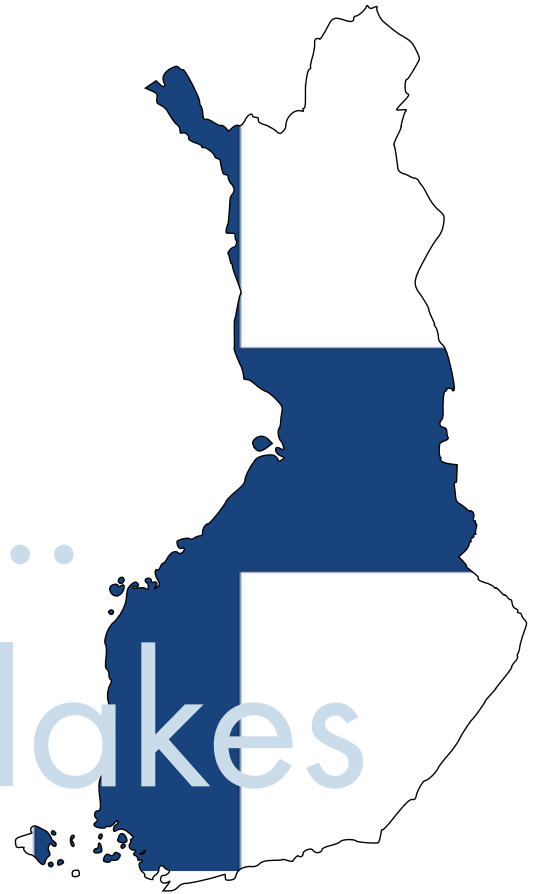


Country Check (12): **Finland**

# Horses, happiness ... and lots of lakes



Most stable state (Fragile States Index), freest country (Freedom House), lowest organised crime rate (Global Competitiveness Report) – Finland is regarded as one of the countries with a high quality of living and as a pioneer in many respects. It was the first country to introduce the female suffrage. According to UNICEF, Finland has the lowest child poverty rate. In 2019, Finland took first place in the

World Happiness Report for the second time in a row. Without Finnish horses, the Scandinavian country would not have achieved independence 100 years ago, let alone developed into such a successful nation.

In part 12 of our “Country Check” series we are presenting Finland and its equestrian sector.



**D**o hour of life is wasted that is spent in the saddle,” Winston Churchill said, and Katja Kulmakorpi from the Finnish automatic feeder manufacturer Oy Equine Innovations even makes a historical connection between Finnish horses and today's high quality of life. “Horse breeding has always played a very big and important role in the history of Finland,” she says. “Without Finnish horses, Finland would not be an independent country. Horses helped in the war and served the soldiers without fear.”

Finnhorses, the only original horse breed in Finland today, played a dominant role in Scandinavia already 500 years ago. So much so that, in the 16th century, the Swedish king Gustav I Wasa even banned them from being exported. Apropos Sweden, for centuries, Finland was an integral part of today's Scandinavian neighbouring country before the Russian Empire incorporated Finland in 1809. After the fall of the Tsar and the October Revolution, the Finnish Parliament declared independence on 6 December 1917.



*“Without Finnish horses, Finland would not be an independent country.”*  
(Katja Kulmakorpi, Oy Equine Innovations)

## POLITICALLY NEUTRAL

In terms of surface area, Finland is about the size of Germany. With its 19 provinces (Maakunta) and 5.5 million inhabitants, politically neutral Finland is one of the most sparsely populated countries in Europe. About 1.6 million people live in and around the capital of Helsinki. In the north, north of the Arctic Circle, in Lapland, which accounts for almost a third of Finland's size, only about 180,000 people live. The parliamentary-democratic republic is one of the northernmost countries in the world. Near the village of Nuorgam with 250 inhabitants lies the northernmost point of the EU.

The longest state border is 1340 kilometres, bordering Russia in the east. Other land borders are shared with Norway (736 kilometres) and Sweden (614 kilometres). According to figures of the Ministry of Environment there are exactly 187,888 lakes in the country that are larger than 500 square metres – a world record. But the “land of the thousands of lakes” is also the European champion when it comes to forests: 65 per cent of the area is covered by forests and woods (mainly pines, spruces and birches). The abundance of forests also means that nowhere in Europe are there more hunters. Six per cent of Finns are eligible to hunt.

## WHITE NIGHTS

Due to the north-south extension of more than 1000 kilometres, there are large climatic differences in the country. In summer, during the “white nights” of the midnight sun, the sun does not set at all for 73 days at the northern tip of Finland. In winter, on the other hand, the sun never rises above the horizon for 51 days



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– polar night. Despite intensive hunting - over a third of the animals are shot every year - there are considerably more elk (100,000) than horses (75,000) living in Finland. Especially in the north of the country, where about 1000 brown bears live, semi-domesticated reindeer (200,000) dominate the fauna.

