

Chatterbox #225 – Andrew goes to Finland

Episode description

In this interesting episode, Andrew takes a trip around the globe to Finland. Grab a notepad and jot down some notes for your next trip to Helsinki! Listen carefully, you might come across a great idea for your next trip abroad.

Fun fact

Finland is the least densely populated country in the European Union; the average population density is only 16 people per km²! Finland also has a very dark winter; every year, several winter weeks pass without the sun ever rising. Nonetheless, despite the dark, cold winter, Finland was voted one of the happiest countries in the world.

Expressions included in the study guide

- To bear with
- In transit
- Venture out
- To come across
- Down [someone's] alley
- To cram [something] in



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: You're listening to the Culips English Podcast. To download the study guide for this episode, which includes the transcript, detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a quiz, visit our website, Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com.

Hey, everyone, my name is Andrew and you're listening to Culips.

OK, so right from the start of this episode, I'm gonna have to apologize because I'm by myself again and I think this is the second or the third episode recently where I've been talking to myself. And I promise that's not gonna continue for very much longer. The last couple of months, I've been so busy and I've been travelling a lot, as well, and it's made it really hard to schedule recording sessions with the other Culips hosts. And I miss them, I wanna record with them very soon. So, **bear with** me here for just one more episode, and then you'll be able to hear me chat with Suzanne and Jeremy and Morag again.

So, today, this will be a Chatterbox episode. And if you're not familiar with our Chatterbox series, it's where we talk, we have interesting conversations, and we let you listen in so you can learn how native speakers talk about specific subjects.

And just a moment ago, I mentioned that I've been doing a lot of travelling recently, and that's actually the topic for this episode. And it's really surprising to me, but I get a lot of email from listeners who say that they really enjoy hearing about my travel stories, and so now I will tell you about a place that I really recently visited: Helsinki, Finland. I will tell you all about my brief but wonderful time in Helsinki.

But just before we get into my story about Helsinki, I wanna let you all know that there is a study guide available for this episode. Studying with our study guide is a really great way to take your English to the next level. So what's included? Well, there is a transcript, there are detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, a quiz, and also prompts that you can use for writing practice or speaking practice.

Now, our study guide is available for all Culips members, and if you sign up to become a Culips member, you'll actually get a ton of other really cool bonus features, as well, one of which is our brand-new Culips series called the Fluency Files. The Fluency Files are short, interesting audio stories that will help you become a more fluent speaker of English. We're really excited about this new series, and it's an exclusive only for Culips members. So if you want unlimited access to our study-guide library and access to these new features,

such as the Fluency Files, all you have to do is visit our website, Culips.com. You can sign up and start studying right away.

OK, so let's start talking about Helsinki, then, shall we? I actually just returned from Europe today. It seems like it was a long time ago, because I've spent the last, wow, almost 24 hours **in transit**, but it was technically today that I arrived back from Europe. So I went to Europe for 10 days, and I spent 3 of those days in Helsinki and then visited Spain for the rest of the time. And I travelled with my girlfriend, just the two of us. And we had an absolutely wonderful time. It was quite lovely.

You might be thinking, Andrew, why the heck would you visit Finland and Spain? Don't those seem like two really random places to go and visit? And my answer to that is, yes, those are two really random places to go and visit, but there's a good reason why we visited those two countries. And the reason is that Finnair, the Finnish airline, had a really affordable ticket to Spain. Originally, we wanted to only go to Spain. However, they were offering an option where you could lay over for a couple of days in Helsinki on your way to Spain.

And so we thought about this for a minute and it became really obvious that we should do that, because I've always been interested in Finland. It's a really interesting country for a lot of reasons. On a personal level, I'm interested in it because it's another winter country, just like my country, Canada, is. They also share some similar traits with Canadians, like I think hockey is really popular in Finland, and I also know that the Finnish education system is always talked about as being one of the best in the world. So I know that the standard of living and the quality of life is really high in Finland. And for all of these reasons, I had a desire to visit there.

