



European Union



RAK
Eesti Riiklik Arengukeskus

Estonia

A cool country with a warm heart



www.visitestonia.com



ESTONIA

- * Official name: Republic of Estonia (in Estonian: Eesti Vabariik)
- * Area: 45,227 km² (ca 10% of Estonia's territory is made up of 1520 islands, 5% are inland waterbodies, 48% is forest, 7% is marshland and moor, and 37% is agricultural land)
- * 1.36 million inhabitants (68% Estonians, 26% Russians, 2% Ukrainians, 1% Byelorussians and 1% Finns), of whom 68% live in cities
- * Capital Tallinn (397 thousand inhabitants)
- * Official language: Estonian, system of government: parliamentary democracy. The proclamation of the country's independence is a national holiday celebrated on the 24th of February (Independence Day).
- * The Republic of Estonia is a member of the European Union and NATO



USEFUL INFORMATION

- * Estonia is on Eastern European time (GMT +02:00)
- * The currency is the Estonian kroon (EEK) (1 EUR =15.6466 EEK)
- * Telephone: the country code for Estonia is +372
- * Estonian Internet catalogue www.ee, information: www.1182.ee and www.1188.ee
- * Map of public Internet access points: regio.delfi.ee/ipunktid, and wireless Internet areas: www.wifi.ee
- * Emergency numbers in Estonia: police 110, ambulance and fire department 112
- * Distance from Tallinn: Helsinki 85 km, Riga 307 km, St. Petersburg 395 km, Stockholm 405 km



Estonia. A cool country with a warm heart

What is the best expression of Estonia's character? Is it the grey limestone, used in the walls of medieval houses and churches, that pushes its way through the soil and takes the form of majestic cliffs when it reaches the sea. The Baltic Sea, which touches the beaches of Estonia's thousand islands, sometimes gently, sometimes angrily. The forest, which covers the whole country and has for centuries provided Estonians with a roof over their heads, warmth and a place of refuge. Excitement about the melting of the snow and the touch of the warm spring sun on one's face – an indescribable joy that one can only fully comprehend in a northern country. The Midsummer Night bonfire on the beach or in a meadow, the enchantment of white summer nights when the sun only sets for a moment... The three colours of the Estonian flag – blue representing the sky, black the soil and white the snow. Or perhaps the hard work, thirst for education, perseverance and stubbornness of a million people, whose greatest monument is the Estonian nation itself – which has survived all of its conquerors and difficult times.

At the end of the day, it is people who shape the face of their country. Estonians are not light-hearted, but that is what is interesting! We do not praise without reason, but at the same time we never forget real friends. In this country, level-headedness and good judgement are highly respected – “Measure nine times, cut once,” says the Estonian proverb. We want everything to be better, and we sometimes even strive too hard to achieve that.

“Still waters run deep” says the Estonian proverb. Estonian humour is apparently distinctive – there have not been many periods in history when we have been able to breathe and speak freely. Living on the edge of Scandinavia, on the border between East and West, has made us not only serious, but also flexible and creative, and also quite cheerful! Thus Estonians are definitely not just serious and modest – the old and dignified Hanseatic city Tallinn is gradually becoming the entertainment capital of Northern Europe, although good food, cold beer, hot saunas and adventures in nature can be enjoyed throughout Estonia. It is not accidental that Estonians are eager Internet surfers and keen mobile phone users. They are also responsible for inventing and applying new solutions – in order to make life even more comfortable and save even more time for communication, enjoying life with one's friends and relatives or instead perhaps being alone.

What one sees when travelling around in the city and in the country is inseparable from our history. Estonians are among the oldest peoples in Europe, and they already lived in their home by the Baltic Sea when the first pyramids were being built in Egypt. Estonia has

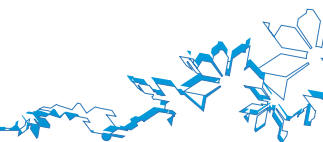
an extraordinary building of its own – in the 16th century Oleviste Church, whose tower is 159 metres high, was the highest in the world.

