

A TASTE of the
WORLD
by Maia

FINLAND!

SWEDEN!



Russia

PUERTO RICO



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INTRODUCTION

One thing I really love to do is to travel. I have been to five different countries, three of which I wrote about in this travel log. The reason I wrote this travel log is that I think that many people don't travel enough so maybe if there are more books that explain where to go more, people will travel more. I also love to write about memories from trips I've gone to. Hope you enjoy my travel log!

Now presenting, A TASTE OF THE WORLD, BY MAIA!

PUERTO RICO

By Maia

Did you know that Puerto Rico is part of the U.S.A?

Puerto Rico is an island located in the West Indies (or Greater Antilles). The people there speak Spanish and English (mostly Spanish). The reason for that is Puerto Rico's history.

More than five-thousand years ago, native people of Central and South America sailed to Puerto Rico and other islands in the West Indies. The last group to reach Puerto Rico was the Taino. They arrived there about twelve hundred years ago. They would have had very happy lives if it weren't for their two enemies. For many years the Caribs (a group of natives like the Taino) battled the Taino and enslaved women and children. Many hundreds of years after the Taino arrived in Puerto Rico, Christopher Columbus came from Spain thinking that he had arrived in India. At first the Taino thought that the Spaniards were sent by the Gods. But soon they realized that the Spaniards were trying to enslave them. The Spaniards made the Taino work for them. When Christopher Columbus came to Puerto Rico he also brought African slaves. That is why a lot of Puerto Ricans are mixed with African, Taino and Spanish blood and speak Spanish.

I am half Puerto Rican. I go to Puerto Rico every other year with my dad and my step mom. Most of my family on my dad's side lives there. My cousins speak English to me because I can't speak Spanish very well. My goal is to speak Spanish fluently when I'm still a kid. Puerto Rican Spanish is kind of hard to understand because when people speak it, they talk really fast and drop the s in words.

One thing I love about Puerto Rico is its music. It is always so lively! My family and I always gather in the living room and then sing Puerto Rican songs and dance. My favorite song is "Palo Palito." Nico, my cousin, always plays the drums. The rest of us play instruments like tambourines and maracas. I play the guittle ("gweetal").

When you go to Puerto Rico, make sure you go to El Morro and El Yunque. El Yunque is the largest and most famous rainforest in Puerto Rico. It is so beautiful! It has many waterfalls, small rainforest animals and tropical plants. El Morro is a famous fortress in Old San Juan. Its walls were built by the Spaniards in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries to guard Puerto Rico and make sure no one would attack them. El Morro's walls, 20 feet thick in some places, were almost immune to cannon fire. How amazing is that?

Right next to El Morro is a huge hill and field by the ocean. It's a beautiful view! People fly kites there and relax. One time when I was in El Morro my dad found a husk of a

special tree. He took it for my cousins and me to slide down the hill on it. It was so fun! Definitely go to El Morro. It is a great experience.

Puerto Rico is a great tropical place to be. Everyone is so happy. Once, when my family arrived to the beach, they all started clapping. I asked my cousin "why are you clapping?" He answered "because we are the happy people."

Puerto Rico is part of the U.S., but its culture is completely different.

RUSSIA

By Maia

Russia is the largest country in the world. It is divided between two continents, Europe and Asia. The Asian part of Russia is mostly taken up by Siberia. The European part of Russia has most of the big cities, including Moscow, St. Petersburg, Novgorod and Kazan.

I am technically only a small part Russian. People are surprised to hear that because I speak Russian, I look Russian and I follow Russian culture a lot. Even Russians think I am almost all Russian!

The last time I traveled to Russia was when I was 7. My mom and I went to Moscow, where most of our family lives. Usually, when we go to Russia, we stay with many different relatives. That is because since Moscow is such a big city, it is hard to go from one end of the city to another just to see attractions.

There are so many famous places to see in Moscow! Probably, the most famous is the Red Square. In Russian it is called Красная площадь ("Krasnaya Ploschad"). That is because in Russian, красная (krasnaya) means beautiful and the Red Square is very beautiful. The Red Square is a square where there are many famous monuments, including the famous Kremlin, a GIGANTIC fortress that, a long time ago, used to be the boundary of the whole city of Moscow, and St. Basil's Cathedral, a GORGEOUS, very unique, cathedral. A very cruel Russian czar, Ivan the Terrible, forced an Italian architect to design the Saint Basils Cathedral. It is said, that because the cathedral was so beautiful, the greedy czar blinded the architect so he would never design a building as grand as the Saint Basils Cathedral again. The Red Square has so many more places to see and do. There are so many that it would take about three days just to see everything there! You should try it though.

Some of the most beautiful places in Moscow are the subways themselves! The Moscow metros are not like the plain ones in New York City. They are so fancy. They are hundreds of years old and very, very delicate. When I first walked in a metro I couldn't believe my eyes! Moscow metros are amazing!

Russia's winter is very much like Madison's winter is but colder. Siberia is even colder. It is very, very, cold in Siberia. In Siberia weather in the winter is usually about -40 degrees. In European Russia summer is pretty warm and can even be hot like Madison.

The last time I went to Russia I stayed for a week at my cousins' dachya (summer house) with them. Only I went though, not my mom, because she wanted me to speak just Russian. Anyway, dachyas are great! They are so relaxing and fun.

Russia is an amazing country to visit. But one the best things about it is its food. Such a variety. From pelmeni (Russian dumplings), to salads to desserts. There is a dish called tvorozhniki.

Tvorozhniki are like pancakes made from a type of sweet cheese like baker's cheese. Russian food rocks!

Come to Russia, it's worth it!

SWEDEN

By Maia

Sweden is a country in Scandinavia between Norway and Finland.

