

TUTORIAL
6.8

Culture snapshots 2

This tutorial looks at two more cultures, those of Finland and Morocco - by giving a brief description of some of the things that are important to people in those cultures, and some of the culture threads that are evident in their societies.

Introduction

We are going to take a snapshot of the cultures of Finland and Morocco. Again, our purpose isn't to stereotype individuals within those cultures, but to look at some common threads in each one to see how people find common solutions to problems and have ways of interacting with one another. We also want you to think again about your own perceptions as an outsider and how your views might have been formed.

Finland



1. Communication

Language: Of the two official languages of Finland, Finnish is the first language spoken by 93% of the country's 5 million inhabitants.

Finnish, unlike Scandinavian languages, is not Germanic but in a class of its own. Theoretically, it is related to Hungarian but in practice the two are not mutually comprehensible. The other official language, Swedish, is spoken by around 6% of the population, most of whom live in the southwest and are also speakers of Finnish. Sami is a minority language in Scandinavia that is spoken by around 2,000 people living in the north of Finland, which is 0.03% of the Finnish population.

Finns place a great value on speaking plainly and openly. What someone says is accepted at face value and this is a culture where "a man's word is his bond" and will be treated as seriously as a written contract, so verbal commitments are considered agreements. Finns are direct communicators, and will tell you what they think rather than what you want to hear.

Finns talk in moderate tones and do not do anything to call attention to themselves. Serial conversation is the rule - i.e. listen to the speaker, wait for them to finish and then reply. Interrupting is rude. Greetings are formal, with a

firm handshake, direct eye contact, and a smile. It is common practice to repeat your first and surname while shaking hands. When greeting a married couple, the wife should be greeted first.

2. Life Values

Finland is an egalitarian society, which is reflected in their language, which employs gender-neutral words. Finns are very modest and downplay their own accomplishments. They view being humble and modest as virtues. Finns believe there is a proper way to act in any circumstance and always expect courteous behaviour.

Honesty and dependability are the two characteristics held in highest regard among Finns. They do, however, give an extreme degree of space to other people which can mean that the initiative for making friends often falls on a foreigner living in Finland. Once the ice is broken Finns are open and warm. Finns are punctual in both business and social situations.



There is a fairly formal dining etiquette - visitors should wait to be told where to sit.

Table manners are continental; the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right while eating, keeping wrists resting on the edge of the table. Bread and shrimp are the only foods eaten by hand. Even fruit is eaten with utensils. Men should keep their jacket on at meals unless the host removes his. Finns do not appreciate waste, so diners are expected to finish everything on their plate. When finished eating, the knife and fork are placed across the plate with the prongs facing down and the handles facing to the right.

The sauna has a special role in the domestic life of Finns. It is an experience shared with family and friends. Important business meetings may be followed by a sauna in which the conversation is continued on a more informal basis. Saunas are found everywhere: At the end of the year 2002, there were 1,212,000 saunas in private apartments and another 800,000 in summer cottages and public swimming pools. This translates to more than 2,000,000 saunas for a population of 5.2 million.



3. Relationships

Finns are interested in long-term relationships. Relationship building often takes place outside the work environment: in a restaurant or the sauna. A

visitor should realise that it is serious to turn down an invitation to use the sauna, as it is an important part of the Finnish culture.

A century ago most people lived in the countryside. Families had many children, and grandparents were present and participated in caring for, and raising their grandchildren. Even fifty years ago Finnish families were large with many children. People from the rural areas moved increasingly into cities, where construction of compact residential areas was started.

Nowadays a typical Finnish family with children consists of a married mother and father with two children. However, in addition to the nuclear family, there are many different kinds of family. Cohabitation is very common in Finland. There are also many single parent families where children live only with a mother or a father. The number of blended families has also increased.

4. Identity

Ethnic Make-up: Finn 93%, Swede 6%, Sami 0.11%, Roma 0.12%, Tatar 0.02%.

Religions: Evangelical Lutheran 89%, Russian Orthodox 1%, none 9%, other 1%.

Finland, along with Iceland, is Nordic rather than Scandinavian. This is reflected in their language, which is not Germanic in origin. While many social values are the same, there are subtle differences with Scandinavians.

Morocco



1. Communication

Languages: Classical Arabic is Morocco's official language, but the country's distinctive Arabic dialect is the most widely spoken language in Morocco. In addition, about 10 million Moroccans, mostly in rural areas, speak Berber - which exists in Morocco in three different dialects (Tarifit, Tashelhit, and Tamazight) - either as a first language or bilingually with the spoken Arabic dialect. French, which remains Morocco's unofficial third language, is taught universally and still serves as Morocco's primary language of commerce and economics; it is also widely used in education and government. Many Moroccans in the northern part of the country speak Spanish. English, while still far behind French and Spanish in terms of number of speakers, is rapidly becoming the foreign language of choice among educated youth. English is taught in all public schools from the fourth year on.

