

48 HOURS IN TALLINN

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The old and new worlds meet in Estonia's capital, where gastronomic and cultural pleasure-seekers can feast to their heart's content. **Neil Taylor** reports

WHY GO NOW?
The Estonian capital is medieval and 21st century, with hardly anything in between – so expect plenty of cobblestones, spires and candle-lit churches, along with Wi-Fi and cutting-edge bars. Centuries of German and Swedish occupation have bequeathed a gorgeous Old Town. Most of the stag parties have now moved on to Ibiza, though they may be back around 6 June when England play Estonia at football. Meanwhile, the locals are celebrating spring.

TOUCH DOWN
Fly from Stansted with easyJet or from Gatwick with Estonian Air; fares are available at £179 in May through www.opodo.co.uk. The airport is only two miles outside the city centre, so some visitors walk into town. Alternatively, a taxi will cost around 100 Estonian kroon (EEK100/£4.50) to city-centre hotels. Bus 2 runs to **Viru Square** (1) for EEK15 (70p) – even less if you buy a booklet of 10 tickets for EEK70 (£3).

GET YOUR BEARINGS
The fortified inner city, known as Toompea, rises

above the outer layer of mercantile Tallinn. Navigational landmarks include the onion-shaped domes of the **Alexander Nevsky Cathedral** (2), and the spires of **St Olav's** (3) and **Niguliste** (St Nicholas) (4) churches. The **tourist office** (5) is just opposite the latter, on the corner of Niguliste (4) and Kullassepa (00 372 645 7777; www.tourism.tallinn.ee). It opens 9am-5pm from Monday to Friday and 10am-3pm on Saturday.

CHECK IN
The **Savoy Boutique** (6) at Suur-Karja 17-19 (00 372 680 6688 www.savoyhotel.ee) is the best of the recent crop of new hotels. Novel features include free drinks and free local phone calls from all rooms. Its location in the centre of the Old Town makes access easy to gastronomic and cultural pleasures. Doubles start at EEK3,000 (£130) including a buffet breakfast, as all hotel

prices in Estonia do. The **Central** (7) at Narva 7 (00 372 633 9800; www.revalhotels.com) is within walking distance of the Old Town and has large, simple and good-value rooms (doubles from EEK1,400/£60). The **Poska Villa** (8) at Jaan Poska 15 (00 372 601 3601; www.hot.ee/poskavilla) is close to Kadriorg Park, so blissfully quiet. Doubles start at EEK850 (£37).

TAKE A HIKE
Start beside **Hermann Tower** (9) at the top of the Old Town where the Estonian flag now reigns supreme. Meander down cobbled streets or steps to the **Town Hall Square** (10). For centuries this was the trading centre of the Baltic Germans, interspersed with the occasional public execution. It is a trading centre again – in

summer for cruise groups and before Christmas for locals. Squeeze through **Saiaakang** (11), Tallinn's narrowest street, emerging into the sunlight beside the **Holy Ghost Church** (12). Turn right into Pikk and look left down Pagari at the building with a bridge across the street. It looks totally out of place in Old Tallinn: this is the former KGB Headquarters. Next on the left is **St Olav's Church** (3) which the KGB also took over – since electronic eavesdropping from its tower was so convenient. Finish the tour at **Fat Margaret Tower** (13)

which, despite the unusual name, is now a Maritime Museum showing how the British Navy helped Estonia secure its independence after the First World War: It opens 10am-6pm from Wednesday to Sunday, admission EEK35 (£1.35). **LUNCH ON THE RUN**
Most Estonians have neither the time nor the money for a leisurely lunch; many have recently become health-conscious. Join them, just

off the tourist beat, at **Loiri Pagar** (14) at Nunne 9 or at its competitor **Pagaripoisid** which recently opened up next door at Nunne 11. Both provide a salad sandwich, yoghurt and fruit tea for about EEK40 (£2), which buys not even a small beer on Town Hall Square.

