

**The Country No One Knows About: Aland**  
**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-UdhhbTY\\_L4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-UdhhbTY_L4)**  
**Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/aland.pdf>**

If you don't live in Scandinavia, if you don't have a special interest in that region, you probably haven't heard of Aland.

Even if you have, you don't know what it is like or what its status is.

It is the same for most people all over the world.

Aland is an autonomous country that almost nobody knows about in Europe.

Yes, it is a country. It has its own flag, national anthem and parliament.

So let's take a closer look at this little known country.

Aland is a strategically important islands country in the Baltic Sea, at the entrance to the Gulf of Bothnia between Sweden and Finland.

Fasta Aland, which includes the capital Mariehamn, the most densely populated island, is 170 kilometers from the Finnish mainland and 50 kilometers from the Swedish mainland.

It serves as a bridge between the two countries.

The country consists of about 6500 islands and rocks. About 60 of them are inhabited.

All the islands cover a total area of about 1600 square kilometers. Its population is 30,000.

Although it belongs to Finland, its official language is Swedish, 93.5% of the population speaks Swedish.

The people of Aland, an ancient Viking island, were Christianized by Swedish missionaries in the 12th century and became part of the country.

After a great naval victory against Sweden, the Russian Tsar Peter I seized the islands in 1714. He began to use them as a Russian outpost.

When Finland declared its independence from the Russian Empire in 1917, the people of Aland wanted to determine their own destiny and the Swedes supported them.

This was because Åland, then as now, had a large population of people of Swedish descent, and this population was in favor of a future union with Sweden.

The Finns declared that they would accept the autonomy of the islands, but opposed their complete independence.

This became an international crisis at the time.

After World War I, the League of Nations was established to resolve problems between states in a more peaceful way, the forerunner of today's United Nations.

The Åland Crisis between Sweden and Finland was the League's first test.

The League decided that the islands would remain part of Finland, but with considerable autonomy.

It also decided that the Åland Islands would be governed by an independent government and would never be armed or used as military bases.

On May 6, 1920, Finland recognized Åland's autonomy and gave it the right to establish its own parliament.

Although technically part of Finland, Åland has its own flag, national anthem, constitution and government.

They have adopted Swedish as their official language instead of Finnish.

The Åland Parliament is completely independent in domestic affairs and has some say in foreign affairs.

For example, when Finland became a member of the European Union in 1995, Åland held a separate referendum on the issue, and the country's accession to the European Union was done in a separate and specially organized protocol separate from that of Finland.

As an independent country, it is an associate member of the Nordic Council.

It has its own police and postal services.

They make and implement their own decisions on many issues such as health, education and transportation.

Ålandic people are also exempt from military service.

Finland is known as the happiest country in the world according to most research organizations.

Aland is above the Finnish average in almost all measures of happiness and well-being.

Life expectancy on the islands is also higher than on the mainland. People are healthier here.

Before the Russians used them as an outpost, these islands were remote.

Since then, they have become more urbanized in proportion to their size.

Mariehamn, already the most populous city, was founded by the Russian Tsar Alexander II in 1861.

The city's name is in honor of his wife, Empress Maria.

As in many ancient Viking settlements, the Alandic people's main source of income was shipping and fishing.

Today, half of the country's economy is based on maritime activities.

One of the country's main tourist attractions is the Maritime Museum.

The Arabic coins in this museum prove that the local people have always had trade links with distant regions.

Agriculture is another important source of income.

The first thing that everyone who comes to Aland describes is its magnificent and unique nature.

Being an archipelago and located relatively south of the Scandinavian geography, the climate is milder than in Sweden and Finland.

Between May and August it is one of the sunniest places in Scandinavia.

One of the most important products of this wonderful geography is honey.

The bees that feed on the various flowers in the beautiful countryside produce the highest quality honey in the world.

Another important agricultural product is the apple. In fact, one of the nicknames of the country is Finland's apple orchard.

Thanks to the longer days and more sunlight, the apples are very productive and delicious.

Another interesting agricultural fact: The oldest potato chip factory in Finland is in Åland.

Finland is known to be a successful country when it comes to software, especially mobile software and mobile games.

Åland seems to have kept up with this recently.

The software and games sector in the country is developing rapidly and they have started to create ambitious brands.

The government has announced incentive programmes to further develop the sector.

On the other hand, this tiny country also has its own internet extension. Sites with .ax extension belong to Åland.

When Åland joined the European Union in 1995 with a special protocol separate from Finland, one of the benefits of this protocol was that they were exempted from the customs and tax practices of the European Union.

This was because if they had accepted the EU's customs and taxes, their main source of income, maritime activities, would have been restricted.

Passenger ships from Sweden, Finland and Estonia regularly arrive in Åland every day.

The purpose of most of these people who come on these ships is to get some duty-free and tax-free products.

The unemployment rate in the country is also very low, however, as in many island countries, the prices of basic consumer goods and food are higher than on the mainland.

Distance learning, or home schooling, has long been discussed in Sweden, even before the pandemic.

It was implemented worldwide during the pandemic and has even become fully or partially permanent in some institutions.

Due to the growing refugee population, Swedes complain that the quality of education in schools is declining.

As a result, the number of home-schooled children has increased in recent years.

However, the Swedish government is strongly opposed to home education for school-age children.

They say it would break the bonds of society and weaken the tradition of democracy.

For this reason, home education was banned in Sweden in 2011.

Finland, however, allows this option for families who want it.

As I mentioned earlier, the official language in Åland is Swedish and this is the language used in education.

Some Swedish families who insisted on home-educating their children moved to Åland after the ban in 2011.

Of course, there is always a strong separatist opposition in any autonomous region.

In Åland, too, there is a large community that wants full independence.

This community is organized under the Future of Åland political party.

The main goal of the Future of Åland party is to make the country fully independent and free.

Since the early 2000s, the party has consistently won seats in the 30-seat parliament.

It is a country where summer cottages are common.

With the arrival of the summer months, especially the inhabitants of the capital, Mariehamn, start to live in their summer cottages, where they are more secluded, more alone with nature.

In Åland there is a rule that everyone has the right to camp.

This rule means that you can camp anywhere as long as you don't stay in one place for more than a few nights, don't light a campfire and don't stay too close to someone's private property.

In a country where thousands of people come for nature tourism, this rule is applied to give people the freedom to camp and pitch tents.

Being a small place and a country of islands, social life is extremely limited.

The most lively part of the country, the capital Mariehamn, has a population of 11,500.

It takes no more than a few minutes to walk from one end of Mariehamn's most popular street to the other.

This is why Wednesday is the most colorful day in the country.

Restaurants, cafes and bars are busier on Wednesdays.

At weekends, islanders often travel to Stockholm for concerts, theater, cinema or other events.

Because it is a small, sparsely populated island nation, almost everyone here is related to each other in some way.

This adds to the sense of trust that people feel towards each other.

One of the most important resources of the islands is red granite. They use these red granite stones in many construction products.

For example, the roads in the country are red because they also use red granite as an asphalt component.

Also, as a country, they have their own separate license plate system for vehicles.

Public transport in Åland is free of charge. And this is not only a right of the locals. Tourists can also use public transport for free.

Since the settlements are small, some public transport lines run between towns, even in remote areas.