

visit  
estonia

# Home of Inspiration

A TRAVEL GUIDE TO ESTONIA





# The charm of Estonia

## Clean and calm

Some Estonian regions are home to just 6.5 people per square kilometre, and it's easy to find peace and quiet, a scarce commodity in other parts of the world. This makes Estonia the perfect place to go for silent tourism, which is growing in popularity worldwide. The tap water is safe to drink everywhere. In terms of air quality, Estonia ranks among the top in Europe.

## Natural beauty

Half of the country is covered with forests, about 20% with national parks. There are more than 2,000 km of hiking trails, many of them in picturesque bogs. Walk across the dramatic limestone cliffs of northern Estonia or the lake-studded hills of southern Estonia. Enjoy yachting and bird watching along nearly 3,800 km of coastline with over 2,000 islands and beautiful sandy beaches.

## Rich in history

Estonia is the perfect place for history lovers, as visitors have not always come to Estonia with just a camera. It has been ruled in turns by the Danes, Germans, Poles, Swedes, and Russians. This history can be seen not only in museums, but also in the country's diverse architecture, and can be heard in legends and stories.

## Unesco listed

Tallinn's medieval Old Town, Kihnu Island's ancient culture, Võrumaa's smoke sauna traditions, the Estonian Song and Dance Celebration, and the Seto *leelo* singing tradition have all been recognized by UNESCO as cultural treasures.

## Fun for families

Having adventure and theme parks in every region, beautiful sandy beaches, and attractions both for teenagers and toddlers makes Estonia a destination to enjoy with the whole family. Many events and attractions are designed especially for kids.



## Relaxing

Back in the early 19th century, the Russian czar's family was fond of spending summers in Estonian resorts. Whether you are thinking about a few morning laps in the pool, a day on the water slides with the kids, or specific spa treatments using local sea mud, you will find what you are looking for here. There is a public beach in every coastal city.

## Delicious

Today's Estonian food is characterized by a fusion of gastronomic trends and old traditions. Little breweries, cosy cafes and home restaurants together with Scandinavian top cuisine offer seasonal organically grown food and make a trip to Estonia a true culinary adventure.

## Inspirational

Over 200 festivals and major events take place in Estonia every year — covering music, film, art, folklore, and sports. It is enough to fill the entire calendar, not to mention different venues — islands, bogs, lakes, and open fields.

## Short distances

No need to choose between the city and nature when, thanks to short distances, you can easily have both. Travelling via the country's developed road network and timely train and bus connections, you can cross Estonia in just a few hours, and almost every village has cosy farm stays and inns.

## Easy to visit

Estonia is a safe destination that is easy to reach from any place in the world. The capital Tallinn is a four-hour drive from Riga and five hours from St. Petersburg, and just an hour from both by plane. The Finnish capital Helsinki is 80 km away and can be reached in less than two hours by fast ferry. Tallinn's Airport is very close to the city centre and is served by a regular tram that will take you downtown within 10 minutes.



At 45,227 square kilometres, Estonia is just a little bigger than Denmark, Switzerland, or the Netherlands. Culturally, it is located at the crossroads of Northern, Western, and Eastern Europe.

The first signs of human habitation in Estonia trace back nearly 10,000 years, which means that Estonians have lived continuously in one spot for longer than many other nations in Europe.

Every corner of Estonia is different. At the same time, everything is delightfully compact: a few hours will get you from one end of the country to another, and you can quickly swap the mainland for an island, or the bustle of the city for a forest lake.





# Summer's white nights

Summer is the time when the water temperature of the Baltic Sea passes 20°C (68°F), the sun shines for 18 hours straight, and total darkness never falls. In June, the nights in Estonia are so light that one can read a book outside without artificial light.

The popular tradition is to light bonfires all over the country on St. John's Eve, 23 June, to leap over the fires, dance, and grill food.



# Winter snow and hot saunas

The Estonian winter is just like a fairy tale — the land is coated with brilliant white snow! It is not just beautiful to look at, but it opens the door to skiing, skating, and sledding. Gliding through the forest on a sled is pure enjoyment.

Estonian winters are usually mild thanks to the moderating effect of the sea. If a warmer spell sets in, Estonians might even throw a party around a bonfire or have a picnic in January.

In December, around the time of the solstice, winters are dark for 18 hours. Especially then, Estonians are fond of saunas, dimly lit spaces heated with hot rocks to more than 80°C (176°F). The skin's pores open and people use a birch, juniper, or oak whisk to beat their skin for better circulation. An immediate plunge into the nearest ice hole, pond, or snow pile follows.





# Five seasons

Yet the summers and winters are not the only seasons.

Spring is the best time for birdwatching. Millions of birds fill the sky from March until May. Estonia is among the top three birdwatching destinations in Europe for the number of species spotted here.

Autumn beckons mushroom hunters and berry pickers into the forests. Skills forgotten in Western Europe live on here — every Estonian knows how to identify the tastiest fall mushrooms and remembers picking their first berries.

Estonia also has a fifth season — the floods that occur in spring, autumn, or winter — when in low-lying areas, daily trips are made by boat, even on roads and in forests.

# Wild forests a stone's throw away

Today's Estonians are known for their enterprising and practical mindset. If someone is talking nonsense, the conversation might be cut short with the expression "*mine metsa!*", which in direct translation means "go to the forest". This mild insult is from the mists of time, when deep woods encircled every farm, and anyone speaking foolishly would be advised to take some time out amidst the trees.

