Just at the southern edge of Tallinn lies Lake Ülemiste. According to a legend, on the darkest autumnal night each year a mysterious old man climbs out of the Ülemiste depths, knocks on the city gates and asks whether the construction of Tallinn has been completed. The little man has sworn that, should it one day be finished, he will release the lake’s waters and drown the whole city. The knowing guards therefore always answer, “No, good sir! There’s still a great deal of construction taking place. Please be so good as to come again after a little while.”

That’s why Tallinn will never be completed. Though already nine centuries old, it’s still a work in progress, forever growing and reinventing itself while never forgetting its unique heritage.
On Town Hall Square you can find a humble apothecary that’s been operating for nearly 600 years. Just a few steps away, there’s an old-fashioned café where specialists make marzipan figurines by hand – edible symbols of Tallinn’s fairytale charm. Nearby, in other cafés and lounge bars, the city’s residents are tapping away at their laptops and surfing the Internet.

Closer than you think

Tallinn is the capital of Estonia, a small, forward-thinking, Nordic country.

Tallinn sits on the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland, just 83 km south of Helsinki. A ferry trip between the cities takes just 2 hours or less.

The city shares a geographical latitude nearly identical with Stockholm.

During Estonia’s White Nights in June the sky here stays bright from 4 am until around 11 pm.

This is a green city, proudly boasting 40km² of parks and forests with a 2 km stretch of sandy beach bordering its bay.

83 km from Helsinki
Tallinn is a popular cruise destination bringing about 600,000 passengers to the town each year – more than there are citizens in the city. Thanks to its small size and compact layout, Tallinn is extremely easy to get around.

Lennart Meri International Airport is only 5 km from the city centre. A tram ride from next to the terminal to the city centre takes about 20 minutes.
A singing nation

The Estonian national identity is entwined in folk song. Every five years, as part of a tradition that goes back to 1869, Tallinn hosts the **Estonian Song and Dance Celebration**, which involves as many as 37,000 performers and more than 200,000 spectators. The next nationwide Song and Dance Celebration takes place in Tallinn from July 4 to July 7, 2019.

**Kadriorg** is a quiet area of Baroque gardens, ponds and fountains, is the city’s cultural nexus. This is the site of the **Tsarist-era Kadriorg Palace**, where the nation’s collection of foreign art is on display, as well as the vast **Kumu Art Museum**, where the best of Estonian works, from the historic to the modern and funky, can be seen. In warmer months Kadriorg is the setting for a variety of outdoor concerts.

Built in 1913, the grand **Estonia Theatre** is Tallinn’s prime venue for opera, ballet and symphonic performances. Most famously, it’s home to the **Estonian National Opera, Estonian National Ballet and Estonian National Symphony Orchestra**, which is run by **Neeme Järvi**. During his long and successful career, Järvi has conducted several of the world’s prominent orchestras and has become one of classical music’s most recorded conductors. He is known for playing the works of another Estonian classical music figure, composer **Arvo Pärt**. One of the absolute giants of classical music, Pärt gave the world a compositional style called Tintinnabuli, which, like many Estonian creations, is both minimalist and mystical.

With Finno-Ugric roots that run thousands of years deep, Estonians pride themselves on being a society rich in music and creativity. This creative energy forms the local concerts, art exhibitions, festivals, plays and other events.

Like that of its Nordic neighbours, **Estonian design** has long been known both for its **simplicity** and its **fresh, off-beat style**. On the traditional end of the spectrum are the **beautiful handicrafts** that are prized by visitors from far and wide. At the same time, modern Estonian designs, as well as architectural trends, have created an enviable splash in Europe’s art scene and garnered considerable praise from critics.
Just before the Christmas season starts, Tallinn hosts the Black Nights Film Festival (PÖFF), one of the biggest film festivals in Northern Europe.

For several weeks each winter Tallinn’s Town Hall Square is filled with an elaborate, traditional Christmas Market, awarded in 2018 with the title of Best Christmas Market in Europe.

