



# NEWSLETTER

December 2025

European IFYE Alumni



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## Greetings from the President

My dear IFYE friends,

Firstly I must apologise as I write this from a cruise ship on our way to the Caribbean with 4 fellow IFYE's. It makes me reflect on the IFYE association and how amazing it is to network and travel together. It also makes me realise how lucky and privileged I am to be a member of IFYE and your President. Without our individual country exchange programmes and trips, I wouldn't have met so many amazing people and super friends who I now travel with, so this is something we as IFYE members have to promote and encourage the younger people to participate in trips.

I understand some of our young farmers/ 4H organisations are struggling to promote the exchange programmes. We, the YFA in Northern Ireland have got more involved in helping to promote the exchange programme and being involved in the selection process, where we also promote YFA and IFYE to all those who apply.





**I had the pleasure to attend another IFYE's special birthday party in England, Helen Ramsey 🇬🇧 🇮🇪 🇵🇹**

**Yet again several fellow IFYE friends from the UK and Europe were in attendance. Thank you Helen and Colin for your excellent hospitality and great party night.**



**The UK YFA reunion was recently held in my home town of Omagh, County Tyrone in Northern Ireland. It was a great success with lots of younger and new fellow exchange members attending allowing them to experience the YFA association and learn more about it. This year we had a lot of overseas (outside the UK) in attendance which is amazing, Special thanks must go to Shirley Walker and her committee for organising a fun filled action packed weekend.**

**Finally I would like to wish you and your families all a very Merry Christmas and Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year wherever you are in the world.**

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# Invitation to 66th IFYE European Conference

## 2025 - Estonia

*written by Team Estonia*

You are invited to the 2026 IFYE European Conference:

**Expect the Unexpected.**

Get ready to dive into a truly magical experience! We are delighted to announce the details for the 2026 IFYE European Conference, which will take place in a breathtakingly beautiful location – Nelijärve, Estonia, 1st - 8th August 2026.

The conference theme is "Expect the Unexpected". Estonia is known for its dense forests, which cover over half of our country's land area. The conference will focus on nature's biodiversity, environmental protection, local traditions, and discovering places. The program includes a week full of interesting workshops, cultural discovery, and of course, fun times and friendship, which are part of every IFYE gathering.

Nelijärve is a scenic resort area surrounded by untouched nature, offering a peaceful yet adventurous backdrop for our global community to come together.

The official conference website is [www.ifye2026.eu](http://www.ifye2026.eu)

Please note that the program and detailed information will be continually updated on the website until we finalize our plans.

Mark the important dates in your calendar:

Registration for all European participants begins on February 1, 2026.

Registration for participants from outside Europe begins shortly thereafter, on February 15, 2026.

Don't miss the opportunity to meet old and new IFYE friends and discover the charm and mystique of the Estonian "Magical Forest."

We look forward to welcoming you to Nelijärve! "Don't come!" ;)

Team Estonia



# EUROPEAN IFYE CONFERENCE 2026 ESTONIA

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## News from Finland

*written by Heli Aaltonen (IFYE from Finland to Hungary 1996)*

Congratulations to Viola Pynnönen for graduating from secondary school on the 31th May 2025.



Viola went on exchange to Switzerland in 2024, please click on the picture below to view a video clip of the trip.