Yet if we consider the stress-relieving effect of trees and the rejuvenative power of nature, one should really take every opportunity to go to the forest: it is a smart thing to do that cannot be missed in Estonia!

Fortunately, the forest is never far away, no matter where you are in Estonia. Even

if you start driving from the capital Tallinn down the highway to the university city of Tartu, you could stop the car and, walking just a hundred paces into the woods in any direction, quickly forget about civilization. The wind and the birds sound just as they did a thousand years ago.

You can find various types of forests here — fragrant and sunny pine stands, dark and mysterious spruce forests, flower-rich birch groves, shady and dignified oak forests. Besides wolves, lynx, wild pigs, deer, and moose, Estonia is believed to be home to about 700 brown bears, rare in Western Europe. Find a guide and go hunting for photographs. Your snapshots on social media will surprise all your friends! Do not forget to tag your posts with [#visitestonia](#).







# The land of contrasts

Cosmopolitan Estonia boasts chic hotels, boutiques selling wares by young fashion designers and world-famous brands, trendy nightclubs, and intimate cafes.

You can also take a romantic walk in a park designed by a Russian czar, stroll around Tallinn's Old Town, taking in views of the best-preserved medieval architecture in the Nordic countries — or find yourself in one of the country's many old wooden houses.

Tour the manors or idyllic fishing villages on the north coast by car, or plan an active holiday in nature by staying overnight in farm inns. You can choose kayaking between the islets, canoeing between high river banks, adventure parks in the wild, golfing, or visiting artisan workshops with a chance to participate.



# The sound of music

Music has a special role in both the Estonians' history and everyday life. The Singing Revolution between 1987 and 1991 led to the restoration of the independence of Estonia. Traditional music dating back hundreds of years can be heard in many festivals like the Estonian Song and Dance Celebration, the Viljandi Folk Music Festival, the Seto Kingdom Day, and the Kihnu Island Sea Party, just to name some.

The latest in modern music can be experienced at the beginning of April at Tallinn Music Week, one of the biggest festivals

in the Nordic countries. It lasts a week and incorporates music, tastes, discussions, and design. You can find famous names in world and jazz music at Jazzkaar in April, or at smaller cosy festivals in romantic places all over Estonia. Major rock bands also regularly stop in Estonia.

In 2017, Estonian composer Arvo Pärt was named the world's most performed living composer for the sixth year running. His minimalist style is influenced by religious music and can be heard also in the background of Hollywood productions.





# Estonia on your plate



Although Estonians might seem introverted, individualistic, and reserved like other Nordic peoples, any Estonian friend would be happy to fix you a sprat sandwich — a little salty treat where dark rye bread meets hard-boiled egg and a particular silvery Baltic Sea fish in a spicy marinade. If you ask, an Estonian will also be sure to offer you kama, a healthy milled grain mixed with sour milk or white yoghurt.

Thanks to the influences of German cuisine, Estonia makes roast pork with crispy skin and sauerkraut, which, when coupled with oven-roasted potatoes, blood sausages and cowberry sauce, are a traditional Estonian Christmas dish. Russian influences are also apparent: solyanka soup made from tomatoes, onions, meat, kidneys, and olives, and Russian salad with beetroot and herring are available everywhere.

Estonia also offers plenty for vegetarians: when spring arrives, magazines are full of

recipes that include local plants, such as nettles.

While people in many Western European countries have lost their connection to wild plants, almost every Estonian has savoured the joy of midsummer's chanterelle sauce — made from freshly picked golden-yellow mushrooms — and knows the secret trails to the best cranberry and porcini mushroom spots.

To get a better understanding of Estonia's culinary side, visit its pickle, dandelion, or garlic festival, or enjoy its cafe days, when many pop-up home cafes show off their creativity and hospitality. Little hipster breweries have become more and more popular across Northern Europe, and promote quality beer culture.

You can taste top European cuisine or be a special guest in a little farm restaurant.

# Spas for every taste

In Estonian spas, you can find a large selection of modern therapies – laser treatments, ultrasounds, lymph drainage, and oxygen therapy. It combines with the air of nearby pine forests, making it an ideal place to de-stress and relax. We certainly recommend eco-treatments, based on ingredients from Estonian nature: herbs, honey, peat, seaweed, hay, and clay.

Many of the treatments in Estonian spas are based on freshly extracted sea mud. It contains many active components indicated to relieve skin problems, as well as various pains in muscles and joints. This is one of the reasons Estonian resort towns became a major destination for Russian nobility already in the 19th century.

Haapsalu is most famous for its curative mud baths. Spas in Pärnu and Narva-Jõesuu are situated beside beautiful long sandy beaches. Kuresaare – the capital of Estonia’s biggest island Saaremaa – is exceptional for having the most spas per capita with a high variety of treatments. Värskä in southeastern Estonia adds to its procedures natural mineral water that last saw daylight 500 million years ago.



# Things to take with you

Besides good memories, there are many little things you can easily put in your suitcase to remember your holiday in Estonia.

Looking for something tasty and very Estonian, you can put together a package consisting of a loaf of dark rye bread, honey jars flavoured with wild berries, organic herb tea mixtures, and berry and vegetable chips. For decades, Vana Tallinn (Old Tallinn) has been a highly sought-after liqueur. It consists of a spiced rum with natural additives such as citrus oils, vanilla, and cinnamon.

Spreading butter can be a little highlight of the day when you use a butter knife made from juniper wood, which smells bitter and sweet at the same time.