Since the 13th century, we have been conquered and ruled by Germans, Danes, Swedes, Poles and Russians – but they also left some good legacies. As members of the powerful Hanseatic League, Estonia's cities flourished, and throughout the country there arose not only manors and fortifications for the conquerors, but also churches, monasteries and schools. The Republic of Estonia was declared on 24 February 1918, and for a little over twenty years, the people felt enthusiasm and happiness about their home, work, children and creative work. In 1940, in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union forcibly annexed this small, peaceful Baltic country and occupied it for nearly half a century. The existing way of life was destroyed, and the Communist terror that was launched meant, among other things, mass deportations and the elimination of dissidents. The occupation arrested the development of most areas of the country's life, which until then had been at the same level as that of Finland.

In 1991 Estonians regained their independence, during the “singing revolution”, and reassumed their place in Europe and the world. In 2004, the Republic of Estonia became a member of the European Union and NATO. Today Estonia, which has chosen the path of decisive reforms, is attempting to strike a balance between nature and modern technology, dynamic economic development and social security, openness and its historical roots. Estonia has become one of the most successful e-countries in Europe, and a hotbed of new ideas and solutions in the areas of Internet banking, the raising of efficiency in production, communication between citizen and state, and entertainment.

Estonia has no high mountains, great plains or deep canyons. Estonia is, however, larger on the inside than it is on the outside – such diversity in landscape types, vegetation, seasons, weather and moods cannot be found in many places. In addition to modern amenities and its vibrant nightlife, there is still an abundance of unspoiled nature, air and space in Estonia – room for everyone to be himself. For me, Estonia is above all a country where everything has a human dimension – nothing is too big or too insignificant to attract attention. It is a place where history and the present meet in a genuine and personal manner; a country that is not yet finished – where life does not stand still, where people are open and curious, and tomorrow always promises to be better than the previous day.

VANO ALLSALU
editor, artist



Tallinn – 21st century Hanseatic city

About thirty years ago, when a Soviet film studio wished to make a motion picture in which the action took place on the western side of the Iron Curtain, they usually came to Tallinn to film. This was partly, of course, because it was not possible to go to the 'real' west, but also largely because the urban environment here, especially the well-preserved medieval city, was clearly different from all of the cities in the rest of the Soviet Union, and was often referred to as the most "western". Now that about fifteen years have passed since Estonia regained its independence, Tallinn is appreciated more

ers, 2/3 of whose original length is still intact, made the city a romantic travel destination even at the end of the 19th century. Much of the Old Town's present attractiveness does not, however, lie only in its unique architectural heritage, but in the fact that the historical city centre is still the focal point of life in Tallinn: parents walking with their children in the afternoon, young people meeting in cafés, a crowd of darkly-clothed art spectators milling around in front of a theatre. The Old Town is a place one goes to in order to visit a bookstore, exhibition or fashionable restaurant.

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for its fusion of different cultures, the meeting of East and West, and the collage of different eras and influences: the Hanseatic city from the 14th- 15th centuries, the wooden workers' suburbs from the Tsarist era, and the new city with glass skyscrapers from the 1990s – all side by side.

According to archaeologists, Tallinn, which in the 9th century already occupied its present location, was admitted to membership in the Hanseatic League, one of the most important merchant organisations of the Middle Ages, in 1248, and by the 15th century the city had become one of the most important ports and commercial centres among the league's eastern cities. Most of the Old Town's well-preserved houses with high gabled roofs, four large Gothic churches and the town hall all date from that period. The narrow winding streets, the quiet courtyards of the houses that are tightly wedged together along them and the high limestone city wall studded with 26 defensive tow-



At the end of the 19th century, Tallinn underwent two significant changes that have influenced the city's appearance to the present day. Firstly, the city wall and the adjoining defensive zone lost its role, because the techniques and principles of war had undergone cardinal changes. That was soon followed, however, by the second change: Tallinn went from being a city of trade to a city of industry. The first change led to the creation of parks in place of the former fortifications – even today, Tallinn's Old Town is still surrounded by a green belt.





