

World Schools' Championships 2019, Estonia

The World Schools' Orienteering Championships 2019, which took place between the 29th April and the 5th May, was an amazing, once in a lifetime experience. Juniors from 23 countries from all over the globe congregated to compete against each other in the extremely physical forest around Otepää, the winter capital of Estonia.

After an early morning wake up of 4am in order to make our first flight from Birmingham airport, leading to a quick changeover at Frankfurt airport, we arrived at Tallin. From the capital, Otepää was then a two hour bus journey inland - this was a good opportunity to take in some of the landscape and check out the kind of terrain we'd be racing in. When we got to our accommodation, we ate some tea before taking the opportunity to check out the resort; we shared the hotel with the Austrian, Spanish, Belgian and Finnish teams, and went to sleep on the first night having already made some new friends in the evening sunshine down by the lake.



Exploring the resort on the first evening

The next day was the model event - a chance to familiarise ourselves with the arena and run in, as well as investigate the terrain we'd be racing in the next few days. The arena was a stadium, with plenty of seats for everyone, and the run in was along the stadium track - this provided a great way to spectate the sport. The event organisers went the extra mile and had a big screen, multiple cameras and even a drone at every event and prize giving in order to provide the best spectating experience. After the model event, the opening ceremony was held, and the event officially opened - this included speeches from the president of ISF, as well as watching some traditional Estonian dances.

The next day was the long race - I was the first off of the England Women's Senior Select team. Below is a map of the course we ran; there was very poor runnability through the light green, and some of the hills were quite steep and by the end of the course I was exhausted. I wasn't pleased with my run at all, as I took some poor route choices and made a mistake that cost me a couple of minutes. On top of that, it was very warm weather - even with two water stops on the course, I felt a little dehydrated at the end. However, I decided to move on and look forward to the Middle distance race.

That afternoon we swam in the lake, jumping off the jetty, before playing some beach volleyball with our international friends.



W1 Select Team – Long Distance Course



Beach volleyball at the hotel

On the Thursday was rest day and cultural evening. In the morning we visited an interactive science centre in Tartu, a nearby town, which had some amazing exhibits, before moving on to do an interactive orienteering based activity around the town in groups. Unfortunately it poured rain for this, although it was still fun, and let us learn a little more about Estonia.

This activity led us from the science museum to a large sports facility where the cultural evening would be held. First we set up the England stall with classic English sweets and treats before going away to look at all the other countries' stalls and try their food!

Then came the cultural performances, where each country did a dance or show of some kind traditional to their country. We had been practising Morris dancing in our free time over the past couple of days, and managed to get through the performance with only a few minor hiccups! My favourite performance was from New Zealand, who did the Hakka, or from the French, who performed some of the CanCan.



The England team Morris dancing

On Friday we all woke up to a bit of a surprise - it was snowing! We had gone from warm sunshine to snow in just a few days, and we knew that the Middle race would be a little different from the long! I had a slightly better race on the Middle distance, but did try to rush a little at the start, causing me to lose a few minutes trying to head off the path and into a forest in the wrong place.

Luckily I realised my mistake before I got too far, although the time had already been wasted. I also found the physical terrain more manageable over a shorter distance; something to take into account when planning my training for this summer.



Me with some teammates listening to one of the coaches

The last day involved the friendship relay, where you're placed into a team of three with people from two other countries; luckily both of my teammates spoke good English, so we managed to sort out which routes we were going to take fairly easily! After this, in the evening, the medal and closing ceremonies took place, followed by the last night party, which included a live band popular in Estonia at the moment.



The W1 select team and our coach

At the end of an exhausting yet amazing week, we headed home on the Sunday. The World Schools' Championships 2019 was one of the best weeks of my life, and an experience I will never forget. I'm very thankful to all the people and organisations who gave generously to make this trip possible.



The entire England team and coaches on the last night