Natural cosmetics from Estonia are good to take back home and keep yourself as well-cared-for as you were at the spa.

Estonian symbols are also traditional Estonian folk costume ornaments. It can be on a woollen sweater, on a pair of wellingtons, on gloves, or on a haute-couture dress.

Estonian design's keywords are environmental awareness and innovation. You can see everyday elements used in new contexts – such as wooden ties, watches, and glasses – or buy original clothes made from recycled materials.



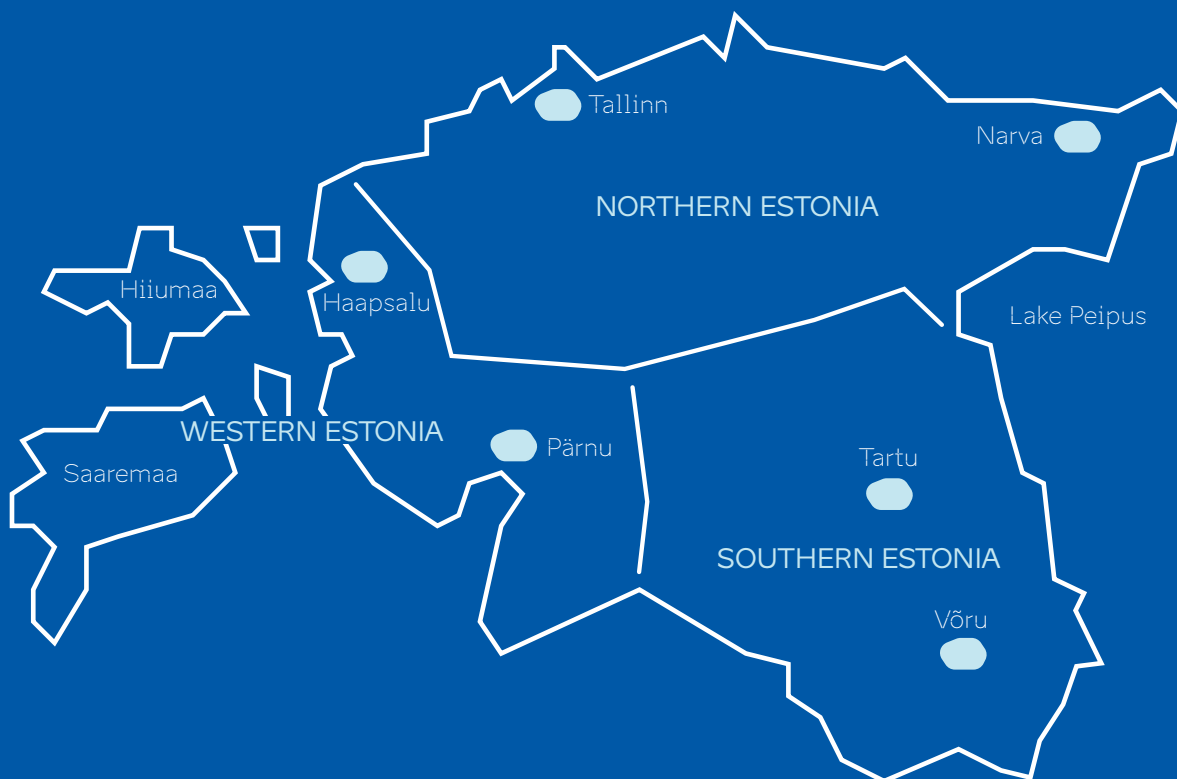
# Travel Guide

The next few pages provide three journeys in Estonia to help you find interesting places and activities. The selection below certainly does not attempt to be the ultimate truth: some want to drive faster, some want to learn more.

**When you are planning your trip, find information about the sites and routes also on the website [visitestonia.com](http://visitestonia.com) and in tourist information centres all over the country.**

We hope this Travel Guide will be a source of inspiration that helps you find your own Estonia.

Welcome to Estonia and have a wonderful holiday!



# Northern Estonia

## Days 1 and 2: Tallinn (~40 km)

The capital **Tallinn** offers activities for every age and taste, regardless of the season. Summer visitors will delight in knowing that the city is indented, close to 50-kilometre coastline has many public beaches. And in every season, one of Europe's best preserved historical city centres is steeped in medieval-era charm. Life in **Old Town** Tallinn revolves around **Town Hall Square**, where the aroma of roasted sugared almonds — made according to a recipe from the Middle Ages — floats in the air. Six centuries old, the Town Hall towers over the square, where many streets meet. Stand with your back to the Town Hall and another 600-year-old institution is visible: the **Raeapteek**, one of the oldest apothecary shops in Europe, where an herbal libation made on the premises recalls times long past.

The Old Town can be discovered on visits to its many churches. **St. Olaf's Church** has a steeple that was once 159 metres high, giving it claim to being the world's highest building from 1549 to 1625. In summer, visitors can ascend the 258 steps in the spiral staircase to enjoy great views from the top.

One of the most authentic Christmas markets on Tallinn Town Hall Square





After touring the lower town, climb up to **Toompea hill**, the seat of government since time immemorial. Its buildings house many Estonian government institutions, including **Parliament**. As a symbol of the continuity of the country's sovereignty through various occupations, the blue, black, and white tricolour is raised every sunrise on **Pikk Hermann (Tall Hermann) tower**, while the national anthem plays. The **Aleksander Nevsky Cathedral** directly opposite Parliament represents the classic Orthodox tradition with its onion-shaped domes.