Spring in Tallinn starts off with the sounds of music, namely the Tallinn Music Week and Tallinn International Festival Jazzkaar.

In summer Tallinn hosts the Old Town Days festival and Medieval Days, both of which celebrate the city’s centuries-old heritage.

Tallinn Maritime Days, held in July, is a huge, sea-faring festival involving all sorts of water-related attractions.

Every August the city welcomes the Birgitta Festival, several days of outdoor concerts set amid the stunning ruins of St. Bridget’s Convent.

Tallinn’s regular events and festivals:
At the beginning of the 16th century, Tallinn had the largest and sturdiest defense system in Northern Europe. Underneath Tallinn there are hundreds of metres of underground passageways, mostly built in the 1600s during the time of Swedish rule. At the centre of Old Town stands the impressive, early-15th-century Town Hall, the best preserved Gothic town hall in Northern Europe. The Old Thomas weather vane that stands atop the Town Hall Tower is a much-loved symbol of the city. The original dates to 1530. One of Old Town’s prime attractions is St. Olaf’s Church. With its 159-metre spire, it was thought to be the tallest building in the World.
The heart of Tallinn is its Medieval Old Town, a fairytale neighborhood of gabled houses, Gothic spires and cobblestone streets that dates in the 13th – 16th centuries, the days when this was a thriving, Hanseatic trade centre.

Merchants from the Brotherhood of Black Heads guild installed a spruce on Town Hall Square in 1441. This became one of the first public Christmas trees in Europe.

The Town Hall Pharmacy on Town Hall Square is Europe’s oldest continuously operating pharmacy. It has been open since 1422.

The St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral atop Toompea Hill is Estonia’s main Russian Orthodox place of worship. The cathedral was built in 1900, when Estonia was part of the tsarist Russian empire.

On the façade of the 14th-century Holy Spirit Church, you’ll find an elaborately painted clock that’s the oldest public timekeeper in Tallinn.

Tallinn’s Old Town was entered on UNESCO’s list of World Heritage Sites in 1997 as an ‘exceptionally complete and well preserved example of a Medieval northern European trading city’.
6000 B.C. – 1219 A.D.

Though traces of human settlement in the Tallinn area date back about 5,000 years, not much is known about life here before the Northern Crusades in the early 13th century. The first mention of Tallinn in historic records comes in 1154, when Arab cartographer al-Idrisi marked it on his world map. Sometime around the start of the second millennium locals had begun using the spot as a market and fishing port, and built a wooden fortress on Toompea Hill.

1219–1342

According to legend, Denmark’s national flag originated right here in Tallinn. During a battle to conquer Estonia in 1219, it “floated down from the heavens” spurring the Danes on to victory. Whether it was really divine encouragement or, as some claim, the arrival of Slavic mercenaries that decided the day’s outcome, that battle with the Danes marked the beginning of seven centuries of foreign rule in Estonia. Though various crowns reigned here, the city was settled by ethnic Germans and was known throughout most of its history by its German name, Reval.
Tallinn’s Medieval heyday lasted from the 13th to 16th centuries when the city flourished as a key Hanseatic trade centre. Merchants here grew wealthy thanks to a brisk trade in grain, linen, textiles, herring, wine, Oriental spices, Russian fur and wax, and, most importantly, salt. The grand houses, towering churches and overall look of Old Town as we know it today took their shape during this period.

Hanseatic League
In 1248 Tallinn became a member of the Hanseatic League, a network of cities that dominated northern Europe's trade in Medieval times. Under the Hanseatic system of law, the town was governed by wealthy Burgomeisters, while business spheres were ruled by powerful merchant and craft guilds, whose grand halls can still be seen in Old Town today.