So we arrived in Helsinki to classic winter weather. It wasn't too cold, it was only around -5 degrees, but it was snowing and it was windy and the sidewalks were covered with ice and snow. And, in fact, there were lots of city workers out clearing the streets and the sidewalks from snow. They were working really hard, that made things a little bit easier for us. But overall, it was a little difficult to get around the city because there was so much ice and snow.

However, you know, this reminded me of my time living in Montreal. It brought back a lot of fond memories, or should I say not so fond memories, of trying to get around a city in the winter. So this was nice, though. I think if you visit a winter country in the winter, you should get some snow, right? It was very fitting. So even though we stayed for only a few days, we did manage to pack in a lot of sightseeing.

In fact, on the very first day, we arrived at about 4 p.m. in the afternoon and we were really tired because the flight from Korea to Helsinki surprisingly took about 10 hours. Much longer than I originally thought it would take. So after a 10-hour flight and by the time we got through immigration, got our bags, took our train downtown, navigated to our Airbnb, and checked in, it was about 7 p.m., 6 p.m., 7 p.m. at night.

And we were tired and quite hungry. So we **ventured out** of the Airbnb and looked around the neighbourhood trying to find any restaurant that we could, really, because we were so hungry. And it just so happened that we **came across** a pizza and pasta restaurant. And although I don't think this is classic Finnish cuisine, we were so hungry that we just went for it. And it actually ended up being quite delicious. We ordered one pasta dish, one pizza, and I really enjoyed that meal. It was good, although I could say that I probably would have been happy eating almost anything, 'cause I was really starving. So we ate and then we decided to do a quick bit of sightseeing that very same evening.

So we ended up walking toward central Helsinki, and we saw a really beautiful cathedral called the Helsinki Cathedral that is built upon a big staircase. You have to climb up maybe 50 or 100 stairs to get to this cathedral. And it's a really grand building, it's big, it's towering. It's majestic and it's a very nice cathedral to look at from the outside. Of course, because it was the evening, it wasn't open to the public. But there were a lot of people there, looking at the building, doing some sightseeing and, in the freshly falling snow, it was quite a beautiful scene. This cathedral is quite old, it was built in the mid 1800s, I think it was finished in 1852.

In front of the cathedral, we saw a really funny scene. There were a lot of people that had gathered, it was a group, and they were all salsa dancing. So they had a little portable Bluetooth speaker with them, they turned on some music, and they were dancing in the moonlight in front of the cathedral to salsa music, wearing snowsuits. And that was a really random sight to see. It was a Friday night. Friday night's a good night to dance, so maybe that's why they were gathered there, or maybe this is something they do regularly, I'm not sure, but it was cute and funny to witness, nonetheless.

And, actually, the very next day, we had an opportunity to go inside the Helsinki Cathedral and it was almost more impressive from the inside, a really, really beautiful place. Right after that, we walked just across the street to another really impressive cathedral, the Uspenski Cathedral—I hope I'm pronouncing that right, Uspenski Cathedral—and, again, it's a very grand, impressive building that was built in the 1800s. This one sits upon a hill and it overlooks the city of Helsinki, and you can see the water there, as well, the ocean. And very nice, very beautiful building and, again, going inside was equally, if not more, impressive. And, actually, there was a service going on while we visited that cathedral, so we couldn't spend too much time inside, but quite an interesting place to visit.

So some other things that we did in Helsinki were visit the Finnish National Gallery. This is a very large art gallery in Helsinki, and it's home to the biggest collection of Finnish art in the world. And it was quite interesting to learn more about Finland and Finnish culture through art. So we had a wonderful afternoon wandering through the gallery, looking through all of the fantastic paintings and sculptures and drawings.

