



Flavours of Peipsimaa

Although Estonia is small, it offers four different regional cuisines. The four different areas are: islands and coastal areas; Southern Estonia; Mulgimaa; and fourthly, Peipsimaa and Setomaa. Three cultures and three cuisines meet in Peipsimaa – the traditions of Estonians, Russian Old Believers and Setos. Today, they have formed a regional food culture where dishes borrowed from different traditions have taken on a new life and become characteristic of an area that has increased over time. Often, the exact source of the dishes is unclear but it is possible to make an educated guess. After all, Peipsimaa was famous for its builders, who used to work inland; in autumns, onions were exchanged for different types of grain and it is possible that food was discussed among all other topics.

Peipsimaa cuisine is characterised by fish and onions, different pies and using plenty of foodstuffs growing in the wild. Peipsimaa dishes were perhaps a little more innovative than inland ones because many of the ingredients had to be bought or swapped for fish and onions, particularly in the coastal areas. Food was prepared with seasonal produce, and in case of Old Believers, Russian Orthodox and Setos, it had to follow the rules of the church calendar. This is known thanks to written records that are a little over a century old. Anything before that is mostly a guess.

Kanepitemp



Kulitš



Rabarbripiirakas



Peipsimaa kala



What do people eat in Peipsimaa?

- Fish and onions

Currently, mostly breams, pike-perch, perch, pike and roaches are caught in Lake Peipus; in case of European whitefish, the population is expected to increase; Peipsi whitefish has become rare.

Today, the most popular method of preparing fish is probably curing it by smoking; however, fish soup made of freshly caught fish is unsurpassable. The most traditional fish course must be fish fried in water: fish is placed in a pan on top of previously browned onions, poured over with water and braised until soft; finally, some heavy cream and chopped dill is added. In Setomaa, a dish called *kaldokala hämmätüs* is

prepared, the meaning of it is a sauce made of dried fish.

No inhabitant of Peipsimaa can do without onions. Onions from the shores of Peipus are considered a local variety, which the Old Believers are said to have brought with them and continued to propagate here. The colour of the onions that are slightly flat in shape varies from whitish-yellow to slightly purple; the bulbs are aromatic and juicy and keep well through winters. Onions are added to everything starting from the green onion salad prepared in the spring to accompany potatoes and ending with soups, stews and pies.

Kapsapiirakas



- A lot of baking

Pies or *piirakad* as they were called in some areas are characteristic of the region; these are prepared with bread dough made of wheat flour or with rye dough for rye bread. Often, in farms, a pie filled with sauerkraut, smoked ham or salted herring was baked when a larger batch of rye bread was made for the following week; the filling depended on what was available. It was usually eaten warm as a separate meal. Slowly, pies made of wheat dough have become more popular, becoming a traditional meal for Saturdays. Pies were filled with carrots, mushrooms, green onions and even beetroots – in a word, with anything that was at hand at home.

Pies were moulded and shaped according to a definite rule regardless of whether they were made with rye or wheat dough: a piece of dough was flattened into a rectangle, filling was generally laid on one side, the other side was lifted over it and sides were carefully pinched together; alternatively, filling was placed on the middle third of the piece of dough, sides were lifted on top of it and pinched together properly. Such pies were usually large – the size of a loaf of bread. Recently, small pies have become more popular; however, it is a lot of work if a huge washbasin full of dough needs to be shaped into pies. Still, there's no point preparing any less for a large household!

Keedusuhkur



Any special dishes in Peipsimaa?

- The most well-known is perhaps Old Believers' Sugar, which is made by boiling milk or cream and sugar. The result is a delicate and brittle toffee to accompany tea – a piece of Sugar is held in the mouth while sipping tea.

- Old Believers start Easter with Kulich. This one is not baked in the usual upright high baking dish; instead, it is bread made of yeast dough consisting of seven layers that grow smaller towards the top and that contain plenty of flavourings and raisins to fill the entire house with the smell of fresh bread. Traditionally, three breads were baked – one was taken along to church to be blessed, the second was taken to the graveyard and the third was eaten at home.

- In Setomaa and Võrumaa, *Sõir* was made for festivals; later, the dish spread across Estonia. This is a soft quark cheese; butter, eggs and caraway seeds were added to it.

- Until the beginning of the 20th century, hemp was grown in Peipsimaa and the entire South Estonia. Along the shores of Peipus, fishing nets were made from hemp; its seeds were used to make nutritious *temp* to accompany bread or potatoes.

- Stews

What could be better in the winter than a stew that has been coddled for a long time in a cast-iron pot in an oven or on a stove? In order to make a vegetable stew, carrots, cabbage, swedes and onions were cut into large chunks, a few pieces of pork were added into the mix and everything was allowed to simmer gently. In this region, even sauerkraut soup or pot-barley porridge can be made in an oven.

- Due to the fact that mostly oats were grown in Peipsimaa and in Eastern and South-Eastern Estonia, oats were used to make *kama* in addition to porridges, flummery and a fermented drink.

- In Setomaa and Eastern Estonia, people used to pickle mushrooms. Mushrooms layered in a jar with dill and black currant leaves acquire a distinctive flavour during pickling that you will either love or hate.

Sõir



Sibulapiirakas