



Schlössle Hotel in Estonia Old World Beauty With Modern Amenities By Thorsten Buehrmann

We landed in Tallinn, Estonia, on the Baltic Sea just below Finland at 7:30 p.m. and were surprised by the bright, blue-skied daylight at this late hour. Ah, yes, we remembered, the sun sets later in the northern hemispheres. Since Tallinn is located only about 40 miles south of Helsinki across the Gulf of Finland, we had chosen that route to visit Estonia's capital city

A welcome sign guided us toward the gracious staff. A Bentley Arnage was parked at the airport entrance and our luggage was handled quickly and carefully. Light canapés and fruit were presented along with flutes of champagne. Our driver drove through the fascinating, one-of-a-kind, historic city to the hotel.

We arrived at Old Tallinn's Schlössle Hotel and stepped out onto lovely cobblestone streets, setting the tone for our stay in a place noted since 1363 as a wealthy townhouse. We entered the dazzling medieval hall of a small, fairytale hotel. General Manager Kay Peter Bischoff and his staff welcomed us and we were invited to share champagne at the cozy but massive fireplace.

We were taken to our accommodations; I stayed in Suite 31 where Prince Charles has slept under wood beams that were hand-hewn sometime in the 1300s. This splendid and romantic suite not only has all the new-day amenities, but a spaciousness

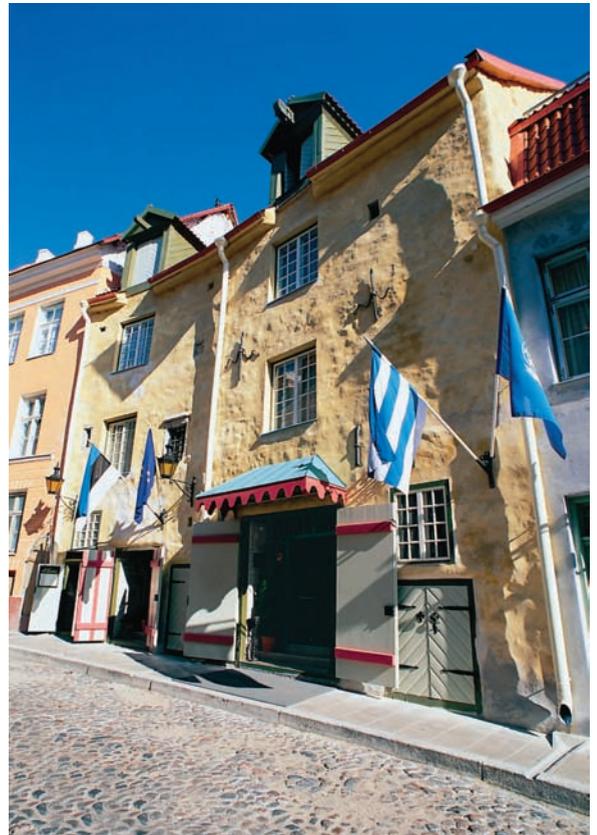
that is rather hard to find in Middle Age buildings.

The bath facilities were accordingly roomy with a large Jacuzzi and bath and spa amenities. Guests may choose from a Medieval Bath Menu and even employ the services of a bath butler, adding a Middle Ages dimension to their bath experience.

We had reservations for a seven-course degustation menu prepared by a young, dynamic chef. The cuisine and the unique setting of the restaurant were perfection.

After a royal night's sleep in luxurious linens, my wakeup call came in to the minute. Room service arrived five minutes later; the coffee was hot and strong, just the way I like it. After a quick shower, I met my colleagues for breakfast. A mini-buffet was nicely arranged and for anything else that our hearts might desire, we were referred to the menu. The service was impromptu, yet professional.

A driver arrived at the main entrance with a new Audi A for a five-minute ride to the harbor. All that followed we can highly recommend for any team-building experience or for a completely different kind of date. We boarded a rustic-looking boat at the pier and arrived an hour-and-a-half later on Naissaar (Ladies Island). Supposedly, only five people live on this island year-round and/or at all.



Next we boarded a small, old train that brought us to a hidden place in the woods, with a fireplace already burning and the aroma of grilled salmon in the air. Under a radiant blue sky we sat at an open fire enjoying white wine, shrimp and freshly grilled salmon.

We then had the opportunity to man a railroad handcar, a first-time experience for every member of our team. A handcar (also known as a pump trolley, pump car, jigger or Kalamazoo) is a railroad car powered by its passengers and we were the passengers. Handcars are nowadays used at vintage railroad events, but here in the middle of the woods on Naissaar, it was part of a way of life. Our jigger brought us to an old, abandoned church in the woods where we saw the island from the perspective of a time long gone. It was a neat experience until we returned to the harbor. The boat was gone!

"Well, what are we going to do now?" We looked at each other more or less speechless until Kay asked something like, "What the heck, why don't we take the helicopter?" From insecurity, to surprise, and finally relief, emotions were written all over all our faces. We boarded the chopper that had been hidden from view and took off. From the air, we circled our fire pit and the old church and discovered the many little hidden white sandy beaches of Naissaar. Back at the landing field, we were welcomed with a nicely chilled glass of Moët, and we all toasted to one of

the most surreal and surprising excursions this Seven Star team had the pleasure of experiencing to date.

After a wonderfully executed dinner at the Stenus restaurant, we skipped the nightcaps and went right to bed. The next morning we had a quick breakfast and were off on a guided walking tour to discover Tallinn. The Schlössle Hotel is at the center of the city's medieval old town and steps away from the historic Town Hall Square and shopping streets. One can easily walk to the palace of feudal lords and barons dating back to the Danish King Waldemar II, the Czars and then some.

Our guide, Eduard Kohlof, had us follow quaint, narrow, cobblestone streets and showed us some of the most historic and cultural landmarks, as well as interesting places we might otherwise have missed, such as a 600-year-old marzipan factory and a 14th-century toilet that still works.

At the Schlössle Hotel, we experienced a highly dedicated management that guides a coordinated team with grace and eloquence. GM Bischoff learned the hospitality trade from the bottom up and is a true professional. Definitely hands-on, he gets the job done. Mr. Bischoff joined the Schlössle Group last fall and once again, Director Bernard Loew has selected the right person for the position.●

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