

BALTIC NATIONAL PARKS

Estonia Latvia Lithuania



Lauku ceļotājs

Visits, © text, © photo: Juris Smaļinskis Baltic country holidays / Latvian country tourism association "Lauku ceļotājs", 2011 Layout: "Dripe dizains", www.dripe.lv Translation: Kārlis Streips

•••••

- **Ⅳ PALDIES!**
- **E** AITÄH!

Folloving persons were involved in producing this guidebook:
Nele Sóber (Matsalu National Park), Maarika Toomel (Vilsandi National Park), Aivar Ruukel and Rait Parts (Soomaa National Park), Dace Sāmīte and Ērika Kļaviņa (Slītere National Park), Andris Širovs, Agnese Balandiņa and Vita Caune (Ķemeri National Park), Anda Andrušaite (Gauja National Park), Anda Zeize and Irēna Broliša (Rāzna National Park), Nika Puteikiene (Lithuanian Maritime Museum, Dunes of Kuršiai National Park), Aušra Brazdeikytė (Žemaitija National Park), Edmundas Vilkas (Aukštaitija National Park), Leona Jančiauskienė (Trakų Historical National Park), Lina Černiauskienė (Dzūkija National Park).

.....

Photographers of © images:

Aiva Jakovela, Aivar Ruukel, Aldona Kuprelytė, Algirdas Panavas, Anda Andrušaite, Andris Klepers, Asnāte Ziemele, Aušra Brazdeikytė, Dainius Elertas, Edouard Bal, Elīna Kalēja, Gintautas Margis, Inese Dāvidsone, Irēna Broliša, Ivars Zupiņš, Jānis Ķuze, Kaarel Kaisel, Lina Černiauskienė, Līga Kondrāte, Maarika Toomel, Madars Mileiko, Peo Jonsson, Rimantas Diržius, Saulius Sidabras, Sigitas Kazlauskas, Tiit Kaljuste, Velga Vītola, Vidmanto Bezaro, Viesturs Vintulis, Vilnis Skuja.

Utilised archives, collections, publications, etc.:

The guidebook includes photographs (mostly historical ones) and postcards from the private archives of Andis Liepa, Edgars Sīlis, Keit Kaadu and Lina Černiaskienė, the archives of the Lithuanian Maritime Museum, Žemaitija National Park, Aukštaitija National Park and Trakų Historical National Park, as well as the Tori Museum. The guidebook includes a photograph from the book "Die Kurische Nehrung. Eine Monographie in Bildern. 1930," as well as a map of flooded territories in the Soomaa National Park (Andres Tonisson).

The authors are grateful to the following people for their advice and experience: Aiva Jakovela, Ālanda Pūliņa, Andris Maisiņš, Dženeta Marinska, Ginta Zalcmane, Guntis Apsītis, Ilmārs Mežs, Ingrīda Smuškova, Jānis Dambītis, Jānis Kalnačs, Ligita Harčevska, Pēteris Vanags, Viesturs Vintulis.

CONTENTS

| Using the guidebook | 3 |
|--|-----|
| Symbols in the guidebook | 3 |
| What's in the guidebook? | 3 |
| The Baltic environment – in what sense is it unique? | 4 |
| National parks specially protected environmental | |
| and NATURA 2000 territories | 9 |
| ESTONIA | |
| The Lahemaa National Park | 12 |
| The Matsalu National Park | 30 |
| The Vilsandi National Park | 46 |
| The Soomaa National Park | 64 |
| The Karula National Park | 80 |
| LATVIA | |
| The Slītere National Park | 94 |
| The Ķemeri National Park | 114 |
| The Gauja National Park | 132 |
| The Rāzna National Park | 150 |
| LITHUANIA | |
| The Dunes of Kuršiai National Park | 166 |
| The Žemaitija National Park | 186 |
| The Aukštaitijos National Park | 202 |
| The Trakų Historical National Park | 220 |
| The Dzūkija National Park | 236 |
| A route to visit the national parks of the Baltic States | 251 |

Using the guidebook

This guidebook offers practical advice and information which you can take along on your travels. It is meant for people who are interested in the environment and various cultural and historical monuments. It is also intended for active tourists who like hiking, biking, boating or cross-country skiing. Public transportation services will not always deliver you to the desired locations quickly and conveniently, so we have also given though to those readers who drive their own cars. The guide covers the most important information about all of the national parks in the Baltic States (14 in all), along with their most important environmental, cultural and historical values, as well as their most interesting points of interest. The authors have attached a map of each national park, along with GPS co-ordinates for the most interesting destinations.

Information can become out of date very quickly, and many things can change, so before you set off on your trip, we suggest that you should contact the visitor or tourism information centre of the relevant park. The author of this guidebook has personally visited all of the national parks and the destinations cited therein, doing so on a regular basis over the past 20 years. All of the routes which are listed have been examined and checked out

When travelling through national parks, please make sure that you observe all safety regulations. Only you will be responsible for your safety and that of your children!

What's in the guidebook?

There are several informational sections about each park:

Getting there: A bit of practical advice and a brief evaluation of the park;

Why was the national park created?: A list of the most important environmental and human values which served as the reason to establish the park. A brief description of the relevant cultural environment is also offered in some cases.

Interesting tourism destinations and routes: A brief description of the most interesting environmental, cultural and historical monuments in each park, along with interesting nature trails, bird watching or viewing towers, as well as routes in the park. Not all of the objects discussed in the guidebook are "classic" tourism destinations (e.g., ethnographic villages), but the authors felt that without the description of these, the guidebook would not be complete.

What else can you do?: Suggestions about other possible activities.

Useful advice: A few recommendations that will help you to enjoy a valuable trip that is environmentally friendly.

Maps and co-ordinates of destinations: An important element in helping you to find your way.

Symbols in the guidebook

Each park has been briefly evaluated in relation to different activities that can be pursued, as well as to the level of improvements in the park:

* or ** This is not the main "niche" or specific aspect of the park

*** There is potential, but there is a lack of relevant tourism products and/or the relevant infrastructure:

**** Worth seeing, learning about and enjoying!

**** An outstanding location in the Baltic States!

The baltic environment: in what sense is it unique?

The origins of the **Baltic environment** relate to the history of the Earth itself. During the Cambrian, Silurian and Devonian eras, the territory of the current Baltic States was often covered by seawater, which is why there are places where lots of geological evidence can be found about these periods in history. These are manifested not just in fossils and various geological objects (environmental monuments), but also in the unique landscape at places such as the Vilsandi Archipelago. The islands of Western Estonia, particularly Saaremaa Island and the ones which are near to it, represent a true paradise of **geological monuments** and **fossils** from the Silurian era. This is a thankful place for the comparatively new tourism process that is known as geo-tourism.

Many of the **geological objects** in the Baltic States – cliffs, huge rocks, lakes, etc., are popular tourist destinations. The Gauja National Park is the only place in the world where complete **fossils of armoured fish** have been found in clay deposits from the Devonian era. This has allowed palaeontologists to reconstruct this ancient fish with precision The Gauja River basin is also one of the most outstanding locations in the Baltic States for **Devonian cliffs** and **caves**. It must be added that these geological objects are also **biotopes** – places where many types of flora and fauna live today.

The largest elements in the terrain of the Baltic States - highlands, hillocks, ancient valleys, etc. - are the result of the last Ice Age, which ended in the region more than 10,000 years ago. The ice left behind many fieldstones which are known as noble rocks. The most impressive ones are mostly found in Northern Estonia. The Ice Age also left behind the Northern Estonian steep shores which stretch along the country's northern seacoast. This provides the Estonian landscape with unique Nordic harshness. Some segments of the steep shores can be seen in the Lahemaa National Park. Rivers and streams which cross the shores produce lovely waterfalls. The ancient Gauja River valley, in turn, stretches throughout the Gauja National Park in Vidzeme – the mightiest river valley in the Baltic States left behind by the retreating ice.

There are other interesting elements of the terrain which emerged after the Ice Age – the Blue Hills of Slītere, the landscape of hillocks and valleys in the Slītere National Park (the largest area of its kind in Europe), and the steep sides of the Salevere Salumägi hill in the Matsalu National Park. All of these relate to the development of the Baltic Sea in the past – the Baltic Ice Sea and the Littorine Sea. The Dunes of Kuršiai National Park, in turn, offers a look at some of the mightiest dunes along the shores of the Baltic Sea. but these dunes were created only a few centuries

ago by humans.

The lives of Baltic residents have always been closely linked to the sea, and the seashore in the region is very diverse, ranging from the cliffs on the shores of Northern Kurzeme to the sandy "desert" of the dunes of Kuršiai in Lithuania. Estonia has many islands (~1,500) which are a unique element in the landscape. Protected dune biotopes (white and gray dunes, etc.) and shoreline coniferous forests are all protected and linked to the Baltic Sea. The recreational value of these areas was appreciated back in the 19th century, when Europeanlevel spas were established in some areas.

Forests cover a significant part of the Baltic States (more than 40% of Latvia alone). The Baltic States are on the border between the boreal forests of the North and the deciduous forests of the South, so plants and animals typical of both areas can be found here. The forests on lake islands and along river valleys and ravines, as well as wetland forests, have been less affected by human activities, so they remain virtually untouched as biotopes. Against the background of the rest of Europe, the Baltic States also have outstanding swamps. The Kemeri, Soomaa, Matsalu and Slītere national parks were all established to protect wetlands (swamps, damp forests, wetland meadows). Smaller wetlands are found in the other parts, as well. The forests and swamps are important elements in terms of biological diversity.