But I have to be honest with you and tell you that my favourite experience in Helsinki was visiting the sauna. So saunas are famous in Finland, right? I think when you think about Finland, one of the things that probably will pop into your head is the image of a sauna. So I put that down on my list of one of things I had to do while I was there. So we visited a sauna that was recommended to us, and it turned out to be just a fantastic, relaxing experience. It was rather small, there were only two steam rooms. One was a steam room that was generated by burning wood, and I think the other one generated the steam a different way, I'm not exactly sure of the mechanics on the second steam room, but nonetheless steam came out and you sat in it and it felt really good.

One of the cool things and one of the things I'll probably always remember about this trip to Finland was being able to run out of the steam room into the freezing cold outdoors, run down to the ocean, and then jump into the ocean. Have a dunk in the ocean, this was a really cool experience and really scary. I mean it was quite cold there, so the water was totally frozen and there was just a hole that had been cut into the ice so that you could jump in and jump out quickly.

And it was a little scary, and I think I was hesitant to do it, but I swallowed my fear and just jumped right into the water, dunked my head under, and then that was about all I could **bear** because it was too scary to actually, you know, swim around in the water. Just a quick dunk, and then out and then back into the steam room. But a very invigorating experience and one that I'll never forget and if any of you listeners out there find yourself going to Finland ever, please take advantage of their wonderful saunas and try this one because I think you too will have an unforgettable experience if you do.

Well, what else? We had a random experience as we were walking about in a neighbourhood called the Design District. We found a store called Helsinki Secondhand. And my girlfriend and I, we're both kind of into vintage and old things, and this store was **right down our alley**. To call it a store is an understatement, it was like a huge warehouse just chock full of vintage furniture, vintage houseware, vintage kitchenware, it was awesome. There was records there, there was clothes there, and we had just a great time perusing all of the vintage, made-in-Finland things, although not everything was made in Finland, but a lot of it was. And I picked up a cup and saucer that was produced by the Finnish brand Arabia, and it's really cool, looks awesome, and I'm happy that I have this vintage cup and saucer as a souvenir of my time in Helsinki.

Well, I've been rambling on for a long time here, so I will shut up really soon, I promise. The last thing I wanna talk about before I go, though, is the food. I think a lot of people are probably wondering how the food was in Finland. I have to say I loved it. It was really **down my alley**, a lot of the restaurants that we went to, we just asked for recommendations and ate what the servers gave us. One of my favourite dishes and, unfortunately I don't remember the name of it, was a dish that had some octopus and a piece of fish and it was just really, really delicious. I didn't eat anything that I didn't like in Finland and, in the future, I would like to go back and eat more of the food because I wasn't there for very long. There's so much food to try when you visit a new country, it's hard to **cram it all in**. So definitely I wanna go back to Finland and back to Helsinki to eat more things and to see more things.

But next time, I'm gonna go in the summer because, although it was nice to experience a winter country in the winter, well, it was still the winter. And I think everything is more pleasant in the spring or the fall or the summer, really, anytime but the winter. So next time, I'm gonna try to go in the summer.

Oh, and there's one last thing that I wanted to mention, but I totally forgot until just right now, and that is Finnish people speak really, really, really good English. Hats off to Finland, because Finnish and English are really different languages. I thought that I might be able to understand a few random Finnish nouns, names for places or foods, basic things like that, and, to be honest, there were only a couple of words that I recognized when I was, you know, looking at things on a menu or reading ingredients on a food package. Finnish and English are really different, so it's not like Finnish people have an advantage when learning English. I think it's very separate and different from their native language, but they all speak it so well.

So I guess this is proof that the Finnish education system really is quite good and effective. And I realize that we don't have too many listeners in Finland, and I think I know why now, and that's because they don't need a program like Culips because they already speak English at very, very high level. It made my trip very easy, and I felt almost guilty about how easy it was to be able to communicate with actually everybody. I didn't talk to one person that worked at a restaurant or a store or one of the galleries or cathedrals, everybody spoke really high-level English, so that was very convenient for me. And also, since you guys can speak English as well, it will be very convenient for you if you decide to visit Finland, which I recommend you do.