**Congratulations to the following weddings:**

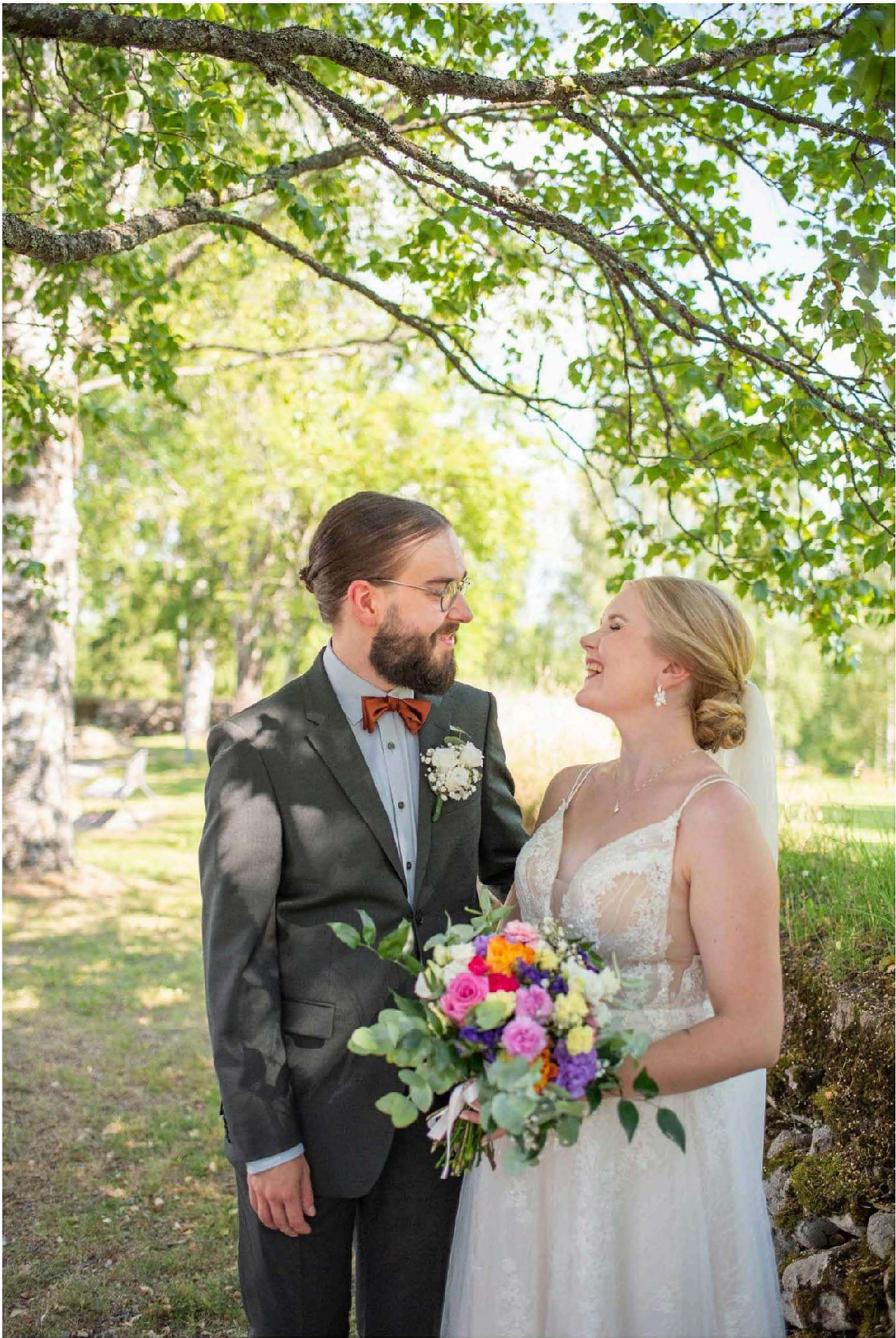
**Uda Iho-Hallinen, nee Vesterinen (IFYE from Finland to Taiwan 2015) and Pekka Hallinen. Married In February 21st 2025.**





**Emma Svahn, nee Maaranen (IFYE from Finland to Scotland 2018 and to Germany 2023) and Walteri Svahn, nee Karjalainen.  
Married in July 26th 2025.**





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## News from Scotland

*written by Mary Turner (IFYE from Scotland to Switzerland 1977)*

## **Spring Event - Scotland in April**

After the success of our Spring Event this year, we are having a similar one from 11 - 12 April, 2026. It will be held in the Aviemore area, in the heart of the Highlands and is open to all. If interested, please get in touch, and we will give you more information.

### **Congratulations to the following:**

#### **A birth -**

Katie Punler, IFYE from Scotland to USA in 2015 and her partner Davie Hay welcomed their son Gordie Robert Hay into the world on 30 June 2025

#### **A wedding -**

Caroline Robertson, IFYE from Scotland to the European Rally in 1983, Ulster in 1986 and Canada in 1987 and James Law, IFYE from Scotland to the European Rally in 1982 surprised us all when they announced they had got married in Kirkwall, Orkney at the end of August, 2025.





