**INTRODUCTION**

The face of Estonian food has been shaped by the natural environment and climate here as well as the main areas activity of the local residents – husbandry and stock rising. Forests and bogs, the Baltic Sea, lakes and rivers have also provided diverse additions to the diet. Changing of the four seasons has shaped the character and flavours of the local dishes.

Estonian cuisine has been open to several cultural influences throughout the eras – German influence has been the most obvious since the medieval times, as well as Swedish influence in Southern Estonia and on the islands, Finnish influence on the northern coast, Russian influence in the Orthodox regions in South-East and Eastern Estonia.

The traditional Estonian peasants’ cuisine has been cautious in accepting changes. For a long time, there were cereal dishes in its core, especially rye bread, then potato. Dairy products, pork and fish were eaten with bread and beer was sipped to celebrate special occasions. The fancy kitchens in towns and manors, however, the local gastronomical oases, reflected quite accurately the developments in European culinary art.

Today, the diversity of the global cuisine has arrived to Estonian dinner tables as well, but our cuisine is still closest to the Nordic countries. Restaurants as well as well-informed consumers have again started to value local seasonal raw material and natural pure flavours.