The deep north

Though it only has a population of 5.5 million, Finland makes up for its small populace with large ambitions. In fact, it has consistently stacked up against far larger countries on the global stage, from being recognised as having one of the world’s leading educational systems to being touted as the best country in the world by Newsweek magazine. Much of Finland’s success stems from the cultural values it aims to foster.

For example, Director General of the Enterprise and Innovation Department at the Ministry of Economic Affairs Jaani Heinonen has stated: “If you want to drive your innovations and solutions to the next level, you need to be in Finland”. These words ring true, especially in light of the fact that the country is home to powerhouse companies such as the ICT giant Nokia. The country prides itself on taking both creative and practical approaches to inspire innovation; it spends 3 per cent of its GDP on R&D, has a strong university-industry collaboration and aims to provide support for start-ups through several public and private organisations. This ecosystem of innovation was recognised this year when Finland was ranked in the top four innovative European countries in the 2014 Innovation Union Scoreboard.

Finland has also placed great importance on its citizens’ health, and it shows – 88 per cent of people stated that they were satisfied with the care they receive. The country runs a universal healthcare system in which local governments are responsible for providing direct healthcare to their residents under the guiding hand of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The National Institute of Health and Welfare, which functions as a statutory statistical expert authority for health and welfare, is not only looking to maintain this level of satisfaction and care for Finnish citizens, but improve it. In this regard, the organisation is grappling with the major threats it sees on the horizon, including the country’s increasing ageing population, morbidity and mortality from lifestyle habits, and inequalities in care.

In addition to paying particular attention to the health of its citizens, Finland also cares deeply about the health of its environment. In fact, the country has consistently been named in the top 20 of the Environmental Performance Index, a method of quantifying and comparing the environmental performance of nations’ policies. As one of the most northern and geographically large countries in Europe, it is a unique location in terms of its natural resources. With nearly 75 per cent of the country covered in Forest Stewardship Council-certified forests, Finland is looking to become a central player in delivering a European bioeconomy. It is also seeking to be a leader in green resource management, as demonstrated by its work to transform the mining sector to a more sustainable and environmentally friendly industry.

In the following section, International Innovation presents the stories of policy makers, academics, organisation leaders and decision makers across Finland who are working not only to further improve the country’s performance in terms of innovation, health and the environment, but to make the nation a shining example to which others can aspire.
Finland's seven natural symbols

Nature is dear to the heart of Finnish citizens, as represented by the fact that the country has seven natural symbols:

- **NATIONAL ANIMAL:** brown bear
- **NATIONAL BIRD:** whooper swan
- **NATIONAL FLOWER:** lily-of-the-valley
- **NATIONAL TREE:** silver birch
- **NATIONAL FISH:** perch
- **NATIONAL ROCK:** granite
- **NATIONAL INSECT:** seven-spot ladybird

Finland is known for its beautiful landscapes, a fact reflected in the country’s flag – the blue represents the colour of its lakes, and the white stands for the snow of its winters.

Facts about Finland

- **CAPITAL:** Helsinki
- **POPULATION:** 5.5 million
- **OFFICIAL LANGUAGES:** Finnish, Swedish
- **REGIONS:** 19
- **INDEPENDENCE:** Declared on 6 December 1917
- **FORM OF GOVERNMENT:** Republic, parliamentary democracy
- **MEDIAN AGE:** 42.7 years
- **FERTILITY RATE:** 1.8
- **LIFE EXPECTANCY:** 78 years for men and 84 years for women
- **KEY FEATURES:** High standard of education, social security and healthcare, all financed by the state
- **CURRENCY UNIT:** Euro (€)
- **MAIN EXPORTS:** Electrotechnical goods, metal products, machinery, transport equipment, wood and paper products, chemicals
- **MAIN IMPORTS:** Raw materials, investment goods, energy, consumer goods (for example, cars and textiles)