The Sami people living in northern Lapland are the inventors of skiing and the only indigenous people in the EU. About 6000 Sami live in Finland. Like Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian, their languages belong to the so-called Uralic language family. On the one hand, Finnish is not an easy language for Western Europeans to learn - a moor in Lapland is called Äteritsiputeritsipuolilautatsijänkä, for example - on the other hand, there are also some loan words from German. People say “kippis” (German: “kipp es”, “toss it down”) for “cheers”. And coffee break - there is no nation consuming more coffee than the Finns (12.2 kg per capita/year) - means “kahvipaussi” (German: Kaffeepause).

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The Finnhorse is Finland's only indigenous horse breed.



## SAUNA PASSION

In addition to their coffee “addiction”, the Finns also share a passion for saunas. There are more saunas in the country than cars, i.e. 2.2 million – they're practically everywhere. For example, one of Helsinki's landmarks – the new Oodi Central Library – also contains a sauna. Even a Burger King branch in the capital has its own sauna, guests can order burgers and fries while taking a sauna.

Finland has been a member of the EU since 1995. In 2002, the euro replaced the Finnish mark as the currency in the country. In 2018, Finland had a gross domestic product of 233 billion euros. The Finnish horse industry employs more than 15,000 people, according to Suomen Ratsastajainliitto ry (SRL), the national equestrian federation, with the turnover of the horse industry amounting to a total of 830 million euros per year.

## GERMANY MOST IMPORTANT SUPPLIER

The Finnish economy as a whole is heavily dependent on international trade. In 2018, Finland exported goods worth a total of 63.8 billion euros and imported goods worth 66.4 billion euros. With an import share of 15.2 per cent, Germany is the most important supplier (ahead of the neighbouring countries Russia and Sweden) and the most important buyer. In 2018, 14.8 per cent of all exports went to Germany, followed by Sweden (10.2 per cent) and the Netherlands (6.5 per cent).

The umbrella organisation of all Finnish equestrian athletes is the aforementioned Suomen Ratsastajainliitto ry (SRL), which was founded in 1920 and has been temporarily managed by Jukka Koivisto since May 2019. With Magnus Rydman, the world federation FEI once had a president from Finland from 1939 to 1946. Helsinki was actually intended as the venue for the 1940 Summer Games, which were ultimately cancelled because of the war. By the way, for decades after the war, Rydman did not appear on any FEI list. The Finnish businessman had been forgotten as FEI President. It was not until the late 1970s that he was rediscovered as the successor of the Dutchman Karel V. Quarles van Ufford and as the predecessor of the Belgian Gaston de Trannoy.

## RIDING AMONG THE TOP 10

Currently, about 170,000 Finns are horse-riders. This makes equestrianism one of the ten biggest sports in Finland. According to SRL, 94 per cent of the association's members are female, and riding is the second most important female sport in the country. 44 per cent of SRL members are younger than 19 years of age. In addition to numerous club competitions, there are 120 national and 330 regional equestrian competitions every year. Figures for 2013 reveal the number of riders with a license to compete - 270 for international, 1700 for national and 3900 for regional competitions. The riders participating in competitions at club level are not registered.

The Helsinki International Horse Show, which includes World Cup jumping classes and always takes place in October, is Finland's largest indoor sports event with 50,000 visitors over five days. Other important competitions take place during the Hanko Seahorse Week, the Suomenhevosten Kuninkaalliset (a trotting race for Finnhorses first held in Ypäjä in 1924) and the Aino Nations Cup in Järvenpää.

## TWO LARGE HORSE FAIRS

In spring, two large equestrian sports fairs take place, the Helsinki Horse Fair (February/March) and the Hevoset-messut (April)



Tampere Hevoset-messut

in Tampere. Hevoset-messut describes itself as “the largest trade fair for the horse industry in Finland”. The twelfth edition in 2019 attracted almost 18,000 visitors to the Tampere Trade Fair and Sports Centre. The Helsinki Horse Fair takes place at the same time as the



Helsinki Horse Show



GoExpo sports and outdoor fair. Both fairs together attracted almost 45,000 visitors in 2019.

Finland is very proud of the breeding of the Finnhorse, the only original Finnish horse breed. The Finnhorse (studbook foundation in 1907) is a very versatile, slightly built heavy horse used for dressage, show jumping, eventing and trotting races. "They are also the best therapy horses," says Katja Kulmakorpi. Worldwide, there are currently about 20,000 Finnhorses. In 1910, numbers had been at 200,000. The Ypäjä Horse Centre, which emerged from the Finnish National Stud, is dedicated to breeding and training Finn horses.

