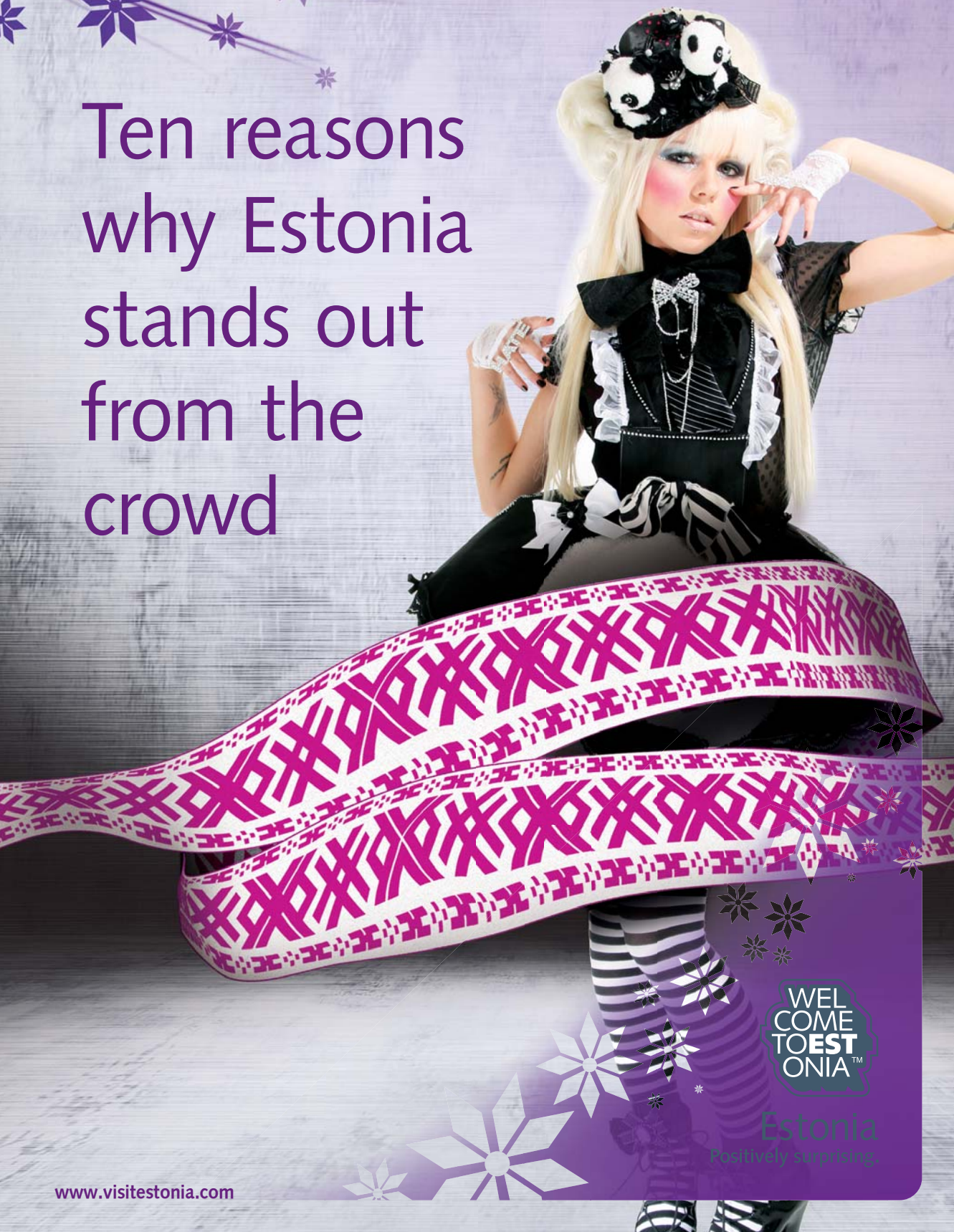


# Ten reasons why Estonia stands out from the crowd





# Shell Patterns

Just look at the stripes on the skirt the woman leaning against the motorcycle is wearing – how magical!

