

Cultural Tips on Housing in Finland

- Information for International Staff and Students

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Introduction

This brochure is meant for newcomers to a Finnish accommodation. You can find some helpful practical tips and vocabulary here, related to living in an apartment in Finland

1. Cleanliness

Upon arrival and when leaving an accommodation, the expected state of cleanliness may be strict - ask to find out.

Clean the drains on a regular basis. Do not put anything down the drain that does not belong (such as oils and cooking fats, paper towels, or diapers), as it may clog the drain.

2. House Rules

Quiet Time

Usually there is a quiet time in apartment buildings (e.g. 22:00 – 7:00). Be respectful of your neighbours on all sides, by reducing the volume on everything from conversations to music after 22:00, including waiting to run appliances until the next day.

Hallways / Corridors

Be quiet in the hallways/corridors and don't leave anything there, as it can be considered a fire safety hazard.

Pets

Usually you are allowed to keep pets in your apartment, however your landlord has the right to ban you from having any pets in the apartment by mentioning this in the rental agreement. It is also a good idea to check with your neighbours in case of potential disturbances.

3. Safety

Fire Alarms

It is compulsory to have enough fire alarms: at least one fire alarm for each floor, every 60 metres square of an apartment requires a separate fire alarm. This means that if an apartment is 45 metres square, one fire alarm is enough, but if an apartment is 65 metres square, two alarms are needed. The tenant is responsible for taking care that there is an adequate amount of functioning fire alarms.

Home Insurance

It is strongly recommended that you have home insurance in Finland. It is also very common that landlords require tenants to have home insurance and thus getting it is a condition for having the rental apartment. You can obtain home insurance separately or together in packages with, for example personal and health insurance also.

Emergency Number

In case of emergency call 112 – it is intended for emergency situations that threaten life, health, property or the environment. Dialing 112 will connect you to an emergency call centre, with access to services such as fire, ambulance and the police. Keep this number handy.

Fires and Smoking

Fires indoors are not allowed unless there is a separate and functioning fireplace in the apartment. Smoking is generally discouraged. Show consideration to your neighbours and others near you when smoking. Landlords can mention in the rental agreement that you are not allowed to smoke indoors. If you do not follow this condition you are responsible financially to compensate for damages.

4. Neighbours in Finland

If you have a problem with your neighbor - such as disturbing behavior - as the first step, go and consult your neighbours face-to-face - and expect the same from your neighbour, for example if you are disturbing them.

If you are disturbing your neighbor, and attempts between parties to resolve the situation are unsuccessful, the real estate provider may be notified, and come to inspect, sending a letter as an official warning if necessary. If the disturbance continues, you as the tenant or owner may be evicted.

5. Waste, Recycling & Energy Efficiency

Waste and Recycling

The law requires that you recycle as much as possible by sorting your waste. Here is a summarised guide:

Biojäte > Biowaste and Compost (brown bin): Collect and pack your biowaste and compost (such as food leftovers, fruit and vegetable peels, tea bags, coffee grounds and filters and paper towels) in a paper bag, cereal box, newspapers, or biodegradable waste bag, and deposit it here

Paperi > Paper (green bin): All paper, for example received by post, including envelopes, along with newspapers and magazines

Kartonki > Paper or Board Based packages (blue bin): Packaging such as milk, juice and yogurt cartons (rinsed out and folded), as well as egg cartons, go into this recycle bin

Energiajäte > Combustable Waste (orange bin): Most plastics such as food packaging and containers, as well as detergent and cleaner bottles (**no** aluminum foil or food leftovers)

Lasi > Glass: Returnable bottles to the shop, other glass (ie. jars) to glass recycle bin

Metalli > Metal: Returnable cans back to the shop (ie. aluminum beverage cans), small metal items to metal recycle bin

Clothes, Furniture, books, etc: Unwanted items with potential for reuse can go to recycling centres, for example clothes and shoes can be brought to UFF or Fida stores. Large items such as furniture can be picked up by Sortti (arranged through hsy.fi customer service)

