



Aalto University



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Degree Program at TAU: MBA

Host University: Aalto Business School - Aalto University, Finland

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Exchange Experience

About the country and city

Finland is a social-welfare country, with a strong economy and a high standard (and cost) of living. It is also very safe, with one of the lowest crime rates in the world. Most of the year Finland has cold and rainy weather, and daylight doesn't last very long. But in the summer, it's the other way around: it turns dark only around 10 PM and the weather can be very hot. I was lucky to have 25-30°C and even went to the beach 😊. Also, during the summer, most Finns go on vacation to their summer cabins far away from the city, so the university is not very full of people – mainly students on exchange, or those enrolled in the summer program (ITP – which involved some mutual work with my program). The city of Helsinki itself is mainly busy during the day and quiet at night.

Finns share some characters with their Scandinavian neighbors. These include strong work ethic, a notion of equality, transparency and preciseness. However, the distinctive character of the Finns is often summed up with the word "Sisu", which is a mix of "determination, bravery and stubbornness". The Finnish language is very complicated, but fortunately – most Finnish people speak good English. They are very polite and helpful, but do not always show emotion, so you might need to guess if they are joking or not 😊. Just make sure you arrive on time...

Helsinki also offers various activities in terms of culture, sports, nature, restaurants and bars. It has a growing startup and consulting scene, which is worth exploring (besides the visits organized by the program). Its location allows easy travel to Tallinn (Estonia) and St. Petersburg (Russia), but also to nearby Scandinavian cities, such as Stockholm and Copenhagen.

About the Host University

The Aalto business school campus is conveniently located in the center of Helsinki (this is supposed to change soon, as the school is moving to a large university campus in Espoo, which is part of the Helsinki metropolitan area). This was very helpful, as it was easy to get around. The school has 2 main buildings which are close to each other – one for classrooms and one for the library, gym, administration office and more. Most activities were held near the university or were accessible by public transport. You could arrive by yourself or with the program coordinator.

Courses and professors

I participated in a special program called "Digital Business Master Class", which included various subjects, including project management and marketing. The students are split into teams, and each team works with an actual company (public or private) to solve a problem. The program is split into 3 parts: 1 week of virtual teamwork during June, with 1 deliverable. Then, a 2-week course in Helsinki. The course in Helsinki had a very busy & extremely planned schedule: it included lectures with some of the best lecturers worldwide, designated time for teamwork and social events. This part includes 1 paper and 1 presentation to be delivered. Finally, there is 1 more week of virtual teamwork in August, with 3 final deliverables. There are specific dates and times for every part of the program and the program directors expect you to work around them, for both team and personal deliverables. The communication with the professors and program staff is very easy and they are all very friendly and happy to help.

Accommodation

The program suggests a discounted room in the university dorms (Domus Academica), which is very close to the university. The cost of accommodation in a shared 2-person room was 450 Euros per person for a stay of 2 weeks. Domus Academica also has single rooms, which can be booked separately and are more expensive. I chose to stay in a cheap Airbnb apartment near the university.

Visa

Like other European countries, Israeli passport holders do not need a visa for Finland (for less than 3 months). Obviously, if you're a European citizen, you don't either 😊.

Transportation

Public transportation in Helsinki and around it is well organized and usually precise (like most things in Finland). It's also relatively cheap, and by buying tickets in advance you can get various discounts. The Helsinki transport mobile app (HSL) is very useful, and it combines trains, metro, busses, trams and rental bikes. Most of

the time I used the bikes to ride around (a weekly pass is 10 Euros), and sometimes I used the metro or busses when needed. I only used a taxi once 😊.

Insurance and Health Services

As I was only away for 3 weeks, I just purchased standard travel insurance.

Living expenses

Helsinki is a very expensive city (in general, Finland itself is an expensive country). As long as you are enrolled in the program and have a student card, you are entitled to various discounts: lunch at the university cafeteria (3 Euros), discounted gym membership and more. Taking advantage of the student status is the best way to save some money.

Food

As mentioned, the university has a great cafeteria with cheap prices. Other than that, Helsinki has many restaurants (recommended: "Lappi") and cafes (recommended: "Cafetoria"), but some of them are quite expensive. One typical food is Karelian pasty ("karjalanpiirakka"): a traditional Finnish dish, made from a thin rye crust with a filling of barley or rice. In general, the main dishes are based on fish or meat - but Helsinki has a lot of vegan options too.

Nightlife

Compared to Tel Aviv, Helsinki's nightlife scene is not very big. However, Finland does have a culture of heavy drinking, so there are some bars to start with. The program includes a bar visit to start with, but after that we just went out as a group of students. I was fortunate to go while the world cup was on, so most of the bars were full, and there was always an excuse to go out... My recommendation – go to a place called "Siltanen". McDonalds is open 24/7 if you need a late-night snack 😊.

It's worth mentioning, that like most things in Finland, alcohol in bars is expensive. Outside bars, it is sold only in one place (a government-licensed chain of stores called "Alko"). Many Finns buy drinks there and socially drink together before going out – students do the same...

Tips

- Take advantage of the fact that Finland has thousands of lakes and islands and most of its terrain is covered by forests – and visit at least one national park. We went hiking in Nuuksio national park, which was great, but there are many more. At this time of year, the weather should be in your favor 😊.
- Although the weather is (usually) fine, bring clothes for all types of weather. I experienced a few days of rain before it became very hot.

- Helsinki has many museums – if it's your thing, go visit them.

General experience

- The program is perfect for students that can't leave home for a long period, due to work or any other reasons.
- Since the program was very busy and had tight schedules and deadlines, I had to prepare myself accordingly; it made work much easier (especially during the last part of the program, when everyone was back home working in different time zones). This also meant I spent a lot of time with the same group of people. The program only had around 30 people from around the world, selected carefully; luckily, we had an intelligent group of people, and we got along easily. It was great meeting smart people from different cultures.
- Overall, in my opinion, DBMC is a good program and I recommend it.

Good Luck!