The **observation platforms on Toompea hill** yield the definitive view of Tallinn to add colour to memories and photo albums. The red roofs and narrow lanes of the Old Town, outer districts, and the sea all spread out below.

The 13th century **Cathedral of St. Mary the Virgin**, also near Parliament, is the seat of the Lutheran Church and is of interest for its numerous heraldic coats of arms, grave plaques, and chandeliers. The most imposing defensive tower in the Baltic Sea region, **Kiek in de K ok**, is the entrance to the underground **Bastion passageways**. Exciting tours take visitors on a trip from the distant past to the year 2219 A.D.

The **Rotermann Quarter** near the Old Town is a fusion of boutiques, office spaces, and restaurants, where shopping features the hottest Estonian products alongside world-renowned brands. One of the most imposing edifices in the quarter is the limestone former salt storage building that now houses the **Estonian Museum of Architecture**.





The **Seaplane Harbour**, a modern maritime museum, is a pleasant 20-minute walk from the Old Town. The route goes through one of Tallinn's oldest quarters, **Kalamaja (Fish House)**, known for its wooden architecture. Unique sea-plane hangars, a tour aboard a World War II-era submarine, and an around-the-world virtual adventure are some of the attractions that make the Seaplane Harbour an activity-filled destination for the whole family.

**Telliskivi Creative City**, located in a former industrial complex, is the creative centre of Tallinn. There are design and nature stores, unique restaurants, and hip bars. Nearly 500 cultural events take place annually and a flea market is held there every Saturday.

The **Rocca al Mare area** has become a pleasant recreational area. The long and smooth bicycle and rollerblading paths cater to the fitness crowd. The area is also home to the **Tallinn Zoo** and the **Estonian Open Air Museum**. In the zoo's children's section, some animals can even be touched. The Open Air Museum will take you several centuries back, showing how Estonians lived on traditional farms. It also holds exciting fairs and festivals. The peasant tavern serves up rustic food just as it was prepared in olden days.



Seaplane Harbour



Telliskivi Creative City



Kalamaja



Estonian Open Air Museum

Kadriorg Palace



**Kadriorg Palace and the surrounding park**, a grand Baroque ensemble, was a gift from Peter the Great of Russia to the empress Catherine in the 18th century, hence the origin of the name. Kadriorg Park is the location of many museums, among them the main building of the **Art Museum of Estonia, Kumu**, crowned the best museum in Europe in 2008, and likewise the largest and most prestigious exhibition space in Tallinn. The residence of the president of the Republic of Estonia is also within the park.

Just a short walk from Kadriorg is one of the symbols of the Estonian nation and state, the **Tallinn Song Festival Grounds**. The song festival, dating back to the 19th century, and the accompanying dance festival, is featured on the UNESCO list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The **Estonian History Museum**, situated both in the Old Town and at **Maarjamäe Palace**, gives visitors the opportunity to explore 11,000 years of Estonian history. Its Children’s Republic offers kids a playful mix of the real and fantasy worlds.

From the Song Festival Grounds, the logical next stop is the **Tallinn Botanic Garden**. From alpine plants to palms, all climatic zones are covered, rounded out by temporary and seasonal exhibitions.

The **Tallinn TV Tower** next to the Botanic Garden offers a 360-degree panoramic view. Multimedia screens show what the city looked like in various time periods. A high-speed lift whisks visitors to the top – 170 metres high – in just 49 seconds. Those who dare and are in good health can go for a walk along the edge – secured by cables – 175 metres above the ground.

Art Museum of Estonia



Pirita beach area



Walking on the edge of the TV tower



## Day 3: Lahemaa National Park (~140 km)

On the way to Lahemaa National Park, the eight-metre high **Jägala Waterfall** spills over the northern Estonian limestone cliff, especially stunning when it freezes, as well as during the high water in spring.

**Lahemaa National Park**, one of Europe's most important forest preserves, features manor complexes nestled deep in nature. **Palmse Manor** makes a good starting point for adventures in Lahemaa, being the home of the national park visitor centre. **Sagadi Manor** is home to the Sagadi Forest Museum. **Vihula Manor** houses a full-service ecospa.

**Käsmu**, a coastal village with many erratic boulders in northern Lahemaa National Park, becomes the home of folklore festivals and concerts during the summer. The village's **Käsmu Sea Museum** offers a chance to go seafaring on a Viking ship and delve into the history of this legendary captains' village, as Käsmu was once known.

Nearby is the **Altja fishing village**, a typical seaside village, with all of its houses stretching along one street. Some coastal farms have been restored and you can enjoy the very authentic atmosphere.

The 3.5-kilometre boardwalk is kept in good condition and the observation tower is accessible even to baby carriages or wheelchairs in **Viru Bog** within Lahemaa National Park. A dip in a bog lake is unforgettable – the water is very pure and stimulating as the temperature difference between gradients can be as much as 10°C / degrees Celsius.

Near the Lahemaa National Park and away from the coast, Kõrvemaa Nature Reserve can be reached conveniently by train or car. **Kõrvemaa Hiking and Ski Centre** rents equipment and arranges different activities, e.g. hiking on snowshoes in bogs.

Jägala Waterfall



Vihula Manor

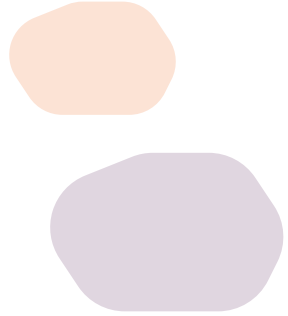


Altja fishing village



Swimming in a bog lake





## Day 4: Rakvere–Kohtla–Toila– Narva–Jõesuu (~140 km)

The historically intriguing town of **Rakvere** is home to the 13th-century **Rakvere Castle**, where visitors both big and small can play knights, eat medieval-style food, shoot a bow and arrow, ride horses, and learn in thematic rooms.