Sekajäte > Mixed waste (grey bin): This bin is for all waste that cannot be recycled or reused (**no** paper, biowaste or other recyclable materials)

See here for more information: www.hsy.fi



Energy Efficiency

Use only as much water and power as you need. Here are some tips to help you to save, both resources and on your bills:

- Only run the washing machine with full loads, with cold water when possible (i.e. 40-60 degrees, you can look for special washing detergent for use in this temperature range)
- When washing dishes and taking a shower use less water and even less hot water (it takes power to heat)
- If the heat is on, keep the windows closed as much as possible
- When you are not using electrical devices or appliances, turn them off, or even better, disconnect their power - either by unplugging them from the wall or by turning off the circuit breaker on your extension cord (otherwise they may still use electricity)

6. Commonly Shared Facilities

Laundry

Usually there is a laundry room in the basement, which you have to book. It can cost, so check if there's an extra charge. If it is necessary to make this booking, you have a right to use the machine then, but please respect the beginning and end time.

Sauna

You need to check the schedule, and usually book a time, for which there might be a fee. Information can usually be found outside the door to the sauna or in the hallway. A time marked as 'Lenkkisauna', means it is reserved for free use by all building residents, however with different times allotted for women (*naiset*) and men (*miehet*).

Cars and Bikes

If you have your own car you can ask from the property manager whether there are any free parking places available on the property, since parking places are rented out for the residents. However it is quite usual that you may have to queue for your own parking place and meanwhile park on nearby streets. Bikes are allowed to be kept in certain areas outdoors- locked to racks reserved for your building, or inside in a storage room, for which you need to use a key.

Common areas and facilities

The custom is that everybody cleans up after themselves after using any common areas/facilities, such as grills and storage areas. Usually the house rules of the apartment building restrict using any kind of grill on the balcony, where the law restricts those heated by wood/coal.

7. Useful Contact People

There is a division of labour and responsibilities in each apartment building. Here are the titles of people to contact along with an explanation of each of their roles:

Isännöitsijä: Property Manager, Building Superintendent, Super

In Finland, besides the rental housing companies, most of the apartment buildings are housing corporations, where all of the apartments are owner-occupied flats. In these housing corporations the real estate management is always outsourced to house managing agencies and each apartment building has its own Property Manager (*Isännöitsijä* in Finnish). The task of the Property Manager is basically to manage the overall administration of the housing corporation. For example when you move in or out of the apartment building you must inform the Property Manager (*Isännöitsijä*). Otherwise as a tenant you do not usually need to contact the Property Manager.

Huoltoyhtiö: Maintenance Company / **Talonmies:** Janitor

Each apartment building has either a maintenance company or janitor who takes care of the condition of the apartment building and its yard. If the apartment building has its own janitor he/she usually lives in the building. The tasks of the maintenance company/janitor vary according to the contract, nonetheless listed here are some of the most common tasks they conduct:

- If you have problems with plumbing or heating, contact the maintenance company.
- For taking care of repairs needed in the common and shared facilities of the apartment building (e.g. sauna, laundry room, hallways) inform the maintenance company.
- Maintenance companies usually change the names on the doors.

Vuokranantaja: Landlord

The landlord is responsible for the functioning of all the equipment inside the apartment (e.g. stove, fridge) - however not the plumbing or heating equipment (see previous paragraph).

NOTE:

Tasks between the Property Manager and maintenance company can vary, depending on the apartment building. For a more accurate division of services between the two, just ask.

Usually the names and contact information of the property manager and Maintenance Company are posted on the board in the hallway of your apartment building.

Frequently asked questions:

Q: Who do I contact if I lose my key?