Town Hall Square
The Picturesque Town Hall Square has been the undisputed hub of Old Town since Medieval times. Historically it served as a market and meeting place, and was the site of at least one execution (resulting from a dispute over a bad omelette). Nowadays it’s home to beautiful, gabled houses, sidewalk cafés and, in December, the town’s Christmas tree. Find the round stone marked with a compass rose in the middle of the square. From this spot, with a little stretching and bending, you can see the tops of all five of Old Town’s spires.

St. Olav’s Church
In Medieval times, this Gothic church tower with its 159m spire was thought to be the tallest building in the world. Nowadays the 124-metre steeple still dwarfs most of Tallinn’s buildings and remains an important symbol of the town.

Dance with Death
Tallinn’s most famous artwork is Bernt Notke’s 15th-century painting Danse Macabre (Dance with Death), a spooky depiction of people dancing with skeletons. The unusual, wall-sized work is on display in St. Nicholas’ Church, and continues to amaze visitors with its immensity and level of detail.

Swedish period
1561–1710

Sweden ruled Estonia from the late 1500s to 1710, during which it put a lot of work into improving Tallinn’s defenses. In addition to strengthening the city wall and its towers, builders installed secret tunnels around the bastions for moving soldiers and gunpowder, and for spying on would-be invaders.

Bastion Tunnels
The Kiek in de Kök museum is the entrance to this fascinating system of hidden, 17th-century tunnels that run under Toome Hill. Originally built for battle, they later served as bomb shelters.

House of the Brotherhood of Blackheads
The ornate façade of this Old Town guild hall is easily the city’s most prized architectural remnant of the Swedish period. Its beautiful Renaissance décor dates to 1597, and the much-photographed red, green and gold door dates to 1640. The Brotherhood of Blackheads gets its odd name from the guild’s emblem, the dark profile of its patron saint, Mauritius. Today Tallinn Philharmonic Society operates here.

Fortification
A large part of what gives Old Town its character is the system of walls and towers that surround it. Work on the town’s defenses first began in 1265, but the current outline of the wall dates to the 14th century. By its heyday in the 16th century, the wall was 2.4 km long, 14–16 m high, up to 3 m thick, and included 46 towers. All these towers had names, some descriptive, some showing a weird kind of Medieval humour.
Tallinn was taken over by the Russian empire in 1710. The change of regime meant a clampdown on freedoms for ethnic Estonians, but a ‘National Awakening’ in the 1860s eventually led to moves for independence.

**Tsarist period 1710–1918**

Russian Tsar Peter the Great built the city’s famous Kadriorg Palace in 1718, naming it in honour of his wife, Catherine I. Surrounded by fountains and manicured gardens, this stunning Northern Baroque palace is now home to the international collection of the Estonian Art Museum.

Kadriorg Palace

At the old Seaplane Harbour in Tallinn’s Kalamaja district visitors can see enormous, reinforced concrete shell hangars that are a one-of-a-kind find in the history of architecture and engineering. Built in 1916, they’re said to be decades ahead of their time. Modern builders claim that, even with the help of a computer, it would be impossible to come up with a better design today. Today this engineering marvel houses the Estonian maritime history museum promising a “sea full of excitement” for the whole family. Covering 7,000 m² on three levels, the museum features a replica seaplane, British built submarine Lembit, 30-metre long aquarium with Baltic Sea fishes and many more attractions.

Seaplane Harbour

Estonian History Museum – Maarjamäe Palace

Museum opened its doors for Estonia’s 100th birthday as an entertaining history centre. The exhibition ‘My Free Country’, covering 100 years, takes visitors to the modern day. Children can build their own country in the “Children’s Republic” game. An outdoor exhibition with Soviet-era monuments and sculptures has also been created in the palace’s park.

1918–1940

Estonia’s victorious War of Independence against Soviet Russia (1918–1920) left Tallinn a turbulent city marked by political intrigue, espionage and economic chaos. By the mid-1930s, however, the Estonian Republic had landed on its feet. The capital underwent a building boom and developed a thriving café and cabaret culture.

