

Taste of life...

15/07/2022 Brindisi Airport , Puglia.

Me, a Lions Club sweatshirt, a suitcase, lots of excitement and in my hand a ticket to Finland.

After three stopovers and a night in the Airport, I arrived in the long-awaited Oulu.

After two years of waiting, due to Covid, I was finally able to fully enjoy this experience offered by the Lions Club as a result of a contest won and sponsored by my school, Amerigo Vespucci of Gallipoli.

And so began my journey...

Waiting for me at the airport some blond hair tending to white and eyes as blue as the sky:

Kati, my Finnish mom and Julia, the little one of the house, together with a friend of hers.

It is difficult for me to describe in words the emotion I felt at that moment, some things you just feel, and they made me feel at home right away.



Talking about my Finnish family:

I spent two weeks in a family together with Kati, Julia, Esko (the father) and his three children Eetu together with his girlfriend Noora, Emmi and Eino.

Crossing the house's doorstep, I felt a certain warmth, a certain "positive aura", the enthusiasm and happiness with which I was welcomed warms my heart even now.

Their dedication to making me feel at home, especially Kati's (whom I got to experience a bit more) was unbeatable.

Having had similar experiences in the past, I can say that this was one of the best. Feeling understood, welcomed, listened to properly, is rare.... I was very lucky.

What amazed me the most was the harmony that was created from day one, as if I had known them all my life.

To give you one of the many examples I could cite, Kati had compiled a list of "things to do with Miriam" taped to the refrigerator so as not to forget anything, and every time we "completed an activity" it was checked off...Little things that made a huge difference.

It was 2 weeks of: small excursions, a visit to Santa's village, a greeting to a polar bear, a cooking class led by me (supported by them); after my initial wariness I loved taking the sauna and soaking in that relaxing warmth; we took walks in the woods; visits to various friends including, I can't not mention, Sanna and Sauli: two wonderful people who kept me company for two days and cooked me an amazing meal with potatoes and salmon; warm people, full of life, with whom it was truly enjoyable to spend time; a trip to the cinema, a day at the amusement park, a jump into prehistory, an afternoon in an escape room, lots of laughter, dancing, talks about more and less, many little life lessons and a sense of happiness and serenity that accompanied me for two weeks.



Talking a little about cooking:

As we well know, we all get patriotic when it comes to food...it is no coincidence that our cuisine is considered among the best in the world. To be honest, italians are usually a little bit “worried” once they put their foot out of Italy...but this time, I can say I was pleasantly impressed: Finns are food-lovers. Specifically, I was able to taste:



- **carrilian pies**: a savory dish made from flour (usually rye), rice and milk; rigorously made by us (thanks to Kati's patience and teachings) and eaten for dinner,

- **salmon soup**: with the addition of potatoes and cream, which Noora taught me how to make, it was delicious!

- **the very fine Arctic raspberry jam**, prepared by Kati, with some bread and cheese.

- **the famous reindeer**, which when I was first mentioned, I thought "I'll never eat it"...but then I became addicted to it... it's really good, similar in flavor to bresaola, and I was able to eat it in several ways , usually always accompanied by potatoes (also excellent).

I also had the courage to taste the tongue, a pleasant surprise.

And, funny but contradictory, on one of our excursions, we visited Ranua Zoo, and right there I had a chance to feed reindeers....

2 hours later for dinner, I ate one!

Speaking of excursions:

Apparently, if you go to Finland, a trip to Lapland is a must: the Christmas land of Santa Claus.

Sharing the same passion for the Christmas season with Kati and Julia, visiting Santa Claus' village was like becoming a child again. We spent the night there, in a beautiful, thematically decorated cottage.

The whole area has something magical about it: just to get to Lapland, you have to keep your eyes wide open because there is a possibility of reindeers cutting your path; not surprisingly on the way there we passed a couple of them. Once we arrived at our destination, among red buildings, Christmas-themed stores, employees dressed as elves and, of course, a meeting with Santa Claus himself! (You can't skip it, that's the rule!!) you become a child again and start dreaming again...and clearly you can't not jump the Arctic Circle line once you're there!



Some interesting facts about Finland:



Finland is the country with the lowest percentage of prisoners in Europe, this is due to a unique prison system: at the basis of this system, there is spending as little time as possible in the prison itself, consequently all prisoners (with some exceptions) benefit from conditional freedom. So, we can say, it's like a balance between the punitive value of punishment and its social and rehabilitative meaning.



The school system is financed by public funds that are disbursed to students.

The basis of this system is to regard studying as a real job; as a result, students receive a "salary," which allows them to leave home as soon as they finish high school.



Whether it is a house, a cottage or a flat, in Finland you will always find 2 things:

a space where you can leave your shoes, before entering the house, so that what you "find outside," stays outside;
a sauna, (considered as a basic room, in Finnish homes).

On campus...

After spending two wonderful and intense weeks with my Finnish family, I spent the last few days on a campus near the town of Kajaani.

We were 17 young people from different parts of the world: Italy, Germany, France, Turkey, Poland, Slovenia, etc.

We already knew each other a bit, either because some of us "had shared" the same family, or because of a tour in the city of Oulu, organized by Marika (head of the Finnish Lions Club) where we had the chance to introduce ourselves and spend some time together.

We only had the opportunity to spend 9 days together, but we made bonds that will last a lifetime.

Our days were organized mostly around meals (we ate 5 times a day, which we didn't mind at all) and activities in close contact with nature.





The campus was completely isolated and surrounded by nature, so we were able to pick blueberries, walk in the forest, take a sauna and immediately dive into the lake like real Finns; we also tried fishing although we didn't have great results and cooked pancakes in a hut-like structure, accompanied by stories from older lions club members.

The sense of tranquility and peace was something priceless; only our voices could be heard.

We spent another day visiting this island not far away. Here, divided into groups, we got to try different activities: picking blueberries, restoring part of the exterior of a house, cleaning up the beach (which actually, was already very clean).

Also having some time on our hands, Silvia (one of the Italian girls) and I decided to venture into the forest, somewhat naively.... But we can say that, it was really worth it:

It felt like being in paradise! Breathtaking views...



A whole day was spent to visit the city of Kajaani. A very nice lady was our guide and she explained the history of the city. We got to visit the two-floors, wooden church and take a small river cruise.

Among the activities I enjoyed most there was definitely the day dedicated to baseball.

We got to be students of real players, who explained the rules and made us practice it, and the next day we saw an actual game.



We dedicated 2 days to the children: we went to a kindergarten, where we played with them and also prepared some dances.

Although they only knew Finnish, which we did not speak, the language was not a big obstacle and we still managed to have fun.



*I will carry this experience with me, forever.
I always tell my family that it was a kind of therapeutic
journey, coming at the right time in my life.*



*PS. I already plan to return,
part of me is in Finland now.*



*Kitos.
Miriam Metafuni*

