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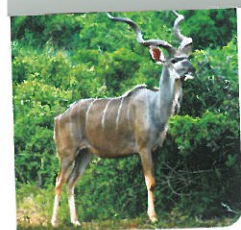


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big game hunting

# Hunting adventure in Estonia

## And a membership to the Half Moon Club

by Evelina Åslund and Thure Mårtensson

Suddenly I feel Thure pinching my leg... What's up? A kronhjort, or red deer in English, is standing at the edge of the forest and with my binoculars I can clearly see how it's checking out the area and chipping its ears. I change my position slightly; raise my rifle to be able to watch it through the sight.

The sound from my feet moving on the frosty ground is picked up by the deer; now a 100 meters away. Its suspicions are roused and the hind continues to watch the area for a few moments but then disappears into the woods. Thure Mårtensson and I are in Estonia for a hunting trip.



Excellent hunting is not the only thing Estonia offers. Just imagine staying at a renaissance castle in the middle of a forest. *Taagepera* is situated in southern Estonia, at the Latvian boarder, where dense forests full of secrets and poetry begins. The castle rises like a large block of stone at the edge of a cliff. The forest spreads out and the stone that was needed to build the castle, looks like it has been carried to the edge of the cliff by Scandinavian trolls, and the cement was mixed by grey haired witches.

The surroundings and framing that the castle creates is a combination of respect and curiosity. This area is still untouched by commercialism; it feels like we've got an exclusive invite by the lord of the castle to hunt and dine with him as his guests. It feels like we're in the 1920's - the mill, the barns and the outhouses are still standing. It's only the car that reveals that we're actually in the 2000's.



Indrek, our Estonian hunting guide, meets us at the castle. It turns out that he's one of the few professional hunting guides in Estonia that is able to make a living out of this profession. He has worked as hunting guide for twenty years and it shows. He gives a very professional impression. Indrek has access to 18,000 hectares split into two areas adjacent to each other. It's in the middle of January when we visit and the animals we're allowed to hunt are *boar, deer, wolf and lynx*. Indrek also carries out inventory of animals on these grounds and when we're visiting the focus is on increasing the number of deer which means that we're not allowed to hunt for hinds. Indrek shows us around his area of the castle. There's a garage with trucks from the Swedish defense, out of different statuses and sizes. There are also a small butchery and freezer room. There's a sauna with an adjacent cozy area for relaxing - the space dressed with trophies. Whilst being shown around we also discuss what game we are allowed to hunt and there's excitement in the air.

Indrek takes out his own rifle. This will be the first time he lends it to someone and it is to a female hunter. I usually use my own rifles when I'm hunting but as this is my first

hunting trip abroad I chose to rent. I accept his rifle with a large portion of respect and pride. Even if we're not able to verbally communicate, it feels like a bond has been created. I ask if it's possible for me to try the rifle, a *SAUER30-06*, but Indrek convinces me that it works perfectly. Indrek runs through all the security regulations and I get to sign a piece of paper as proof that I have understood them and will comply. The lord of the castle, Georg, translates and makes sure there are no misunderstandings.

We're now running short on time - it must not get too dark! I get dressed with all the clothes I brought. It is at least twelve degrees below and to be able to sit still in a hunting tower requires good clothes in many layers.

Its dusk and we're in a hurry. We need to get to that hunting tower fast. We get into the car and drive on narrow and winding roads through the forest. When we get to the hunting tower, the boars are already at the feeding place. That's not good. When we got closer we just manage to catch a glimpse of the last of the boars disappearing into the forest. We were too late, what do we do now? >



Thure Mårtensson





## big game hunting



It was after four in the afternoon and there was only one hour left of daylight. Indrek told us to climb the tower, sit down, make ourselves comfortable and stay silent. No talk what so ever. The slightest sound could spoil all chances of a successful hunt. Once we found a comfortable spot in the hunting tower, we soon became one with the Estonian troll forest.

This is when Thure pinches my leg. The first deer showed up and Thure saw it first. It was a hind and we were not allowed to kill it. Just a few minutes after the hind disappeared into the woods, another couple of deer shows up at the edge of the field. A pretty deer starts walking towards the feeding place where the boars were standing earlier. The hind is more careful and stays at the edge of the field, checking the area and keeping a safe distance. The hind keeps making sounds, signaling that she doesn't feel safe being there. The kronhjort however, continues to move closer to the feeding place.