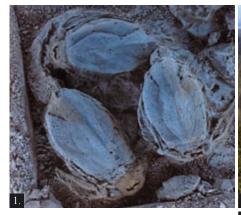
The Baltic territory is in a temperate climate zone, with precipitation which exceeds evaporation, and that means enough water for major rivers, lakes, and the aforementioned wetlands. That is why the three countries have a dense network of rivers and lakes. Rivers in the Baltic States have not been straightened out as canals, and dense areas of buildings are found on the shores of only a few lakes. The absence of major industrial enterprises is the reason why the level of pollution in these waterways can be described as insignificant. There are two "lands of lakes" in the Baltic States -Latgale and Augštaitija, both of which are have national parks. Water tourists, fishermen and "ordinary" tourists appreciate the rivers of the Lahemaa National Park and the Soomaa National Park, the Gauja and Amata rivers (the Gauja National Park), the Merkys and Ūla rivers (the Dzūkija National Park), and the lakes of the Rāzna National Park and the Augštaitija National Park.

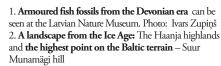
The Baltic States are at the crossroads of the living areas of many different plants and animals, and that is why "northern," "southern," "western" and "eastern" species can all be found here. One of the few global bird migration routes passes along the shore of the Baltic Sea, and there are places in the Baltic States were, in a fairly small territory, you can spot the white-

backed woodpecker, the middle spotted woodpecker, the black woodpecker and the grey-headed woodpecker. All of them are fairly common nesting birds in this area. Latvia is also home to several species that are uncommon elsewhere in Europe – the **black stork** (500-700 pairs, which is the largest density in Europe), the corn crake (26,000 to 38,000 birds, with Latvia known as the European metropolis for the corn crake), and the lesser spotted eagle (~4,000 pairs, 10 times more in Latvia than in Estonia). Bird watchers will also be able to look for uncommon birds such as the great snipe. The best **bird watching** locations in the national parks include the Bay of Matsalu, the area around Kemeri, Cape Kolka, and the dunes of Kuršiai. The Baltic States are also home to three of the largest predatory animals in Europe - the bear, the wolf and the lynx. Another animal that is quite often seen in forests and open areas is the Eurasian elk, which is the largest animal of its type in Europe.

The **contemporary landscape** of the Baltic States has been established by diverse interactions between people and the environment. The evolution of the landscape has very much depended on the ethnographic groups that have populated each specific area. There are fundamental differences in the landscapes of the Western Estonian islands (juniper fields, wooden windmills), the Karula highlands and Setomaa ("ethnographic" single family farms and small populated areas), the so-called Liv Shore (Liv fishing villages), Latgale (buildings and their design, crucifixes), the dunes of Kuršiai (wooden crosses, wood engravings, Catholic churches, ethnographic villages) and Dzūkija (large forests with ethnographic villages).

Rural people in the Baltic States continue to live, in most cases, on single-family farms or in small villages. Management of farms has been and continues to be an extensive process. That is one reason why there is such diversity of biotopes and natural territories in this region, and that, in turn, is the main reason for the broad diversity of plants, mushrooms and animals.





3. The highest cliffs on Estonian islands – the Panga cliffs (pank) are among the most popular tourist destinations on Estonian islands

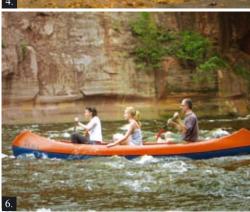




- 4. Ehalkivi the largest **noble stone** in the Baltic States is not far from Kunda in Northern Estonia 5. The steep Northern Estonian cliff of the Pakri peninsula during the winter 6. The ancient Gauja River valley and the Gauja River by the Ķūķu cliffs 7. The white dunes at Daugavgrīva near Rīga are an important recreational resources











- 8. The wetland meadows of Dviete are flooded each spring and are only accessible by boat
- 9. A trail through a **moss swamp** in the Endla Reserve
- 10. **Pine forests** (Northern Latvia) are popular for hiking, mushroom hunting and berry picking



- 11. The **bird's-eye primrose** *Primula farinosa* used to be common, but now it is seen more rarely in meadows 12. A family of Eurasian elks in the Gauja National Park. Foto: Velga Vītola 13. **Looking for animals** in the Slītere National Park. Photo: Elīna Kalēja



The landscape of the lakes of the Augštaitija highlands

National parks Specially protected environmental and *Natura 2000* territories



NATURA 2000 territories were established by European Union member states as a network of specifically protected environmental territories. In the Baltic States, these territories are aimed at protecting rare and endangered European plants and animals, as well as their biotopes. There are more than 1,000 NATURA 2000 territories in the Baltic States at this time, including 14 national parks.

The **Baltic national parks** are quite large, and they are meant to **protect the environmental, cultural and historical heritage**. Another important goal for national parks is to educate the public about the environment, as well as to offer various events related to tourism and recreation. This means that the national parks are open territories which people can visit freely all year long (except for nature reserves) to learn about nature and cultural and historical monuments, as well as to take part in various events. You can hike, bike, boat or drive in the Baltic national parks, though motor vehicles are restricted to general use roads. The parks will offer you a look at birds, animals, plants, mushrooms and landscapes.

| National Park | Established as national park | Area (km²) |
|------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Lahemaa | 1971 (oldest one) | 725 |
| Matsalu | 2004 | 486 |
| Vilsandi | 1993 | 237 |
| Soomaa | 1993 | 390 |
| Karula | 1993 | 123 |
| Slītere | 2000 | 264 |
| Ķemeri | 1997 | 381 |
| Gauja | 1973 | 913 (largest one) |
| Rāzna | 2007 (newest one) | 596 |
| Dunes of Kuršiai | 1991 | 264 |
| Žemaitija | 1991 | 217 |
| Aukštaitija | 1974 | 405 |
| Trakų Historical | 1991 | 81 (smallest one) |
| Dzūkija | 1991 | 559 |

Please be gentle in terms of respecting natural and human-made treasures in national parks, because they are exactly why we have come to the parks in the first place!

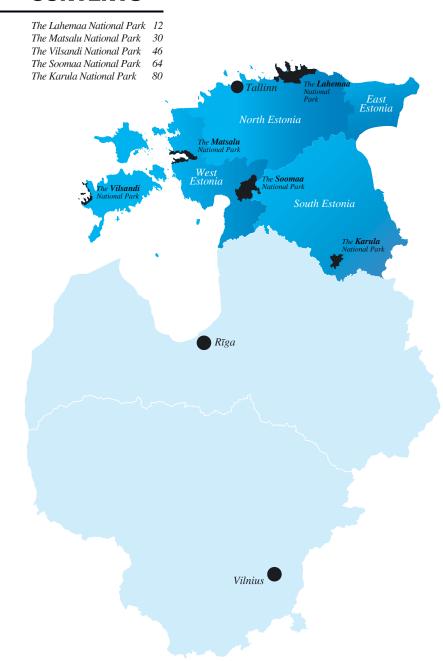


BALTIC NATIONAL PARKS

Estonia

Lahemaa, Matsalu, Vilsandi, Soomaa, Karula national parks

CONTENTS





The word "Lahemaa" means "Land of Bays" in Estonian.

The sea, islands, noble rocks, fieldstones, waterfalls, forests, swamps, ancient burial grounds, castle mounds, outstanding noble estates, fishing villages, the military heritage, and a broad diversity of flora and fauna. The Lahemaa National Park was the first national park to be established in the Baltic States.

CONTENTS

The Lahemaa National Park

- 14 Getting there
- 15 Why was the national park established?
- 18 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 26 What else can you do?
- 28 Useful advice
- 29 Map, co-ordinates for destinations



South. From Tallinn, you can travel to Loksa and other populated areas in the park, doing so by car



By foot

The park has several well-appointed nature trails and hiking routes. One stretches throughout the territory of the park. The coniferous seaside forests of Lahemaa are an excellent place for hiking, with lots of small earthen roads and pathways.



On bike, you will need three or four days to learn all about the park. Riding around the park's peninsulas is a particularly attractive process. It is not just the Tallinn-Narva highway that is appropriate for biking. Other roads, too, have comparatively little traffic, and their quality is fine for bike riders.



Lovers of extreme water sports should look at the Valgejõgi River and the Loobu Jõgi River during flooding season. There are few islands in the maritime territory of the park, the Mohni Island is the most attractive offering unusual landscapes.



The Lahemaa National Park is the largest national park in Estonia, so a car is the next best way to tour it after a bicycle. All of the major destinations in the park are accessible by car or tourist bus.



Bus tours

Passenger buses travel along the Tallinn-Narva road and link the larger populated areas of the park.