Each stripe is a code that carries information. The skirt is a data storage medium, just like a CD or a memory stick. And when viewed together,



Traditional Estonian skirts tell a lot about the wearer!

the stripes provide a knowledgeable eye with information about the wearer's life – where she is from originally, where she has lived her life, who she is married to, how satisfied she is with life etc. These are the Shell Patterns – the voodoo of the North!

There are over 1,500 islands in the sea off the Estonian coast and one of them bears the name Shell Island. The islands are all places with a unique, almost pristine natural environment and an individual cultural atmosphere. And there is always something to be found there that merits the exclamation – “but there's no way...!”

Just a couple of words about the motorcycle and wooden sidecar in the picture. The men of Shell Island are fishermen. But fishing is one of the most dangerous and masculine trades of all. For that reason the wives of Shell Island's men gather at the seashore to await their sweethearts' return from the sea. The sidecars are for the fish the men have caught.

Real fishermen also like to drink like real men now and again and when they do their sweethearts will heave them into the sidecars along with the fish. It makes it really easy to zoom off home. *Normaalne!*



“Normaalne!”

## Normaalne!

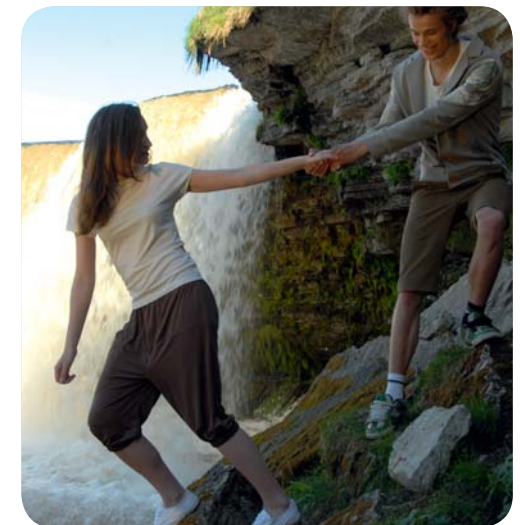
*Normaalne!* (“Cool!” Lit. “Normal!”) That's what Estonians say when they have particularly good luck. Say your Estonian friend wins a million Euros one Friday night in the casino, gets engaged to the daughter of an Arab oil sheikh and, to mark the occasion, is presented by his prospective father-in-law with a Lamborghini... ask your friend how his weekend was and he'd reply “*Normaalne!*”

When the Estonian athlete Gerd Kanter made his gold-medal-winning discus throw at the Beijing Olympics, thousands of Estonians watching on TV whooped “*Normaalne!*”

The use of this slang term in no way reflects poor levels of self-esteem among Estonians. It is simply a local response to expressions such as: “I just can't believe how lucky I've been!” “I've waited so long for this moment and now it's finally here.” “Thank heaven for the miraculous coincidence that brought us together so unexpectedly,” etc etc.

And that's precisely what Estonians think when, shaking your hand and imitating the stony ex-

pression of Clint Eastwood, they reply to the greeting “How are you?” with a “*Normaalne!*” Outward displays of emotion are not really the most striking thing about Estonians. But then again, once you've been accepted, you gain a loyal companion with whom you can ride off into the sunset... or perhaps explore the wild nightlife. Or just pop out with for a bite to eat.



Exceptional Estonia





Estonian fashion artist Reet Aus wearing her own eco-conscious line of clothing

## Think green!

You can become acquainted with Estonia's wholesome, distinctive cuisine in city coffee houses or gourmet restaurants in historical manor-houses tucked away in the depths of primeval forest. The local cuisine uses the world's finest and most wholesome ingredients and organic farming – a method which is growing in popularity in Europe, has for many years been the normal way of life in rural Estonia.

Green thinking is held in high regard here. The use of renewable sources of energy and ideas for sustainable consumption come naturally to Estonians as they are a people surrounded by nature. Great strides have been made in establishing wind farms and putting recycling arrangements in place.

