

# A VIEW FROM ABROAD

THE ESC VOLUNTEERS MAGAZINE



**INTERVIEW:  
FROM  
GERMANY TO  
GREECE**



**8 FACTS  
ABOUT  
ESTONIA**

## 8 Interesting Facts About Estonia



XXVI Estonian Song Celebration in 2014

### 1. It's mostly female

The country has distinctly more women than men. For every 100 females in Estonia, there are 84 men – only the Northern Mariana Islands, a US territory in the Pacific, with a population of around 50,000, has a smaller percentage of males. Estonian women live 10 years longer, on average, which goes some way to explaining it.

### 2. Estonians are linguists

Great news for travellers is that most Estonians speak multiple languages. You may be relieved to know that Estonians count among their languages of proficiency: English, Russian, Finnish and German, in addition to their mother tongue. So, even if English is the only language that you share with your hosts, take heart that most Estonians are at least bilingual, and are credited with being among the best English speakers in Europe.

### 3. Sing-song the Estonian way

Singing people: Estonia holds the largest collection of national folk songs in the world, over 133,000. The Song Festival, held every five years in Tallinn, is famous for the highest number of choral singers on stage at once. All together 34,000 people turn up to sing, up to 18,000 people can be on stage at the same time and over 200,000 people attend the event. That's nearly 1/6 of the entire population!

#### **4. Suur Munamägi (Big Egg Hill), at 318 meters high, is the highest in the Baltic region**

According to a tale in the Estonian national epic Kalevipoeg, Suur Munamägi was made by the giant Kalevipoeg for a pillow to rest his head on. Even when this story lacks documentary evidence, the hill is still a good six meters higher than the highest point in Latvia – a point of much pride for its northern neighbours!

#### **5. Estonia has the highest number of international supermodels per capita in the world**

Narrowing down Estonia's top most-known models to just a few girls is not an easy task. Let's just say that among others, both Carmen Kass and Karmen Pedaru come from these parts of the world.

#### **6. Estonia has most start-ups per capita in Europe**

Estonia is the 132nd-smallest country in the world by land mass. Yet, according to the Wall Street Journal, it produces more start-ups per capita than any other country in Europe. We have produced such global firms as Skype, TransferWise and GrabCAD, to name a few.

#### **7. Wife-carrying is a sport**

While this peculiar Estonian pastime may not have made it to the Olympics, we give it a gold medal for pure entertainment value. What's more, the rules are fairly simple. As the name suggests, husbands pick up their wives and race several hundred metres with their better (and clearly wiser) halves upside down on their backs, with her legs over his neck and shoulders. The track must have two dry obstacles and a one-metre deep water obstacle. And, here's the kicker – the 'wife' carried must indeed be your own, or a neighbour's, and at least 17 years old. Before you ask, yes this is a world championship.

#### **8. Online voting**

Estonia was the first country in the world to allow its citizens to vote online in 2005. The country is often touted as the most digitally advanced society in the world. The benefit to tourists? Travel throughout Estonia is incredibly slick. With WiFi hotspots all over the country (even in those forests) and all government services available online, e-Estonia is leading the way. That means you can WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram your way through the country with absolute ease.

By Sten Taim



# Reviews for the holidays

Cinemas, theatres, libraries are all closed and the lock-down makes it hard to search for new cultural opportunities and offers. Luckily the coronavirus has hit us in a century, where internet and apps makes streaming and downloading possible and then we can bring lots of culture to our own homes. Stores, bars and restaurants are closed and you have properly saved some moneys on beers, that you can use for treating yourself with a new streaming service or a new published book. Here are my recommendations on what you should spend the rest of the quarantine and upcoming holidays with.

## TV-Series

I have myself just rewatched one of my favourite series named SKAM, which was very popular in Scandinavia four years ago. It is a teenage drama, but it separates from many usual high school themed movies, because of a well written storyline, as well as lovely, believable faulty characters, that really evolve during their own seasons. The series consists of four seasons and the main character and point of view are different from each season. SKAM does a great job of portraying the teenage party scene and teenage life in general in a realistic but still kind of tasteful way. The themes circle

around topics as love, friendship, youth, eating disorder, mental health, religion, sexuality and revenge. If you want to watch SKAM you can find it on “daily motion” with english subtitles, but don't remember to still enjoy the beautiful norwegian language.