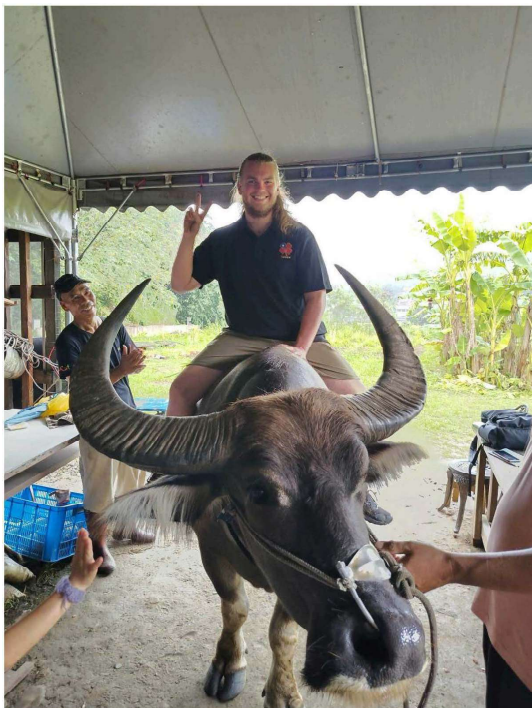
## **IFYE exchange trip to Taiwan**

*written by Jere Puolakka (IFYE from Finland to Taiwan 2025)*

**After a 30-hour journey, I arrived in hot and humid Taiwan for a two-month 4H exchange - my first visit to Asia. I had chosen Taiwan because I wanted to experience a culture and environment as different from Finland as possible.**



The trip began with an orientation introducing us to Taiwanese agriculture, culture, and 4H activities, together with other IFYEs from around the world. We also visited Taipei, including the Ministry of Agriculture and the famous Taipei 101 skyscraper.

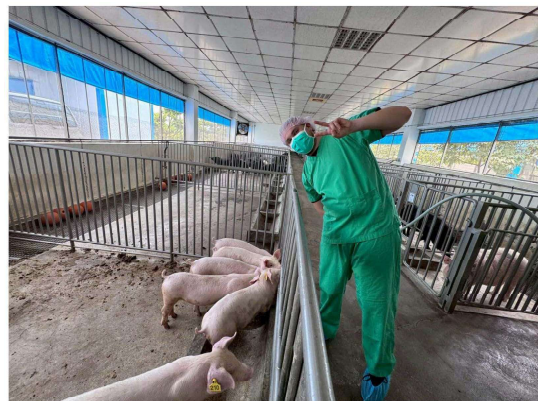
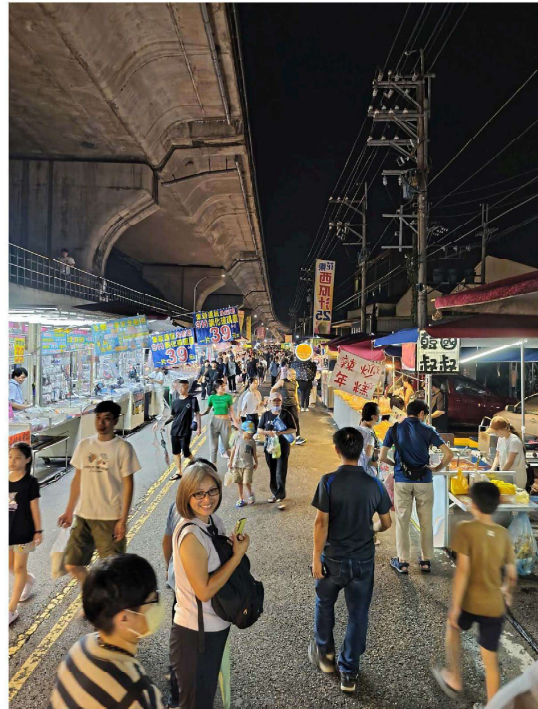


Food quickly became a memorable part of the experience. I encountered unusual local dishes like duck intestines, pig skin, and congealed blood - my only real culture shock - but soon learned to enjoy the country's diverse flavours, even trying bean and spring onion ice cream.

During my exchange, I lived with four host families across different regions: Miaoli, Hsinchu, Tainan, and Yilan. With each family, I explored local farming practices, from rice and melon fields to mushroom cultivation, joined community workshops for seniors, and experienced daily Taiwanese life. Weekends were filled with family activities like bike rides, visiting hot springs, and firefly watching.



