


# HIKING ROUTE

# THE

# KOLKASRAGS CIRCLE

# Welcome to Slitere!

In the Slitere National Park, except for restricted areas, you may walk freely through it to look for plants, animals and landscapes, to pick mushrooms and berries, to go swimming (except at Kolkasrags, where it is dangerous), to get a suntan, to ride a bike or a boat. While doing it, let's respect the nature values!





The Slitere National Park (established in 1999 as a strict nature reserve) is known, with good reason, as an open-air museum which shows the historical development of the Baltic Sea. Nowadays evidence of geological events is seen in the Blue Hills of Slitere, which stand 20 to 30 metres high above what was the shore of the Baltic lake of ice 10,000 years ago. The Stiebri hills were former 8,000 or 9,000 years ago, while the Littorina Sea formed Europe's largest set of dune ramparts and damp hollows between those ramparts. This occurred between 4,000 and 7,000 years ago. The gentle climate of Northern Kurzeme is the reason why so many rare plants are found in the park – some 860 in all including Common Yew (*Taxus baccata*) and Baltic Ivy (*Hedera helix* var. *baltica*). Of certain value in the preservation of these treasures was the Soviet military machine, which has left behind army bases and other military objects in the area. The presence of the military meant that the area of what is now the Slitere National Park remained largely undisturbed for 50 years. The park includes one of the most popular tourist destinations in Latvia – the Cape of Kolka, which is visited by more than 50,000 travellers each year. During the spring migration of birds, tens of thousands of birds fly over the cape within one hour. Along the shore of the Baltic Sea is the so-called Livonian coast, which stretches from Kolka to Sikrags and Oviši. Fishing villages and other cultural objects established by the world's smallest ethnic minority, the Livonians, can be found here. Tourists will enjoy interesting four nature trails, bicycling routes, viewing tower, and the Šlītere lighthouse which is open for visitors.

The Slitere National Park features several other hikes, as well as bike, water and auto routes. Look for a list of routes on [www.countryholidays.lv](http://www.countryholidays.lv) and for markings out in nature.

## THE MOST INTERESTING DESTINATIONS

**1 The Kolkasrags Visitor Centre.** Here you can have some hot coffee or tea, buy souvenirs, and obtain valuable information about historical events in the region. Information stands are there to provide that information.

**2 Kolkasrags** is the most distinct cape along the Latvian seashore, and it is the place where the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Riga come together. The horn extends under the sea for another five kilometres and up to the Kolka lighthouse. The sun rises and sets in the sea at Kolkasrags, and those are some really fantastic views. Swimming is not recommended here because of shifting currents and sand. A monument by the sculptor Girts Burvis, to "Those Taken by the Sea", has been installed in the dunes at Kolkasrags. The monument represents a gate through which the Kolka lighthouse can be seen. Other points of interest include a wrecked ship, a rock marking the centre of Europe, information stands dedicated to the founder of Latvia's maritime industry, Krišjānis Valdemārs, and a former Soviet military base which is used today by the Latvian Coast Guard and which can be viewed only from the outside. During spring migration, there are lots of birds at Kolkasrags, and this is of interest to bird watchers. There is a convenient car park, benches with tables, a visitor centre, and, during the summer season, a small café where you can have a delicious meal.

**3 The old Kolkasrags lighthouse** is just a set of ruins right now. The lighthouse at the tip of the horn was built in the 16th century and renovated several times. The ruins are slowly decaying because of storms and ice during the winter. They had been standing well away from the shoreline once, but now are slowly disappearing under water.

**4 The Kolka lighthouse** is on an artificial island which was created between 1872 and 1875. The original lighthouse was made of wood, and its light was first lit in June 1887. As the island settled into the sea, the current tower was built. It began operations on July 1, 1884. Today the lighthouse is six kilometres from Kolkasrags at the end of its sandy shallows (back when it was built, it was just five kilometres away). The island still has the building for the lighthouse supervisor, as well as several outhouses. The metal lighthouse which is there now was built in St Petersburg. It has been an automated lighthouse since 1979.

**5 The Kolkasrags Pines trail** is made up of wooden pathways along which you will view an interesting pine forest that at one time was partly covered by sand from the dunes. There is a massive pine tree that is partly covered by sand, as well.

**6 A shooting range** which isn't really there anymore, but it was once used for training purposes by the Soviet military. Right now you will see an overgrown area of land which stretches from the seashore to the Kolka-Ventspils road. That's where the shooting range was located.



The monument to "Those Taken by the Sea"



The winter by the Baltic Sea



Kolkasrags (the Cape of Kolka)



The rock marking the centre of Europe



On the shore at Kolka



The Kolkasrags Pines trail



The Kolkasrags Visitor Centre



The wrecked ship



Information stands dedicated to the founder of Latvia's maritime industry, Krišjānis Valdemārs



The old Kolkasrags lighthouse



The Kolka lighthouse



The shooting range

Photo: Lauku Ceļotājs (Juris Smaļinskis), Peo Jonsson, Jānis Mednis, Ūši