If you lose your keys you may ask either the maintenance company, or if the apartment building has made a contract - the security company, to come and open up the doors for you. This service usually costs approx. 50-100 € depending on the time of day. You also need to prove your identity. Usually the door opening service and prices are posted on the board in the hallway of your apartment building, or on the front door. It is advisable to save this “emergency door opening number” in your cell phone. If the landlord lives close by, you can also call him/her and to ask whether she/he can come and open up the door for you. Of course, if it is late at night this option is not recommended.

It is wise to either ask for or make spare keys when you move into the apartment. This way you would have spare keys in the apartment ready to use if you lose the original ones. You also may consider giving the extra keys to a trustworthy friend, who lives close by and could come and open the door for you, in case you lose the keys. Always inform the landlord if you lose your keys.

If you do not have spare keys but are in need of a set, you need to contact the landlord so that new copies of the keys can be made. Sometimes, depending on the type of the locks and keys, you need to order new keys from the Property Manager and this might take some time. With some keys you can just go and make copies yourself. You need to pay for the new keys and also any other costs caused by losing the keys.

NOTE: Do not identify your keys by marking your full name or address or any other information which could identify the apartment building to which the keys belong. Changing locks for the entire building is really expensive!

Q: ‘Furnished’ vs. ‘unfurnished’, what does it mean?

The majority of the rental apartments in Finland are unfurnished. This means that you cannot expect anything besides the accommodation itself. You need to bring all the furniture yourself, along with kitchen ware, sheets, curtains etc. However unfurnished apartments usually include a stove and fridge and sometimes even a washing machine and dishwasher. You need to go to the rental apartment showing or call to the owner/real estate agent in order to get the actual information about which necessities are included in the rental agreement.

The degree to which furnished apartments are already equipped can vary considerably. A furnished apartment can mean that it is equipped only with the basic furniture, or basic furniture and kitchenware, plus even sheets and towels. There is not any standard definition for ‘furnished apartment’. You need to go to the rental apartment showing or call to the owner/real estate agent in order to get the actual information on which necessities come as part of the rental agreement. If you are renting a furnished apartment, it might be wise to make a detailed list of all the furnishings which come included in your rental agreement (e.g. 6 pieces of IKEA forks, 6 pcs of IKEA plates, 3 carpets, kitchen table and 4 chairs...

etc.). This might help both parties - tenant and landlord - in case of any uncertainties when moving out of the apartment.

Q: What is the metal rack in the yard used for?

The metal racks in the yard are used for hanging your carpets/blankets in order to air them out, and also to get the dust out by beating them with a carpet beater. Therefore they are called carpet racks (*mat-toteline* in Finnish). Since it is very common for Finns to clean their homes during the weekend, it is not polite to occupy the carpet rack for many hours during the weekends.

It might be surprising that the carpet racks are more often used during the cold winter season. The reason is that the dust mites (small harmless bugs that live in the carpets/beds) are killed very efficiently by the cold.

Q: How do you clean your carpets?

There are many ways you can clean your carpets. Usually it is enough just to vacuum them and perhaps shake them outside - also freshening them by hanging them outside on the carpet rack.

If you need to wash them, just follow the carpet's washing instructions. You may use a laundry company service or then you can wash them yourself. It is not usually allowed to use apartment building washing machines, in the common laundry room, for washing any items other than clothes and sheets/towels - so do not wash your carpets in them. If the machine breaks you need to pay for the damages.

In Finland there are municipal carpet washing places where you can wash your carpets yourself, without any cost. These places are situated outdoors and they are open only during summer time. Especially during the warm and sunny days you can find all the carpet washing places filled up with Finns washing their carpets!

Usually in these places you cannot and you do not have to book any time for your washing. The rule is that whoever comes first, gets the place first. Meaning that if there is not any room left for you to wash your carpets, you need to come another day/hour. You can also stay and queue for your turn. Usually only environmentally friendly washing powders are allowed to be used.

More info and locations of the municipal carpet washing places can be found out from the municipality/city's office.

More questions? Check with your landlord.