OK, so I promised I'd shut up soon, and I'm going to do that now. Remember, we have a website, it's Culips.com. If you want any information about becoming a Culips member, that's the place you are going to want to visit. We're also all over the place on social media, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter. And if you visit our Instagram page, you



will be able to see a couple of shots that I uploaded from my time in Finland. So if you wanna get a little bit of a visual to match with this audio, check out our Instagram.

That is it for me for now. Thank you again for listening, and I promise I'll be back next time with a Culips cohost, OK? Talk to you then. Bye.

Detailed Explanations

To bear with Phrasal verb

To bear with something is to be patient with and endure something. For example, if someone says to you, "Please **bear with** me," it means that person wants you to be patient and listen to them.

Here's one more example with **to bear with**:

Matthew:	Dude, I've been waiting for you for forever! Let's go!
Ben:	I know, I know. Just bear with me, please. This is important. I'll be done in 1 minute.
Matthew:	What's more important than pepperoni pizza at a time like this? I'm starving!

In transit Idiom

Someone or something that is **in transit** is in the process of travelling from one place to another place. In this episode, Andrew says that when he came back home from Europe, he was **in transit** for 24 hours straight; in other words, he'd been travelling by a variety of modes of transportation (bus, taxi, plane) for 24 hours in a row. That's a long time!

Here are a couple more examples with **in transit**:

Miguel:	When is Tony supposed to arrive?
Fernando:	He's reached New Jersey, and he's in transit to the hotel. He should reach it before 5:00.
Miguel:	He'd better. If Tony is late to this meeting, we are in serious trouble.
Fernando:	Don't worry, he'll be there.

Raffe:	Where's my package, the one I sent for yesterday?
Santana:	It's in transit . It should be here by Wednesday at the latest.



Raffe: All right. Let me know as soon as it arrives.

Santana: No problem, boss. Let me know if you need anything else.

Venture out Idiom

To **venture out** is to leave a familiar place and go somewhere that might be dangerous or unfamiliar. Venture is similar to the word adventure; both words give a sense of danger, excitement, or exploration. In this episode, Andrew and his girlfriend **ventured out** from their familiar Airbnb to explore the nearby streets of Helsinki.

Here are a couple more examples with **venture out**:

Thibou: How about we **venture out** of the city today and find something new? I'm getting restless around here.

Natalie: I'm in! I could use some fresh air.

Thibou: Great! Shall we leave around 3:00?

Natalie: Yup, I'll run to the store quickly to get some snacks for the trip!

Tracy: Mom! Can I go outside? I want play.

Mom: OK, but don't **venture out** too far from the house. Make sure I can see you from the window.

Tracy: Don't worry, Mom. I'll be careful!



To come across

Phrasal verb

To come across something is to find it by chance. When Andrew talks about his adventures in Helsinki, he mentions **coming across** a pizza and pasta restaurant. In this instance, Andrew did not plan to go to that restaurant. He simply walked around and found that restaurant by chance; he simply **came across** it. People often say that they **come across** interesting things while walking around unfamiliar places.

Here are a couple more examples with **to come across**:

Rachel: How was your day?

Dalia: I **came across** the loveliest little café while I was walking around the neighbourhood today. Shall we go together tomorrow afternoon?

Rachel: Really? That sounds great. I'd love to check it out with you.

TJ: I **came across** something very interesting during my trip last summer.

Max: What did you see?

TJ: While in Australia, I saw a rare albino kangaroo. I took a picture. Would you like to see?

Max: Wow, cool! Yeah, I'd love to see it!

Down [someone's] alley

Idiom

Something that someone is very interested in is **down their alley**. Therefore, a guy who likes sports would say that going to a baseball game is right **down his alley**. In this episode, Andrew says he and his girlfriend really love old things, so going to a vintage store in Helsinki was really **down their alley**.