At the foot of the citadel is the **Aqva Hotel & Spa** with a lavish array of saunas, pools, and beauty services.

The interactive **Estonian Police Museum** gives visitors the chance to experience the work of police in a fun way. You can test your reaction skills at the wheel of a car, try on a police uniform, take someone's fingerprints, or solve criminal cases.

Driving east, the peaceful views of the landscape become spiked with adrenaline at **Kiviõli Adventure Centre**. In winter, the artificial ash hill from oil shale mining is blanketed in snow and open for snowboarding and down-hill skiing. In the summer, it transforms into running and mountain vehicle tracks, and a 700-metre zip-line.



### The Estonian Mining Museum

gives visitors an opportunity to don a helmet in underground passageways, and offers active pursuits such as ATV safaris, wall climbing, and much more.

The nature in this area is beautifully wild. A 20-kilometre limestone cliff peaks at a height of 55 metres at **Ontika**.

**Oru Park in Toila** is a place to stroll and enjoy a view of the sea. The wellness center at the **Toila Spa** offers a luxurious holiday: a pool with underwater music and lights, saunas and beautician services, curative sea air, and oxygen-rich pine forests.

**Narva-Jõesuu beach** is Estonia's longest and boasts clean, fine sand. The idyllic seaside resort, also called the Nordic Riviera, has a long history, and caters to families and couples who enjoy long walks, swimming, and curative spa treatments.



### Day 5: Narva—Avinurme—Paide (~220 km)

For seven centuries, the Estonian border city of **Narva** on the banks of a wide river has been guarded by **Narva Castle**, with eight bastions that constituted northern Europe's most powerful fortress. Take part in the 17th-century artisan world and try your own hand at crafting. You can also take a guided tour to the famous **Kreenholm Textile Factory**, the largest factory in the Russian Empire in the 19th century. A compact complex of industrial architecture for thousands of workers was built in the English style using red brick.

The eastern border of the European Union in Narva: Estonia on the left, Russia on the right bank





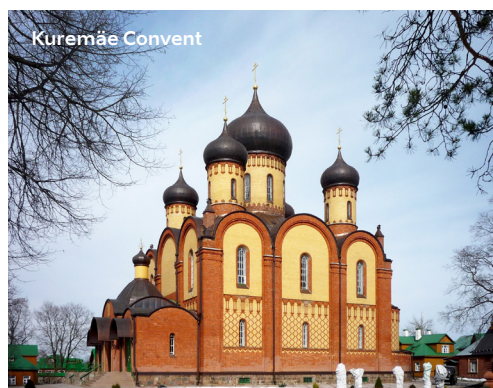
Over 100 years old and with more than 100 nuns, **Kuremäe Convent** is the only Orthodox religious community of women in Estonia. The nuns provide guided tours, but visitors are also free to strike out on their own.

Not far from Kuremäe is **Kauksi Beach**, a beloved holiday destination on the shores of Europe's fourth-largest lake, Peipus, where the water is usually warmer than it is on the coast, but which otherwise resembles the sea, with the sky meeting the water at the horizon.

Amidst expansive ancient forests, at **Avi-nurme Woodworking Centre**, visitors can witness the finest aspects of local traditions, trying their hand at basket weaving, baking bread, and dipping candles.

Estonia's recent past in the form of Soviet-era vehicles, farm machinery, and roadwork equipment are on display at the **Järva-Jaani Shelter of Old Vehicles**, where one can even go take a sauna in an old fire engine.

The former castle in the town of Paide features the **Wittenstein Time Centre**, where special effects, video programmes, and illusions make history come alive. The time



Kuremäe Convent



Wittenstein Time Centre

machine is a lift that transports visitors from one era to the next.

For an enjoyable meal sourced from the private garden of one of Estonia's best restaurants and prepared over coals, visit **Põhjaka Manor** just off the Tallinn-Tartu highway.

# Western Estonia

## Day 1: Tallinn–Haapsalu (~110 km)

**Haapsalu** city is home to **Haapsalu Castle** with its storied history. During the summer, several music, gourmet, and theatre spectacles take place here. The big, medieval-style playground appeals to kids. Another option for children is **Ilon's Wonderland**, which is named after Ilon Wikland, who is best known as the illustrator of Astrid Lindgren's children's books and who spent her childhood in Haapsalu.

Haapsalu has Estonia's most romantic walks due to the **promenade**. Step into one of the little cafes and lounge on Tchaikovsky bench, named for the composer who spent his summers here in the czarist days. You can listen to the music emanating from the bench. Estonia's longest and most attractive covered railway platform is in Haapsalu, too. Here, the Russian czar's train stopped. The station-house is part of the ambience — today, it is home to the **Estonian Railway and Communications Museum**.

**Museum of the Coastal Swedes** is a good introduction to the next stop along the way, introducing Swedish people who dwelt on these shores for some 1,000 years.

Mud treatment in Haapsalu



Estonian Railway and Communications Museum



Haapsalu promenade





Kõpu lighthouse, one of the oldest constantly working lighthouses in the world

## Day 2: Vormsi or Hiiumaa (~220 km)

Passengers disembarking from the Haapsalu ferry on **Vormsi Island** could well be setting foot in a completely different land. The Swedish language place names here bear witness to the coastal Swedes who once lived here. Visitors are greeted by unspoiled nature, small villages, and the world's largest collection of stone circle crosses in Vormsi cemetery.