## Movie

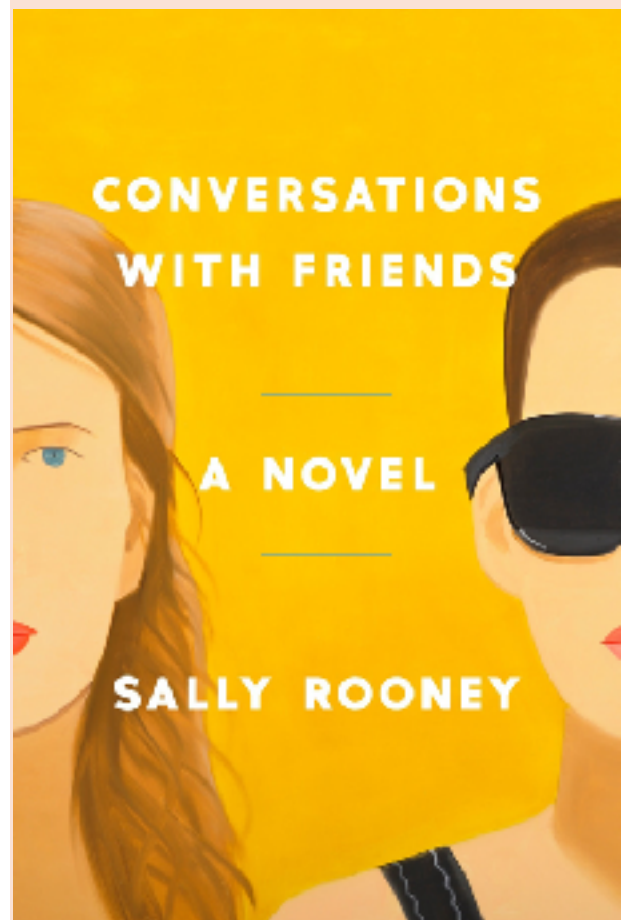
I have just watched the Netflix movie “Marriage story” and I think you should watch it as well. The drama movie is from 2019 and is starring Scarlett Johansson and Adam Driver in the leading roles and other high profiled actors in leading roles as Laura Dern, who won the Award for Best Supporting Actress at the Oscars. The film is about Charlie and Nicole, a couple living in New York, who are going through a divorce. Charlie is working as a director and Nicole is a former teen actress and together they have a young son Henry. Nicole is offered a role in LA and moves in with her mom in West Hollywood. Charlie decides to

stay in New York, as the play is in the process of moving to Broadway. Despite the couple agreeing to split amicably and forgo lawyers, Nicole hires Nora Fanshaw, a family lawyer. Nicole tells Nora the full story of her relationship with Charlie and how she gradually felt neglected by him and how he rejects her ideas and desires. Marriage story shows the difficult feelings in a divorce and how the sinews of a relationship remain, as the bones –the emotional connection that provides the real structure – melt away. This couple have a shared life, with a child and a mutual passion for theatre, but ultimately what they have not taken care of is their emotional connection. You can find the movie on Netflix.

### **Book**

The young Irish author Sally Rooney became popular in the first lockdown, when her bestselling book “Normal People” was filmed into a series about young love. Despite that the book I will recommend is her first book named “Conversations with friends”, which was published in 2017. The novel is about two college students and their strange, unexpected connection with a married couple. The protagonist Frances is twenty-one years old, cool-headed, and darkly observant. A college student and aspiring writer, she devotes herself to a life of the mind--and to the beautiful and endlessly self-possessed Bobbi, her best friend and comrade-in-arms. The book shows human

interaction between the friends and also their conversation with the married couple Nick and Melissa. The characters reflect on big topics as religion, capitalism, relationship etc. I will recommend this book if you are searching for a real page-turner, there is really well-written and gives you something to think about.