Distances among various cities and populated areas (km)

| | Loksa | Palmse |
|---------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Tallinn | 68 | 80 |
| Pärnu | 198 | 210 |
| Rīga | 380 (via Tallinn) | 359 (via Paide) |

A brief evaluation of the park

| Natural diversity | **** |
|--|------|
| Bird watching | *** |
| Environmental tourism products | *** |
| Infrastructure for nature and active tourism | **** |
| Diversity in cultural and historical objects | **** |
| Cultural tourism products | **** |
| | |



Our recommendation on combinations of travel modes:













- 1. Get the best sense of the park by combining various types of transportation
- 2. There are marked **hiking routes** in the park
- 3. Some of the **noble rocks** in the area are out in the sea

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK **ESTABLISHED?**



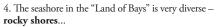
- 1. The park features a wealth of **geological objects**. Many fieldstones were carried to this location during the Ice Age, and some of them are very huge, indeed
- 2. The fieldstones in some places resemble Scandinavian landscapes and their **fields of rocks**. This is a photograph of the field of rocks at Käsmu (Käsmu kivikülv)
- 3. Several kilometres from the Gulf of Finland, there are the steep and hilly Northern Estonian cliffs











- 5. ... and sandy beaches ...
- 6. ... and countless **bays and capes** which confirm the topographic name of this location 7. There are beautiful **waterfalls** on the rivers and
- streams which cross the Northern Estonian cliffs. They particularly come to life during flooding season and after major rains





- 8. Various types of **forestland** cover most
- of the park

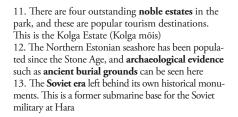
 9. **Lighthouses** such as the one at Mohni
 (Mohni tuletorn) offer particular charm to
 the landscape of islands in Northern Estonia 10. This is Mohni Island, with lots of rocks and juniper stands. It is unusual even for Estonia

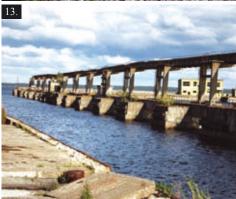






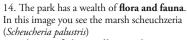






14.





- 15. Altja is a **fishing village** with an ancient appearance and smell
- 16. There are many wetlands in the park such as the **Viru bog** (Viru raba)

INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

1 Cape Juminda (Juminda neem, Jumindu nina)

The Juminda peninsula ends with Cape Juminda. At the end of the road is a car park and sites for tents. There are several interesting objects nearby – a **fake missile** from the Soviet era which is at the edge of the forest and was used to confuse the enemy during the early part of the Cold War, the **ancient burial ground** which is now an impressive pile of rocks, the Juminda lighthouse (Juminda tuletorn), which is 32 metres high and can only be viewed from the outside, and a monument to victims of World War II who perished in the minefields in the Gulf of Finland. An usual element in the monument are neutralised mines. Many ships which once belonged to Latvia sank in the Gulf of Finland because of the mines. The village of Juminda is also nearby.







2 The Majakivi rock

This is the third largest rock in the Baltic States, some 7 metres high, 32 m around its base, and a volume of 584 m³. The word "Majakivi" means "House Rock," and that is a good description of its size. The rock is aside the **Pikanomme-Majakivi trail** (4.5 km), which starts on the western edge of the **Aabla bog** (Aabla raba). At the top of the forested dunes you will find a **viewing tower** which offers an outstanding look at the local moss swamps. There are wooden pathways across the swamp and other damper areas. The other end of the trail is at the Leesi-Virve road.





3 The Muuksi castle hill (Muuksi linnamägi)

One of the largest castle hills in the Harjumaa district, this one is atop the **Northern Estonian cliffs**. There are various stories about when the hill was used and for what purpose. It is said that at Cape Kolka, robbers set false fires to tempt passing ships into running aground. The Muuksi castle hill offers a good look at the **Bay of Kolga** (Kolga laht). At the top is a metal plate with a **map of Estonian castle hills** and a three-part **granite monument** (1994) which was installed in honour of people who took part in Estonia's liberation battles and in World War II.





4 The ancient Muuksi (Wolf) hillocks (Muuksi Hundikangrud)

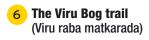
Estimates of how many burial sites there are in this region range from 80 to 250, but one way or another, these are among the largest and most expressive burial sites in Estonia. They are large circles of rocks, with "coffins" at the centre made of one or more rocks. The deceased were placed inside the coffins. These sites date back to the Iron Age and the Bronze Age. There is a marked **trail**. The hillocks are an outstanding example of how ancient burial sites can be used to accumulate historical knowledge.



5 The Kolga Estate (Kolga mõis)

The Kolga Estate is located on an impressive landscape. It has many buildings, and the exciting breath of antiquity is evident everywhere. The first written information about the estate dates back to the 13th century, while the castle that is there today was built in the style of Baroque during the 17th and 18th centuries and then redesigned in the style of Classicism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The ancillary buildings mostly date back to the 18th and 19th century. From the late 17th until the early 20th century, this was the largest estate in Estonia. Today it features a **hotel, restaurant, conference centre** and **museum**. Local guides are available.





This 3.5 kilometre trail crosses the Viru Bog from the South to the North. The start of the trail is at the Vahastu-Loksa road. The bog features a wooden **viewing tower** from which you will see a typical landscape of a moss (high) swamp, with a small lake and a series of pools. This is not a circular trail, so think about the logistics. You will spend approximately one hour on the trail, and we might add that this is one of the most interesting trails in the whole national park.



7 The Pärispea peninsula (Pärispea poolsaar)

On the shores of the Pärispea peninsula are former fishing villages, as well as remnants of Soviet military bases. **Massive rocks** left behind by the Ice age are an unique element of the peninsula. The **Odakivi** rock is out in the sea, hard to find and difficult to access, but at the end of **Cape Purekkari** (Purekkari neem) you will find the **Purekkari boulder** (Purekkari rändrahn), the **Mähu rocks** (Mähu kivid) which are washed by the sea, the **Black rock** (Must kivi), which is on the beach near the village of Viinistu, the **Kuhjakivi** rock

which rises above the reeds, the **Painuva** rock, which is quite impressive but only can be accessed by swimming out to it, and the incomparable **Jaani-Tooma** rock. Four of these rocks are five metres high or higher. The village of **Turbuneeme** features lots of rocks. You will require true enthusiasm and a good bit of time to find all of the giant rocks and take pictures of them. The Pärispea peninsula ends at Cape Purekkari, which is the northernmost dry land place in Estonia. The landscape here is breathtaking.



8 Mohni Island (Mohni saar)

There are 1,521 islands in the waters of Estonia, and the 38th largest of them in terms of area (63 hectares) is Mohni Island, which is approximately 2.5 km long. Wooden pathways lead down the centre of the island so as to protect fragile vegetation which may remind you of a busy tundra. The southern end of the island is narrower, and it and the nearby seashore are covered with one of the most unique rock fields in Estonia. The Mohni lighthouse (Mohni tuletorn) at the North of the island was built in 1871, and its light can be seen at a distance of 10 nautical miles. This is one of the most beautiful lighthouses in northern Estonia. You can reach the island by boat (register in advance) from the Viinistu port (Viinistu sadam), which is approximately 5 km away. It will take around an hour to get to the island in a boat or kayak. There are no permanent residents on the island, but the village of Viinistu features the Viinistu Art Museum (Viinistu kunstimuuseum), which was opened in 2002. The building and its history are most impressive, indeed.





9 The Jaani-Tooma rock (Jaani – Tooma kivi)

Unbelievable! That's what those who see the gigantic rock that has been left behind by the Ice Age and who are interested in the greatest rocks of Northern Estonia say. The Jaani-Tooma rock is near two other giants – the **Tammispea rock** (Tammispea kivi) and Ehalkivi (which is close to Kunda). These are among the highest rocks in the Baltic States, with a height of nearly 8 m. In terms of volume (274 m³), true enough, the Jaani-Tooma rock is only in the 14th place among rocks in Estonia, but it is nevertheless impressive in terms of its length (13.9 m), width (7.3 m) and perimeter (35 m). The Jaani-Tooma rock can be found at the edge of a small field of juniper in the village of Kasispea.



10 The Tammispea rock (Tammispea kivi)

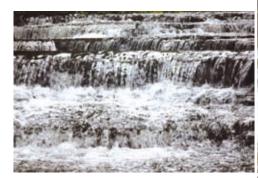
This rock is just as impressive as the nearby Jaani-Tooma rock, though it is less popular as a tourism destination. The Tammispea rock is in the forest, near to the village of the same name on the southern shore of the Bay of Eru (Eru laht). In terms of volume (262 m³) it is in 16th place in Estonia. It is 1.7 m long, 6.5 m wide, 7.5 m high, and 27.8 m in circumference. Pieces of the rock which have broken off are also impressive. If you take pictures of the largest rocks in the Baltic States, you must include images of this rock in your collection.

11 The Nõmmeveski waterfall (Nõmmeveski juga)

There are several waterfalls in the park, but there are two which you absolutely must visit. The Nõmmeveski waterfall is 1.2 m high and has just one level. It is on the Valgejõgi River where it crosses the **Northern Estonian cliffs**. The river is reminiscent of a swift mountain river, and it is particularly rapid during the spring. It flows along a canyon that is surrounded by cliffs which are several metres high. During flooding season, extreme water sports fans love this phase of the river. Downriver from the waterfall are the remnants of a **hydroelectric power plant** which was built around 1920.



The rapid segment of the **Loobu River** (Loobu Jõgi) near the village of Joaveski has around 160 metres of small, but very beautiful cascades of waterfalls that are 0.5-1 m in height. This is the place where the river crosses the North Estonian cliffs. A **hydroelectric power plant** was installed here in 1898, and its remnants can be seen on the right bank of the river. Boaters use this location for training purposes during the spring.





13 The Käsmu Peninsula (Käsmu poolsaar)

This peninsula is covered with coniferous forests, and it is perfect for hiking and biking. There is a bike route from the village of Käsmu (Käsmu küla) to Lake Käsmu (Käsmu järv), and then along the western and southern shores of the peninsula, leading right back to the village. This is not a route for beginners, because the road is sandy in some places, and along the shoreline, there may be fallen trees on the way. Toward the North of the Käsmu Peninsula is the outstanding Käsmu field of rocks (Käsmu kivikülv). The forest is full of mossy rocks. The largest is the Matsikivi rock with a volume of 132.9 m3. To the North of Käsmu is an impressive little group of rocks on the seashore. The most impressive is the Old Jüri rock (Vana Jüri kivi), which is 5.5 m high and has a volume of 102.9 m³. During appropriate weather conditions (particularly during the summer), there is a rocky path that will allow you to walk or hike to the **Saartneem Island**, which is approximately 500 m away. On the way back to the village, you can pick up a rock and put it on the "Pile of rocks of fortune". There is a 4.5 km hiking route in the northern section of Käsmu. The Käsmu captain village (Käsmu kapteniküla) is the place where Estonia's first maritime school was established in 1804. Between 1798 and 1920, about 40 ships were built here. It is known that more than 100 families, who once lived here, produced no fewer than 62 captains. The old building of the school now houses the Maritime Museum. The Käsmu chapel is nearby.