Haapsalu is also the ferry port for departures to the country's second-largest island, **Hiiumaa**, where juniper-rich pastures are kept trimmed by a hardy breed of sheep with a thick coat of wool. The wool is sheared and taken to **Vaemla Wool Factory**, where 19th-century machinery rumbles away and gives the public the chance to see how wool becomes yarn.

History buffs interested in warfare can head for the **Hiiumaa Military Museum**. The Soviet border guard era is introduced: barracks, surveillance and communication devices, and military equipment.

Hiiumaa is also known for its **Tahkuna, Ristna, and Kõpu lighthouses**, all open for visitors.



## Day 3: Saaremaa and Muhu Island (~200 km)

From Hiiumaa's Sõru Port, the ferry arrives in Saaremaa, the biggest island in Estonia.

**Angla Windmill Mount** is a good initiation to the traditional lifestyle. Examine the workings of a wooden windmill, a central establishment in the island culture, taste authentic Estonian black bread, and learn how to make national handicrafts.

Another sight is 14th century **Karja Catherine Church**, which bears traces of magical pagan symbols painted on the ceiling above the altar during the time of construction.

**Vilsandi National Park** is a treat for nature lovers. Gaze at seals during a boat ride or on a diving trip, and see many birds, orchids, and rare plants. The national park visitor centre is in **Loona Manor**, where a permanent exhibition, films, and guided tours provide insight into the national park.

**Kuressaare Castle** in Saaremaa's capital Kuressaare is one of the best-preserved medieval citadels in the Baltics. In addition to the site's historical value, numerous cultural events take place here, such as the international opera days held every summer. Kuressaare also has many spa hotels to choose from, running the spectrum from luxury stays and curative spas to good options for families.



Sörve lighthouse in Saaremaa



Angla Windmill Mount



Kuressaare Castle

**Kaali Meteorite Crater** lets us look some 4,000 years back in time. The meteorite fell at a time when Saaremaa was already settled, causing major damage and, amazingly, impacting the mythology of cultures as far away as India.

While on the small island of **Muhu**, the stepping stone between Saaremaa and the mainland, visit the **Muhu Museum**, which takes up the whole **fishing village of Koguva**.

It is known for its authenticity, but also its remarkable integrity. The village streets and squares intersect each other, all lined by grand old stone walls. This is no ordinary open air museum — here, the houses are still lived in. **Pädaste Manor** on the island of Muhu is also home to **Alexander restaurant**, which has been declared Estonia's best on several occasions.



## Day 4: Matsalu National Park (~30 km)

Heading back toward the mainland, the route passes through **Matsalu National Park**, which is a really tempting place for birders worldwide in spring and in autumn. On the most spectacular days of the migration in mid-May, there can be millions of birds in the sky at one time. For more information, drop by the Matsalu Nature Centre located in **Penijõe Manor**.

Bird migration in Matsalu National Park





## Day 5: Kihnu Island (~20 km)

From Munalaid port, a ferry departs to the island of **Kihnu**, the culture of which is included on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage list. The culture cannot be seen only in the **Kihnu Museum**, but all surroundings, as well. To really discover the diminutive island, hire a bicycle at the port or take a tour in a truck. Several festivals bring fun for the whole family with a handicrafts and food fair, craft and dance workshops, and concerts by local instrumentalists.

## Day 6: Pärnu and surroundings (~200 km)

Years ago, the city of **Pärnu** was the very model of high society — dapper gentlemen, dainty ladies with parasols, a promenade, white sand, villas. The resort still has much of its refined charm today, boasting architectural gems in different styles, from Art Nouveau to functionalism. Dubbed Estonia's summer capital, the city also offers diverse attractions in winter at its spas.



The largest family theme park in the Baltic States is **Lottemaa (Lottemaa Theme Park)**, located in a lovely forest by the sea; the park features over a hundred attractions and thematic houses popularized by Lotte cartoons, musicals, and books.

You will find the beautiful sandy **Valgeranna Beach** near Pärnu. The beach is protected from the northern winds by a pine forest and it is open to the sun all day long. The beach has a children's playground, adventure park, and sail boat rental.

**auto24ring** in Audru is the most modern racing complex in Northern Europe, offering a variety of exciting experiences for both individuals and groups.

A unique 5-course dinner from ingredients received from local farmers and seasonal forest products is served in the **Ööbiku Gastronomy Farm Restaurant**, considered to be among the best in Estonia.

**Järvakandi Glass Museum**, the bastion of old-style glass blowers, gives visitors a chance to indulge their fancies and mould a personal souvenir.

**C.R. Jakobson Farm Museum** in Kurgja allows visitors to learn about old farm culture in a model farm personally established by one of the seminal 19th century National Awakening figures, Carl Robert Jakobson.



Lottemaa Theme Park





# Southern Estonia

## Day 1: Tartu–Peipus lakeshore (~90 km)

The university town of **Tartu** is associated with young love, intellectual inquiry, bohemian parties, and cosy cafes. Students set the tone as Tartu is the home of one of the oldest universities in Northern Europe, dating back to 1632, and they are everywhere, both in front of the main building with its six columns, and the nearby **Town Hall Square**. It is the heart of Tartu, which is home to exciting events year round, from the Hanseatic Days to tARTuFF, the love-themed film festival during the warm nights of August.