**Independence**

The Jugend-classical theatre building designed by Finnish architects Armans Lindgren and Wivi Lönn was the largest building in early 20th century Tallinn. The Opera House’s repertoire consists of classical and contemporary operas and ballets, as well as operettas, musicals and children’s plays. During World War I, the theatre building operated as a military hospital.

Estonian National Opera

Presidential Palace

Just up the hill from the more famous Kadriorg Palace is Estonia’s Presidential Palace, built in 1938 to serve as the official residence and workplace of the head of state. It still serves that function today.

Café Maiasmokk

Tallinn’s oldest and most famous café, Maiasmokk has been operating since 1864, and still retains its amazing, pre-war interior. This old charmer lives up to its name (Estonian for “sweet tooth”) by serving up a variety of tempting cakes and pastries – all made right on the spot.

Most visitors to Tallinn are fascinated by Tallinn’s ‘wooden house districts’ – Kalamaja, Kopli, and Põhja-Tallinn. These neighbourhoods of colourful working-class houses took their shape during Europe’s 19th-century industrial boom. But unlike their counterparts in other countries, Tallinn’s wooden house districts escaped 20th-century redevelopment and are now among the last places in the world where one can find such an intriguing hodgepodge of old-fashioned homes. The most architecturally unique of these are called ‘Tallinn Houses’. Built in the 1920s and 30s, these two- to three-storey apartment houses are made of two symmetrical wooden wings separated by a stone central staircase. There are about 500 of these in the city today.
World War II ended with Estonia trapped behind the Iron Curtain. Five decades of Soviet occupation resulted in much of the offbeat architecture that can still be seen around the city.

1940–1991

In September 1988, about 300,000 people – over a quarter of all Estonians – gathered in Tallinn’s Song Festival Grounds to sing national songs and hear politicians make calls for independence. This was one of the nation’s defining moments: its peaceful ‘Singing Revolution’. After re-establishment of independence in 1991, Tallinn developed into a high-tech, European capital, but never lost sight of its Medieval heritage.

Linnahall

Linnahall, formerly the V.I. Lenin Palace of Culture and Sport, was built for the 1980 Moscow Olympics. As the Olympic sailing regatta took place in Tallinn, many buildings meant to demonstrate the best of Soviet architecture were built in the city. Known by locals as Linnahall, the cultural building once housed a concert hall and an ice rink, but now stands largely abandoned and awaits to be renovated.

Hotel Viru & KGB Museum

This first hotel-museum used to be the secret office of the Soviet security services, hidden away on the 23rd floor of the Viru Hotel. The tour provides a treasure trove of stories about the Soviet-era hotel business and the KGB’s part in it. Visitors will also be treated to breathtaking views of the sea, Old Town and city centre from the terraces of the hotel, which was the country’s very first skyscraper.

Pirita Harbour

In 1980 Tallinn played host to the yachting events of the Moscow Olympics, and several major building projects were undertaken here in the lead-up to the event. One of the most visible remnants of those times is Pirita Harbour, a must-see for anyone interested in Olympic history, socialist architecture or large amounts of oddly-shaped concrete.

Kumu Art Museum

Opened in 2006, Kumu is the impressive main building of the Art Museum of Estonia, and it’s naturally a magnet for every visitor interested in Estonian culture. The focus here is on Estonian art.

Freedom Square

Completely revamped in 2009, this vast square on the edge of the Old Town is a fantastic place to get a sense of Tallinn’s history in all its richness. From here you can see remnants of several eras at the same time – Medieval towers, 19th-century churches and 1930s-era cafés all surround a 21st-century public space.

Rotermann Quarter

This former factory complex near the city’s Passenger Port has been hailed by visiting experts for its cutting-edge architecture, a prime example of how the city continues to develop in new and interesting ways.

1991

Standing at 314 metres, Tallinn’s TV Tower is easily Estonia’s tallest structure. It’s also a prime example of Soviet engineering (completed in 1980), and reflects the somewhat tacky and bizarre style of the period both inside and out. There is a restaurant on the 170m level.