14 The Palmse Estate (Palmse mõis)

The Palmse Estate is unquestionably one of the most beautiful and ornate estates in Estonia. It was first listed in documents in 1510 as being owned by a convent from Tallinn. In later years it was owned for a long time by the aristocratic Pahlen family. The **mansion** was built in 1697, but its current appearance dates back to the 18th century, when it was reconstructed. Another round of reconstruction occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. The Palmse

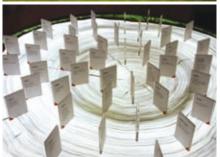
Estate is surrounded by a lovely park with ponds and pavilions, as well as many ancillary buildings which are still used today. There are omate interiors in the mansion. You can visit the cellars and purchase Estonian wine. The stable-wheelhouse is now home to the Lahemaa National Park Visitor Centre, with an exhibition about the park that is on display.



15 The Sagadi Estate (Sagadi mõis)

This estate was first mentioned in written documents in 1496. The mansion was built in the mid-18th century in the Baroque style, and at the end of the century, it was rebuilt in the style of Classicism. The estate and its territory were restored once again in the 1970s and 1980s. Today the mansion contains a museum (which features wooden furniture from the 18th to the 20th century). The estate also features a hotel, a restaurant and an education centre. The old granary is now home to the Forest Museum, which has an outstanding and interactive educational programme. The estate is surrounded by a park, and 18 buildings in all have been restored.





16 The Altja fishing village

This village dates back to the mid-15th century. It is a very old fishing village, and along the seashore vou can find sheds which fishermen used to use for the nets and other equipment. These were restored nearly 40 years ago. Today the sheds are no longer used and are just there for the sake of the surrounding landscape. There is a nearby **pile of rocks** where each visitor is asked to leave a rock of his or her own along with a wish. Certainly make time for a visit to the Altja tavern (Altja kõrts), which is a log building with a thatched roof. Inside you will be served some of Estonia's national foods. After touring Altja, look for the Oandu hiking trail. There are actually several trails here of various lengths – the **Altja information** trail (3 km), the Beaver trail (700 metres), but also the Kõrve hiking trail, which is 79 km in length and is meant for a hike of several days.





17 The Vihula Estate (Vihula mõis)

The Vihula Estate was first mentioned in writing in 1501. It was sacked during the Great Northern War, and the buildings that are there today were built after 1810, when the estate was purchased by Alexander von Schubert. The **mansion**, which is in the style of Historicism, was completed in 1880. Today the estate features an exclusive hotel with a spa complex, restaurant, etc. There is a **park** around the estate. The buildings can be viewed from the outside.



WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

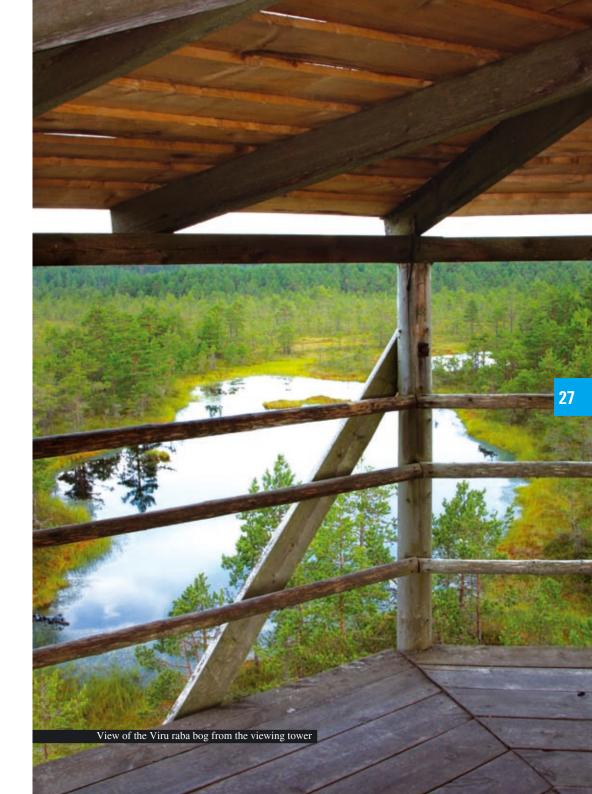






- Enjoy all of the "joys of the sea"
 The shoreline is a great place for bird-watching
 No big hurry? Spend some time in the small taverns along the shore
 Nature lovers can seek out the biggest rocks in the Baltic States





USEFUL ADVICE

- The Lahemaa National Park is very large and features many interesting destinations. Plan to spend at least 3 or 4 days there.
- Larger populated areas in the park Kolga, Loksa, Käsmu and Võsu – offer **services** to tourists.
 - The most popular **beach** in the park is at Võsu.
- If you're thinking of scaling one of the **big rocks**, first think about how you're going to get back down.
- When visiting former **Soviet military territories**, please remember that there are potentially dangerous areas.
- When visiting **ancient graveyards**, please don't trample over the graves.
 - Before visiting an **estate**, find out when it is open.
- If you want to **take a boat to Mohni Island**, book it in advance, and please remember that weather conditions may be such that boating is impossible. Also please note that there are no services of any kind on the island.
- You can enjoy an **ethnographic meal** at the Altja tavern or at one of the estates in the park.
- Please remember that **tents** can be put up and **campfires** can be lit only in locations specifically intended for that purpose.



28

Additional information

www.altja.ee

The Altja saloon (designed in a national style)

www.gi.ee/rahnud/rahnud.pdf

A book about the great rocks of Estonia (Enn Pirrus: Eestimaa suured kivid)



www.kasmu.ee

The Käsmu Sea Museum, etc.



www.keskkonnaamet.ee/lahe-eng

The Lahemaa National Park



www.mois.ee

Estates in Estonia





www.palmse.ee

The Palmse Estate

}|€

www.sagadi.ee

The Sagadi Estate

====

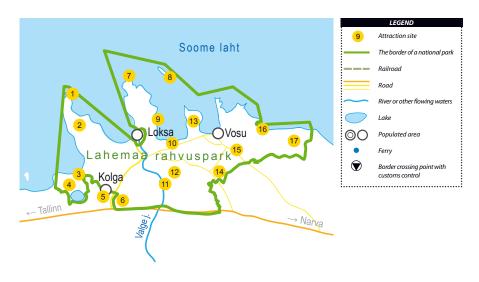
www.vihulamanor.ee

The Vihula Estate

The national park's visitor centre at Palmse

Palmse, \$\frac{1}{4}\$ +372 3295555, info@lahemaa.ee, www.lahemaa.ee

MAP, CO-ORDINATES FOR DESTINATIONS



| Object | Width | Length |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Cape Juminda | N 59°38,85' | E 25°30,48' |
| The Majakivi rock (the start of the trail at the viewing tower) Majakivi | N 59°34,52' N 59°34,91' | E 25°33,99' E 25°34,56' |
| 3 The Muuksi castle hill | N 59°30,67' | E 25°31,16' |
| 4 The ancient Muuksi graveyard (Wolf hillocks) | N 59°29,84' | E 25°30,70' |
| 5 The Kolga Estate | N 59°29,51' | E 25°36,64' |
| 6 The Viru bog trail (start of the trail on the south-western edge of the bog) | N 59°27,96' | E 25°38,72' |
| 7 The Pärispea peninsula (Cape Purekkari) | N 59°40,35' | E 25°41,68' |
| 8 The Mohni island (lighthouse) | N 59°41,02' | E 25°47,69' |
| 9 The Jaani-Tooma rock | N 59°36,02' | E 25°46,32' |
| 10 The Tammispea rock | N 59°33,60' | E 25°49,01' |
| (11) The Nómmeveski waterfall | N 59°30,47' | E 25°47,29' |
| 12 The Joaveski waterfalls | N 59°30,73' | E 25°48,95' |
| 13 The Käsmu peninsula (the Old Jüri rock) | N 59°36,92' | E 25°54,75' |
| 14 The Palmse Estate | N 59°30,76' | E 25°57,35' |
| (15) The Sagadi Estate | N 59°32,22' | E 26°05,06' |
| 16 The Altja fishing village (fishermen's sheds) | N 59°35,21' | E 26°07,01' |
| 17 The Vihula Estate | N 59°32,80' | E 26°10,99' |



Matsalu is a paradise for birds in Estonia – a place where so many birds may be in the sky at once that they cause something of an "eclipse." The shallow Bay of Matsalu and the wetland meadows around it are of pan-European importance in terms of birds during the spring and autumn migration season, and many species of birds also nest there. The park also features a number of former baronial estates that are of interest today.

CONTENTS

The Matsalu National Park

- 32 Getting there
- 33 Why was the national park established?
 - 35 The lives of farmers around the Bay of Matsalu in the late 19th century and early 20th century
- 36 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 43 What else can you do?
- 44 Useful advice
- 45 Map and co-ordinates of objects



GETTING THERE

The Matsalu National Park is on the shores of the Matsalu Bay in Western Estonia. The park is most easily reached from Haapsalu or



There are several well-appointed nature trails in the park. We suggest you to pay attention to the bird-life, while you are hiking, because this is the most interesting part of this park and the issue, it is mostly famous for.



