



Name: Jesus, 50 years old

Home country: Spain

Education: Two Master's degrees in Business administration and Economics

Occupation: Works in business consultancy

Moved to Finland: in 1993 as an exchange student

Languages: Spanish, English, Finnish

Intercultural relationship: Jesus is married to a Russian woman

"MY PATH": my story before Finland, in Finland, my goals and hopes

Jesus moved to Finland as an exchange student under the Erasmus student exchange programme. He may be called a pioneer of Erasmus, as it was 1992 when the Erasmus programme was launched in Spain and early 1993 - when Jesus arrived in Finland. At that time, Nordic countries were relatively unknown, and only two students from his university went to Finland to study business administration.

Jesus loved Finland from the very beginning. He was impressed by how accessible nature was, how well the country functioned and its high autonomy. He wanted to continue living abroad and decided to stay in Finland after his exchange semester was over.

Jesus met his wife through his consulting work, when he had already settled down in Finland, and they decided she would move to live with him from Russia. He remembers that the paperwork process was extremely long and difficult for them, as many documents needed to be translated and legalized. Jesus overdid the paperwork, which he believes speeded up the process, as the Immigration Services could see that their relationship was real.

Jesus's tip № 1: Do not be afraid of overdoing paperwork in Finland whenever any proof is needed. If you have something to explain, do it in detail from the very beginning, as it allows the Immigration Services (or any other authority) to see a real person behind papers.

RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKS

Jesus remembers that in 1993-1996, Finnish people tended to react to foreigners cautiously, as there were not many of them. Finland was not a part of the EU until 1995, so there were very few exchange students when Jesus studied, which is not comparable to present times. To build connections with local people and Finnish classmates, he constantly needed to prove that he could be trusted and that he really intended to integrate into Finnish society. He points out that the most effective way to do it was learning Finnish. He believes that Finnish people really appreciate the effort dedicated to learning Finnish from a foreigner. It is a proof of merit, and it lets Finnish people be themselves while speaking.

Apart from local people, Jesus felt that he needed to communicate with Spanish people or someone having a similar mindset. For example, Finnish people are more reserved when sharing details about their private life, which is considered to be normal in Spain. So, he formed a circle of friends from his own culture, but always kept the main focus on integrating himself in Finland.

Jesus's tip № 2: Even if you manage with English in Finland, remember that speaking Finnish to local people is very much appreciated. It allows locals to be themselves and makes them more open to communication.

FINNISH LANGUAGE

Jesus says that it was hard to survive without Finnish outside of the university campus. Finnish Universities are very internationally oriented. They are very caring towards visiting students, English is the main language, and students are not expected to speak Finnish with the staff and students. He believes that there is a big and sudden difference between the life of a student in Finland and real post-student life regarding both the language, and the autonomy expected from one. Day-to-day paperwork issues after being a student, such as tax related documentation, local registry paperwork, renting a flat, purchasing internet, medical and any other services, are all done in Finnish as a primary language.

When Jesus decided to stay in Finland permanently, he enrolled in as many Finnish courses as possible, spending about 7-8 hours a day studying it. Learning Finnish was of great need for him, since being no longer a student, he was out of that foreign-friendly English speaking bubble and was very exposed to Finnish speaking situations. He made learning Finnish his top priority, and it took him about 2 years to be able to speak fluently. Written Finnish took him longer, around 4 years.

He recommends those who learn Finnish not to expect that just participation in Finnish language courses will automatically help to learn the language. He felt Finnish grammar was very unique, and it required him a tremendous amount of independent work to be done apart from the courses to have progress.

What helped Jesus to memorise Finnish vocabulary was surrounding himself massively with Finnish words, in order to familiarize his brain with them (since he felt that Finnish words had no similarity with Spanish). For example, something like putting stickers on objects with a Finnish word for them helped a lot. As he saw those objects at home every day, he started subconsciously memorising the words. Besides, he avoided switching to English when he had hard times understanding Finnish, for example, when speaking to someone or reading documentation.

Jesus's tip № 3: Cut a deal with yourself and do not immediately switch to English when you face difficulties explaining yourself or understanding something in Finnish.

EMPLOYMENT

Jesus's career path in Finland started from carrying out small tasks, such as doing translations and preparing speeches in Spanish for various companies. He was a bit disappointed, that even having two Master's degrees could not guarantee him a fulfilling position with professional growth opportunities. He would like to have more responsibilities in his professional field.

He continued doing similar type of work for about a year before he was involved in a management education project. Later, he became a programme manager at the executive education department at Aalto. Since then, he has been focused on both speaking and consultancy jobs. He admits that now, when he built his customers' base and proved himself as a trustworthy and reliable person, it is easier to be self-employed.

For foreign job seekers in Finland, Jesus recommends letting employers know that one intends to stay in Finland for a long time. Some employers are worried that foreigners may unexpectedly leave Finland for their home country or elsewhere. It means for them that the recruitment process should be initiated again, which costs time and money. Proving that one considers Finland to be a long term place of residence can help to reduce an employer's uncertainty towards a foreign candidate. At the same time, being a foreigner can bring new insights and perspectives to a company, so Jesus recommends combining two aspects in one's elevator pitch: background from abroad and willingness to stay in Finland.

Jesus's tip № 4: In your cover letter and during an interview, demonstrate to an employer your serious intentions of living in Finland for a long time and highlight how your foreign expertise and origin can help them.