From the year 800 to 1050 A.D., sailors from Sweden, Norway and Denmark journeyed abroad to obtain foreign goods and territories. These Scandinavians later became known as Vikings. Socially, women were treated as equals to men and ran farms when the men were away on journeys. Christianity reached Sweden in the early 1800s, when a missionary from France traveled there and converted some people. Most Swedish people continued to worship several gods throughout the time of the Vikings. Later, Christianity became the official religion of Sweden.

I am a small part Swedish. Like many Swedes, I have some Viking blood.

When I went to Sweden, I was surprised that almost everyone speaks English. That is because in school, teachers teach it as a subject. So luckily, my relatives could understand my mom and me and we could understand them.

When my mom and I first arrived in Sweden (we took a plane from Vaasa, Finland to Stockholm), we had to go right to the train station so we could catch a train to a small town in the middle of Sweden where some of my family lives. When we arrived to our relative Märta's house, she told us that her large apartment was a "passive house." A passive house is special because there is no heating; instead, it uses body heat and the way the windows are positioned to heat the rooms, even in winter. Sweden is one of the few countries that has passive houses.

I met a friend in that town named Frida. It was so funny because she had a dog named Fido Castro!

In Stockholm, I went to many really amazing places. I went to a lot of museums, including the Historiska Museet, the Moderna Museet and the Vasa Museet. The Vasa Museet had a huge, complete 17th century ship in the middle of the museum. It was awesome! Another place I went that I would really recommend is Skansen. Skansen is like Old World Wisconsin but much bigger and about Sweden. Skansen also had many, many Nordic wild animals including lynx, lynx cubs, foxes, brown bears, reindeer, moose, elk, wolverines, owls and special birds. Another fun thing was when I was eating there, these red European squirrels started crowding around me. They actually let me feed them bread out of my hand! It was so fun. Another fun thing to do in Skansen is to see glass blowing. It is cool! Then you can buy glass that you see being made. Skansen is so cool! Make sure you go there.

What does Sweden not have?!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

FINLAND

By Maia

Finland is a country in Scandinavia, to the east of Sweden and to the west of Russia. Finland used to be home only to Nordic wildlife like reindeer and wolverines, and to the Sami people. The Sami are a group of people who live in Northern Finland (in the Arctic Circle). But as time went by native people of Russia came into the eastern part of Finland and native people of Sweden came to the western part of Finland. The Vikings also came to Finland. After that, Finland became a mixed country.

I am actually not Finnish at all, but a lot of my Swedish family lives in Finland. That is because they are a special ethnic group known in Swedish as "finlandsvensk" ("Finland Swedes" or Swedish Finns). In Finland, the western part of the country by the Gulf of Bothnia has a lot of Swedish speaking people whose culture resembles Sweden's more than the rest of Finland's. It is not known for certain whether the Swedish Finns have always lived in the area (there is evidence that people have lived there continuously since prehistoric times) or whether they emigrated from mainland Sweden starting 900 years ago. Either way, the people in my relatives' town speak their own special dialect that doesn't resemble Finnish at all. Interestingly, it resembles Norwegian more than it resembles Swedish, and the people from mainland Sweden cannot understand it. However, since the dialect is only spoken, not written, all the people in the area learn to read and write standard Swedish in school and consider Swedish their native language also. Many of them, despite living in Finland, do not speak Finnish very well, especially older people.

When I was in Finland, I took the train a lot. The train is the main transportation for many people if they are trying to travel around the country.

When I went to Finland, I arrived in Helsinki (Finland capital). There was this huge store/grocery called Stockmann's that took up a whole block! When my mom and I went inside the store, we saw that the employees had miniature flags on their shirts. Each flag symbolized a language the person spoke. For example, if an employee spoke Finnish, Swedish and English, they would have 3 flags on their shirts: the Finnish flag, the Swedish flag and the United Kingdom's flag. Some employees spoke 7 to 8 languages!

The next day in Helsinki before my mom and I took the train to a city on the West Coast of Finland near where our relatives live, we took a tour of Helsinki. While we were taking the bus tour, I realized that a lot of the buildings in Helsinki are the fancy Russian-style of building. Later I learned that that is because the Russians ruled Finland at one point in history. After the tour my mom and I ate at the Helsinki farmer's market. We had a great time in Helsinki!

Most of the time in Finland my mom and I stayed with our relative Siri. Siri is an archeologist who works at this small but very informative outdoor museum. The local museum shows how

Swedish Finns lived and how their houses looked. I got to go into the houses. I met a lot of my family in that visit. One memorable moment was when my cousin's grandmother invited my mom and me to go to her summer cottage. In order to get there we had to ride a motor boat because the summer house was on a tiny island where the only thing on the island was the summer house and some land. We went with my 3-year-old cousin Zelina, her parents, her grandmother (who owned the summer house) and Zelina's aunt. The motor boat was so fun, especially because I had never been on one before. At the summer house we had a lot of fun. After we ate a very Swedish lunch and we swam in the Gulf of Bothnia. After we swam in the freezing gulf, we went to the sauna. I mean a real Finnish sauna. Zelina didn't go in the sauna because it was too hot for her. While she was gone we put gray stuff on our faces to clean our pores. When Zelina came back in, she was so scared! It was funny. Anyway, you *have* to go to a Finnish sauna. After the sauna, Zelina and her father and I made instruments out of plants. I had a great time!

Another fun time was when my mom and I were invited to my 12-year-old cousin Linette's English class at her school. We taught the class that day. It also happens that Linette's English teacher was a referee at the Olympics in sailing and had just gotten back from London. *How cool is that?*

Finland is a great country to go to. It is so Fintastic!