Green is in fashion! Literally – the garments created by the Estonian designer Reet Aus bring an utterly unique chic to the international stage; her elegant collections, born of an ecological mindset and recycled materials, have attracted a great deal of attention across Europe.

Estonia is famous for its pristine wilderness and virgin nature reserves – they are without ques-

tion among the reasons why Estonia welcomes millions of tourists each year. The fact that a tightly packed, diverse community lives alongside Estonia's natural environment is the very thing that makes it special. Within half an hour's drive of the city centre you can suddenly find yourself in the fairy-tale stillness of virgin forest, looking at an animal or mushroom you have never seen before and feeling the tickle of fir needles and ladybirds on your skin.



Gourmet cuisine, Estonian-style

## Midsummer Day

The Estonians love their countryside dearly. Especially in the summer, a season longingly anticipated in a country with an otherwise chilly climate. Summer's white nights are the most beautiful time of year and the longest summer's day can last up to 19 hours. That day is 23 June – the summer solstice, known as Midsummer Day or St John's Day. The solstice, when the night is at its briefest and the day is at its longest, is associated with fertility. It is always celebrated in spectacular fashion and is one of the most important events of the year. Traditionally there is a huge bonfire in the evening, home-brewed beer is drunk and customary leaps over the bonfire are performed. Later, at night, you accompany an attractive member of the opposite sex on a short stroll into the forest, a custom referred to in popular parlance as "looking for the fern blossom".

## Sauna

Certainly on Midsummer Day, but in fact year-round, regardless of the season or the phase of the moon, Estonians delight in a seemingly sadomasochistic activity: they shut themselves in



100 degrees Celsius – and still pleasant



Leaping over the bonfire is all part of Midsummer's Day

airless rooms heated by hot stones to over one hundred degrees Celsius and sit in the heat until their pores open and the sweat starts to drip. They then pick up a whisk of birch or juniper twigs and strike themselves all over until their skin is red. Then, where possible, they hurry into the nearest body of cold water and declare the activity "most pleasant".

The hot room is called a sauna and it is very popular in Estonia and the Nordic countries in general. It's popular because it has a cleansing, restorative action on the body. Even today folk medicine, herbs and nature-based therapies are held in high regard in Estonia. Shamans, healers and even witches were the people who treated the sick in the olden days. Most medical procedures took place in the sauna, not just because the action of the sauna prompted the excretion of toxins, but also because in winter temperatures in Estonia can in places fall below -30°C.

Watch carefully – behind an intent gaze there may be a shaman's descendant or even a witch. Fortunately, there are only good witches in Estonia.



## WiFi you!

Evidently the Shaman blood in Estonians' veins makes it is easy for them to communicate over large distances without opening their mouths. Even if there's a vast expanse of virgin forest or an Estonian limestone crag between the individuals concerned.

I'm not talking about jungle drums here, but wireless internet. Perhaps you've heard rumours about a small country where you can use Wikipedia to identify plants even when you're out in the wilds? Yep, they're true. Virtually the whole country has wireless internet coverage, mostly for free.

Estonians are renowned for being workaholics and because of it are sometimes referred to as "the Japanese of Europe". The WiFi-thingumabob is a good side to all this. It stands to reason that a seemingly intractable problem should unravel itself more easily on a park bench or seashore than behind office walls. In summer it feels good to get out of the office for a while, stroll to the nearest park and write up a report that has juddered to a halt in a confined space. Or in winter visit the nearest coffee house, have an



Log on in the forest,

espresso and send a mail to your boss saying, "I won't be back in today. I'm off on a round-the-world trip!"

