



Tallinn

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Why Go?

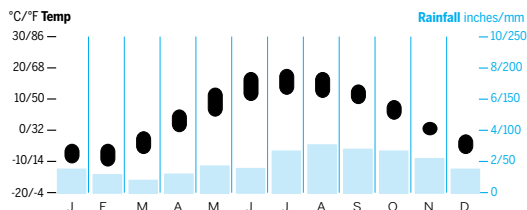
Estonia doesn't have to struggle to find a point of difference; it's completely unique. It shares a similar geography and history with Baltic neighbours Latvia and Lithuania, but it's culturally very different. Estonia's closest ethnic and linguistic buddy is Finland, and although they may love to get naked together in the sauna, fifty years of Soviet rule separated the two countries.

In recent decades, and with a newfound confidence, Estonia has crept from under the Soviet blanket and leapt into the arms of Europe. The love affair is mutual: Europe has fallen for the allure of Estonia's capital, Tallinn and its two-tiered, Unesco-protected Old Town, a 14th- and 15th-century jumble of turrets, spires and winding streets.

A Tallinn visit from Helsinki is just too easy to overlook – 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 country 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

The medieval Old Town, just south of Tallinn Bay, comprises the lower town, still surrounded by much of its 2.5km defensive wall, and Toompea (the upper town). Immediately east of Old Town is the modern city centre.

OLD TOWN

LOWER TOWN

Raekoja Plats

SQUARE

(Town Hall Sq) Photogenic Raekoja plats has been the heart of Tallinn life since markets began here in the 11th century. It's ringed by historic, pastel-coloured buildings and al fresco restaurant tables.

Town Hall

HISTORIC BUILDING

(www.tallinn.ee/raekoda; Raekoja plats; adult/student €4/2; ☉10am-4pm Mon-Sat Jul-Aug, by appointment Sep-Jun) Raekoja plats is dominated by the only surviving Gothic town hall in northern Europe, built between 1371 and 1404. You can climb the **town hall tower** (Raekoja plats; adult/student €3/1; ☉11am-6pm May-mid-Sep) for red-rooftop views.

Town Council Pharmacy

HISTORIC BUILDING

(Raeapteek; Raekoja plats 11; ☉10am-6pm Tue-Sat) This is another ancient Tallinn institution; there's been a pharmacy or apothecary's shop here since at least 1422, though the present facade is from the 17th century.

Holy Spirit Church

CHURCH

(Pühavaimu 2; adult/concession €1/0.50; ☉Mon-Sat) Duck through the arch beside the Town Council Pharmacy into the narrow **Saiajang** (White Bread Passage), which leads to this striking 14th-century church.

Estonian History Museum

MUSEUM

(www.ajaloomuuseum.ee; Pikk 17; adult/student €5/3; ☉10am-6pm, closed Wed Sep-Apr) This newly renovated museum has filled the striking 1410 Great Guild Hall with a series of ruminations on the Estonian psyche, presented through interactive and unusual displays.

Pikk

STREET

Pikk (Long Street) runs north to the **Great Coast Gate** – the medieval exit to Tallinn's port. Pikk is lined with the 15th-century houses of merchants and gentry, as well as the buildings of several old Tallinn guilds.

St Olaf's Church

CHURCH

(entry at Lai 50) At the northern end of Pikk stands this gargantuan church. Anyone



NEED TO KNOW

- » **Population** 416,500
- » **Country code** ☎372, no area codes
- » **Language** Estonian
- » **Currency** euro (€)

unafraid of a few stairs (258, to be precise) should head up to the **observation tower** (adult/student €2/1; ☉10am-6pm Apr-Oct, to 8pm Jul & Aug), halfway up the church's 124m structure.

Lower Town Wall

HISTORIC SITE

Suur-Kloostri leads to a long and photo-worthy stretch of the Lower Town Wall, which has nine towers along Laboratooriumi. Here, as well as at various points around the town wall, you can enter the towers.

Vene

STREET

Several 15th-century warehouses and merchant residences surround Raekoja plats at its southeast corner, as you head towards Vana turg and Vene (Vene means 'Russian' in Estonian, named for the Russian merchants who traded here). Vene is home to some gorgeous passageways and courtyards – **Katarina käik** (Vene 12) is lined with artisans' studios, and **Masters' Courtyard** (Vene 6) is a cobblestoned delight partially dating from the 13th century.

Tallinn City Museum

MUSEUM

(www.linnamuuseum.ee; Vene 17; adult/student €3.20/1.90; ☉10am-5pm Wed-Mon) A medieval merchant's home houses the City Museum, tracing Tallinn's development from its early beginnings.

TOOMPEA

A regal approach to Toompea hill is through the red-roofed 1380 **Pikk jalg Gate Tower** at the western end of Pikk in Lower Town, and then heading uphill along Pikk jalg (Long Leg). Alternatively, a winding stairway connects Lühike jalg (Short Leg), off Rataskäevu, to Toompea.

Alexander Nevsky Cathedral

CHURCH

(Lossi plats) The 19th-century icon-filled Russian Orthodox cathedral greets you at the top of Toompea in all its onion-domed splendour. It was built as a part of Alexander III's policy of Russification, and is sited strategically across from Toompea Castle, Estonia's traditional seat of power.