





The Estonian Song Festival \* @ \* Sprats \* Whisperers

Cow-Pats and Bear's Trousers \* The Spirit of Tartu \* Õ

Pariisi, London...

Limestone \* Ruins

Neighbours \* Vana Tallinn

Kama \* Graveyards

Barn-Houses

# THINGS ESTONIAN

Black Bread \* The Finnish Bridge \* The Juniper

The suit-and-tie man \* Barn Swallow \* The Sauna

...and all these other things

A long line of people snakes along a street, its head and tail nowhere in sight. Trumpets are blaring, bagpipes drone. People stand on both sides and join in with gusto. Whatever is happening here?

The song festival, for which men and women, young and old, have been preparing for five years is about to begin. The festival is like an idol of Estonian culture: much revered, but also kept at a distance.

The tradition was initiated in 1869, with the aim of gathering all the major choirs in the country to sing together. This was an expression of a new consciousness of nationhood, both at that time and later. The wearing of national costumes by the singers has

# THE ESTONIAN SONG FESTIVAL

always stressed the desire for self-determination. In politically difficult times, tens of thousands of performers assembled in the song festival grounds have attracted an audience of almost one third of the population.

Few of the original Estonian runo songs made it into the repertoire of the song festivals modelled on the German example. Most of these ancient songs were destroyed by Christianity, especially by the 18th-century Pietist movement that smashed up bagpipes and *kannels* and dyed the colourful national costumes black. Part of the ancient tradition has still won through and thrives alongside the Liedertafel-style later folklore. In any case, at the song festival the singers present both traditions with equal enthusiasm, a tear wells in the eye of an old worldly-wise woman, people rejoice and flashbulbs pop. Long live the song festival!





‘Tiger of the Nordic Countries’ was the new term of endearment for Estonia when the project Tiger Leap was launched, with the aim of bringing the Internet into every school and rural location in the middle of nowhere. A perfect example of innovation, cheered the papers, when the Estonian government started the E-government project. Photographers rushed to take pictures of the new traffic sign @ stuck up in the forest. Cartoonists spared no effort visualising Estonians settling down to the Internet, as ever with lavish humour and acute self-irony.

It is indeed true that it took Estonians very little time to adopt bank cards (having missed out on the cheque-book period), internet banking and filing tax returns by computer. Free internet access in a village shop, wireless internet connection on a beach, or some local IT people producing world-acclaimed programmes raises no eyebrows here. Eyebrows do shoot up, however, if a document is not immediately available or an institution fails to make the most of its technological facilities. It is sometimes less hassle for an Estonian to keep an eye on the movements of his money whilst in a faraway corner of the world than to negotiate the intricacies of the Estonian Health Insurance Fund.

Rumour has it that Estonian computer-innovation seems to have slackened pace recently, and the Estonians themselves are becoming too complacent. It might help if Latvia and Lithuania threatened to overtake us in this field. Wanting to get the better of their neighbours has always spurred Estonians on to great deeds.





Säilitada:  
temp. +2°C kuni -8°C  
Koostis:  
Balti kivid, keeväsool  
max 8%, vürtsid, suhkur.

Pärm enne  
sage kaunist.



Sprats are small significant fish that blithely swim around in the Baltic Sea. Catching sprats, however, is not necessarily a blithe business — Estonians have even managed to quarrel with their neighbours on account of this matter. As Estonian history does not exactly abound in heroic battles, the disputes over who has the right to catch sprats, and where, known as the Sprat War, exercised people's opinions about the territorial extent of their sea and land, their neighbours, and the topic under discussion.

## SPRATS

Once the sprat has been caught, it is salted with about 20 spices, and we get one of the delicacies of Estonian cuisine. Although an Estonian might see the notion 'Estonian cuisine' as a contradiction in terms, for locals these spicy sprats truly constitute an exotic bite. The taste is rather peculiar and the smell even more exciting, but it is something Estonian through and through.

Sprats have also made their mark in the area of cultural history, and in quite an original way. There must be thousands of different methods for preserving and preparing sprats. One of them has resulted in 'Tallinn Sprats'. It was written, as early as the 17th century, that the sprats of Reval (i.e. Tallinn) were 'especially sweet'. Preparing sprats was such a refined activity that even aristocratic ladies did not turn up their noble noses at it — they even prepared the dish themselves. With the arrival of canning, the sprat tins were adorned with the tower-filled silhouette of the Old Town of Tallinn. From that time onwards, the beautiful view of Tallinn from the sea has been known as the 'sprat tin silhouette', and the city itself is teasingly called 'Spratsville'.

If we consider the mysteries of the millennia, one of them is certainly the Estonian barn-house, equivalent to the Scottish wheelhouse or Sardinian *nuraghe*. This age-old type of building, where the living quarters could be adapted to grain threshing or turned into a sauna, or even a stable for young animals during the frosts of winter, remained practically unchanged until the mid-19th century, with its high thatched roof, logs stuffed with moss, low-ceilinged rooms, tiny windows, high thresholds and the non-existent chimney. And the stove, what a stove! You heat it for a week, and it stays warm for the next. How this desolate, squat, and, from today's point of view, hopelessly uncomfortable building

could possibly have survived in its 'canonised' form for so long is anyone's guess.

