



#### ◀ 14. MUSCAT, OMAN

The sultanate of Oman stretches south from the Emirates along the coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Historically, this was an important centre for trade between Asia and East Africa, and the country is rich in historical and archaeological landmarks.

The absolute monarch, Sultan Qaboos, is an enlightened, famously Anglophile ruler who keeps a Scottish pipe band in his entourage. His love of Western classical music led him to issue a royal decree for the building of one of the most impressive new theatres in the region.

The new Royal Opera House, Muscat, which opened in October 2011 with Domingo conducting *Turandot*, combines traditional Arabic neoclassical architectural motifs with state-of-the-art technology. The theatre hosts visits by major international companies, though plans are afoot to mount homegrown productions of opera in the near future.



#### 15. SAAREMAA ISLAND, ESTONIA

The biggest of Estonia's Baltic islands, Saaremaa feels like a place lost in time. Teeming with wildlife, from marbled seals to rare butterflies and wild orchids, this is a land of windmills, stone-built thatched houses and the biggest meteorite crater in Europe.

The annual Saaremaa Opera Days festival takes place each July against the romantic backdrop of the medieval episcopal castle in Kuressaare, the Island's laidback capital. ▶