WINDOW SHOPPING
Maiasmokk (15) at Pikk 16 means "sweet tooth" – and this is the shop where all nostalgia buffs congregate since nothing has changed here since the 1930s (except the prices). The 1930s was a time when chemical additives and artificial sweeteners, not to

mention strip lighting and piped music, had yet to be invented. Come here for icing, but even more for marzipan, which makes an easy-to-carry souvenir.

WRITE A POSTCARD
Charming vendors roam the Old Town selling postcards for EEK10 (40p) or more. Instead, drop into the handsome **post office** (16) beside the **Nevsky Cathedral** (closed Sundays) and pay at most half this price for a wider selection.

AN APERITIF
Few foreigners find the narrow entrance to **Tristan ja Isolde** (17) under the Town Hall Tower so it is rarely crowded, even in midsummer. Try a **Vana Tallinn**, Estonia's signature aperitif, or one of the wide range of coffees. At the **Casa del Habano** (18) at Dunkri 2, the staff make cocktails from a much bigger variety of spirits than any Cuban bar could manage. To smoke while you drink, get to Tallinn before July, when it will be banned. **DINNER WITH THE LOCALS**
Tourists have largely

taken over the Old Town restaurants so take a 10-minute walk to meet both local Estonians and those who return regularly from abroad. They get together at **Eesti Maja** (19) at Lauteri 1 (00 372 645 5252). Order mashed potatoes in some shape or form, as they will be well-laced and well-spiced. Other dishes will be well-laced, too, such as pork in cider. Leave room for the signature dessert: chocolate cake and fruits of the forest ice-cream served together; EEK 230 (£10) should cover two courses and a beer.

SUNDAY MORNING: OUT TO BRUNCH
Take bus 21 from **Baltijaam railway station** (20) out to Rocca Al Mare, which despite the name has nothing to do with Italy. It is the location for the Open Air

Museum (www.evm.ee), which opens 10am-6pm daily, admission EEK70 (£3). Wooden houses, chapels and stables have been assembled from all over Estonia to recreate 18th-20th-century country life. One building is the **Kolu Inn**, where a brunch of pea soup followed by mashed potato is served on wooden plates. Souvenirs are good value, as the shop caters mainly for local visitors.

GO TO CHURCH
Leave Estonia behind by walking into **Alexander Nevsky Cathedral** (2) – a wholly Russian environment where the Cyrillic alphabet and incense still dominate. As is the custom in a Russian Orthodox Church, members of the congregation stand throughout. The **Holy Ghost Church** (12) has services in English every Sunday at 3pm.

CULTURAL AFTERNOON
Take tram 1 or 2 from **Viru Square** (1) to its final

THE ICING ON THE CAKE
Join a group tour of the **Bastion Tunnels** (21) which have just been opened to visitors. Despite the size and length of these defensive structures, they did not stop Peter the Great seizing Estonia. Guided tours (EEK50/£2.20) take place daily except Monday and Saturday between 11am-4pm, though check first on www.linna muuseum.ee/kok.



A cut above: a view across the rooftops of the Old Town
Estonian Tourist Board

Graphics: Kristina Ferris

stop in Kadriorg. Walk through the park to **KUMU**, Estonia's newly built art gallery. Look in particular for paintings by Gregor von Bochmann, the first artist in Estonia to paint peasants and farmhouses rather than the nobility and castles. Open 11am-6pm daily except Monday (and to 9pm on Thursdays). The admission price of EEK75 (£3.25) also covers the nearby **Kadriorg Palace** (www.ekm.ee). This was built as a summer retreat by Peter the Great. Sadly for him, he did not live long enough to see it completed. You can also visit the former palace kitchens over the road from the main building, which now house the fascinating **Mikkel Museum**. During Soviet rule, Johannes Mikkel somehow managed to assemble and keep a collection of Dürer woodcuts, Meissen porcelain and Flemish paintings.



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