

Treasures Of Tallinn

Jan Fuscoe is in the oldest capital city in the Baltics.

DID YOU KNOW
Famous Estonians include: Arvo Pärt, the world's most performed living composer; Louis Kahn, one of the 20th century's finest architects; Ahti Heinla, Priit Kasesalu and Jaan Tallinn, who created the software for Skype.

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Estonian ingredients, and there are some fine wines and craft beers on offer, too. It also has a lovely garden.

>Restaurant Platz in the modern Rotermann Centre is great for anything from a quick lunch to a gourmet multi-course dinner, making full use of local herbs, local fish, and serving at least half a dozen delicious Estonian craft beers.

>For a real pick-and-mix, take a wander around the Kalamaja area, once an industrial district and now full of fabulous international food outlets housed in shipping containers. You'll find British fish and chips, Turkish falafel and Vietnamese street food, and that's just for starters

Where to stay

>Tallinn has plenty of two- to four-star hotels as well as bed and breakfast accommodation. The Solo Sokos Hotel Estoria is bright and stylish, with original furniture designs dotted around the hotel. Renting an apartment is also an increasingly popular option. ■

Insider tip

The Tallinn Card is an all-in-one card offering free admission to over 40 museums and sights, including Tallinn's top 10 attractions. It offers dozens of discounts, free offers and gifts. The card also includes free transport, including the tram.

Things To Do

>A walking tour in the Old Town, which is divided into upper (Toompea) and lower town, is one of the best ways of exploring the city. Toompea translates as "Cathedral Hill" and takes its name from the 13th-century St Mary's Cathedral, or Dome Church, the only building in Toompea to have survived a 17th-century fire.

>Toompea Castle, in use since the ninth century, has seen many incarnations, including as a monastery, when the still-visible towers appeared, the tallest of which is the 48-metre Pikk Hermann (Tall Hermann) that dominates the skyline.

>The lower town held merchants' houses and shops. Many are more than 500 years old, including the

Town Hall Pharmacy, first written about in 1422 and still open. Look out for the brand new Museum of Icons Art, at Vene 6, which has one of the largest European collections of icons, some from the 15th century.

>The sleek and modern Kumu Art Museum is one of the largest art museums in northern Europe and awarded European Museum of the Year in 2008. It is filled with a collection of Estonian art dating back to the 18th century. Visitors can take a two-and-a-half-hour guided art tour that also encompasses the 18th-century Kadriorg Palace, the former home of Russian royalty. The palace now houses a beautiful art collection and is situated in a 280-acre park. Alternatively, you can take the "hop on, hop off" bus which stops close to both.

>Those looking for a great retail experience should head for Masters'

Courtyard, a lovely artisan quarter full of shops and studios selling textiles, ceramics, jewellery and ironwork. Just north of the historical centre, a 10-minute walk away, the once-industrial Kalamaja area is also great for flea markets, antiques shops, bars, and a host of cool design shops.

>Another highlight is the thrilling Seaplane Harbour maritime museum on Vesilennuki, where attractions include the 1930s submarine *Lembit*, made in northern England and the only existing full-size replica of the Short 184 seaplane. The world's largest steam-powered icebreaker is moored outside.

>Further afield are the famous Tallinn Song Festival Grounds. Built in 1960, they were the first modern post-war construction to be built in the city. A popular venue for events, the grounds host the Song Festival every five years, with nearly 25,000 singers and a audience of almost 100,000.

THE UNESCO World Heritage City of Tallinn has a spectacular mediaeval old town and a castle built in the 13th century by crusading knights of the Teutonic Order. The beautiful public buildings, especially the churches, symbolise the city's wealth when it was a major centre of the Hanseatic League. Over the years it has been controlled by Denmark, Sweden and, most recently Russia, but in 1991 Estonia gained its independence and, just over a decade later, joined the European Union. Today, the oldest capital city in the Baltic Sea region is one of the most fascinating cities to visit.

When to go

>Thanks to the Gulf Stream, Estonia benefits from warm weather between May and September, with the occasional heatwave, but more usual temperatures are around 20 degrees Celsius. Even March and October have

up to 12 hours of daylight, with an added incentive of lower hotel prices. Short rain showers can occur at any time, so bring a brolly.

What to eat

>There's no shortage of great restaurants and bars in Tallinn's Old Town, and one of the best is Leib, referring to Estonia's delicious "black bread" at Uus 31. Friendly staff serve delicious creative dishes using entirely



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