We now felt compelled to stay absolutely still - we didn't want to scare these animals. I raised my rifle and followed the kronhjort's single movement towards the feeding place. I didn't move my feet or lean on my rifle. The snow under my shoes forced me to stay still

and my shooting position became more and more awkward. No, it really didn't feel good. The handsome deer had now reached the feeding place and was in perfect shooting range. It stopped and looked our way. It was perfectly still with its side towards me. It was in a perfect position for me to take my shot. This was my first paying hunt in Estonia and for a few seconds I thought about how much it would cost to take down a deer? Should I wait and see if we come across some other



animal? Maybe me and Thure could split the cost? Maybe I can set up a payment scheme? I let go of these questions and quickly decided to go for it. What the heck? We were here to hunt..... Bang!

I fired the shot, which is probably still echoing in my partner, and acting photographer's, ears. Perfect hit! The deer was obviously hit but did run from the spot where it was hit into the woods, out of sight from us. I was so happy! I smiled towards Thure who was taking photos. "But what happened Evelina", Thure cries out. In between my eyes, just above my nose, a stream of blood came down. Ouch! Because of my awkward shooting position the sight had hit my forehead on the recoil. The adrenaline from hunting worked wonders with the injury though.

After all, I didn't have a makeup mirror with me in the hunting tower so I asked Thure to take a photo so that I could inspect the damage. I laughed from seeing my half moon wound and stopped the blood from running by pulling down my hat a bit further. We made sure the magazine was emptied and put the rifle back in its cover and packed up the gear. I had managed to get the same kind of injury earlier, hunting for capercaillie



in Sweden. It very easily happens if you're a bit too eager and you shoot before you have good enough support for the stock against the shoulder. No worries though - we call it the half moon club!

We climb down the tower and walk up to the point where the kronhjort was hit. We could detect that the animal was somewhere close by. We called the master of the castle, Georg, who acted as our guide and told him about our successful hunt. He congratulated us. I was sure that the hit was good and that the deer probably was lying somewhere close by and I wanted to walk around a bit more to look for it. By now daylight had ended and we were recommended to stay where we were and wait for Indrek and his dogs. They would be joining us in about 10 to 15 minutes. It was getting more and more exciting.

We were standing at the point where the kronhjort was shot, about ten meters from where the boars had been standing when we first arrived to the scene. We then heard grunts from the forest. It didn't sound very friendly. First we were surprised but then I got shivers down my back, realizing that it was the boars, wanting to get back to the feeding place, annoyed by our presence. What had felt like a fairytale forest suddenly felt threatening. What do we do now? In the darkness, we hurried towards the hunting tower where we would squat down and wait.

And we were right. In only a few minutes we heard the boars come closer. They were there to feed. It was pitch dark and we could only hear them. Thure used the flash of the camera to try to get an idea of the situation. In the light from the flash we saw the reflection of

twenty something eyes. Scared but thrilled we spent a few minutes in the presence of the wild boars. Shortly we saw the headlights of Indrek's car arriving and I felt relieved.

Indrek and Georg got out of the car and came up to congratulate us. Indrek immediately asked questions to try to find the kronhjort that I shot. Indrek was happy with answers he got and let his two laikadogs out of the car. One was wearing sound equipment and the other was on a leash. He was clearly used to these kinds of situations. The search was very quick. The deer was lying about ten meters into the woods. Indrek checked out where the shot had taken and with a big smile he called it a perfect hit. Straight through the heart. Quickly he took a branch to decorate my rifle to indicate a successful hunt. It was a deer, 1 ½ years old, weighing 83 kilos. We dragged it to the car and loaded it on the back of the truck. A perfect hunting day was coming to an end. Now it was only a dinner fit for a castle awaiting.

According to old traditions at Taagepera, before dinner we had freshly fried liver and heart from the newly shot deer. Together with this, we had a schnapps (a small shot of spirits) - according to tradition always provided by the hunter. Luckily, I had purchased a small bottle of the local liquor, Vanatallinn, earlier



that day, and was able to provide schnapps to the master of the castle, the photographer and the hunting guide.

Georg did wonders in the kitchen, fixing Evelina's half moon wound in with tape.

*Evelina Åslund arranges hunts and is a hunting guide. She runs the business, Joy Event Hunt and Health AB, and most of her work takes place in Sweden. She focuses on selling grouse- and capercaillie hunts but also arranges elk/moose- and bear hunts. Her specialty is to combine hunting trips with a health theme and has in her portfolio for example hunting and yoga trips as well as hunting and spa trips to Estonia.*

*A good way of making new business contacts and creating good relationships with other people in the hunting business is to be a hunting guest at someone else's arranged hunt. This trip was a trial of a now annually reoccurring hunting trips to Estonia that Joy Event arranges. Next trip takes place at the end of November 2012, when Estonian law allows hunt for kronhjort, elk/moose, boar, deer, wolf and lynx.*

**Text: Evelina Åslund and Thure Mårtensson**  
**Photos by: Thure Mårtensson**