

Europe, July to September 2026

August 12, Helsinki

Before starting, I'd like to present some information our lecturer gave on the Scandinavian countries. The lecturer was, at one time, ambassador to Denmark from India. He had some interesting statistics to present.

- First, all the four countries, Sweden, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, derive over 90% of their energy from renewable sources. Norway gets 98% from hydroelectric due to the coastal mountains. Not so for Denmark, where the highest point is only a few hundred feet above sea level. But, for them, 60% is from wind with sizeable amounts from solar and biomass (organic waste). Sweden has some hydro and nuclear.
- All the countries are high on the “equivalency scale” (my wording) where the differentiation between people with money and people with less is not as significant as, let's say, elsewhere
- The government takes care of people by providing free medical, schooling, and other social services. One country provides 46 weeks of paid leave for new parents. Yes, taxes are high and, yes, so is happiness. Finland has been voted the happiest country in the world for almost ten years. Denmark is 3rd, Sweden is 5th, Norway is 6th.
- Over 50% of new car sales are electric and the air quality (especially Helsinki) is among the cleanest in the world for metropolitan areas

We might schedule our reincarnation here.

So, having said that, today was Helsinki, a 4-mile walking tour. The first thing we noticed was approaching the city on ship. We're almost there, but there were a couple of isolated houses.



Both are isolated islands with one house. I assume they have generators. I wonder how they handle their water, garbage, and waste. We saw the same thing a few years ago as we approached Oslo. Not for me.

Helsinki is a relatively new town. Most of the building occurred in the 1800s. Finland was part of the Russian empire back in the tsarist days and gained independence in 1918 as a side effect of the Russian revolution. It was never part of the USSR.



Walking into town, we passed a Ferris Wheel. Lots of major European cities seem to have them now. Helsinki is no exception, except this one has a tweak. There are two special cars. This picture shows one of them in a dark color at the lower left. Special cars cost a bit extra and are different from the rest. Obviously. This one is a sauna. You can enjoy a steam bath as you rotate up and around. The other one is a champagne car. You get a free

glass (or maybe bottle) of champagne. Well, not free. You paid for it. That I can understand. Paying for a sauna on a Ferris wheel ride is not in my scope of appreciation.



The guide told us a fairly unusual fact about the Finnish language. Until sometime in the 1800s (or maybe late 1700s) it was a spoken language only. Not written, or hardly ever. When some religious figure tried to translate the bible into Finnish, and print it as a book, he had to invent about 3,000 words. The spoken language never used many of the words required to translate liturgical concepts. Not sure how you invent words that people can understand. People sometimes say I do that, but that's just me talking fast.

It wasn't until 1854 (more or less) that the first non-religious book in Finnish was written. That's very late. It was such a big deal, that they erected a statue to the author. A statue for writing a book! Unusual.



That statue was, not surprisingly, located on the way to the Helsinki library. The library is likely a good case of the advantage of living in a country with a high degree of socialism. The library, recently opened, is in downtown Helsinki not far from the train station. Besides books and nice reading area, it has work rooms and conference rooms that can be reserved by the citizens. Want to hold a business meeting with easy access to public transportation? Just reserve a room.

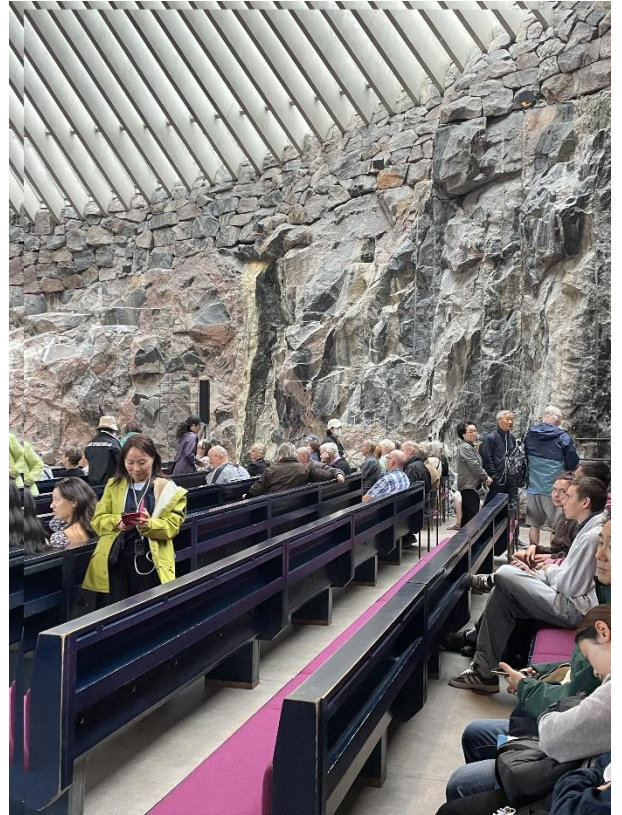
There were also many people using computers (provided by the library or their own) in private work rooms. I imagine Jon would have an easy time of it here.

A view from a balcony at the top of the library shows a pleasant city scene. You can also sit and work out here. That's the parliament building, designed by Saarinen. His son moved to the US and designed, among other things, the arch in St. Louis.



The guide said everyone is comfortable in Finland. You can earn a good living, but it is hard to become very rich. Likely the high tax rate. But, remember, Finland is enjoying its 10th year as the number one happiest country in the world.

Ok, on the churches. There is a reason for this one. I guess I said that before, but this is really different. The building. It doesn't matter that it's a church. Just coincidental. This one was built into a hill of solid granite, what used to be a hill of solid granite before the church.



And then there is the typical big city sculpture.



This is a tribute to Sibelius, a Finnish composer. That was our culture for the day.

Tonight we have hopes. There is a solar eclipse that will be visible from certain parts of the world. Here, the eclipse will be 80% and occur around sunset. The ship gave us special viewing glasses. However, right now, about 6PM, it's cloudy, so we will see (or not).