By bike

Why not travel through the Matsalu National Park on a bike? Distances are short, road quality is appropriate. This will be quicker than if you hike, and it will be far more true than if you were in a car from which you cannot smell the sea and hear birdsong.



By boat

Organised canoe and boat trips are offered down the Suitsu River (Suitsu jõgi) and just canoe trips along the Kasari River (Kasari jõgi), which is a peaceful river in the lowlands, after the nesting season.



By car

The paths, viewing towers, bird observation towers and other interesting objects are easily accessible by car and tourist bus.



Bus tours

Passenger buses travel down the larger roads in the region (No. 31 and No. 10).

Our recommendation on travel in the park: 🦒 😚

A brief evaluation of the park

| Natural diversity | **** |
|--|------|
| Bird watching | **** |
| Environmental tourism products | **** |
| Infrastructure for nature and active tourism | *** |
| Diversity in cultural and historical objects | *** |
| Cultural tourism products | *** |

Distances among various cities and populated areas

| | The Penijõe Estate (Penijõe mõis) |
|----------|-----------------------------------|
| Tallinn | 112 |
| Pärnu | 60 |
| Haapsalu | 58 |
| Rīga | 244 |



WHY WAS THE NATIONAL **PARK ESTABLISHED?**

- 1. The **Matsalu Bay** is approximately 18 km long and up to 6 km wide, and it is the largest "internal" bay in the Baltic States
- 2. The wetland meadows of the Matsalu Bay are home to many plants and nesting birds









- 3. The Kasari River is an "artery of life" for Matsalu Photo: Tiit Kaljuste
- 4. The extensive **coastal wetland meadows** are vastly flooded every spring. Photo: Tiit Kaljuste
- 5. **Juniper stands** of the type that are seen throughout West-Estonia can also be found here



6. They, like the **wetland meadows**, are governed by livestock

7. The shallow Matsalu Bay is part of the one of the most important **bird migration routes in the Northern Hemisphere** along with the Western Estonian shoreline and its islands











8. For that reason, there is a **large concentration of many different birds** here in the spring and autumn. In picture: barnacle goose *Branta leucopsis* 9. Migrating cranes *Grus grus*. Photo: Kaarel Kaisel 10. The **great snipe** *Gallinago media* is uncommon at the European level, and every bird watcher will want to spot it. Photo: Kaarel Kaisel



11. Because the landscape here is wide and open, there are often various **animals** that can be spotted. Here you see the Eurasian elk *Alces alces* 12. There are several **baronial estates** in the park which offer testimony about the economic and political life of this region during the past three or four centuries



The lives of farmers around the Bay of Matsalu in the late 19th century and early 20th century ¹

People living near the Bay of Matsalu traditionally earned their living via agriculture and livestock breeding. True, this did not ensure much revenue, because the land was not particularly fertile, and pastures were often flooded. People used old-fashioned equipment for centuries to till the fields and harvest and thresh the grain. The summer harvest was often threshed with the help of horses, which "trampled" the stalks of grain. Only wealthier farmers in the late 19th century could afford a plough and harrow. Rye was harvested with a scythe all the way until the late 1920s, and threshing of rye by hand continued until the 1930s. Hand-operated threshers appeared in the late 19th century, and in advance of World War I, people also used machines that were powered by horses.





Local residents also went fishing to find additional food. Fishing spots had to be rented from landowners, and the fee was paid with money, fish or work on the fields. Most farmers used special baskets, less on lines or nets. They often fished along the shores of Saaremaa Island, where many families spent their summers.

The people of Matsalu lived in buildings which combined homes with barns. The buildings also had a chamber, a kiln, a long and a short anteroom (leading to the barn), and a warehouse. The kiln was one of the most important elements, because during the winter it was used as a residential and working area, as well as, sometimes, a sauna. Warehouses were installed in those rooms which were not heated. Grain was threshed in the barn, and during the winter (as elsewhere in Western Estonia), livestock was kept there. During the summer, people slept in granaries, and meals for people and animals were cooked in an outdoor kitchen. During the late 19th and early 20th century, buildings with larger rooms and smokestacks appeared, but it was only in the 1920s that stoves were first installed in rooms. The kiln was still used as a kitchen and a workspace. Villages in the area of Matsalu kept their traditional appearance all the way until the mid-20th century.



INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

The Kiideva Estate (Kiideva mõis)

This estate was first listed in documents in 1614, but the two-storeyed mansion that is there to-day was built in the late 19th century. The walls are panelled with pieces of wood which resemble fish scales. That is a unique design in Estonia. Between 1919 and 1951, the mansion housed a school. There is a small **park** alongside it. Sadly, the building has been abandoned for nearly half a century, and it is in very poor condition. Still, that is a reason to visit it while it can still be seen.

2 The Haeska Estate (Haeska mõis)

This estate was cited in historical sources dating back to 1560, but the stone mansion that is there now was built in 1805. During the Soviet era, the Matsalu Nature Reserve administration worked here, but today it is a hotel. Access to the mansion is via a beautiful **alley**, and other buildings from the estate can be viewed, as well.





3 The old Kasari bridge (Kasari vana sild)

This is an interesting structure – one which is fairly unique in the Baltic States. It is 2 km to the North-west from Kirbla. The arched bridge is 307.8 metres long, crosses the Kasari River, and was built during nine months in 1904. At that time it was the longest armoured concrete bridge in Europe of this type. Today it can be crossed only on foot or on bike. When it is dark outside, the bridge is beautifully illuminated. The length of the bridge is due to width of Kasari river in spring-time floods.





4 The Kirbla church (Kirbla kirik)

This is the only church in the national park. It is on a small hillock in the village of Kirbla. During the era of the Baltic ice lake, the hillock was an island which was surrounded by water. The origins of the church date back to the 16th century, and there are interesting stories about how it was built. It is also one of the smallest sanctuaries in Estonia (29x11 metres)!

5 The Penijõe Estate (Penijõe mõis)

The estate was first mentioned in writing in the early 17th century, but the Classicist mansion was built in 1835. Unlike many other estates, the Penijõe Estate was well maintained because it was home to the **visitor centre** of the Matsalu Reserve (before the national park was established). In 2000 the mansion was restored, and a small **exhibition** was installed. The visitor centre is still there, and you can get all of the information that you need at the centre. You can view the **ancillary buildings of the estate** from the outside.







38



6 The Matsalu Estate (Matsalu mõis)

Written information about the Matsalu Estate dates back to 1560, when it was part of the local episcopacy. The buildings that are there now were built between the latter half of the 18th century and the early 20th century. The centre for the Matsalu Reserve was meant to be located here, but was instead sited at the Penijöe Estate (see above). Today the mansion, other buildings and park (which includes a pond with an islet) are in critical shape. Still, the estate can be on your list of destinations because it has stood as a witness of history. The estate is on the road to the Keemu bird watching tower.

7 The Nääri Boulders (Näärikivid)

These are three large rocks which are protected environmental monuments and are found on the shore of the Matsalu Bay between the villages of Saastna and Metskülla. There is an information stand at the side of the nearby road, and a marked **trail** leads to the rocks themselves. According to the folk myth, long time ago on New Year's Eve, a big stone was hit by a thunderbolt, which broke the stone into 3 pieces. The **meadows** that are around the rocks are important for many plants, as well as for nesting birds. Because of this, the trail is open only from July 1 until the end of September. The rocks can be seen well from the aforementioned road, however. We know that the Ice Age carried them to this location from the area of Turku in Finland.



8 The Salevere Grove Hill (Salevere Salumägi)

During the era of the Littorine Sea (some 6,000 years ago), the Salevere Grove hill was an island. Today it is a very distinct hill (particularly on its northern face) which rises above the Seashore lowlands. On the northern face of the hill is an open area of limestone which is actually the remnants of a coral reef from the Silurian period (some 400 million years ago). The waves of the Littorine Sea washed across this reef. At the foot of the hill is the **Eye Spring**, which is said to have therapeutical properties. There is a circular **trail** (1.5 km) for visitors to the hill. From its apex, there is a good view of the Bay of Matsalu. Long, long ago it was a **castle hill**.

For bird and landscape watchers

If you enjoy bird watching or landscapes, then you will need information about bird watching towers, viewing towers, viewing platforms and nature trails in the Matsalu National Park.

9 A bird watching tower at Cape Puise

There is a two-story leisure facility at Cape Puise (Puise nina), and it has a bird watching tower which offers a view of the shoreline. This is a popular area for migrating geese to rest. The territory is private, and we suggest that you contact the owner before visiting it.

10 A viewing platform in the village Puise

In the "centre" of Puise, there is a viewing platform atop of one-floor wooden building. It offers a good view of the village, the harbor, and the shoreline fields of juniper.





11 Bird watching platforms in the village Kiideva

The first platform in the village of Kiideva is on the roof of the one-storey **visitor centre**. It offers a broad view of the village, the harbor, and the reedy northern part of the Matsalu Bay. You can hike from Kiideva to Puise along the shores of the Matsalu Bay via a 5 km **nature trail**. If you hike the trail, you will certainly spot a wider range of birds







12 A bird watching tower in Haeska (Haeska linnutorn)

This is a massive three-level wooden tower which offers one of the best views of the Bay of Matsalu and its surrounding wetland meadows. Livestock grazes on the meadows, and the environment is appropriate for all kinds of birds and plants. This is a good place to watch migrating geese and related birds. The tower is on the land of the **Tuulingu homestead**. You must park your car at the nearby car park, and if you have a dog, it must be on a leash.