As a result of the second change, before the First World War the city expanded to the north and northeast of the former city centre. Several important factories were built in the Kopli and Kalamaja [Fish House] districts (the latter earned its name from the fishermen's village that had existed there in the Middle Ages), and around these factories there arose two-storey wooden dwellings for workers and officials. In the 1920s and 1930s, wooden houses with central stairwells made of stone were constructed in the same district, offering better living conditions than their earlier counterparts;

gardens and bustling small-town ambience, in which a preserved turn-of-the-century atmosphere holds a central role, have good potential to become popular residential areas in the near future.

This historical grandeur and the burden it carries did not, however, prevent Tallinn from undergoing another change at the turn of this new century: today a new city with tall office buildings, hotels and shopping malls has arisen alongside the Old Town; its glittering glass towers express the 1990s aspiration to emulate the model of



this type of building was referred to as the Tallinn house due to its great popularity and distribution. Most of these unique districts with wooden buildings have survived until the present day, and the apartments therein, which initially had few amenities, are gradually being renovated into modern homes. Districts with large back

the prosperous big city. In the same wave of construction, however, new and important public buildings have been erected. Of these, the Museum of Occupations, with its bold and modern architecture, deserves special mention. In 2005 a new Museum of Estonian Art will be completed in Kadriorg, near the former summer castle of Russian Tsar Peter I, built at the beginning of the 18th century.



The key to Tallinn's attractiveness lies perhaps in its many changes; the ability to preserve the old and at the same time allow the new to take its place alongside it; adaptation to a globalising world and the simultaneous attempt to create the basis for a unique local culture. Tallinn continues to offer a splendid background for the filming of both costume dramas and thrillers, but in addition to these simulations, its genuine and natural, unmistakably recognisable and distinctive urban environment continues to exist. It is a city whose youthful pulse beats within a centuries-old body.

ANDRES KURG
architecture critic



Paradise for party animals and music lovers, something for everybody

It's cheap here – it really is! Let's agree that the currency of international night life is one beer. And even in Tallinn's most refined night establishments, one beer is at least twice as cheap as anywhere else in the northern hemisphere. And it is everywhere decanted half a litre at a time; Estonians do not consider a smaller quantity

with magnetic cards – you have to lie in wait until someone opens the door. There are even places that cater to non-drinkers, non-smokers and vegetarians.

There is no shortage of glamorous clubs; powerful sound equipment; shining metal surfaces and dancing platforms. Or naughty-looking Bordeaux red curtains and devilish design features. Lots of neon lighting. World-class stars on the stage, and local superstars on the couch. These are the elements that make up Tallinn's most impressive clubs. All of this may seem unbearably trendy, but Tallinn's larger nightclubs are booked solid. House, hip-hop, reggae and R'n'B resound in clubs Privé, Moskva and Hollywood. At BonBon, the crowd moves to club jazz and old and new hits. Local rock, pop and disco music rules at clubs Parlament, Rock Café and Panoramaam. Did I forget something? Trance, perhaps? Try Décolté.

There are many small club rooms that exist between and around Tallinn's 'superclubs', which operate under the supervision of uniformed

worthy of being called a beer. Other prices one may encounter at night locales are close to prices in stores. Tallinn may only exceed nearby capital cities in nightclub admission fees.

Tallinners have also put great emphasis on places to start up an evening out on the town. Innumerable lounges, cafés and bars where one can gather to create a party mood have been established in the city. There are many places where one can find luxurious surroundings, gentle jazz and perhaps also a mouthful of sushi (Pegasus, Spirit) – or perhaps clinical ultramodern-retro (Stereo) or a long list of fresh-tasting cocktails (Kaheksa). If you wish to be surrounded by art people, drop by the shadowy KuKu or Noku clubs. The latter is made more exciting by the fact that the door only opens to those

security guards and barmen. The smaller clubs are more vibrant, younger, more 'underground' and perhaps also a little sweatier. In these places one can find punk and indie rock, roots reggae and bhangra, deep house or experimental techno, electroclash and free jazz. In other words, everything that a person with mainstream taste would probably not be able to tolerate for more than ten minutes. The most important places where something "out of the ordinary" is almost always taking place are: Von Krahl, LoveSexMoney, Levist Väljas, KuKu and Kultuuritehas Polymer.