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Ypäjä Equine College is one of the largest training centres in the European horse sector. "In Finland, people are very interested in the health and well-being of horses. Here, horses are turned out every day. This seems to be a very important thing for Finnish horse owners," says Tuomas Korhonen, head of marketing at the Finnish feed manufacturer Chia de Gracia, who has noticed a trend towards natural nutrition evolve within a few years: "The Finns pay much more attention to what they feed their horses."

Korhonen estimates that there are between 100 and 150 equestrian shops in Finland, most of which are located in the more densely populated south and southwest of the country, where the major Finnish cities are. "Due to the short summer and the longer winter, Finnish horses need comparatively many (winter) rugs," explains the marketing expert from Chia de Gracia, adding that the season in which there is green grass is quite short. "The horses spend a lot of time in paddocks, just a few months in the fields."

## TRADE AND EQUESTRIAN CHAINS

Finland's leading agricultural trade chain with the largest range is Hankkija, a subsidiary of the Danish Agro Group. The 800-employee company has 53 branches and the most versatile online shop in the industry. In 2015, Hankkija realised a turnover of 810 million euros. Lantmännen Agro operates 76 outlets in the country.

Puulo is a low-priced department store chain founded in 1982 with almost 30 stores, each offering a wide range of products (household articles, toys, building accessories, tools, car accessories, gardening supplies). But there is also a separate horse section selling feed, equipment and clothing. In the 2018-2019 financial year, Puulo, which employs 390 full-time staff, reported a turnover of 136 million euros. The Swedish equestrian chain Hööks, which describes itself as Scandinavia's largest equestrian company, operates seven branches in Finland.

## HORZE, THE BIG PLAYER

It was in Lahti in Finland where the foundation of the company Finn-Tack by Gunnar Gangsö in 1982 started the success story of Horze, one of the largest players in the European equestrian sector. In its home country, the company has two large stores, in Lahti and



For Finns, the health and well-being of the horse has top priority

Helsinki. "Finns value good quality and a high standard of goods production when shopping," says Katja Kulmakorpi of Oy Equine Innovations. "Online shopping has become the most popular way to shop. The Finns buy quite a lot of goods from Europe."

And now for something quite curious: Finland is also known for its fun sports competitions, which have a long tradition. The country of the former mobile phone world market leader Nokia features world championships in mobile phone throwing. The record holder is Ere Karjalainen. He threw the phone the crazy distance of 101.46 metres in 2012. In addition to world champi-

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onships in wife-carrying, mud football and mosquito killing (without any aids, just bare hands) as well as air guitar playing (Finland has the most heavy metal bands in the world per capita - 53 per 100,000 inhabitants) Hobby Horsing has been booming for some time.

## HORSING AROUND



In this Finnish sport, which features gymnastics elements, mainly girls and young women between the ages of 10 and 18 ride on mostly home-made hobby horses in competitions that simulate show jumping (with fences) and dressage classes. About 10,000 people are engaged in Hobby Horsing in Finland. The 2017 national championships in Helsinki attracted 1000 spectators. "We find it simply wonderful that Hobby Horsing has become such a popular phenomenon," commented Fred Sundwall, SRL Secretary General for many years. "It gives child-

ren and teenagers who don't have horses the chance to interact with them outside stables and riding schools."



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*"We think it's simply wonderful that Horsing has become such a popular phenomenon."*

(Fred Sundwall, long-time SRL Secretary General)



### Country comparison:



	<b>Finland</b>	<b>Germany</b>
Square kilometres	338.145	357.340
Inhabitants	5,5 million	82,2 million
Largest population group	25 to 54 years (37,6 %)	25 to 54 years (39,9 %)
Birth rate	1,7	1,5
Population growth	0,3 per cent	- 0,2 per cent
Gross domestic product per capita	42.190 Euro	40.852 Euro
Unemployment rate	7,4 per cent	3,4 per cent
Utilised agricultural area	2,2 million hectares (7,5%)	16,7 million hectares (47,9%)
Largest city in terms of inhabitants	Helsinki (0,6 million)	Berlin (3,5 million)
Number of large cities (more than 100,000 inhabitants)	9	80
Umbrella association (members)	Suomen Ratsastajainliitto ry/SRL (50.000)	Deutsche Reiterliche Vereinigung/FN (686.747)
Number of riders	170.000	3,9 million
FEI tournaments	31	331
Number of competition horses	37.000	147.000
Total number of horses	75.000	1,3 million
Equestrian trade fairs	-	spoga horse, Cologne
Equestrian fair	Hevoset-messut, Tampere Helsinki Horse Fair, Helsinki	Equitana, Essen
Number of equestrian magazines	5	60
Number of equestrian specialist shops	150	more than 1.500

Sources: information from DCSB, FEI GFN, SRL, World bank, estimates