WiFi allows you to work anywhere in Estonia. Even if, for example, you should wake up on Monday morning on a limestone seashore, your head resting on your laptop, or in the embrace of a brown bear in its den.



or by the sea



or in town

## International Estonians

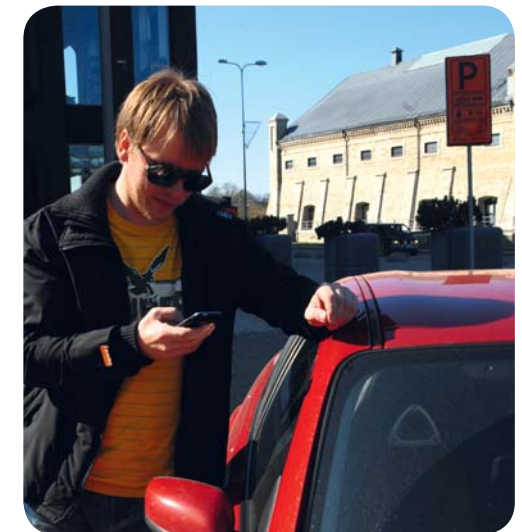
Did you know that Skype was the invention of some ordinary Estonian guys? Yep, it's true. They knew how to make life sweeter. Respect!

But did you also know that Estonia is one of the world's leading countries in terms of innovative internet-based infrastructure development? It's more than just the fact that in Estonia you can pay to park your car by sending an SMS message from your mobile phone or sign things electronically on the internet. Estonians can even vote by internet in the Presidential elections! It's not for nothing that Estonia is called the e-Country.

The explosive development and coverage of electronic media sparked by the national computerisation project "Tiigrihüpe" (Tiger-leap) has made Estonia a computer-dependent paradise. Any time, any pose, anywhere – you are wired, man! And I don't just mean logging in to Facebook in the city park. I'm talking about electronic muscles that make the life of tourists in Estonia super-straightforward – they don't have to rely on locals who speak English with a weird accent in order to communicate and can take care of things with computerised precision.

It may well be that Estonia's computer geeks have helped establish a better data protection system in your country or provided know-how to integrate mobile telephone or day-to-day internet-based services into the public arena.

So if you think that the future of mankind might be with a flash-memory stick that slots into a USB port in your ear, you will like Estonia!



Mobile parking made simple



## Old Town meets New City

It's not exactly the standard thing to step out of an ultra-modern hotel in the heart of the capital city of a European country and walk past a charming wooden cottage with stove-fired heating and a smoking chimney, then turn a corner only to suddenly find yourself in an old city, for example, standing in front of the tallest church in Mediaeval Europe. The Old Town of Tallinn is not very large, but it is unique in its intimacy. While drinking wine in a coffee house that has been in business continuously for two hundred years you may mull over the timeless and the transient and the following morning purchase some Alka-Seltzer from the *Raeapteek* – the Town Hall Pharmacy – which is one of the oldest pharmacies in Europe to operate from the same premises. The earliest reference to the *Raeapteek* in historical documents is in 1422. But the essential thing is not so much a building or an unexpected contrast, it is the fact that all these aspects have been assimilated to form a thoroughly original environment in which to live and work, where the expression "it's round the corner" really can be taken literally. All it takes to get you from bar to hotel is your legs and a few steps over the mediaeval cobbles. Everything



Old and new rub shoulders

you need is clustered together in the Old Town and its immediate surroundings – coffee houses, hotels, cinemas, theatres and spas. It is a delight for working people to be able to step away from the bustle of the city and in a few paces find a spot in a small, shaded park to read emails and then join the revellers ready for the fashionable *futuretro* time machine to transport them into both the past and the future in the Old Town's coffee houses and nightclubs.



The view of Tallinn Old Town from a roof-top cafe



Musical giants Eri Klas and Arvo Pärt

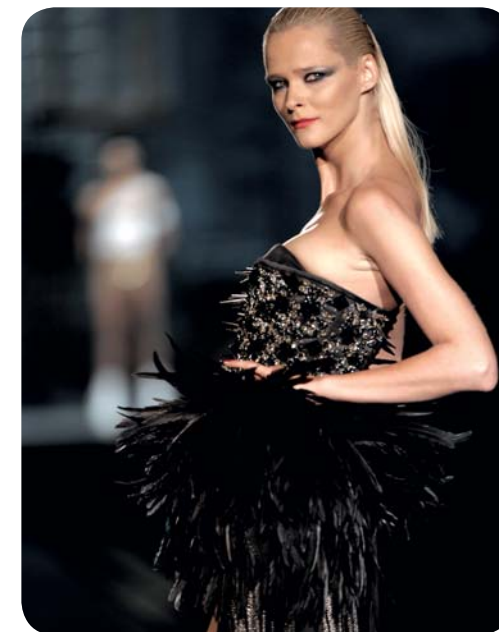
## Estohype!