If you meet any local club experts, they will undoubtedly confirm that the most euphoric parties can be found in the city's gay clubs. For that reason, local gay clubs are popular and well appreciated among those who tend





to be a little more hedonistic. There are a handful of gay clubs, some smaller, some larger, some more open, some more private, some more glamorous and some more shadowy, where one can dance to the most “stylish” music. Of these, the newly-opened gay lounge and club Angel, the largest in the region, is most likely the jewel in the crown.

On four weekends out of five, one can be certain that somewhere – in some club, hall, dancing tent – some world-famous star, legend of dance music or a new superstar, i.e. someone who is idolized under the strobe lights all around the world, will be performing. It has



been noted that celebrities who come to entertain Tallinn tend to leave here with the words “That was the best party and the best audience!” and are apt to return soon. It is not by chance that Tallinn is increasingly the destination of ever-expanding club tourism... Indeed, Tallinners know how to party – both in the polite and fun and also in the way-out and riotous senses of the word.

This also points to the fact that Estonia's best club outside Tallinn is also called Tallinn! This club, which is the most spacious, has the boldest design, the broadest musical menu and is the most talked about in Estonia, bears the name Club-Tallinn. In the summer it moves to Pärnu, the country's summertime capital, but it winters in the university town of Tartu, the country's capital of knowledge. Incidentally, birds sing in the club's toilets!

In fact, no consequential venue in Estonia is located more than 250 kilometres from Tallinn. And in the summer, all of the more important and distinctive festivals and cultural events take place “in the country”, i.e. outside the capital. For instance, there is a week-long international folk festival in Viljandi, and don't miss the Leigo Järvemuusika [Leigo Lake Music] series of open-air concerts with spectacular visual effects, where performances by classical, rock, jazz and folk artists are held on tiny islands in Leigo Lake, among the picturesque hills of southern Estonia. In Rakvere, on the other hand, one can see Baltoscandal, a week-long festival of the most modern of international theatre. Each county in Estonia has at least one distinctive summer event! An added attraction of summer cultural events is the heady-smelling white nights in June, and warm and starry nights in August that are every bit as enchanting.

Within Tallinn, also, nothing is far – all of the above-mentioned Tallinn clubs are within no more than a five-minute walk from one another. This is because they are all concealed either in the famous Old Town or in areas near its borders. And of course, a visual gourmet can find similar pleasure – either as a change from partying or as a goal in itself – from walking in the old Hanseatic town, walking along a boardwalk in a bog or by climbing a high limestone cliff and looking out to the boundless sea. There are separate temptations for gourmets of food – more refined ones in Tallinn and other cities, and more down-to-earth and pleasantly rustic ones in country taverns.

SIIM NESTOR
music critic,
journalist



Curd and the sprat tin view

The 'sprat tin view' denotes the pretty picture that one sees when arriving in Tallinn by boat. This view includes the towers of the Old Town, the hill of Toompea and now also the tall buildings of the new city. This view has long adorned the tins of Estonian sprats. And sprats are Estonian food par excellence. This is why the word "sprat tin view" is a suitable title for this brief overview of Estonian food and eating places. Curd, on the other hand – curd just goes very well with sprats.

and less sweet sauces, the recipe for Tallinn sprats is unique and inimitable. Their taste, which is the result of a dozen or so spices, has remained the same for hundreds of years, and cannot be found anywhere else. This very spicy and salty little fish gives a wonderful flavour to the other components of a mild dish. An unsuspecting foreigner could even be shocked by the taste of a sprat all on its own. But if one is eating sprat without potatoes, one can accompany it with black bread (another unbeatable Estonian classic!) and wash it down with a big glass of rich Estonian milk. This leads to thoughts of organic farming, which is developing very successfully here – and arises as if spontaneously from the country person's mentality and diligence (and suspicion of all kinds of doubtful chemicals).