*By Marie Østergaard*

## **From Germany To Greece, Mario's Volunteering Story**

In the first three issues of our magazine, we're going to introduce each of our volunteers. For this issue I sat down with our volunteer Mario from Italy and we had a nice chat about her experience here and life back at home.

Introduce yourself briefly, Mario.

I am 27 years and 3 months old. Although I am from Italy, I have lived in Estonia for more than a year. I have also lived in Brno when I was younger, because my step-father worked there. I was working as a waiter at a car wash.

**How did you find this opportunity, why volunteering?**

I somehow found a Facebook group that has different ESC opportunities. I applied for different ones but the competition is quite big so not all of them give you a response. I saw the post of Cultural Centre Babylonia and it seemed a reaaaaaaaaaaaaaly interesting opportunity to take part of. I fulfilled the application and I was chosen! Lucky me.

I wanted to do some volunteering because I really enjoy travelling and living in different cultures. Since I had lived in Estonia and Czech (if we leave South African Republic out, don't want to talk about that) I wanted to experience a different culture and people in it. I choose volunteering because I wanted to make an impact in something and to meet new people from all around Europe.

**Did you had some previous volunteering experience before coming here?**

Not really, but I had thought about it. I think that ESC is a really wonderful program that gives all people (no matter your background) equal opportunities.

**Describe your first emotions when you arrived here.**

I was the last of our group to arrive. Because I arrived later at night I dressed up more warmer because I expected it to be cold in the night time. When I stepped out of the airport I was really positively surprised of the warm weather here. The weather was completely different, I think that at the moment the weather in Estonia is really cold if we can compare it to weather in here.

At first I felt quite weird because I didn't know what to expect and being in a different environment both culturally and climatically seemed interesting. I fell in love with the atmosphere of the city immediately. I think that it is really easy to make new friends here because people are really outgoing.

### **What do you like the most here?**

The warm winter! I also enjoy the rhythm of the life here, it is more chill than in Central Europe. And the food of course because you can get a proper meal at a really cheap price. I think they have the best streetfood here in the whole Europe. And if we're talking about food, I need to mention Ion chocolate with almonds. YUM!

### **What do you like the least here?**

Well, the Coronavirus but it is everywhere. I can't really name anything that bothers me that much.

### **What do you enjoy doing here in your free time?**

Before the lockdown I really enjoyed chilling with friends at the city centre and near the White Tower. Since I like to stay up really late I listen to different kind of music and watch a lot of films. I also enjoy doing sports but it is really hard now because all the gyms are closed. We have a fiddle in the house and I play it every day, my roommates hate it, but I don't.

### **What is your favorite memory from Greece?**

I can't really give one exact memory but I think it was from the time before the lockdown. All the nights that we were by the sea with the other volunteers were really great. The city feels really alive in the night time.

### **And the last question: if someone plans to do some volunteering abroad, what would you suggest them to know?**

Well It's hard to give one exact suggestion. But I think you just should be open to everything and even say yes to things that you wouldn't normally do. You will get out of your comfort zone and develop as a person. You are going to learn more about yourself and develop as a person!

Eat souvlaki and develop as a person. Eat Ion chocolate (YUM!) and develop as a person. Not going to the gym (because its closed) and develop as a person! Go for a walk and develop as a person. Take a dump and develop as a person.

Thank You Sten for this good interview. I hope I will develop myself by the time the next interview issues.

