

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a light purple strapless dress and black boots, stands on a wooden pier extending into a calm lake. She is holding a small dark cup in her right hand and looking out at the sunset. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of orange, pink, and purple. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by dark, silhouetted tree branches in the upper left corner. The far shore of the lake is lined with a dense forest of tall, thin evergreen trees, which are reflected in the still water. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

VERA STAHA

Finland
through the eyes
of a foreigner

Vera Staha

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Prologue

Finland is known as a country of thousands of lakes and islands. I came here for the first time back in 2005. And five years later I packed my bags, said good-bye to Latvia, and moved to Finland.

I've been living here ever since. Strangely, only recently I've noticed how much life here has changed me. I learned to love beer and sauna. I started enjoying peaceful evenings by the lake and long walks in the forest. I think I have always admired nature, but only after I moved to Finland I truly opened my heart to it. I don't just love nature; I respect and appreciate it now. And words "unity with Mother Nature" are not just stilted words to me anymore. They became something important, something meaningful. They became a part of who I am.

Yes, Finland has changed me. I would say I got "Finnishilized" if that's even a word. If not, it definitely should be.

My Nordic walking experience

For those of you who are not familiar with the term “Nordic walking” (Finnish: *sauvakävely*), it’s a fitness walking with specially designed poles, which are quite similar to ski poles only shorter. I haven’t heard about this type of walking till 2005 when I visited Finland for the very first time. And when I saw people walking with the poles in the middle of July... I giggled. Well... in my defense - it looked silly, funny, and unnatural.

It took me twelve years to get around the thought of trying this “dementia skiing” (forgot skis at home). In the beginning, it felt really weird. Six kilometers later I had mixed feelings but overall, I kinda liked it. So, I continued.

One cold April day I decided to take it to the next level. I wanted to check how it would feel to do this Nordic walking thing in the forest. Here I should mention that the Finnish forest is not like any other forest I’ve been to before. It has stones, big rocks, cliffs, and hills; and Nordic walking turns into Nordic climbing and jumping, which made the experience more challenging.

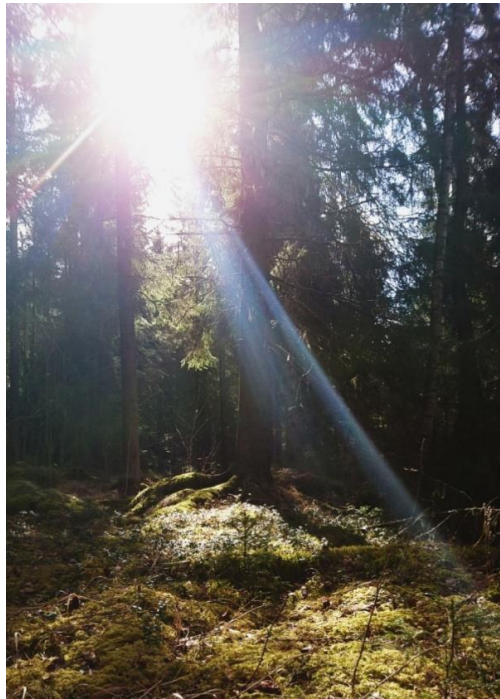
The two-kilometer long path took me to the dead end. I had two choices, either turn around and go back or continue walking and exploring the magical Finnish forest. Unfortunately, I didn’t know at that time that the forest is not just magical but enchanted as well. Or should I rather say “bewitched”?

Farther I went, denser the forest became. Branches of spruces were ruthlessly slashing my face; cut trees sprawled on the ground like dead soldiers were constantly grabbing my ankles as if they wanted me to fall and lie down beside them on their battlefield. Every now and

then my rubber boots plunged into some strange wet and sticky substance while making hideous smacking sounds.

Any normal person (if he is in his right mind, of course) would stop this masochistic and extreme experiment and would turn back a long time ago; back to civilization and steady ground under his feet. But I guess I'm not normal enough, he-he. The excitement that drove me, in the beginning, was replaced by unshakable stubbornness, so I continued my path. It was a matter of principle... or maybe just stupidity, who knows.

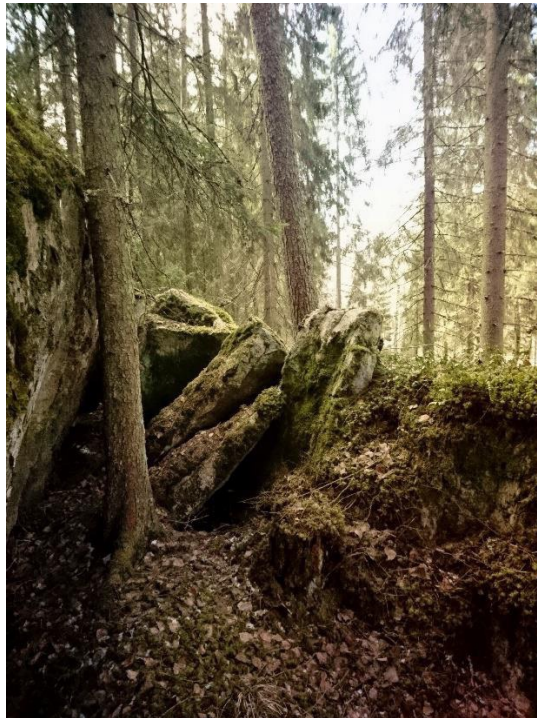
I was lost. That's what happens when you have a broken "inside navigator". Google map didn't help much either, it was all the time advising me to get back to the road. Thank you, Google! What would I do without you? Not the best forest guide I must say.



But I wasn't worried about it since it wasn't my first time being lost. It happened a lot over the years. Luckily, I always managed to find the way out. And this time was not an exception. I got out of the forest... one and a half-hour later.

I was angry, tired, and excited. And that was the moment when I realized that Nordic walking can actually be fun. I haven't had that kind of adventures since childhood and it was awesome!

One more reason why I like Nordic walking in the forest is the opportunity to make really beautiful pictures of nature.



Nordic walking in Soukka

If you are not from Finland, then you probably wonder what Soukka is.

Soukka is a Finnish district, located in the southwestern part of Espoo city. It's one of the oldest areas in Espoo.

Even though I'm not a Finn, I do love and adore nature. So, if I have to choose between life in the quiet green neighborhood or noisy overcrowded center of the city, I won't think twice.

Soukka is just 25-30 minutes' drive from Helsinki by bus, which I think is pretty close but at the same time, it seems to be far away because it's surrounded by forest.

I was aware of the fact that Soukka has beautiful sceneries and landscapes... But knowing it and seeing it with your own eyes are totally different things. And up till the spring of 2017, I haven't really realized how blessed I am to live here! I have seen some parts of the area already the previous year. I've been to the closest beach, have driven around in the car, and have witnessed the most incredible and fascinating sunsets in my life from my very own balcony:





But I was able to see and appreciate the beauty of the magnificent place that I call home only when I began my Nordic walking exercises.

Thanks to Nordic walking my childhood passion for adventures has awoken. I started wandering around, exploring “the unknown land” and every single time I was blown away by the beauty of Finnish nature. I walked to the sea using different routes, climbed the highest rocks and cliffs, made dozens of photos, and enjoyed most breathtaking sunsets while sitting on top of the cliff.



That’s how Nordic walking helped me to see what a wonderful and magical place Soukka really is.



Vera Staha
Born in Russia.
Raised in Latvia.
Matured in Finland.

Finland through the eyes of a foreigner is a collection of short stories and photographs from my travels. It's all about exploring Finland, discovering new places, and visiting interesting events.

This book is not just informative but entertaining as well, and it will be useful for both tourists and locals.