The Song Festival Grounds

It was here in 1988 that the Singing Revolution, a massive, musical demonstration against Soviet rule, set Estonia on its road towards independence. Most famously the site is home to the Estonian Song and Dance Celebration, an unforgettable event that takes place every five years, drawing together up to 37,000 performers and 200,000 spectators.

Soviet times Independence re-established
Traditional Estonian cuisine has its roots in village culture, with Germanic, Scandinavian and Slavic influences thrown in the mix. Most known dishes include sauerkraut, jellied pork, marinated eel, herring, and at Christmas, blood sausage. The local signature drink is Vana Tallinn, a sweet liqueur invented in the 1960s. It’s usually taken straight or added to coffee.

Tallinn’s bustling restaurant scene is packed with inventive chefs and offers mouthwatering cuisine for every taste: Medieval, ethnic, elegant, cutting-edge and more. Thanks to strong cultural and historic links, the city is also home to several top-notch restaurants.

Peruse the city’s diverse café scene to find creative cafés with wide selection of gourmet coffees, cakes, handmade chocolates and salads. A romantic hideaway, a trendy hangout or just a place to get a decent cappuccino – whatever kind of café you’re looking for, you can find it in Tallinn.
Tallinn has long been a popular destination for relaxation. The city is home to several spas, all offering brand new facilities and services ranging from various saunas to chocolate massage.

If relaxation means biking, yachting, swimming, golfing or enjoying the great outdoors, Tallinn can also oblige. Aegna, Naissaar and Prangli, small islands just off the coast are known for their quiet pine forests, secluded sandy beaches and fishing village charm.

The city’s nightlife offers something for every taste and speed, whether that means grabbing a pint and watching the game in a friendly pub, sipping cognac in a fireside lounge, or dancing the night away in a trendy club.

With its wide range of local fashion, design products and handicrafts as well as popular, internationally known brands, Tallinn caters to even the most extreme shopaholics.
As much as Tallinners pride themselves on their city’s Medieval heritage, it’s the modern side of city life that tends to grab international headlines.

Not only is Tallinn ranked among Europe’s most technology-oriented cities, leading the way in everything from free public Wi-Fi to e-government, it also has a dynamic business community eager to engage in new areas.

The average resident is incredibly tech savvy, and businesses are always quick to adapt to the next new thing.

The city has hundreds of free Wi-Fi areas and public Internet access points.
Tallinn is home to the world development headquarters of the company Skype, a telecommunications product developed in Estonia.

Most drivers pay for street parking via SMS text message or by using parking apps, such as Barking and Parkimine.ee.

99% of the country’s bank transactions are done online.

Tallinn is home to NATO’s Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence.

In January 1, 2011 Estonia became the 17th member of the Eurozone.

Tallinn is the first European capital offering free public transport for its residents since 2013.

Since 2015, people all around the world can become e-residents of Estonia. The innovative solution lets business owners and entrepreneurs access our famous e-services, such as digital signatures and establishing a business online in 18 minutes. Find out more here: www.e-resident.gov.ee

The 3D Tallinn Old Town application covering 121-hectares of the Medieval city offers a unique way to discover the old by the way of the new technology: www.3d.tallinn.ee

Public Wi-Fi

Tallinn is among the 10 best cities in the world in terms of public Wi-Fi coverage.

In Medieval times, Tallinn’s St. Olav’s Church tower with its 159 m spire was thought to be the tallest building in the World. Nowadays the city’s tallest structure is its 314 m TV Tower, which hosts a futuristic exhibition featuring the latest of Estonia’s high-tech inventions.
Tallinn is a fantastic place to experience each of the four seasons in all its glory. In summer the city positively bursts with life – parks, beaches and Old Town streets pulse with a festival atmosphere. Both the crisp, colourful autumn and the warm, fresh spring offer their own natural charms. And during the frosty Christmas season the city takes on a truly magical quality!