

Tasty Tallinn

A food-focused fam trip to Estonia's capital serves up a feast of wonders for Tracey Davies

birch sap, cloudberries, sea buckthorn, rhubarb... yes, rhubarb! Finally, an ingredient I recognise. As a traveller entirely led by her stomach, I'm willing to try anything, even if I don't recognise it. I've only been in the Estonian capital a matter of hours and already the food is blowing my mind. Luckily, I've packed an extra pair of elasticated shorts.

With the Estonian tourist board looking to work more with the travel trade – and the country's food in the spotlight – I've bagged a place on a fam trip to Tallinn with a group of lovely travel agents, who are as equally enamoured with the restaurants as I am.

We arrive on the eve of this year's Michelin Guide selections, with our host, Visit Estonia's Kadri Koor, nervously awaiting the announcement. There was probably no need for the tourist board to worry. Gwendal Poullennec, international director of the guides, has said: "Thanks to last year's inaugural edition, more and more people are discovering the hidden jewel that is Estonia's culinary scene. The country offers a very appealing mix of restaurants and

can boast plenty of skilled and ambitious chefs who are taking full advantage of the local produce."

Indeed, Tallinn – which also happens to be this year's Green Capital of Europe – now has a dazzling 34 restaurants recognised by the guide. Topping them all this year is the first in Estonia to be awarded two stars, 180° by Matthias Diether, which also has a green star for sustainability.

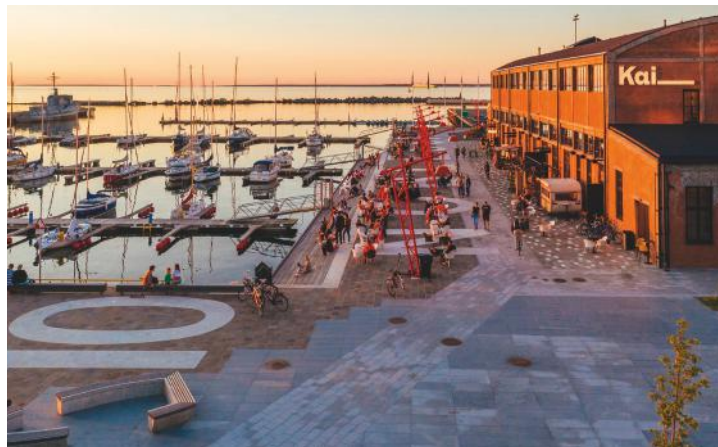
PEDAL POWER

After breakfast, we hop on a Waypoint Tallinn bike tour led by Stanislaus, a charming fountain of knowledge. Whizzing along tree-lined boulevards in Kadriorg Park, we pass Peter the Great's candy-coloured palaces and nip into the Kumu Art Museum, which has a mix of contemporary, modern and Soviet pop art. On Tallinn's lengthy waterfront we find some beautiful soft sandy beaches, then trundle along to Noblessner Marina, the city's cool harbour district.

If we had longer, I'd hire one of the funky little sauna pods at Iglupark on the waterfront, but it's time for lunch at Lore Bistrot. Holder of a Michelin Bib ➤

DESTINATIONS

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Rado restaurant; Noblessner Marina; sauna pod at Iglupark; FoodStudio

PICTURES: Robert Lang; Kaupo Kalda Photography; Marten Vaher; Priidu Saart

Gourmand for outstanding value, Lore offers Estonian comfort food but with a cool, contemporary twist. Sitting on the terrace in the sunshine overlooking the Baltic Sea, I feast on butter-fried pike perch, Brussels sprouts and béarnaise sauce. At €22, it's remarkably well-priced for a Michelin-rated spot. I particularly love the vegan apple semolina with vanilla and cinnamon for dessert.

PERFECT FOR FOODIES

New Nordic cuisine is big in Tallinn and chefs like to use foraged ingredients such as spruce, green pine cones and blackcurrant leaves in their dishes. Yet, rather deliciously, the trend is much more affordable here.

"Estonia is a perfect destination for foodies," says Kadri. "We always use local and seasonal ingredients, plus everything is so close – you can have fine dining in the capital at lunchtime, then reach the countryside to try some home-cooked local food in the evening."

I manage a quick sauna back at the hotel. Sauna is a big part of Estonia's heritage and the country is currently celebrating the Year of the Sauna with a heap of sauna-related events. In the evening, we take the tram to Tallinn's buzzy creative district of Telliskivi for dinner at the FoodStudio, where guests learn how to cook a three-course Estonian-inspired meal with a professional chef, then enjoy it together.

Estonia's fine-dining scene has blossomed over the past decade, largely driven by a slew of innovative chefs and with an ethos built around farm-to-table produce and zero waste. Over the next few days, we're lucky enough to eat at acclaimed chef Orm Oja's Michelin-listed Noa and Rado restaurants, where the local and seasonal menu changes daily.

BOOK IT

Regent Holidays offers a four-day Tallinn Summer City Break trip from £695, including flights, four nights at the Hotel St Barbara and a bog walking tour. regent-holidays.co.uk

For dedicated trade information, head to visitestonia.com/en/forthetrade

PORT OF CALL

Tallinn is a popular stop on Baltic cruises, and the increased interest in the city has inspired a swish new cruise terminal, complete with a tiered rooftop seating area and a children's playground. Most visitors head straight to the Old Town, a Unesco World Heritage Site, but we wait until our last day to explore it, via a walking tour of the Lower Town and Upper Town.

Passing the pastel-hued Russian Orthodox churches, turreted towers and medieval arches, all linked by charming cobbled alleyways, I'm particularly taken with Fat Margaret, the nickname for a rather stocky 16th-century defence tower that's now home to the Estonian Maritime Museum. Maybe it's because I can identify with her after my gluttonous epicurean adventures in Tallinn. **TW**

AGENTS' views



"I absolutely loved Estonia. The people are proud and innovative,

striving to make their country stand out – I guess this explains why companies like Skype and Bolt were created here. Our visit to the FoodStudio, where we prepared a sumptuous three-course meal, was a real highlight, as was the guided bike tour of Tallinn's parks, palaces, port and beach."

Caroline Linton,
personal travel consultant,
Travel Counsellors



"It was easy to see more than just Tallinn in a short

break. We spent a morning visiting the Jägala Waterfall and Lahemaa National Park, where we walked along the boardwalk across peat bogs to the watchtower, which had an impressive view of the park. That night we checked in at the Radisson Collection Tallinn – the poshest hotel I've ever stayed in – which had a beautiful rooftop bar with views over the city."

Lina Bruzaite, business travel consultant, S&N Pickford



Lahemaa National Park