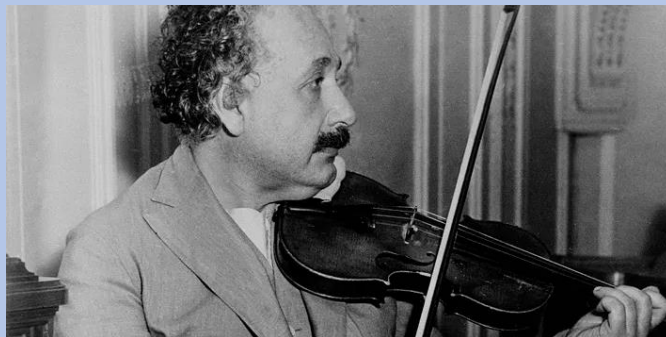
**By Sten Taim**

## The Importance of playing an Instrument

Music! Music is a pattern of weird sounds that make something interesting, beautiful, engaging, expressive, meaningful, divine, uplifting, makes you tap your foot or something... who knows why. Playing an instrument and creating music is pretty cool, you know, we've always seen sassy people play; in concerts, in the streets, in a pub, bar, restaurant, thinking „God, I should've played something, but now it's too late.“ AAAAND you're wrong. You know it, but in our busy day-to-day life we can't really put inside time for an instrument. Well, I've spent some time contemplating on the importance of playing an instrument and what I found out was actually something really really impressive. Not just the hands doing some moving on a wooden or metallic thing, it's much more beneficial for everything in your life, for example.

Playing an instrument makes you smarter...? Why?

A lot of geniuses played some kind of instrument, for one reason or another, who am I to judge? But they all agree that it helps them think, rethink and focus, furthermore, playing with both of your hands will help your brain stuff because of the coordinational and complex motor skills activated in your brain. It's like a firework of exciting actions happening for your brain, a lot of parts of the brain are working together, your left and right brain will become even better friends which will benefit:



**- Your Memory:** Remembering all those patterns in a meaningful way, even tho they're weird sound things that you are able to memorize is quite impressive. Proven to help with memory! And fighting off Alzheimer's and related diseases! There's even evidence that music can help a patient's brain recover from a stroke, as well as slowing down dementia.

**- Your Coordination:** As already mentioned complex motor skills and coordination, It's quite impressive to play the tones, then playing them in a rhythm, then keep playing the notes with the rhythm for a long extend of time, those things really help you with the brain stuff.

The coordination later becomes joined with your memory, and sometimes, without even remembering the tune of the song your fingers will start playing the song and make you remember. It's weird, yeah. but true.

**-Your Concentration:** Focus is a necessary part of learning an instrument. This isn't a passive hobby like watching TV or mindlessly scrolling through the phone (I know you do it, you know you do it). Improving your musical skills forces you to use all the parts of your brain involved in concentration, making you



better able to concentrate in other situations in life, not just when playing, it's all connected. This is another reason why music is beneficial for those with disorders like ADD.



- **Your STRESSSSSS (not increase but decrease):** Music keeps you calm, it has a unique effect on our emotions and has been proven to lower heart rate and blood pressure. You can scream, shout and break a few vases, but that's not good, that's making you do more work actually. To play a song you give „into“ Music and gives you a different purpose, humbling you down for a moment and allowing yourself to focus on something positive. It's a healthy and usefull „distraction“.



- **Your Achievement:** There's nothing like the feeling of finally mastering one of your favorite songs! Setting a goal, putting in the work, and eventually reaching that goal gives you a lot of good feelings inside your belly, a strong sense of achievement. It will improve your confidence in other areas of life in the process, good stuff.

-**Your Creativity** – Practising and perfecting a piece of music does wonders for the creative side of your brain, now matter how much a composer annotates their composition, they cannot fully express how a piece of music should be played. So it's up to the player to put their own stamp on a piece, to inject some of their own personality into the music. There is a reason why even classical artists win awards for their performances.

**-Your Fun Time!** “The art of music is so deep and profound that it has to be approached with a bit of intensity laced with great affectionate joy.” Even though there is an extensive amount of scientific reasoning stating why music training is so beneficial, you should learn a musical instrument simply because it is so incredibly fun to do so. People fill their lives with hobbies that make them happy, that gives them an escape from the monotonous repetition of day-to-day life. Other passive past times like watching TV or scrolling through social media provide no sustenance to our lives, music engages and stimulates our brains, making us happy and occupying our time. Music has the special quality to bring joy, peace and fulfilment that helps lift the spirit and make life enjoyable for everyone involved.

Hope this helps, we need more music in our life!

by Petar H. D. Keirs