13 A bird watching tower in Rannajõe (Rannajõe linnutorn)

This is a two-level viewing tower along the Laiküla-Haapsalu road, and it offers a look at the wonderful landscape which features the wetland meadows surrounding the little rivers which flow into the Matsalu Bay. You will see migrating cranes and geese, and perhaps you will be lucky enough in springtime to see or hear the great snipe *Gallinago media*. This is one of the very few towers in Estonia which has been adapted for people with special needs.

14 The Kloostri viewing tower

This metal tower is on the left bank of the Kasari River, approximately 5 km from the Matsalu Bay. From here you can see the wetland meadows of the Kasari River delta. They are no more than one metre above sea level, so during spring flooding and strong western storms, a vast area becomes flooded. It is thought that this is one of the largest wetland meadows in Europe, and it is important as a nesting place for plover-type birds and a feeding and rest place for cranes, geese and similar birds. Today, as in the past, farmers graze their livestock on the Matsalu meadows and mow the hay there.

15 The Penijõe tower (Penijõe torn)

To get to this tower, you will have to hike the nature trail which starts at the Penijõe Estate and runs along the left bank of the Penijõgi River. Here you will see the work which has been done by busy beavers who build their homes out of branches. The tower offers a look at the Kasari River delta, which appears to be a monolithic and endless field of reeds. The Kasari River and several smaller rivers break it up. Each part of the delta has an historical name. To the left of the Penijogi River, it is known as the Lihula Sea (Lihula meri), while to the right it is called the Kloostri Sea (Klostri meri). Bird watchers can hike a longer (7 km) circular nature trail which passes through the wetland meadows, but please remember to bring appropriate footwear according to the season (especially during the springtime). There is livestock grazing on some of the meadows, so please close any gate which you open, and don't disturb the animals. You are not allowed to step off of the trail not to disturb birds which are there.

16 The Suitsu tower (Suitsu torn)

The Suitsu tower was built in 1979 as the first metal tower in the Matsalu Reserve. It was restored in 1998. The tower soars 21 metres into the sky, and it offers an outstanding view of the environment of the reedy Kasari River delta and the **Suitsu River** (Suitsu jõgi) that is alongside it. On the banks of the river are **boat huts** which were once built by fishermen.

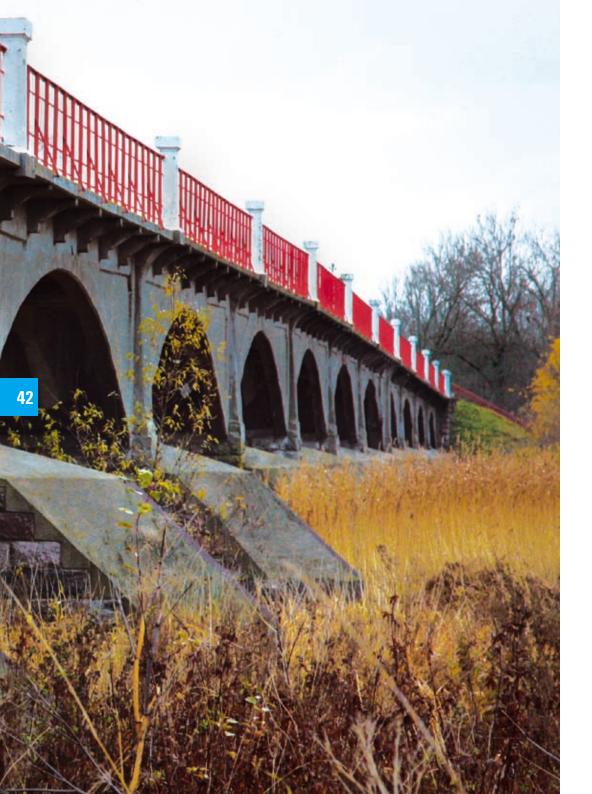
17 The Keemu viewing tower (Keemu vaatetorn)

This tower is at the **Keemu harbor** (Keemu sadam) on the southern shore of the Matsalu Bay. The tower is made of metal and wood and is six metres high. Alongside it is a small **visitor centre**. This tower, like the Haeska tower, offers an outstanding view of the landscapes of the Matsalu Bay and its shores. This is a fine place to watch birds during migration season.









WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

- 1. Birds, birds and more birds. This is a great place for **bird watching**. Photo: Kaarel Kaisel 2. **Migrating birds** have been surprised by an early snowfall. Here you see barnacle geese *Branta leucopsis*. Photo: Kaarel Kaisel 3. You can sail down the Kasari River by **canoe** ...











- 4. ... or small **motorboat**. Photo: Tiit Kaljuste 5. Fishing traditions offer relaxation today. Here you see **fishermen** at the Kasari bridge. Photo: Tiit Kaljuste
- 6. Culture Days are held in Lihula each year, bringing together people from a wide area. Photo: Tiit Kaljuste



USEFUL ADVICE

- The best time to visit the Matsalu National Park is during spring and autumn bird migrating season (April in the first case and late September and early October in the latter).

 • Dress appropriately for mostly windy
- weather conditions on the seashore.
- While birds are migrating and nesting, the traffic is limited in the Matsalu Bay.
- **Lihula** (on the border of the national park) has dining facilities, stores, an ATM, a post office, medical services and other necessary services.
- There are just a few tourist accommodations in and near the park, so make bookings in a good time.

Additional information

www.haapsalu.ee

The town of Haapsalu – tourism opportunities, accommodations, etc.



www.keskkonnaamet.ee/matsa-eng

The Matsalu National Park



www.matsalunet.net

The Matsalu National Park- it gives information not only about the park but also about the network in Matsalu and events.

.....



www.mois.ee

A Web site about estates in Estonia.



www.terramaritima.ee

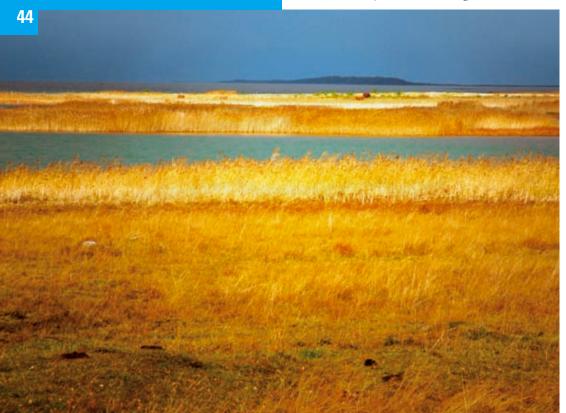
Information about Matsalu and its surrounding area.



The Matsalu National Park Visitors Centre at the Penijoe Estate

Penijõe mõis, Lihula vald, 90305 Läänemaa,

+372 4724236, matsalu.looduskeskus@rmk.ee





| Object | Width | Length |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 1 The Kiideva Estate | N 58°46,87' | E 23°33,13' |
| 2 The Haeska Estate | N 58°47,27' | E 23°39,76' |
| 3 The old Kasari bridge | N 58°43,91' | E 23°59,53' |
| 4 The Kirbla church | N 58°43,72' | E 23°56,48' |
| 5 The Penijõe Estate | N 58°42,86' | E 23°48,96' |
| 6 The Matsalu Estate | N 58°44,04' | E 23°41,59' |
| 7 The "New Year's Eve" rocks | N 58°43,65' | E 23°35,98' |
| 8 The Salevere Salumägi hill | N 58°41,42' | E 23°34,83' |
| 9 The bird watching tower at Cape Puise | N 58°45,88' | E 23°27,04' |
| 10 The viewing platform in the village of Puise | N 58°45,96' | E 23°27,22' |
| 11 The Kiideva bird watching tower and visitors centre | N 58°46,30' | E 23°32,87' |
| 12 The Haeska bird watching tower | N 58°46,76' | E 23°39,55' |
| 13 The Rannajõe bird watching tower | N 58°48,96' | E 23°46,87' |
| 14 The Klostri viewing tower | N 58°45,25' | E 23°50,64' |
| 15) The Penijóe tower | N 58°43,62' | E 23°48,19' |
| 16 The Suitsu tower | N 58°43,39' | E 23°44,81' |
| 17) The Keemu viewing tower | N 58°44,73' | E 23°40,44' |



The landscape of the Vilsandi archipelago reminds us of the views that can be seen along the shores of Scandinavia, and it is truly unique at the Baltic Sea Region. The islands in the region are the oldest nature protected territory in the Baltic States. You'll see birds, seals, interesting vegetation, ancient fossils and lighthouses – these are just a few of the most outstanding treasures of the park..

CONTENTS

The Vilsandi National Park

- 48 Getting there
- 49 Why was the national park established?52 A brief history of the Vilsandi archipelago
- 53 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 57 What else can you do?
- 60 Useful advice
- 61 Map and co-ordinates of objects



GETTING THERE

The Vilsandi National Park is in Northwestern Estonia, covering the North-western part of Saaremaa Island and the adjoining Vilsandi archipelago of islands. The easiest way to get to the park is from Kuressaare, which is the largest city on the island. If you want to get to the island from the continent, you can take ferry boats from Virtsu to Kuivastu, and these will take you to the Muhu Island. It is joined with Saaremaa via a three-km dam along which you can travel for free.

Our recommendations on travel in the park: (the Saaremaa part therein)











The national park features many small islands, and hiking is the best way to learn about them. There are lovely shoreline roads on the Vilsandi Island, often passing through beautiful stands of juniper. The seashore is not always passable, because it is covered with rocks and is often overgrown with reeds. More active travellers can head off to Vilsandi on foot from the Kuusnõmme Peninsula (see below).