Skype is not Estonia's only object of superstar hype: Estonia is the birthplace of legendary supermodel Carmen Kass and the young up-and-coming Karmen Pedaru and Tiiu Kuik, as well as of the world-famous stars of classical music Arvo Pärt, Veljo Tormis and Erki-Sven Tüür, whose timeless works always figure in self-respecting music shops' collections.

Kerli Kõiv – a rising star in the pop world, is another Estonian – I'm from a land called secret Estonia; nobody knows where it's at – surely you recognise it...? Tim Burton certainly does – and it was not for nothing that Kerli was asked to write for the soundtrack of his much-anticipated 3D animated film "Alice in Wonderland".

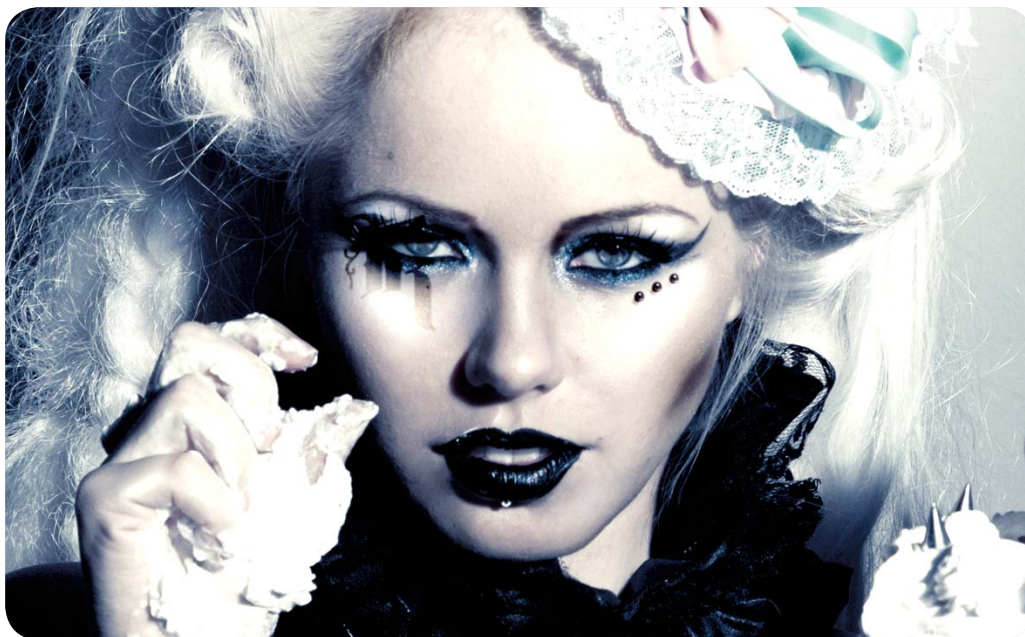
In 1992 Noel Gallagher, later of the world famous band Oasis, attended the Estonian music festival "Rock Summer" as a roadie for Inspiral Carpets. The Carpets hung out in town with members of Röövel Ööbik, Estonia's pioneering indie band at the time. When they asked the Manchester musicians what good, new bands they knew of, Inspiral Carpets pointed to the quiet roadie at the table, "This guy's in a really

good band! Oasis!" The (now defunct) pulp mag from which Estonia's Röövel Ööbik indie musicians made money at the time, was the first publication in the world to print a picture of Noel Gallagher. It's true – they talked about it on a show presented by the late John Peel.