Although Estonian cuisine cannot boast great variety, and the country has no enormous food markets or history of gourmet cooking, one can find some rather unusual culinary experiences here if one keeps one's eyes open. Estonian cuisine has actually been fusion cuisine for centuries. German and Russian influences have been thoroughly assimilated, and since Estonia is a maritime nation, Scandinavian and Finnish cuisine is not unknown here either. One should also mention the ancient Finno-Ugrian foundations

If I had to name one food that is most representative of Estonian cuisine, it would probably not be pork roast with sauerkraut (too German) or flummery (too archaic), but namely spiced sprats. Spiced sprats with hot boiled potatoes, sour cream and curd and onion and boiled eggs – this is very Estonian. Eggs and milk products and potatoes have always grown locally in Estonia, and are very tasty too. No Estonian would ever buy foreign cream or potatoes. Onions also grow more quickly near Peipsi Lake. And although every maritime country offers many different varieties of herring in all kinds of more

of present-day Estonian cuisine, and the skilful use of seafood. Thus one can safely say that Estonian cuisine is whatever Estonians in Estonia cook up (preferably using





local produce). Whether the name of the dish is the typically Russian selyanka, or German sauerkraut – in Estonia they are made in an Estonian way, and definitely taste different. Simple things like potato salad or pancakes taste different in different culinary cultures, and in Estonia they taste Estonian. One might think that mixing mayonnaise and sour cream is a culinary crime, but in Estonia one cannot make potato salad without doing so. And presumably, every Estonian who has travelled a little is disappointed to find that in Finland, what is described as potato salad is a nondescript substance made of two components and sweet mayonnaise, or when, in Germany, they encounter big warm pieces of potato doused in vinegar offered under the same name.



Of course, in contemporary Estonia, as elsewhere, one can enjoy food from all over the world, and good restaurants offering cuisine from every corner of the globe are being opened all the time. Even Estonians don't want to eat Estonian food every day. But there are no Estonian restaurants in the rest of the world. There

are some in Estonia, although for a while it seemed that Estonians were a little ashamed of their own cuisine. At the same time, however, there are more and more varied restaurants that have at least a few clearly Estonian dishes on their menus, and also make them in a completely genuine manner, whether that be in an ancient or modern style.

To someone who wishes to become familiar with Estonian cuisine, one can confidently recommend Eesti Maja [Estonian House] in Tallinn (more cosy) or the Kuldse Notsu Kõrts [Golden Piglet Tavern] (more refined), as well as the Altja and Viitna taverns in Lahemaa, which take different, but very tasty, approaches to genuine old Estonian cuisine. One should not forget Olde



Hansa, which is very local, although medievally local. And for instance, the trendy Novell restaurant offers some exciting modern derivations of old-fashioned Estonian cuisine. The development of Estonian cuisine that has taken place in the last ten years has been incredible, in fact, and if things continue at the same speed, I think that in another ten years Estonian restaurants may begin to arise in other countries. Because Estonia has something to show off. Estonia already offers lots of possibilities for eating in a genuine and good Estonian style – one just has to keep one's eyes open and not sit down in the first tourist trap one encounters.

Visitors continue to take home the good old classics: sprats and candies, vodka and Vana Tallinn liqueur.

These have always been good in Estonia, they last a long time and pleasantly remind one of this place even several months or a year later. Oh yes, the curds mentioned in the title must be eaten here – and Estonian dairy products occupy a class unto themselves; many of them contain new and beneficial bacteria invented by local nutritionists.



The best food recommendation, however, is this: let Estonians invite you to visit them.