The only roads in the region lead to the Vilsandi Island and are in the northern part of the national park which is on Saaremaa Island. The roads are gravelled or earthen, but they are in good shape.



Boats and sea-based kayaks are the best way to tour the islands. Take weather conditions into account when you are on the sea, and please remember that you are not allowed to visit the Vaika islands (Vaika saared) and Nootamaa because of restricted environment regimes there.



Leave your car at the Loona Manor. You can use it to transport boats.



Bus tours

For bus transportation from Kuressaare to Kihelkonna see: http://bussipilet.ee/bus_stops. Kihelkonna is 3 km away from the Loona Manor.

- 1. Just five years ago people rode in *KRAZ*-type vehicles to get to Vilsandi island by sea. Now it is an historical image.
- 2. When weather is good, you can also walk to the island. Photo: Maarika Toomel
- 3. You can get to Vilsandi island by boat from the Papisaare harbour port (Papisaare sadam)

Distances among various cities and populated areas

| | The Loona Manor (Loona mõis), center of Vilsandi NP |
|---------|---|
| Tallinn | 249 |
| Pärnu | 187 |
| Rīga | 370 |

A brief evaluation of the park Environmental tourism products Infrastructure for nature and active tourism **** Diversity in cultural and historical objects ** Cultural tourism products

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK **ESTABLISHED?**





- 1. There are more than 150 small islands in Vilsandi archipelago
- 2. There are also tiny islets and rocky shallows to make up one of the largest concentration of such islands in the Baltic States. Here you see Alumine Vaigas Island



- 3. The islets are formed of the Silurian sediments showing us fossils of the period. Here you see the rocky shore of the Elda peninsula
- 4. Here and there you can see calcified coral reefs from the Silurian Period. Here you see Keskmine Vaigas Island
- 5. One can find different fossils on the coastline and coastal cliff
- 6. This woman has found a **stromatolite** from the Silurian Period











7. Many species of birds use the islands for rest, feeding and nesting. Here you see the abandoned nest of a **great cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* 8. The nest of a **common eider** *Somateria* mollissima







- 9. The **historical landscape** of Vilsandi includes a lighthouse that is 200 years old, but also a border guard tower that was installed by the Soviet military about 50 years ag
- 10. One of the largest and most successful **populations of gray seals** *Halichoerus grypus* in the Balic Sea are found at the Vilsandi archipelago. Photo: Maarika Toomel
- 11. The limestone base of Saaremaa makes the soils rich of calcium, which allows for a wide diversity of orchids (34 species). Here you see the fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*. Photo: Maarika Toomel 12. The lady's slipper orchid *Cypripedium calceolus*.
- Photo: Maarika Toomel



A brief history of the Vilsandi archipelago

Vilsandi salai tuvumā esošajās Vaikas salās 1910. g. tika izveidota Baltijas pirmā aizsargājamā dabas teritorija, tādēļ ir vērts ielūkoties dažās šīs vietas vēstures lapaspusēs.



The Vaika islands (Google Map, from Vides Vēstis)

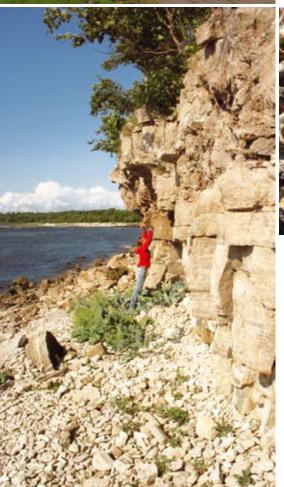
| The Silurian Period (more than 400 million years ago) | The unimaginably distant past in this location saw sea and land in what is now the territory of the Baltic States, with continental drift meaning that the area was in equatorial waters where stromatolites, coral, brachiopods, molluscs and other plants and animals flourished. Long-lasting environmental processes turned the remnants of these beings into sediment rocks which now make up the islands of the Vilsandi archipelago. Many of the rocks can be seen as cliffs. When on Vilsandi Island, you are basically walking upon ancient coral reefs. |
|---|---|
| The last Ice Age | The ice sheet which covered Northern Europe was so massive that the very surface of the Earth was pushed downward. Today, more than 10,000 years after the end of the Ice Age, there is an irreversible geological process in which the crust of the Earth is rising in a neo-tectonic way. This means that the islands of Western Estonia and the territories which surround them are rising at a level of some 2-3 mm per year. |
| 18 th century (1703) | The first permanent residents settled on Vilsandi . It is said that one of them was the Dutch mariner Johann van Doll . |
| 1908 | The supervisor of the Vilsandi lighthouse, Artur Toom , leased the Vaika islets from Kihelkonna parish with the noble goal of protecting nesting birds . |
| 1909 | A biological research facility was established at Kihelkonna with the help of the Rīga Association of Natural Researchers and Professor Karl Reinhold Kupfer (1872-1935). |
| August 14, 1910 | At Kupfer's suggestion, the first environmentally protected territory in the area of the current Baltic States was established to protect the Vaika islets lands. The purpose was to protect nesting birds . The same year, 124 birds were ringed on the Vaikas and |
| | around Kihelkonna – the first time that birds were ringed in the territory . |
| Soviet era | Before World War II, there were some 200 permanent residents on the island. After the war, Vilsandi Island and the seashore of Saaremaa Island became the western boundary of the Soviet Union, and that is why a border control facility was established on the island. True, border guards later left the island, because supply chains were too difficult. The shallow sea around Vilsandi Island makes it difficult to access it with larger boats, and boats can only be used when the sea is not frozen. KRAZ-type lorries were used to cross the shallow and rocky sea, but that was not an easy process, because the equipment kept rusting and breaking down. The restricted area for birds was re-established on the Vaika islands in 1957, and the Vilsandi Reserve was established in 1971. It was closed to everyone but scientists. |



INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

1 Loona Manor Estate (Loona mõis)

This estate was first cited in written documents in the 16th century. The one-story mansion that is there today was rebuilt several times between the 17th and the 19th centuries. In 1997, the building was restored once again to create a **guesthouse** and the **Vilsandi National Park visitors centre**. Here you will find valuable information, as well as an exhibition of fossils found in the area. It is from the estate that you can start your trip to Vilsandi Island or other destinations in the park. One of the buildings on the estate features an **exhibition** related to the Vilsandi National Park.





2 Elda cliffs (Elda pank) and peninsula

The Elda peninsula stretches into the sea from the South-western part of the national park. This is a very peripheral, but lovely patch of land with juniper forests and an interesting view of the sea from land which is made up of sediment rocks left behind from the Silurian period. At the end of the peninsula is an old Soviet-era **border guard tower**. (NB!The tower is in very bad shape and so we cannot recommend climbing it.) The **Elda cliff** (Elda pank) will be of interest. It is approximately two metres high and 0.4 km long, and at the foot you can find interesting fossils that have been washed out from the sea.

3 Kuusnõmme peninsula (Kuusnõmme poolsaar)

The peninsula is approximately 7 km long, and go there if you plan to take one of the most unusual hikes across a sea narrows. A narrow and very curvy gravel road passes along the Kuusnõmme peninsula. At the end of the road is a spacious car park, dry toilet, a small hut to take shelter if it is raining or too windy, as well as an information stand and bird watch tower. What to do? Well, you can take marked nature trail to Vilsandi Island on foot, crossing the small islets on the wayands that are there. This is best during warm weather when the wind is calm and when the weather forecast is clear for at least the next two days. A high-voltage power line will help you make your way. This will take up to two hours to reach Vilsandi, the walk is approximately four kilometres in length. The deepest part of the water (if you stay "on route") is at the beginning of the hike, where the marked nature trail crosses the boat route. Depending on the wind direction and water level, the sea can be as much as one metre

deep here. The landscape which you can see from the **viewing tower** will help you to get a sense of the route. This route is advertised out widely, but you must be responsible for your own safety when you are there! For information turn to the center of NP.



4 The Harilaid peninsula and the Kiipsaare lighthouse (Kiipsaare tuletorn)

The impressive **Tagamõisa peninsula** (Tagamõisa poolsaar) stretches into the sea from the North-westem part of Saaremaa Island, and a smaller peninsula, in turn, stretches into the sea from its North-western part. That is the **Harilaid peninsula**, which is around 5 km long. At the centre of the peninsula is **Lake Laialepa** (Laialepa järv), which was once part of the local bay, but became an internal body of water as the crust of the earth rose. The Harilaid peninsula itself was an island a few centuries ago (the word "laid" means "islet " in Estonian). At its tip is the 26-m high **Kiipsaare lighthouse**, which is one of the most

unusual buildings of its type in Estonia. It was built in 1933 in the middle of the peninsula, when the sea was 100 metres away from the lighthouse. Erosion has washed away the sands and whole peninsula and today the lighthouse stands about 50 m off the coast in the sea. Harilaid is popular among migrating birds, as well as seals. You can visit the peninsula only on foot or bike. You'll have to leave your car in the marked parking lot. This is an unusually open and variable rocky landscape. The peninsula was forested some 40 years ago. The hike will be approximately 10 km long in all.