When Moroccans greet each other they take their time and converse about their families, friends, and other general topics. Handshakes are the customary greeting between individuals of the same sex. Handshakes may be somewhat weak according to western



standards. Once a relationship has developed, it is common to kiss on both cheeks, starting with the left cheek while shaking hands, men with men and women with women. In any greeting that does take place between men and women, the woman must extend her hand first. If she does not, a man should bow his head in greeting.

When entering a social function, it is correct to shake hands with the person to your right and then continue around the room going from right to left, and when leaving to say good-bye to each person individually.

Moroccans are non-confrontational. They may agree rather than cause anyone to lose face.

They expect a fair amount of haggling. Moroccans seldom see an offer as final. Decisions are made slowly - the process is as important as the outcome, and rushing it would be interpreted as an insult. Moroccans can be deliberate and forceful negotiators.

The society is extremely bureaucratic. Most decisions require several layers of approval. It may take several visits to accomplish simple tasks.

2. Life Values

The Concept of Shame - *Hshuma*: Moroccans' most cherished possession is their honour and dignity, which reflects not only on themselves but also on all members of their extended family.

Moroccans will go out of their way to preserve their personal honour. *Hshuma* occurs when other people know that they have behaved inappropriately.

A Moroccan's sense of self-worth is externally focused, so the way others see them is of paramount importance. If someone is shamed, they may be ostracized by society, or even worse, by their family. To avoid *hshuma*, many Moroccans will say or do things publicly because it makes them look good or helps them avoid embarrassment or awkwardness.

Moroccans judge people on appearances, so it is important for them to dress and present themselves well.

Conservative Moroccans may not entertain mixed-sex groups at a dinner in their home. Food is generally served at a knee-high round table. The guest of honour generally sits next to the host. A washing basin will be brought to the table before the meal is served. Each guest holds their hands over the basin while water is poured over them. The host will begin eating after he blesses the food, then everyone begins to eat.



Food is served from a communal bowl. Eating and drinking is done with the right hand only - food is scooped with a piece of bread or the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand. A person should never reach across the bowl to get something from the other side. Honoured guests will have choice cuts of meat put in front of them. Water is often served from a communal glass. The washing basin is brought around the table again at the end of the meal. Providing an abundance of food is a sign of hospitality. Mint tea is served when meeting someone, as this demonstrates hospitality.

3. Relationships

The family is the most significant unit of Moroccan life and plays an important role in all social relations. The individual is always subordinate to the family or group. Nepotism (favouritism) is viewed positively, since it indicates patronage of one's family. The family consists of both the nuclear and the extended family. The elderly are revered and respected and often exert a great influence on the rest of the family.

Moroccans prefer to do business with those they know and respect; therefore they expect to spend time cultivating a personal relationship before any business is conducted. Who you know is more important than what you know, so it is important in Morocco to network and cultivate a number of contacts who may then assist you in working your way through the serpentine bureaucracy.

4. Identity

Ethnic Make-up: Arab-Berber 99.1%, Jewish 0.2%, other 0.7%.

Religion: Islam is practised by the majority of Moroccans and governs their personal, political, economic and legal lives. Islam emanated from what is today Saudi Arabia. Among certain obligations for Muslims is to pray five times a day - at dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening. The exact time is listed in the local newspaper each day. Friday is the Muslim holy day. Everything is closed. Many companies also close on Thursday, making the weekend Thursday and Friday. During the holy month of Ramadan all Muslims must fast from dawn to dusk and are only permitted to work six hours per day. Fasting includes no eating, drinking, cigarette smoking, or gum chewing. Expatriates are not required to fast; however, they must not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum in public. Each night at sunset, families and friends gather together to celebrate the breaking of the fast (*iftar*). The festivities often continue well into the night. In general, things happen more slowly during Ramadan. Many businesses operate on a reduced schedule. Shops may be open and closed at unusual times.



DISCUSSION POINTS

Culture snapshots 2

1. What are some of the things that a foreign visitor could unintentionally do that might annoy a Finnish person? What might be some of the things you would find difficult about living in Finland, or what things might you enjoy?
2. Which areas of life in Morocco do you think are not affected by Islam?



ACTIVITIES

Culture snapshots 2

1. Choose one of the cultures in this tutorial and compare your own culture with it. Note any contrasts you see in each of the areas: *Communication, Life Values, Relationships* and *Identity*.