

Chef Rene Uusmees (left) preparing a dish at the Meek restaurant in Old Town

Photos: Kalpana Sunder



TALLINN

ESTONIA



GETTING THERE

There are direct flights to Tallinn from Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, Hamburg Helsinki, London, and Paris among other European cities. Estonia Air and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and Air France fly from Mumbai to the Lennart Meri Tallinn Airport with stopovers.

USEFUL INFORMATION

- The city of Tallinn is on the banks of the Gulf of Finland, and situated about 80 kilometres south of Helsinki.
- Before you start sightseeing, get familiar with the city using a map. And visit the Old Town first.
- Work your way through the city by each section. Do not miss the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, St Mary's Cathedral or Toomkirik, Raekoda or the Town Hall which is now the Tallinn City Museum.
- You might also want to visit All-Linn or the Lower Town, which is one of Tallinn's busiest shopping area.
- For information on getting around, visit www.tourism.tallinn.ee

Drawing from a variety

Tallinn is such a mix of cultures and cuisines that at some point you feel truly at home



Inside the colourful Marzipan museum



TALLINN, ESTONIA

KALPANA SUNDER

In a medieval building of the Town Hall pharmacy in the heart of the Tallinn town square, I visit Estonia's first garlic restaurant, Balthasar. This restaurant uses garlic in all its dishes, even ice-cream!

Next I head to the colourful Kalev Marzipan Museum. Tallinn is supposed to be where this almond and sugar delicacy was invented. In the museum there's marzipan painted with food colours and in a variety of shapes and figures — plates, animals, birds, fruits vegetables, postcards with views of the city, even a

Hansel and Gretel marzipan house.

Old merchant houses have now been converted to medieval-themed restaurants with names like Olde Hansa and Pepper sack. Olde Hansa seems to be more popular with medieval maidens in period costumes standing outside. The usual fare is game pot, wild boar, elk and beer-marinated pork. Inside there are wrought iron fittings, wooden benches with boar skins, hand painted murals, candlelit tables, rich tapestries, a lute player, and a medieval store where you can buy a Victorian looking gown. The food is rich with spices and tastes great washed down with honey beer.

Understanding cuisine

Rene Uusmees is a young Estonian chef who owns the MEEK restaurant in old town. He explains that MEEK stands for Modern Estonian cuisine and that he draws on local produce like Estonian cheese and meat and fish and eating habits, interpreting them in a modern way. His cuisine follows the seasons — in summer it's berries, fresh vegetables, tomatoes, pike and garfish; autumn is characterised by mushrooms, apples, plums and cloudberrries; and in winter he depends on preserved vegetables and meat.

Estonian food has Scandinavian, Russian and German influences. You have to have a strong heart to taste the local specialty — blood sausage. The staple at every kitchen table seems to be rukkileib, the black rye bread and potatoes used in a variety



The Chocolaterie de Pierre sells over 50 kinds of truffles, including one with vodka

of ways. Besides Estonian cuisine, there is Mexican, Thai, Indian and even Mc Donald's. At the swanky Meriton Spa Hotel, I have a Chinese lunch at the Asian restaurant Wok and Grill. Meriton's also has a café serving the best French pastries in town and a Spanish tapas bar in shades of orange and black.

Coffee and conversations

The city has many subterranean cafés where you can spend a cozy hour over coffee and cakes. I especially enjoyed the Chocolaterie de Pierre, which sells a variety of over 50 truffles including one filled with vodka.

The Bogapot is a cozy, family-run café in Toompea, which serves fresh sandwiches, snacks and pastries. It

also doubles up as a ceramic studio and displays handmade pottery. You can enjoy munching on roasted almonds sold in carts and the most popular liqueur is the Vana Tallinn, with a hint of rum and a taste of vanilla and other spices.

There are more than ten Indian restaurants in Tallinn. One called Maharaja, is smack in the centre of the Town Square. In Old Town I head to Chakra to meet chef Venkat Indla from Andhra Pradesh, who recommends a hearty Mughlai meal. I lie back on mirror-worked cushions looking out of the brightly hued drapes at Old Town, feeling totally at home.

Kalpana is a Japanese language specialist and a travel writer based in Chennai.



The facade of Olde Hansa, a medieval-themed restaurant