KARL-MARTIN SINIJÄRV
writer, gourmet

A great little country



It may seem unusual to inhabitants of larger countries that no place in Estonia is far away – without speeding, one can get from one end of the country to another in 4-5 hours. Estonia is, however, larger on the inside than on the outside – one doesn't encounter such diversity of landscapes, vegetation, seasons, weather and mood in many countries. At the same time, there is room for the wanderer here – although its territory is of comparable size to that of Denmark and Holland, Estonia's popula-

tion is 4 times as small as Denmark's, and 12 times as small as Holland's!

in Estonia. Elsewhere the limestone cliffs are interrupted by rapid-flowing rivers at the bottom of primeval valleys, but in northeast Estonia the cliffs stretch for 20 km uninterrupted. Incredible views of the Gulf of Finland unfold from the high banks. In Valaste the highest waterfall in Estonia falls from the cliff, and in the same place one can see cross-sections of picturesque rock strata – the limestone cliffs are like an opened window into our planet's ancient history. Limestone is also Estonia's national stone, and much of the Old Town of Tallinn and the historical buildings of northern Estonia have been built using it.



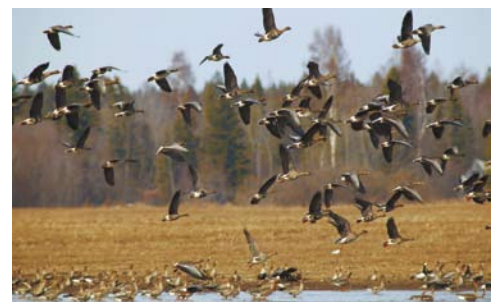
Estonians have been a maritime people since time immemorial. This is no surprise when one considers that this small country is surrounded by 1520 small and very small islands, and the total length of its coastline is nearly 3800 kilometres!

Lahemaa National Park offers a good impression of the relation between sea and land in Estonian life. The park contains many peninsulas with deep backwaters wedged between them, as well as coastal juniper copses and groups of erratic boulders. Whereas it is extremely rare to find giant erratic boulders with a circumference of more than 30 metres elsewhere in Europe, there are as many as 50 in northern Estonia. These giants, which were brought here from Scandinavia and deposited by melting glaciers, give the landscape a primeval feel. Ancient fishing villages and manor houses with beautiful parks permit one to look back into the past, and sandy beaches invite one to swim and sunbathe.

Estonia's greatest wonder of nature can be found on the island of Saaremaa. There is no other meteorite crater in Europe that is as easily accessible and as impressive as the 110-metre diameter Kaali meteorite crater. The meteorite, which fell from the sky only a few thousand years ago, is also one of the last large celestial objects to fall to earth in a densely inhabited part of the world.

The main attraction of northern Estonia is its limestone cliffs. This wonder of nature, which begins at Öland Island in Sweden and stretches 1200 kilometres before it comes to an end near Lake Ladoga in Russia, has been entered as a candidate for the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, alongside the Great Wall of China, the pyramids of Egypt and the Galapagos Islands. Whereas the bluffs on the island of Öland are only 10 metres high, they reach their maximum height (56 m) at Ontika

Estonia lies on a major route used by migratory birds. In spring the skies of Estonia resound with the beating of wings – this is when flocks of geese and Brent-geese returning home to Scandinavia rest from their migration in the flat areas of





Saaremaa and western Estonia. In the country's north-west corner, however, one can observe the countless numbers of arctic waterfowl – on some days in May, more than a million birds fly overhead! In autumn, enormous flocks of storks gather their strength in the fields surrounding Matsalu National Park. In summer one can explore the depths of the reed-beds and marvel at the expanses of the coastal floodplains. The park's viewing towers, some of which are wheelchair-accessible, have

the highest peak in the Baltic States, and Tamme-Lauri Oak, which is the widest in Estonia, with its girth of 8 metres, and is estimated to be 700 years old. Whereas foreigners may chuckle when they hear 318-metre-high Suur Munamägi ['Big Egg Mountain'] referred to as a high mountain, the sight of the more than 2 metre high anthills of the Akste Ant Colony, which stand in a shadowy spruce forest, should please any nature-lover. One of Estonia's most beautiful places, Taevaskoja – 400-million-year-old sandstone outcrops in the primeval valley of the Ahja River, is not far from here. The 43-metre-high Härma Wall by the Piusa River is even more imposing.