There are many sites connected to the university, but interesting to wider audiences as well; among them are the **Tartu Observatory** and the **University of Tartu Natural History Museum**, including the Botanic Garden.

The **AHHA Science Centre** introduces science in the most exciting way possible – hands-on. A planetarium, science theatre, medical exhibits, and a lift leading down into the “bowels of the earth” are all found here.

**The Estonian National Museum** has two permanent exhibits. “Encounters” is an exhibit about ordinary Estonian folk who have lived in this country through the ages. “Echo of the Urals” exhibit presents the traditional everyday culture of Finno-Ugric and Samoyedic people.

Near the Estonian National Museum, **Tagurpidi Maja (the upside-down house)** is a dizzying adventure for visitors of every age.



In the Tartu area, take a trip to the distant past in the form of the **Ice Age Centre**, where the exhibition surveys the history of the epoch, typical animals, all the way up to today's changing climate. From the centre, go on a boat tour across the picturesque **Lake Saadjärv**, which is also a relic of the Ice Age.

As you leave the Ice Age Centre, take note of how the glaciers scoured the surrounding landscape. The movements of the ice sheets are still very evident. Amid the low ridges is **Elistvere Animal Park**, where large animals such as bear, lynx, moose, and others roam, many of which are rare in Europe, but still abundant in Estonian forests.

With the nature tour behind, culture lies ahead in the form of the **Onion Route**, as locals call this area where a number of ethnicities and cultures intermingle. Try the local cuisine along the Peipus shore, featuring lake fish and pastries. Pickles and smoked fish are sold by locals along the roadsides, along with Estonia's most celebrated onions, known for their long storage life and flavour.

You can acquaint yourself with the lives of the Old Believers, a people descended from religious refugees from Russia who arrived in Estonia three centuries ago after a schism in the Orthodox Church. Their traditions remain vital today and are profiled at the **Peipsimaa Visitors Centre**, where, after the exhibits and a cup of tea from a samovar, visitors can go for a ride on a pushbike or, in winter, kicksled. The sights of the museum continue in real life as you head south along the shore past ancient one-street villages lined with Old Believers' houses. To gain even more insight into the local culture, there is an **Old Believers Museum in Kolkja village** and a **Varnja Old Believers Prayer House**.



Ice Age Centre



Lake Peipus shore lifestyle



## Day 2: Setomaa–Võru (~90 km)

Just 100 kilometres to the southeast from the shores of Peipus is the next gem — the Seto region or **Setomaa**. It is home to an ethnic group that has its own centuries-old customs, language, cuisine, and folk costume. Their style of folk singing style, *leelo*, is honoured on the UNESCO list of Intangible Heritage.

The lifestyle, handicrafts, and everyday items used by the Setos can be seen in the **Seto Farm Museum**. Local food and drink can be enjoyed in an authentic Seto atmosphere right next door to the museum. If you are fortunate enough to visit on a Seto feast day, these are worth partaking: Seto Kingdom Day, the Seto song festival, Easter celebrations, or the fish and onion fair.

The Seto region is also famous for Estonia's best-known brand of mineral water. **Värskä Spa and Water Park** offers a taste of mineral water 500 million years old and a chance to relax in mineral water baths. Visitors are also treated with unique curative mud procedures that rejuvenate the skin.



Setomaa lifestyle

In addition to its famous mineral water, the Seto region is also renowned for its sand — which you can learn all about at the [Piusa Caves Visitor Centre](#). Sand for glass-making was first extracted here 100 years ago, leaving spacious caves supported by natural columns.

The ruins of [Vastseliina Castle](#) from the 14th century are open to the public, with a medieval centre, food service, and local crafts available.

The highest hill in the Baltic States, [Suur Munamägi \(Great Egg Hill\)](#), affords views of up to 50 kilometres from a 346.7-metre elevation. Especially in winter, the view from the top is breathtaking, with the forests cloaked in snow, but the views of golden fields of grain and tiny lakes in summer are equally as impressive.

Idyllic [Võru](#) is set on a lake with a beach and promenade. [Kubija Hotel-Nature Spa](#) in a natural setting just outside of town provides a concentrated dose of charms.



### Day 3: Võru—Otepää—Võrtsjärv (~170 km)

To the north of Võru, the River Ahja offers boat trips through an old valley of 400-million-year-old reddish Devonian sandstone. The best known area is called [Taevaskoda \(Heaven's Hall\)](#). The cliffs are more than 20 metres tall here, forming a natural echo chamber that amplifies the river's sounds.





One of southern Estonia's places of interest is the **Estonian Road Museum**, where visitors start out walking on planks across wetlands and finish up on asphalt. Environments and road signs from the past can be seen along the way. Witness large road work equipment in a real life setting, and enjoy the sight of historical vehicles as well as the electric car of the future. A unique historical stable for postal horses and an old-fashioned bicycle also await. Children have their own traffic village.

**Otepää** is Estonia's winter sports Mecca, and even hosts World Cup events. Each winter, internationally competitive athletes arrive, world-class professionals training alongside beginners. You will find fun for the whole family there, from skiing to snow-tubing.

In summer, the hilly landscape also offers athletic opportunities — intermediate and

advanced bicyclists can cool off in scenic lakes after exertion. **The observation platform at Tehvandi** ski jump hill is great for surveying the rolling landscape of Otepää. The platform is 218 metres above sea level. A climbing wall at the ski jump facility and a zip-line up in the treetops are exciting draws for adrenaline junkies.

