



**Name:** Julia, 26 years old

**Home country:** Russia

**Education:** Degree in International Relations in Russia, degree in Social Services in Finland.

**Occupation in home country:** Worked as a waitress, cleaner, barista (part-time), at a kindergarten in an English speaking club

**Moved to Finland:** Almost 5 years ago

**Languages:** Russian, English, Chinese, Finnish

**Intercultural relationship:** Julia is married to a Finnish man

### “MY PATH”: my story before Finland, in Finland, my goals and hopes

Julia comes from the far east of Russia, so initially she wanted to move to China or another Asian country, which are quite popular destinations for Russian people who live in the east. People from the eastern part of Russia rarely consider moving to Europe, as it is very far from their home, so Julia admits that she could not imagine she would happen to live in Finland one day.

She moved to Finland to live together with her partner whom she met in China 7 years ago being an exchange student at a Chinese university. They fell in love and in a couple of years decided that Julia would move to Finland. Not knowing much about Finland, Julia avoided building up expectations with regards to her new life here. Her primary goal was to be together with her partner again, no matter where.

### WELL-BEING

Julia remembers that her first winter in Finland was very tough both mentally and physically. Coming from the east, she was used to cold but sunny winters and felt down about long dark days and never-ending winter in Helsinki. Changing climates negatively affected her well-being - she was often lazy, sad and not willing to leave home.

Going to a gym became her escape from apathy and bad mood. Physical activity helped her reduce stress levels and feel better emotionally. Later, Julia got into university where she made a lot of friends, participated in activities and meetups, and was involved in group work. She says that being a student saved her from depression and helped her survive Finnish winters. Moreover, she expanded her networks at university, making good friends with classmates, as her group was quite small and tightly knit.

*Julia's tip № 1: Pay attention to your mental health, especially if you are not accustomed to the weather and climate in Finland. In the beginning, you can feel depressed in autumn and winter, so it is important to find something that would motivate you and give energy.*

### INTERCULTURAL FAMILY/COUPLE

Julia says that in the beginning, either of them did not plan to be together for a long time perceiving their relationship as a new and exciting experience of dating someone from another country. However, with time, their relationship grew into something more serious and they started thinking of a country where they could live together.

Julia thinks that perhaps her moving to Finland initially became a bit of a pressure for her partner, as he felt responsible for showing her around and providing everything she needed for living, combining it with his daily routine and work. Moreover, the couple struggled with cultural differences affecting their communication. For example, Julia could not understand why her husband rarely expressed emotions and tended to be silent at home. At first, she was worried about him not willing to share his thoughts and supposed he was distancing himself from her. However, now she realizes that it is his way of recharging from social encounters during the day, and does not mind being silent at home for some time. In turn, Julia's partner initiates a conversation when he sees that she has something to share.

Another issue that caused difficulties between partners was the gender roles in their cultures. For Julia's husband, it was unusual to be the one who financially contributed to their family, as Julia could not find a job in the beginning. Conversely, she did not perceive the situation as something extraordinary, as in Russia, it is quite common for only one spouse to provide the family with means of financial support. Although Julia wants to be financially independent from her partner in the long run, it took them time to discuss their perceptions of this issue through a cultural prism and be at peace with Julia being a job seeker temporarily.

*Julia's tip № 2: Do not hesitate to discuss your concerns with your partner regarding their behaviour. Something that you perceive as distancing or reluctance to talk to you can be fatigue from combining work and taking extra care of you, as you are new in Finland.*

## FINNISH LANGUAGE

The couple speaks English and Finnish at home. In the beginning, when Julia did not know Finnish, they spoke English sometimes mixing it with Chinese.

Julia started learning Finnish as soon as she moved to Finland. She wanted to participate in an integration course but as she was still enrolled in a Russian university (she continued pursuing a degree remotely when she moved to Finland), she was not accepted as a participant. That is why she decided to study Finnish independently at home.

She remembers that it was hard to practice Finnish in her daily life because almost everyone in Finland speaks good English, so there was no motivation for her to push herself and speak Finnish to local people. Besides, seeing that she was a foreigner, Finnish people would often switch to English believing it would be easier for her to communicate. If that happened, she politely asked to continue their conversation in Finnish, explaining that it was important for her learning process.

She also watched the TV in Finnish and sometimes spoke Finnish at home, although being a perfectionist, she was ashamed of making mistakes even when talking to her husband. After almost 5 years of learning the language, Julia speaks Finnish well and manages with it in her daily life.

*Julia's tip № 3: Following news, series or TV shows in Finnish is an effective way to improve your understanding of the language and enhance pronunciation.*

## EMPLOYMENT

Currently, Julia works part-time supervising exams at the University of Helsinki. She found this job through her personal networks. Her friend heard of this opportunity and shared it with Julia.

Julia has graduated from university recently and is looking for a job in Finland. She usually goes through open positions on LinkedIn, TE-toimisto website and the Helsinki City website. Moreover, she is registered at TE-toimisto as unemployed, so quite often Julia receives newsletters and tailored open positions via email from them.

Sharing her experiences in job hunting with friends and listening to theirs helps Julia to maintain a positive attitude towards job search. She also finds it helpful to talk to her husband about this topic, although she believes he is not able to fully relate to her situation, being born and raised in Finland.

Julia's recommendation for those looking for a job in Finland is to keep searching even if one does not feel like and stay positive. Also, she reminds that it is not necessary to fixate on being employed in Finland. If there is an option to move somewhere else where one supposes it could be easier for them to find a job (because of language skills for example), why not to give it a try?

*Julia's tip № 4: If you cannot employ yourself in Finland and your partner is open to moving somewhere else, it can be your chance to start a new life together, having equal opportunities career and language-wise.*