There are many ways to become acquainted with Estonia's diverse natural environment. An ever-increasing number of camping trails and nature study trails are being built, offering opportunities for in-depth acquaintance with the secrets of the local natural surroundings. Vacation homes, camping sites and information centres help make spending time in nature a safe, pleasant and educational adventure. Those who seek more intense experiences may try adventure camping packages, whereas tourism farms offer activities

from riding to farm work using old-fashioned methods to those who wish to spend a family vacation. Along the way, food can be found in cheerful restaurants set in former taverns. After a long day camping, however, one can enjoy relaxing treatments at one of the many modern spas in Estonia. It would be even better, though, to visit one of the archaic 'smoke saunas' in Haanja or the exotic floating sauna in Soomaa and try whisking oneself with a juniper, thistle or birch whisk, after which one can sample the local beer. Alternatively, one could just go for a walk and enjoy the unique feel of the midsummer white nights, when the sun only sets for a brief moment.

Breathtaking views of primeval natural landscapes can be seen in the Endla Ecological Reserve, where one can climb a viewing tower that stands directly above the bog-pools. Towering sand dunes that lie under bright pine forests rise up along the Riga-Tallinn Road, not far from Pärnu. A tower on the crest of the dune offers a bird's eye view of both the bog below and the Gulf of Pärnu that glitters behind a strip of forest. Tiny Kihnu Island, whose inhabitants' colourful culture has been deemed to be one of the most valuable items on the UNESCO World Heritage List, stands out in the distance.

Southern Estonia has a different appearance – the landscape is more irregular, and is dotted with hills and small lakes. As elsewhere in Estonia, there is lots of forest here – after all, it covers nearly half of Estonia's area. This is the home of one of Estonia's largest ant colonies,

ties from riding to farm work using old-fashioned methods to those who wish to spend a family vacation. Along the way, food can be found in cheerful restaurants set in former taverns. After a long day camping, however, one can enjoy relaxing treatments at one of the many modern spas in Estonia. It would be even better, though, to visit one of the archaic 'smoke saunas' in Haanja or the exotic floating sauna in Soomaa and try whisking oneself with a juniper, thistle or birch whisk, after which one can sample the local beer. Alternatively, one could just go for a walk and enjoy the unique feel of the midsummer white nights, when the sun only sets for a brief moment.

PEETER ERNITS
journalist,
naturalist



Europe in Estonia



What does the educated tourist come in search of in a small country? Above all, distinctive culture. Estonia's national mythology has for more than 150 years contained the wisdom that if one is not great in terms of strength, perhaps one can be equal to other countries in the area of culture. In this country, therefore, despite all of the political and economic shocks and upheavals that have taken place, culture is a kind of unusual religious confession, although exceedingly self-ironic Estonians can easily frighten foreigners with their black humour – namely about cultural life and the local sights.

Estonians are also proud of their language, which is probably the main reason we have retained our national identity under successive foreign rulers. The Estonian language was our resistance. The word "kurat"

south axis from Tallinn to Malta. Perhaps it is for that reason, or for precisely that reason, that the world's highest structure at the time, 159-metre-high Oleviste Church, was built in Tallinn in the 16th century – to serve as a landmark that could be seen far out at sea to symbolise a safe, majestic and inviting port. If one is required to ascend the Eiffel Tower when one visits Paris, in Tallinn one must climb the steps that lead to the tower of Oleviste Church.

To quote a verse from a popular Estonian song, the dear apothecary comes to our assistance when our health fails. The Tallinn Town Hall Pharmacy, which has operated since 1422 at the latest, is the longest continually operating pharmacy in Europe. One can still buy a glass of claret here – a spirit made in accordance with a medieval recipe. Across from the Town Hall Pharmacy stands the Town Hall, which was completed in 1404 – it is the pearl of the distinctive Tallinn Gothic school and the only Gothic town hall square in northern Europe.