In **Sangaste Castle**, Count Berg, a nature lover and rye grower, wanted large rooms, each room with a different window. Besides the unique manor, the circular stable, dairy, and dendropark are other attractions at Sangaste.

Võrtsjärv is Estonia's second largest lake after Peipus and there are many holiday opportunities in the region. When ordering a holiday package tour at **Võrtsjärv Visitor Centre**, remember to look at the centre itself — it's made of eco-friendly materials, wood, clay, and straw.



## Day 4: Viljandi–Soomaa–Põltsamaa (~120 km)

A small city with a long history, **Viljandi** lies on the shores of a picturesque lake. The best views of the area are from the 13th-century **Viljandi Castle ruins**. The panorama has been compared to Switzerland. The symbols of the city are boats on the lake and the suspension bridge at the castle ruins.

In July, Viljandi is the home of the world-famous Viljandi Folk Festival, one of the most fun and family-friendly music festivals. The performers and audiences are increasingly international and dancing and workshops are just as important as the concert experience.

**Soomaa National Park** is where melting snow floods a huge area in early spring, rendering it traversable only by boat. Exciting tour packages are on offer during this period — canoeing past trees and houses. In winter, there is kiksledding on frozen rivers, and in summer, river sailing and saunas. Soomaa is also home to some of the world's most untouched and loveliest bogs, where hiking is an unforgettable experience.

### Soomaa National Park





# Practical Information



**112**  
emergency number



**estonian**  
official language



**euro**  
currency



**utc+2**  
time zone



**+372**  
country code



**type f**  
power sockets



**230 v**  
voltage



**reflector**  
compulsory in dark

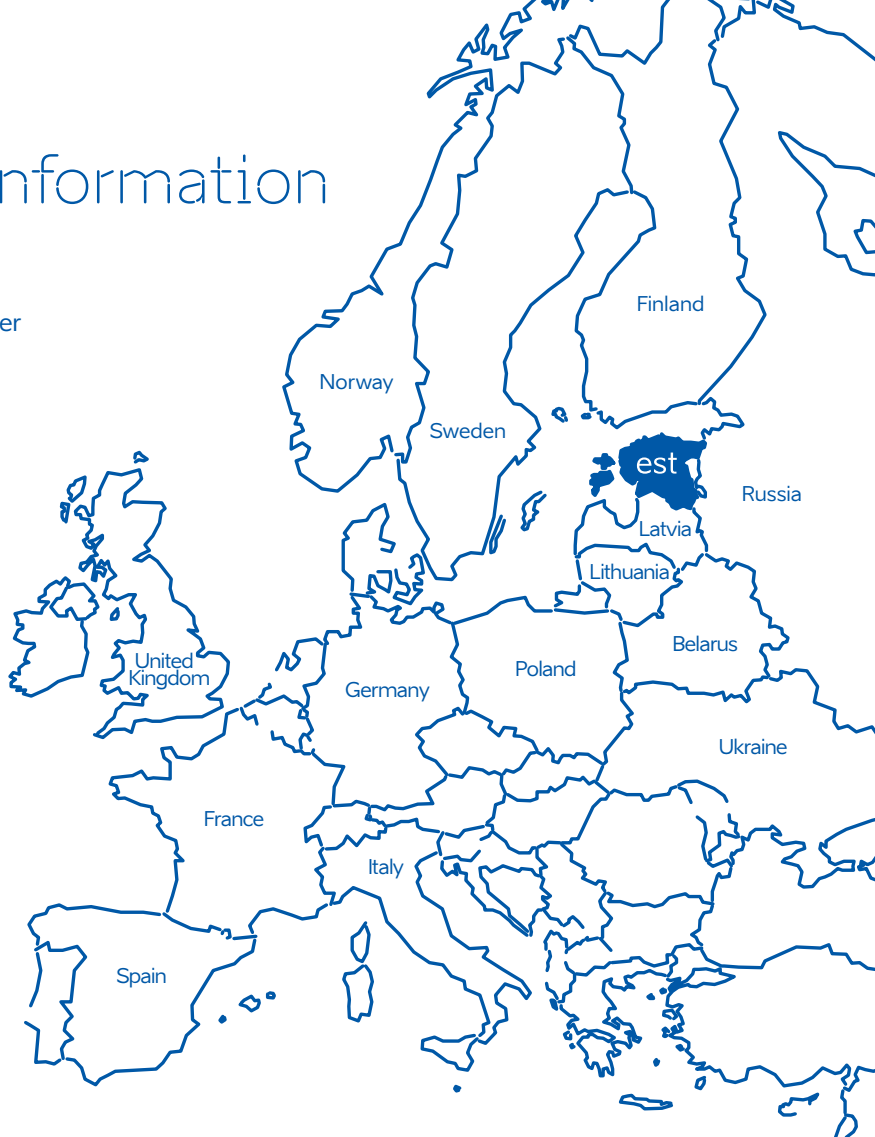


**right-handed**  
traffic

**speed limit**  
50 km/h in urban areas  
90 km/h on main highways,  
unless posted otherwise



**driving**  
whenever driving, turn on your  
headlights and fasten seatbelts  
in both front and rear seats.  
NB! Zero tolerance for drink  
driving



## tourist info

there are official Tourist Information Centres in all bigger cities and county centres. Step in and ask for advice, maps, general tips on where to eat, and how to make the most of your holiday. Most offices are open every day during working hours.

[visitestonia.com](http://visitestonia.com)

