

## A little History

From the thirteenth century, Finland belonged to the Swedish Empire, the nobility was Swedish and the official language was Swedish. From 1909, the country belonged to the Russian Empire but it was the Grand Duchy of Finland so it had a relative autonomy. The path to independence began in 1906, when the tsar Nicolas II gave new liberties to Fins, including the right to vote for women. Finland was also recognized internationally when it was allowed to participate under its own colors and not those of Russia, at the Stockholm Olympic games of 1912.

On 6 December 1917, taking advantage of the Bolshevik revolution, Finland declared its independence, recognized by the Soviet

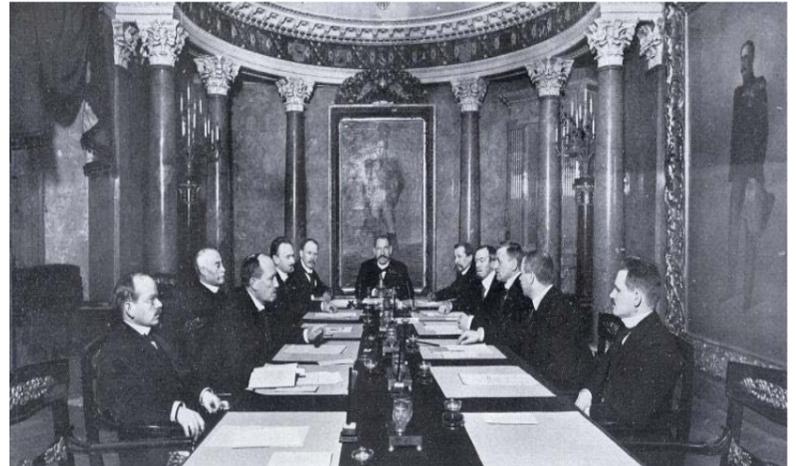
on the January 4th, 1918. It was the beginning of the Finnish Civil War, which opposed “Reds” supported by Russia and “Whites” supported by the German. The Whites won this war on April 30th, 1918. After their independence there were supporters of a constitutional monarchy and supporters of a republic. The Whites, who won the war, were for the constitu-

tional monarchy. There have been several kings in the country until the defeat of Germany at the second battle of the Marne during the Second World War. The republic was proclaimed on July 17th, 1919, putting an end to the kingdom of Finland.

## Finland's national day

Finland's national day takes place on the 6th of December, to commemorate the independence of the country. During this day, there are several traditions such as religious services, parades and commemorations at memorials amongst which, the mass in Helsinki cathedral. That day, the Finns are used to lighting two candles, one blue and one white, between 6.p.m and 8.p.m. to honor those who fought for their independence. For

lunch they decorate the table with the colors of their country. One of the main traditions is the ball at the Presidential Palace, it has existed since 1925. Now the ball has about one thousand eight hundred guests who are mostly politicians or economists and traditionally all guests shake hands with the President of the Republic. Finland's national day is one of the symbols of the country.



## Fortress of Suomenlinna

The fortress of Suomenlinna, also called North Gibraltar, was built in 1748 on an island off the coast of Helsinki under the direction of Augustin Ehrensvärd. It is one of the cultural treasures of Finland and it is a World Heritage Site since 1991. Sweden, which owned a large part of the Kingdom of Finland, began the construction of the fortress in the mid eighteenth century because they wanted to improve its defenses against Russia but in 1808 the fortress became Russian. It was a garrison town for one hundred years. It suffered several damages during

the Crimean War and after that the Russians began renovations. After the independence of Finland, Suomenlinna became a Finnish garrison. It was a civil camp for the Reds during the civil war and one year after, during the Second World War, the fortress occupied an important function

for air defense and also served as base for submarines. It came under civil administration in 1973. Today the fortress of Suomenlinna is part of the city of Helsinki and eight hundred fifty people live there. The fortress hosts approximately seven hundred thousand visitors annually.



## Aurora borealis

An aurora, from the Latin word aurora, (one might like to say sunrise) is a natural light display in the sky, particularly in high latitude (Arctic and Antarctic) regions. In countries like Finland, there are some luminous phenomena named aurora australis, when they occur in the south, and aurora borealis, when they are located in the northern hemisphere. One can see them during specific seasons. They are usually green. We can see them most often around the equinoxes of spring and autumn in a cold, dark night (around -30°C and between 65° and 80° degrees latitude north). But the field of view can be extended to America and northern Europe. The months during which we can see them are March,

because it's the most geomagnetically active month of the year and October. However in the summer, nights are short and really bright, so we can't see auroras. It's really difficult to see some of them let alone photographing them because they move. These phenomena are fabulous shows but their origin isn't yet known. Even so, scientists say that maybe these luminous phenomena are witnesses of attacks of the land, due to the solar wind and magnetic field disturbances.