The first café in Estonia was founded in Tallinn in 1702 by a Spaniard called Carvadillo. This was the time of the devastating Great Northern War, and thus it is no wonder that the café did not have customers for very long, and was closed. The oldest functioning café was Maiasmokk, which opened its doors here in 1864. The café also offers marzipan, a candy whose invention is claimed by both Estonians and Germans.

Only a handful of works by renowned 15th-century Lübeck painter and wood-engraver Bernt Notke, who was one of the most prominent representatives of the northern European late Gothic style, remain in existence today. Two of these are in Tallinn: the main altar of Pühavaimu Church and an extremely rare seven and a half metre canvas fragment on display in Niguliste Church entitled 'The Dance of Death'. The second central attraction of Niguliste Church (which lay in ruins in 1944, when the Soviet Air Force bombed Tallinn), which has been restored/reconstructed into a museum of medieval art

(literally 'devil' / = 'damn') will be easy to remember, but be careful how you use it. On the other hand, Estonia has always been open to all things cosmopolitan, and below are a few comments connected with the European cultural context that should be of interest to the traveller.

If you come to Tallinn, prepare to arrive in Europe's northernmost Hanseatic city and the easternmost outpost of Christian civilisation in the Middle Ages. Even in the 16th century, geographers measured Europe's north-





and concert hall, is the church's main altar. This folding altar, which is the largest still in existence in northern Europe, was made by another 15th-century Lübeck master – Hermen Rode. A third item in the Niguliste exhibit is also unique in its own right – the Black Head Brotherhood's altar of Mary, the largest medieval altar wall in Scandinavia.

At the end of 2005, the architectural project of the 21st century will be completed in Tallinn – the new building of the Estonian Art Museum, the first modern museum building to be built in the Baltic States. During the last ten years, Estonian art has finally become an object that local collectors wish to purchase, and last year an auction price for a local painter's work exceeded one million Estonian kroons. The home of Michel Sittowit, the

Estonians gather to demonstrate their sentimental unity. The festival has taken place in all weather on the world's largest singing stage, built in 1960. The first song festival, however, was held in Tartu in 1869, and served as the example for the Finns, Latvians and Lithuanians, who began to hold similar events a few years later.

The most famous Estonian composer alive today is Arvo Pärt, who divides his time between Estonia and Germany. In the 17th century, however, the most famous local composer was German Johann Valentin Meder, whose opera "Kindlameelne Argenia" [Argenia the Resolute] is the first opera known to have been written in the northern Hanseatic cities in the Baroque period, and is also the third-oldest existing German opera. The Revaler Liebhaber-Theater operated in Tallinn from 1784-1795 under the direction of the era's most sensational playwright August von Kotzebue. Estonia, the country's national opera house, however, celebrates its hundredth anniversary in 2006.

Estonians curse the media, but cannot get by without it. The first newspaper was printed in Tallinn in 1675 (the corresponding dates for England and France are 1702 and 1777 respectively). Today Estonia has one of the highest rates of Internet and mobile phone use in the world.

Tallinn is called the Prague of Northern Europe. Why? In the same way that Amsterdam is the other Venice... But above all because Tallinn is a truly unique and spirited fusion of history and the present, culture and exuberant everyday life. And, of course, the country does not consist only of its capital city – there are enough sights, objects of value and wonderful things in all corners of Estonia.

HARRY LIIVRAND
art historian, journalist

most famous European portrait painter of the 15th-16th centuries, who was born and died in Tallinn and was the first star artist to show his works in European royal courts, can still be seen in the Old Town of Tallinn.

Estonians are a singing people, and even the restoration of our independence is referred to as the singing revolution. Every five years Estonians gather in Tallinn for the Song Festival, with its tens of thousand of participants, where otherwise extremely individualistic







Malev Toom, Mark Raidpere, Annika Haas, Aarne Maasik, Rauno Volmar, Meelis Lökk. Data as of January 2005.

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