



A love letter to Michael Booth

Dear Michael, Thank you so much for your recent book – *The Almost Nearly Perfect People: the Truth About the Nordic Miracle*. The book was funny, well written and to the point.

Your tongue-in-cheek approach just confirms what I already knew from home (my wife is British) – Brits have a great sense of humour.

I loved the way you described the Nordic countries. Danish TV is bad, Swedes are less democratic than they claim, Norwegian oil isn't very "green," Icelanders are... well Icelanders, and we Finns probably drink a bit too much on Fridays. I also liked the way you later described the reactions to your book. In Finland we were pretty cool about it, Swedes were indifferent, Danes just a tad pissed off, Icelanders frustrated that they did not get more of a mention and the Norwegians were insulted.

We Finns have a great sense of humour too and that's why I wanted to share some of my thoughts on your criticism of us Finns. It's always good to look at yourself in the mirror and for an outsider to reflect on that image. But the truth is that Finland has emerged as a top three country in the past 20 years and much of it has been because of the EU and the end of the Cold War. In the past, we might have taken your criticism seriously. Now we can brush it off like dandruff because if you look at international measures

– the OECD, the World Economic Forum, the UN – we aren't doing too badly.

Internationally, we have dominated the top spot in education for a decade. We are number three in competitiveness, in the top 10 for happiness, and one of the world's least corrupt and most transparent states in the world. And this is just a fraction of the stuff where our star shines brightly.

WHILE TRAVELLING AROUND

the Nordics you must have marvelled at our power-showers, single faucet sinks and modern central heating without radiators. After all, you come from a country still reliant on a Victorian plumbing system. At least in Denmark where you live, you can take a warm shower and go to bed without a hot water bottle.

WITH ALL STEREOTYPES, THERE'S AN ELEMENT OF TRUTH.

As for calling us the drunks of Europe? I've

been out in the UK on a Friday night: our drinking habits seem very British, if anything. Cheers! Kippis!

You also say that our landscape is "samey." We have a beautiful archipelago of 20,000 islands, the Lake District with more than 100,000 lakes, and Lapland.

There is nothing fake about the average Finn: what you see is what you get. We may not be big talkers, but if a Finn likes you he will eventually open up. And he'll do that sober too.

And we joke about it ourselves. How do you tell the difference between a Finnish introvert and a Finnish extrovert? One looks at his own feet when he's talking to you, the other looks at your feet.

The bottom line is that these are hilarious stereotypes and as with all stereotypes, there's an element of truth. Please come and visit us again. You will soon find that our slogan holds true: "Finland, even cooler than you think!"

Yours truly,
Alexander Stubb ●

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ALEXANDER STUBB is Finland's Minister for European Affairs and Foreign Trade.
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