

How Strzyżów met Põlva

In June of 2010 in Strzyżów took place annual meeting of the European Association of Rural Municipalities (Charter of European Rural Communities) in which we had the opportunity to participate as volunteers. These few days was a great opportunity to get to know many wonderful young people of a united Europe. At that time we did not realize that friendships will continue after the reunion. On the first day we got to know many Europeans. Most of the time we spent with a delegation from Estonia. Shortly after the meeting we received an invitation to the music festival in the town Põlva representing



Estonia in the organization Charter. Without hesitation we decided to buy tickets. After 27-hour-long journey we arrived to Tartu, the second-largest city in Estonia (though it has just 100000 inhabitants). From the bus station we were pick up by our Estonian colleague Ako.



The first day we visited Tartu. The city is called 'city of good thoughts' and we surely agree with that! In the one-hundred-thousand historic settlement anyone can not be bored, always something's going on: massive events, festivals, arts. It is worth mentioning that Tartu is historical connected with Poland. Because of polish king Stefan Batory, city flag is white and red just like the polish one. The king also founded a Jesuit high school, still working as a University of Tartu.

After a day-long visiting city we went to Põlva to attend the official opening of Uue Ajastu Festival , accompanied by an exhibition of works by young artists and performances by the Estonian teams, which took place on two stages throughout the city. The organizers also prepared watching movie in the open air.

Over the next three days we had the opportunity to participate at the concerts of Estonian and Russian celebrities. Concerts were accompanied by many attractions, including dancing with the fires, poetry readings, food tasting. At the same time during the day we were able to cheer on local athletes in international competitions in handball.

Ako Laugamets, who was one of three organizers of the festival, normally is the head of a youth center: Põlva Avatud Noortekeskus (open youth center), which is located in the municipality building Põlvamaa. Incredibly modern place where everyone can spend their free time. Thanks to the hospitality and assistance during our visit in Polva we had a chance to stay in a sports center with artists occurring at the festival and athletes participating in competitions. It was a great opportunity to get to know many interesting people not only from Estonia but also other Baltic countries.



We observed that Estonians are secretive and distrustful nation for strangers, but on closer acquaintance a very warm and welcoming. Particular attention we turned to the culture of drivers who stop even with the squeal of tires, when a passer went close to crossing the street. It is also worth mentioning the interesting solutions in the urban land use and the magnificent pristine nature. Environment in Estonia is so pure that the trees bend from the excess of lichens. An interesting fact is also an assortment of shops- much richer than in Poland. Furthermore, it is also possible to obtain many Polish products!



The very last day we were visiting Põlva and its fabulous neighborhood. With Erik and Pille we saw the most interesting corners of the Põlvamaa province. First of all we visited Museum of the Road and a great place called Suur ja Väike Taevaskoda. 'Taevaskoda' in old Estonian language means House of Heaven. This place has not got the rank of a national park but it should and is treated like it. The most characteristic magnet for tourists are two exposed sandstone walls: slightly smaller and larger Väike

Suur (150m debt. X 20m height). As we are told it is the largest of its kind in Europe. From time immemorial Taevaskoda was considered as a holy place. Here were held all the pagan rituals. It was believed that one of the caves is inhabited by a family of Satan himself, and spring in the Neitsikoobas cave is nothing else but the tears of virgins forced to work at the looms. Apparently this is magic source, its water can make you youth forever and face washed in this water won't ever know what wrinkle is.

The last two nights we spent in Tartu. Enjoying the amazing and unique atmosphere of the city which always begins to come alive at night.

After 8 days in Estonia, tired but happy, and richer with new experiences we came back to our homes. Estonia has made a huge impression on us. Mainly because what we saw was far away from the stereotype about this country we heard back in Poland."



Põlva city is picturesquely located on a hill around the lake of the same name. This is a great place for relaxation. On the shores of the lake there are sport fields, playgrounds, skate park, a small pier and a fountain in the middle of the lake. There is also the island, covered with lights shining after sunset.