

4th Baltic Conference of Anaesthesiology and Intensive Care 11-13th December 2008, Hotel Reval Latvia, Riga

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Introduction

What an excellent and varied programme, definitely placing the Baltic States firmly on the International Conference scene. Twelve hundred delegates and a hundred speakers, 44 of whom were from non Baltic countries, including USA, Germany, Scandinavia, UK and India. My contribution to this large faculty consisted of four UK consultant anaesthetists, a neonatologist and one specialist in Emergency Medicine who had travelled from Australia. There were six simultaneous lectures, workshops and poster presentations with standards as high as one would expect at any such meeting. All credit must go to Professor Antonina Sondore from Riga, President of the organising committee.

Opening Ceremony

This was characterised by several eminent speakers including FEEA President Prof Phillipe Sherpereel from France and President of the European Board of Anaesthesiology, Jannicke Mellin-Olsen from Norway all of whom justifiably praised the efforts of Professor Sondore. Sadly the President of the Latvian medical society brought the audience back to reality with the fact that due to the current financial situation the Latvian government was planning to slash the healthcare budget by 20% and increase VAT on medical equipment and drugs from 5 to 10%. But this depressing news was compensated for on the night by the ensuing fantastic performance by the University of Latvia Wind Ensemble and the charming lady singer Baita Berke who definitely raised the spirits of all present.



Fig 1 Jaunmoku Castle



Fig 2 Chocolate fountain

Conference Dinner

Following a one hour bus ride from Riga the dinner took place at the impressive Jaunmoku Castle, which was spectacularly illuminated by a changing sequence of different coloured lights (fig1). This was built as a hunting lodge in 1901 by Georges Armitstead the then Mayor of Riga. We had an excellent buffet dinner which included a chocolate fountain (fig 2) in which one dipped various fresh fruits on sticks. During the evening we also explored the hunting lodge itself with its original furniture and various staff members dressed in period costumes.

Local attractions in Riga

On a guided tour my wife and I visited the *Peace Monument* (fig 3),



Fig 3
The Peace
Monument

an *infamous cat* (fig 4) and an



Fig 4
An
infamous
cat

interesting terrace of houses known as the *three brothers* (fig 5). We then lunched at the famous *Garlic Bar* (fig 6) even sampling the garlic ice-cream!

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Fig 5 The Three Brothers



Fig 6
The Garlic Bar



Fig 7
The Anglican Church

On our last evening Professor Sondore kindly gave some of us tickets for a remarkable two hour rendition of 'The Transfiguration of Christ' performed by a choir over 100 strong accompanied by a large orchestra with a remarkable variety of instruments. On the Sunday morning my wife and I attended the service at the Anglican church (fig 7) in Riga where most of the congregation were Latvians who had returned 'home' after they or their parents had fled abroad to countries like Canada to escape the former Soviet regime. The vicar himself had once lived in the Scottish Isle of Lewis.

Riga is an incredibly attractive and very clean city, what is also striking is how polite the young people are not only in restaurants and hotels and also in the streets.

This was my fifth visit to this beautiful city since 1997. It is a such an attractive and vibrant place that I have no hesitation in recommending a visit to anyone whether to a conference or just on a long weekend break. There are regular flights from London on airBaltic and Ryanair.