An alley is a small back street, but in this phrase it refers to someone's own province—the place where someone comes from. Therefore, something that is **down my alley** is something that I am familiar with and that I enjoy. This idiom is similar to the idiom one's cup of tea that was defined in an earlier Culips episode. Check out Chatterbox episode #211 to see the definition of one's cup of tea.

Here are a couple more examples with **down [someone's] alley**:

Rosalie:	Do you wanna go to a film festival with me next weekend?
DK:	Sorry, I'm busy next weekend, but why don't you ask Ned? He loves movies! A film festival would be right down his alley .
Rosalie:	Oh, Ned, good idea! I'll ask him when I see him in class later.
DK:	Great! I'm sad I can't make it, but you guys will have a great time.

Ming:	What are you doing?
Tianqi:	I'm looking for a present for Zoey's birthday. Have you got any ideas?
Ming:	How about tickets to the local theatre performance? That would be right down her alley .
Tianqi:	Oh, that's a great idea! I can't believe I didn't think of that.
Ming:	What can I say? I'm a genius.

To cram [something] in

Phrasal verb

To cram in has two similar meanings. The first meaning is to fill a small space with a bunch of stuff, almost to the point of overflowing. The second meaning of **to cram in** is to do a lot of stuff in a very short amount of time.

An example of the first meaning would be trying **to cram a lot of clothes into** a small suitcase. The second meaning is similar to a situation that Andrew discusses in this episode: he says that there are so many things to do and foods to eat in Helsinki that he and his girlfriend had a difficult time **cramming it all in** during their short stay in Finland. In other words, they had a hard time completing all of the things they wanted to do before they had to leave.

Here are a couple more examples with **to cram in**:

Jesse:	We've got a problem. There are seven people, but my car only has five seats. Should we call a taxi?
Dennis:	Oh, don't worry about it! Let's just cram everyone in . It's only a 10-minute drive, we'll survive.
Jesse:	Technically, that's illegal, but it is only a 10-minute drive ... OK, let's do it.

Trent:	Helen, guess what I did today? It was such an amazing day.
Helen:	What did you do?
Trent:	I went to the zoo, I visited my grandma, I had lunch at a new burger place, I went to the bookstore, and now I'm here with you!
Helen:	Wow! How did you manage to cram that all into 1 day?
Trent:	Well, first I had two cups of coffee to give me energy, and then I just bounced from place to place without stopping.
Helen:	You are going to sleep well tonight, that's for sure.



Quiz

1. If I have to cram for a test, then what am I doing?

- a) panicking about the test
- b) cheating on the test
- c) studying for the test in a very short period of time
- d) helping my friend study for the test

2. Which of these is not a synonym to down one's alley?

- a) up one's alley
- b) one's cup of tea
- c) can't stand something
- d) just one's style

3. When you find something by chance, you _____ it.

- e) fade by
- f) come across
- g) turn a blind eye to
- h) pass over

4. Which is an example of being in transit?

- i) hanging out in a café with friends
- j) riding a train to work
- k) reading a book at home
- l) eating dinner in a fancy restaurant

5. Which is a synonym for to bear with?

- m) to enjoy
- n) to fight with
- o) to joke with
- p) to endure



Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been to Finland? If not, where would you like to go in Finland if you could go?
2. What are some of your favourite things to do when travelling abroad?
3. When you are in transit, what kinds of things do you like to do to pass the time?
4. What was one of the coolest things you came across while travelling?
5. What is something that's down your alley?
6. When you travel, do you prefer to cram a lot of activities into one day, or do you like to keep your schedule open? Why?

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.c 3.b 4.b 5.d

Episode credits

Host: Andrew Bates

Music: *Something Elated* by Broke For Free, *Let It Go* by Scott Dugdale

Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates

Audio editor: Andrew Bates

Transcriptionist: Heather Bates

Study guide writer: Kassy White

English editor: Stephanie MacLean

Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima

Project manager: Jessica Cox