



Tallinn

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Why Go?

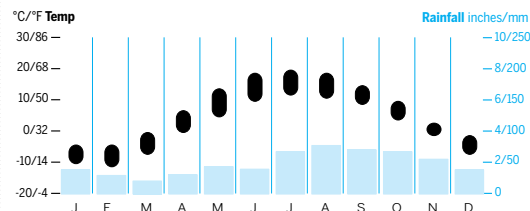
Estonia doesn't have to struggle to find a point of difference; it's completely unique. Its closest ethnic and linguistic buddy is Finland, and although they both may love to get naked together in the sauna, 50 years of Soviet rule has created obvious differences.

If you're labouring under the misconception that 'former Soviet' means dull and grey, Estonia's capital city will delight in proving you wrong. Tallinn has charm by the bucketload, fusing the modern and medieval to come up with a vibrant vibe all of its own. It's an intoxicating mix of church spires, glass skyscrapers, baroque palaces, top-notch eateries, brooding battlements, run-down wooden houses and sunny squares – with a few Soviet throwbacks in the mix.

A visit from Helsinki is just too easy to pass up – ferries ply the 85km separating the two capitals so frequently that Finns almost think of Tallinn as a distant suburb.

When to Go

Tallinn



Apr–May See the city shake off winter's gloom, with forests thickening and gardens blooming.

Jun–Aug White nights, beach parties and loads of summer festivals.

Dec Christmas markets, mulled wine and long, cosy nights.

Sights

Old Town

Tallinn's medieval Old Town (Vanalinn) is without doubt the country's most fascinating locality. It's divided into Toompea (the upper town) and the lower town, which is still surrounded by much of its 2.5km defensive wall.

TOOMPEA

According to legend, Toompea is the burial mound of Kalev, the mythical first leader of the Estonians. When Tallinn was a German town (known as Reval), this large fortified hill was the preserve of the bishop and the feudal nobility, literally looking down on the traders and lesser beings below. A couple of wonderful lookouts offer sumptuous views across the Lower Town rooftops to the sea.

St Mary's Cathedral

CHURCH

(Tallinna Neitsi Maarja Piiskoplik Toomkirik; www.eelk.ee/tallinna.toom/; Toom-Kooli 6; tower adult/child €5/3; ☎ 9am-5pm daily May-Sep, 9am-3pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) Tallinn's cathedral (now Lutheran, originally Catholic) was founded by at least 1233, although the exterior dates mainly from the 15th century, with the tower added in 1779. This impressive, austere building was a burial ground for the rich and titled, and the whitewashed walls are decorated with the coats-of-arms of Estonia's noble families. Fit viewseekers can climb the tower.

Alexander Nevsky Cathedral

CHURCH

(Lossiplats; ☎ 9am-6pm) The positioning of this magnificent, onion-domed Russian Orthodox cathedral (completed in 1900), opposite the parliament buildings, was no accident: the church was one of many built in the last part of the 19th century as part of a general wave of Russification in the empire's Baltic provinces. Orthodox believers come here in droves, alongside tourists ogling the interior's striking icons and frescoes.

Kiek in de Kōk

CASTLE, MUSEUM

(☎ 644 6686; www.linnamuuseum.ee; Komandandi tee 2; adult/child €4.50/2.60; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Tue-Sun) Built around 1475, this tall, stout fortress is one of Tallinn's most formidable cannon towers. Its name (amusing as it sounds in English) is Low German for 'Peep into the Kitchen'; from the upper floors medieval voyeurs could peer into the houses below. Today it houses a branch of the City Museum, focusing mainly on the development of the town's elaborate defences.

Museum of Occupations

MUSEUM

(Okupatsioonide Muuseum; www.okupatsioon.ee; Toompea 8; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun) Displays illustrate the hardships and horrors of five decades of occupation, under both the Nazis (briefly) and the Soviets. The photos and artefacts are interesting but it's the videos (lengthy but enthralling) that leave the greatest impression – and the joy of a happy ending.

LOWER TOWN

Picking your way through the lower town's narrow, cobbled streets is like strolling into the 15th century – not least due to the tendency of local businesses to dress their staff up in medieval garb. The most interesting street is Pikk (Long St), which starts at the Great Coast Gate and includes Tallinn's historic guild buildings.

★ Raekoja Plats

SQUARE

(Town Hall Sq) Raekoja plats has been the heart of Tallinn life since markets began here in the 11th century. It's ringed by pastel-coloured buildings from the 15th to 17th centuries, and is dominated by the Gothic town hall. Throughout summer, outdoor cafes implore you to sit and people-watch; come Christmas, a huge pine tree stands in the middle of the square. Whether bathed in sunlight or sprinkled with snow, it's always a photogenic spot.

Tallinn Town Hall

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Tallinna Raekoda; ☎ 645 7900; www.tallinn.ee/raekoda; Raekoja plats; adult/student €5/2; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Sat Jul-Aug, by appointment Sep-Jun) Completed in 1404, this is the only surviving Gothic town hall in northern Europe. Inside, you can visit the Trade Hall (housing a visitor book dripping in royal signatures), the Council Chamber (featuring Estonia's oldest woodcarvings, dating from 1374), the vaulted Citizens' Hall, a yellow-and-black-tiled councillor's office and a small kitchen. The steeply sloped attic has displays on the building and its restoration.

NEED TO KNOW

Population 412,000

Country code ☎ 372, no area codes

Language Estonian

Currency Euro (€)