The legendary supermodel Carmen Kass





The superstar Kerli Kõiv, who is also featured on the cover

Estonia's pop and underground scene is well-known Europe-wide. Estonia's clubs and DJs are famed in London and other hard-partying cities. Estonians always want to be in the vanguard, especially in matters in which they take pride, such as fashionable music. You could even be so bold as to say that what's beating or buzzing in an underground club in Tallinn today will be mainstream in Europe tomorrow.

I'm not saying all this to name-drop, I'm just highlighting one aspect of the spirit that is part of the Estonian inheritance – you can be exactly what you want to be!

The positive stubbornness of the Estonians is especially evident in sports – Estonia has its own representative even in exotic sports such as sumo – Baruto. Real name Kaido Höövelson, who wrestles monumental samurai in Japan. Mart Poom is known to all football hooligans and armchair fans. It would take the fingers of several hands to tot up Estonia's Olympic champions. And did you know that wife-carrying is a sport devised by Estonian men?

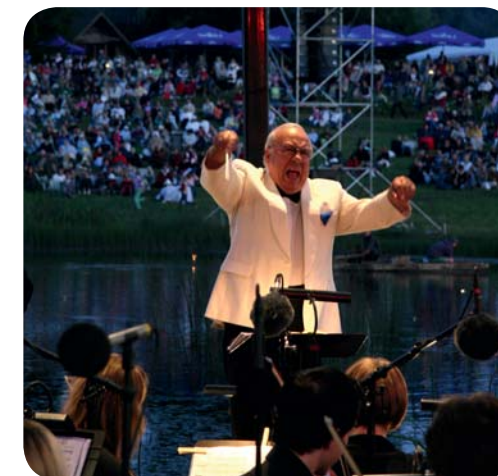


Baruto, Estonia's biggest name in sumo wrestling

## Estonians have a love of their own culture and festivals.

In Estonia it has become the norm to hold festivals of high culture in rural beauty-spots away from city centres. There are over 50 fairly major music festivals in Estonia every year, catering for every musical form from opera to the avant-garde. The Leigo Lake music concerts, the Nargen Opera festival on the Island of Naissaar, theatre productions in summertime amid the beauties of Mother Nature all over Estonia – and that is only one aspect of the contemporary cultural scene. The international Black Nights Film Festival has become extensive and influential. The fringe horror festival HÕFF offers more chilling experiences in one of the more beautiful spa towns, Haapsalu, a town which also boasts a more interesting history than most.

And it is precisely out of tradition and popular culture that the essential symbol of Estonian culture has grown – the festival of song and dance; a national festival that brings together tens of thousands of performers from all over the country and an even larger number of spectators. The tradition dates back to 1869 when the first na-



Concerts at the Leigo Lakes

tional festival of song was held in the university town of Tartu. The year 2009 saw 913 choirs and orchestras gather in Tallinn for the national festival of song to perform in the Tallinn Song Arena specially built for song and dance festivals. Precisely 28,166 singers' voices rang out together in the largest ever combined choir! The festivals of song and dance are a bridge between the culture of yesterday and today, the ancient and the contemporary. The high calibre of performance here paints a portrait of Estonia's essence, its sorrows, its joys and its aspirations!



Participants in a dance festival form a map of Estonia

[www.visitestonia.com](http://www.visitestonia.com)



## Estonia in Brief

<i>Official name:</i>	Republic of Estonia (Eesti Vabariik in Estonian)
<i>Area</i>	45,227 km <sup>2</sup>
<i>Inhabitants</i>	1.36 million
<i>Capital</i>	Tallinn (405,000 inhabitants)
<i>Official language</i>	Estonian
<i>Form of government:</i>	parliamentary democracy
<i>National holiday</i>	24 February (Independence Day)
<i>National bird:</i>	barn swallow
<i>National flower:</i>	cornflower

The Republic of Estonia is a member of the **European Union**; **Schengen area** and **NATO**.

Estonia is in the **East European time zone** (GMT/BST + 02:00).

Estonia's country code is +372. To place an International call start by dialling 00.