The barn-house is something essentially Estonian, a phenomenon that

some criticise, some feel ashamed of, and some idolise. The barn, built by the head of the household himself, embodies for an Estonian both the ancient struggle for freedom and the rural idyll. Besides museological value, the archaic houses exhibited in our open-air museums also nurture the Estonian identity. The meagre spirit of the barn dwelling may well show through in the activities of an Estonian political party, while the ancient might of its soot-covered walls has offered soul-scratching inspiration to several generations of creative minds, in literature, art and architecture.

## BARN-HOUSES





# COW'S CAKE AND BEAR'S TROUSERS

These two items take many an adult back to their childhood days. The first evokes memories of summers spent in the country with relatives, where on a wild dash across the meadow one's feet inevitably slipped in a cow-pat. Incidentally, the Estonian equivalent for cow-pat is 'lehmakook' — cow's cake. The second brings back the agony,

especially for kindergarten and primary school girls, of having to pull on a pair of shapeless but warm woollen tights, known as bear's trousers, preferably out of sight of the boys.

But more than memories, these words express the joy of playing with words. The Estonian language abounds with metaphorical adjectives: a young man often has a wolf's appetite, a bear's might, and the brains of a foal. Something new and exciting causes calf enthusiasm. Bad handwriting is known as crow's feet.

Moreover, the Estonian language allows itself to be shaped according to the speaker's perception of his surroundings. Water in a stream murmurs, rustles and bubbles; a window shutter squeaks, rattles and clatters in the wind; birds twitter, trill, warble, chirrup and screech. Even better: the speaker can always make up his own word denoting a particular sound — the listener will understand.

The prettiest town in Estonia is Tartu, or so the song claims. Tartu is the Athens of the river Emajõgi, assert our literary classics. Tartu — a city of good thoughts, declares the local city government. I go to Tallinn as seldom as possible, says a bohemian in a baggy sweater as he sinks into his chair in a Tartu café. In any case, Tartu is the only town in Estonia where the Spirit truly exists, even in the opinion of the most hardened materialists: nobody in Estonia dares doubt it. To some, this is the highest form of existence, intelligence par excellence, whilst others might consider it nothing but languid narcissism. Some find that the Spirit of Tartu alone bears the responsibility for Estonia's ethical development, others ridicule that same ethos for its pedantic wrangling and persistence.

## THE SPIRIT OF TARTU

It is the university that opened here in 1632 that might be held accountable for the birth of the Spirit. If you want to go to university at all, then Tartu is the place — such is the opinion of several generations. Tartu would not be Tartu without its university, but then the university would be nothing without Tartu: their joint existence has provided fertile soil, and not merely for

Estonian intellectual life. And Tartu's bookshops are clearly the best in Estonia.

Tallinn and Tartu have never seen eye to eye, and hopefully never will. Maybe they only recognise one another's good points in timeless matters. This might partly be the reason why there has never been a proper motorway between these two cities, and why trains persistently take more than two hours to cover the 200 kilometres between the Tallinn of movers and shakers and the highbrow Tartu. The Spirit of Tartu laughs up its sleeve.



*Andante.*

Kas on linnuressel mustet.

*Seeti raskuusis  
Liesu jöölöti  
c. K. K. K.*

Soprani

Öö - ööö - ää-ä ö - öö - ääää

Alti.

Üü - ööööööö - äö.

Tenori  
Basso

Ööööööö - äää - ööööö - ü

Ööööööö - äää - ööööö - ü

Ööööööö - äää - ööööö - ü

Ööööööö - äää - ööööö - ü

Ööööööö - äää - ööööö - ü

*Yksimeltyinen raskuusis I orkester  
Sopraanin ja tenorin kanssa  
K. K. K.*



Õ is a genuinely Estonian letter. There was nothing suitable to be borrowed from German — on the basis of which the rest of Estonian orthography was shaped — so the great man of the Enlightenment in Estonia, Otto Wilhelm Masing, had to invent it himself. The inhabitants of the western island of Saaremaa, however, pronounce this sound — to the delight of other Estonians — as an ‘ö’, a more open and rounded sound. So people from that area can be recognised by their speech, as can true South Estonians, although in their case it is by no means only the letter ‘õ’. In southern parts of the country a northerner might even have trouble understanding the local dialect. The South Estonian language could easily have become the national standard, but for one most unfortunate fact: the translators of the New Testament into South Estonian, published in 1686, both perished in the course of the warfare with Russians. Thus the North Estonian Bible of 1739 was free to reign supreme. As in other Protestant countries, the Bible played a central rôle in shaping the standard Estonian language. Today, commendable efforts are being made to breathe life into the South Estonian literary language once again.

