

## *May 2012*

## White Nights and Juhannus

The long, cold, dark winter is about over now in Finland. Now the long awaited spring begins and it becomes warmer. Also, that is the reason why this year's Europatreffen is held exceptionally about one month later than usual. For over one thousand years now, the Midsummer fest is being celebrated in the Scandinavian and Baltic countries. As per astronomy and yearly, the summer sun solstice takes place on June 21<sup>st</sup>, the longest day of the year. But the fest, as per calendar, is celebrated on June 24<sup>th</sup>. In earlier times this was also the Christian High Feast of John the Baptist (Juhannus). But for over 55 years now, it is being celebrated on the last weekend in June, while Saturday is a holiday, and many Finns prepare already on Friday for that, maybe taking a day off. Besides Christmas, this is the biggest event of the year. This year's midsummer night falls on June 22<sup>nd</sup> and midsummer day on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. But we will celebrate this about one week earlier already, because many Finns go out in the countryside one week later, about everything is closed, and the cities are almost empty. Considering archaic believes the fest is

being celebrated lively and with loud music, because it is supposed to chase away the bad spirits. A lot of folk dances are being performed, some Finnish Tango is being danced and you wear your colorful, flowery dresses and, since a few years now there are also some modern music festivals. In the nights around this time it almost does not become dark and those are called the "White Nights". The houses and rooms are decorated



"White  
with flowers and birch

branches and one brings a lot of food and maybe a special *Midsummer beer* to the countryside with them. Some drive their boats on the lakes and the Finnish flag is being hoisted. After following some nice old traditions during the day, at night at some of the lakes, there are so called big St. Johns bonfires. One is happy that now for a few weeks there is no more darkness. This could be very unusual for our Non-Finns, and if you are used to sleep in the dark only, it may be strongly recommended to bring a sleeping mask with you...