Communication was sometimes challenging, as few people spoke English, so I relied on translators, gesture, and a few Mandarin phrases. Despite language barriers, people were warm, helpful, and endlessly generous - I even sent home several boxes of gifts and Taiwanese tea.



Throughout the exchange, I gained insight into Taiwan's agriculture, education, and everyday culture, while also reflecting on my own Finnish identity. Although locals sometimes mistook my calmness for boredom or irritation, their kindness always made me feel welcome.

At the end of the program, we received diplomas for participation, and I took one last walk through Taipei before heading home.

What did I take away from two months in Taiwan? Tangibly, many gifts - and a few extra kilos - but more importantly, lasting friendships, deeper cultural understanding, and a renewed appreciation for humanity's shared values. As the saying goes, travel broadens the mind - and I can confirm it truly does.

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## **68th Annual Young Farmers Ambassadors**

### **Reunion - Omagh, Northern Ireland 24th-**

**27th October 2025**

*written by Janette Stirling (IFYE from Northern Ireland to Scotland 2004, Canada 2006 & Rally 2009)*

At the end of October, 110 YFA members from England, Scotland and Wales found themselves trekking west in Northern Ireland to the Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh for the 2025 UK reunion weekend. Joined by some Australians, Austrians, Americans and Norwegians, the UK reunion kicked off with the traditional themed fancy dress night, "initial makes it official", where members came as something matching the first initial of their name. With Adele from the Amazon, Jane the Jockey, Pauline in her penguin pyjamas and a few Santa Clauses imaginations had really run wild. Linda the Lighthouse and Alastair the Abbot were some of the prize winners on parade. Music by Ryan McGarrity had everyone on the dance floor from the first song!







On Saturday morning, after we got the obligatory group photograph, buses were loaded to head out for the day. Visits included Foyle Meats Innovation farm, Bronagh O'Kane's farm looking at soil management, Butterloop social farm, Ulster American Folk park, and the Abbington collection. A soup lunch which was provided by local ladies in a local orange hall seen us refuelled and ready for our afternoon activities which included the options of an afternoon tour of Butterloop farm, showing off skills at the local golf driving range, crafting with familiar faces Fiona Patterson and Racquelle Reid, or free time in Omagh.

Saturday night was the formal dinner, where additional members of Ulster YFA joined for the evening meal, along with the YFCU travel committee who were introduced to YFA in the best possible way. 140 people attended the meal and the band were most entertained by a version of "fliegerlied" taking over the dance floor!



Sunday morning was spent in the hotel with the church service to start, where Claire Woods conducted a service around the theme of trees. Country meetings and the UK AGM followed, where Elaine Mowat completed her 2 years as secretary and has been replaced by Nicole Doidge, and Meg Findlay will complete her second year as chairman. A craft fair was held in the hotel with local crafters and friends with Trevor Woods displayed lots of homemade crafts, a lot of Christmas shopping done!

Sunday afternoon visits allowed folks to explore Omagh more with a guided walking tour or a trip to Pigeon Top Christmas Farm, home of Noel and Margaret Hemphill where we got educated on the business of growing and selling Christmas trees!

Back to the hotel for Sunday night, we had YFCU members who had travelled in 2025 give presentations of their trips. Katie Witherspoon had been on RYE rally in Slovenia, Kirsten Davis had been to Tasmania, Alastair McKelvey told us about his time in Austria and Gemma Dobson who spent her exchange in

**Switzerland. The infamous grouse shoot also took place in an undisclosed location, and welcomed these young farmers into the YFA family.**

**To finish the weekend, Helen Ervin took on the role of "taskmaster", with all members getting involved in the fun and games. Who knew a bag of hats could cause so much chaos!**

**We were all delighted to explore the western county of Ulster, the home town of so many Ulster YFA members and thankful so many people made the trip from across the world to Omagh. Thanks must go to the organising committee including Shirley Walker and Linda Steele, along with local members who planned such a great weekend.**

**Next year the 69th annual Young Farmers Ambassadors Reunion will be in Exeter, England, 30th October - 2nd November 2026 all welcome.**

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**Deadline next issue: 31st March 2026**

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**European IFYE Alumni Association**

**web address: [www.ifye.eu](http://www.ifye.eu)**

**e-mail: [newsletter@ifye.eu](mailto:newsletter@ifye.eu)**

**IFYE Europe Newsletter - December 2025**

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