An Estonian is prepared, at the drop of a hat, to swap his mother-tongue for a foreign one when it is clear that the other person cannot manage Estonian. In longer conversations, an Estonian is certain to mention the extremely complicated nature of his own language. When pressed for details, he says: “We have 14 cases, 3 stress quantities, but no article, gender, or grammatical future.” In actual fact, learning Estonian, a member of the Finno-Ugric family of languages, is probably no more difficult than mastering any other language from ‘another’ language group. But it is certainly nice to know that you know a language spoken by only slightly more than one million people.

... Atika, Kapri, Lihtenstein, Soodoma and Borodino — all these names can be found on the Estonian map. Also Ambla (Amplae Mariae) derived from Latin, or, from German, Vaabina (von Faben). Beside these domesticated foreign names, placenames in Estonian offer their own delights: Puujala (Wooden Leg), Kiimariigi (Realm of Lechery), Litsemaa (Whore Land), Napsi (Schnapps), Kiilaspere (Bald Family). The world travels of Baltic German landlords at the time of the Enlightenment also had peculiar results back at home. Manor houses acquired the exotic names of faraway places, and equally exotic and unsuitable names were given to peasants.

## PARIIISI, LONDON...

In the early 19th century there were about 41,000 family names in Estonia (today around 138,000): almost 25 times more than in France. The peasants first received their surnames in the late 18th century, the last to do so being the Orthodox Setu people in southeast Estonia in 1921. To make up for it, they chose especially poetic and patriotic names such as Aiatamm (Garden Oak), Haavaoks (Aspen Branch), Kodumaa (Homeland), Sõdur (Warrior). A name is an omen. As a rule, an unborn child is not called by its name, and the parents often have to admit that the chosen name does not 'suit' the child. When the usual choice fails to please, a name is simply invented. Thus the names here include, Tõelemn (Fond of Truth), Linda and Ülle from folk history; Tõnis (Anthony), Riina (Catherine), Malle (Magdalene) or Jaagup (James) adapted from Christian tradition; concoctions of the spelling and pronunciation of many languages like Käthlyn; foreign names that sound well in Estonian such as Raa, Kevin and Robin, or artificial names like Öro, Lordes, Telon, or In.





EESTI PANK

100

SADA KROONI

100

CL669455



Limestone is certainly no rarity. In Estonia, however, it has acquired the status of a national stone. This despite the fact that South Estonia hardly has any connection with this stone, because, half-way there, the limestone bedrock plunges deep into the earth. The imposing limestone cliffs of North Estonia, tens of meters in height, have found their way onto the obverse of the 100 kroon banknote. The Estonian word 'pank', by the way, means both the cliff and the bank.

Seen from a distance, the fields seem to be sown with stone, like shingle on a beach, rather than containing fertile soil. Limestone has many different manifestations:

alvars lined with junipers, karst areas where little rivers disappear into or emerge from caves, stone walls, churches, manor houses, castles. Those buildings belonging in the treasury of Estonian architecture are also largely of limestone.

## LIMESTONE

Its place of honour as the national stone, however, has not saved limestone from ill treatment. Soviet heavy industry, and the blind urge of the creators of urban landscapes to rearrange nature, have destroyed layers of limestone by blasting. The stone quarries have revealed over fifty layers with different characteristics; names such as the Evil Seven, Yellow Chin, Old Puffball, North Staircase and Stallion denote layers with different organic matter content, with colours ranging from brilliant white to carmine red, from seaweed green to chocolate brown.

Limestone exudes peace and security. That is why monuments to Estonian heroes or crosses and tombstones lasting for centuries have usually been made of limestone.

Ruins are an integral part of the Estonian landscape: for Estonians, ruins are both a romantic element from their childhood and a witness to history's violent somersaults. Over the course of the 20th century, property laws in Estonia changed five times, and each trauma has left behind its own 'monuments': crumbling manor houses, villages emptied by Soviet deportations, abandoned farms on bog islands, small power stations and water mills standing unused, ghastly missile depots and underground control centres inherited from the forces of occupation, ghostly factory buildings and huge deserted collective farm stables with their shutters clanking in the wind. Incidentally, such stables

were often erected at the very heart of a village or manorial complex, so as to obliterate from popular memory these places as they were once known.

## RUINS

For photographers and those seeking out the past, the Estonian landscape offers endless delights. Brushing aside the spruce branches in a forest you may chance upon the long-abandoned site of a farmhouse, where the old apple trees, happy to see the surprise visitor, invite him to taste their fruit. Equally, you may stumble upon a rusty railway line that used to take whole peat bogs, turf by turf, to the boiler house, all for the 'glory' of socialist construction work.

Ruins instil a bitter-sweet perception of the past in every person who has grown up in Estonia. History becomes physically palpable, and in the pine-scented swelter of summer one can just about hear a dog barking on a bog island, and the rattle of a tin pail at the well...