5 Vilsandi Island (Vilsandi saar)

The heart of the Vilsandi National Park is Vilsandi Island, and it is the 12th largest island in Estonia (6 km long, 2.3 km wide). It is a very "new" island in that it emerged only 2,000 years or so ago thanks to the rising crust of the earth. This brought together two separate islands and occurred around 350 years ago. People settled the island in the 18th century, and their main activities were fishing, ship building and a bit of farming. Prior to World War II, there were some 200 residents here, but they were all kicked out when the Soviet Union established its border regime in the area. Much of the island is covered by forest and fields of juniper. There is a gravel and earthen road all along the length of the island, with side roads to the sea. You can stroll through the island in several hours, looking at local buildings (some of them modern), as well as the Tolli homestead which, according to legend, was one home to the Dutch seafarer Johann van Doll . There is also a windmill there. Certainly walk to the western topshore of the island, where you will find the Vilsandi lighthouse with surrounding buildings.. You will see the Vaika islets very well from here. Today only three people are permanent residents of the island.





6 The Vilsandi lighthouse (Vilsandi tuletorn)

The Vilsandi lighthouse was erected in 1809. If you look at the tower closely, you will see that it has been heightened several times over the subsequent decades. The lighthouse is 37 m high, while the light is 40 m above sea level. The lighthouse and its side buildings can only be viewed from the outside. If you are travelling along the Vilsandi archipelago by boat, the lighthouse will be a very good focal point among the countless islands, bays and peninsulas which are there. From the lighthouse you can see a maritime rescue station that was built on the shore of the sea. Locals say that rescuers from the station have saved 29 people, two dogs and one cat.



7 A view of the Vaika islets (Vaika saared)

The legendary Vaika islets are well seen from the Vilsandi lighthouse and the surrounding area. The area is a strictly restricted reserve and can only be viewed from a distance. The smallest island, Kullipank, has a diameter of just a few tens of metres. It is a fragment of a dolomite cliff that has been attacked by the sea for centuries. It is covered with pebbles, small rocks and just a few plants. During storms, the island disappears under the waves. Alumine, or Lower Vaika islet, is the largest of the six here. It has a diameter of around 150 m, and it stands at least two metres above the sea level. The island is rich with vegetation, and there are even a few small shrubs at its centre. Cliffs on the island are up to 1 m high. There are still remnants of "birdhouses" on the island which were installed by Artur Toom in the early 20th century in the hope of attracting nesting





WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

The Vilsandi National Park offers a wide variety of tourist activities, and we recommend that you make use of the services of local tourism organisers.











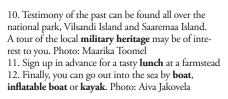
- 1. You can **hike** along the islands and the shoreline during the summer...
- 2. ... and the winter. Photo: Maarika Toomel
- 3. During the winter, you can engage in the unusual activity of **seal watching**. You will need an experienced guide, and you will have to stay away from the animals, which give birth to their young during this time of year. Photo: Maarika Toomel
- 4. The park is also great for **bird watching**. Photo: Maarika Toomel
- Look for mushrooms and berries! Photo: Maarika Toomel
- There are many rare and protected plants on the islands, and these are attractive to botanists. Photo: Maarika Toomel



- 7. Winter means **cross country skiing** on the ice! Photo: Maarika Toomel
- 8. A guide will take you and other skiers all the way to Vilsandi Island. Photo: Maarika Toomel 9. Performances by the **ethnographic ensemble** of
- 9. Performances by the **ethnographic ensemble** of Saaremaa Island will be an interesting cultural and historical adventure. Photo: Maarika Toomel













Veere MAP, CO-ORDINATES FOR DESTINATIONS | Section | Company | Company

USEFUL ADVICE

- The most appropriate time of year to visit the Vilsandi National Park is the summer, but you will find interesting things to do during other times of the year, as well;
- If you're going to Vilsandi Island, bring enough **food and water** for at least two or three meals;
- There are no shops, dining facilities, ATMs, medical facilities or fixed telephones on Vilsandi Island. The closest populated area is Kihelkonna. and it is beyond the boundaries of the Vilsandi National Park:
- **Food** is only served on the island during the summer and at one of the tourism farms, but you must contact the relevant establishment in advance for booking;
- Before hiking or rowing to Vilsandi Island, make sure that you know the **weather forecast**, because strong winds will cause big waves, as well as a higher water level between the islands;
- If you're driving to Saaremaa, reserve your **ferry ticket** from Virtsu to Kuivastu (Muhu Island) in advance in both directions, particularly during the tourist season;
- The Vaika islands are a nature reserve and closed to visitors;
- Put up tents and light campfires only where permitted.

Additional information

www.loonamanor.ee

The Loona Manoi

www.saaremaanaturetourism.eu/

Environmental tourism on Saaremaa Island

- 3/4

www.heritagetours.ee

Guided tours in Vilsandi National Park

>

www.visitsaaremaa.ee

Tourism opportunities on Saaremaa Island

一米二十十

www.vilsandi.ee

still now only in Estonia

The Vilsandi National Park Visitors Centre at the Loona Manor

Loona móis, \$\frac{1}{2}\$ +372 45 46510, 52 69974, info@loonamanor.ee, www.loonamanor.ee

| Object | Width | Length |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 1 The Loona Manor | N 58°19,97' | E 22°01,26' |
| 2 The northern part of the Elda peninsula | N 58°18,31' | E 21°49,73' |
| The Kuusnómme peninsula (car park) | N 58°21,08' | E 21°56,13' |
| 4 The Harilaid peninsula and the Kiipsaare lighthouse (Kiipsaare tuletorn) | N 58°29,81' | E 21°50,49' |
| 5 Vilsandi Island | N 58°22,82' | E 21°51,53' |
| 6 The Vilsandi lighthouse | N 58°22,97' | E 21°48,75' |
| 7 The Vaika islands (Alumine Vaika) | N 58°22,90' | E 21°48,21' |



Loona Manor, Vilsandi National Park

Kihelkonna parish, Loona village 93401 Saaremaa

Services in Loona:

- Guesthouse 10 rooms
- Tenting
- Cafe Kadvel, park cafe
- Picnic packages
- Celebrations, parties, cultural events
- Daily guided heritage tours
- Travel agency, bus, ferry and air tickets

- Miku Forest Park
- Tourist information
- Souvenir sales
- Equipment rental
- Exhibition house
- Stone house (museum of fossils)





Phone: +372 526 9974



Wilderness Experience in **Soomaa National Park**

canoeing – bog-shoeing beaver safaries – wildlife tracking mushrooming – snowshoeing kick-sledding and more...

> Info @ soomaa.com Phone: +3725061896



In Estonian, "soomaa" means "land of mires." The offer made by the park is the most extensive one in the Baltic States. You can wade through the swamps with special shoes, go boating, or take part in environmental tours led by a guide. Here you will feel and experience the "fifth season" of spring floods which turn the swampy territory into a vast lake with no shore and no edge.

CONTENTS

The Soomaa National park

- 66 Getting there
- **67** Why was the national park established? 69 The "fifth season"
- 72 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 75 What else can you do?
- 78 Useful advice
- 79 Map and co-ordinates of objects



GETTING THERE

The Soomaa National Park is in Southwestern Estonia, not far from the popular spa town of Pärnu. Busses run twice a day from Pärnu to Riisa village, 7.00 and 14.25, back from Riisa to Pärnu 7.45 and 15.30. Otherwise, you will have to rely on your own transport





This is a true paradise for hikers and environmental tourists. There are more than 10 trails of various lengths in the park, and it will take at least two days to hike all of them. You will pass along swamps and the wetland banks of the rivers, and you will learn about the natural and cultural environment of Soomaa. One of the hikes (only for true enthusiasts) is 32 km long and crosses the entire park.



Biking is a good way to get around the park, but the roads are all gravelled, and they may prove to be quite boring. If, however, you want to deal with all of the trails in Soomaa, why not do it in an environmentally friendly way? It will take less than a day to bike to Pärnu, while the nearest railroad station at Tori is 14 km away (the Pärnu-Tallinn train departs twice a day).



By boat

This is also a paradise for boaters. During the summer you can boat down the Halliste River (Halliste jõgi) and the Raudna River (Raudna jõgi). During the spring flooding season you can travel "according to the azimuth." There are special places in the park for water tourists to relax or spend the night.



By car

The Soomaa National Park is crossed by two larger roads - the Jõesuu-Kõpu road, which runs North and South, and the Tõramaa-Kildu road, which runs East and West. During the summer the roads are usually traversable by car or bus. During the flooding season (the "fifth season"), however, you must know that only the Jõesuu-Kõpu road will be navigable, and only from Kopu to the park's visitor centre at Tõramaa. Other roads may be underwater. When the area is not flooded, however, you can drive to the starting points of all of the described trails.

Distances among various cities and populated areas (km)

| | Tõramaa |
|---------|-----------------|
| Tallinn | 152 |
| Pärnu | 50 |
| Rīga | 217 (via Pärnu) |

A brief evaluation of the park

| Natural diversity | **** |
|--|------|
| Bird watching | *** |
| Environmental tourism products | **** |
| Infrastructure for nature and active tourism | **** |
| Diversity in cultural and historical objects | ** |
| Cultural tourism products | *** |
| | |















- 1. A boat, a bike, a car, and your legs will ensure a successful trip!
- 2. After flooding season, boating down the Soomaa rivers will offer you an entirely new
- 3. The national park has a modern and contemporary visitors centre

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?





- 1. Of the greatest value in the "land of mires" are peat-bogs and related biotopes and species 2. Wooden pathways are great for **learning about** bogs. Here you see the Ignatsi hiking trail 3. Damp and excessively damp forests are on the edges of swamps and rivers, and these are protected biotopes of European importance

4. There is a network of **rivers** in the park, and during the spring, they flood a huge territory. Here you see the Navesti River (Navesti jõgi) 5. The **wetland meadows** of the rivers flood during the spring, forming a huge lake with no shores – one which can cover as much as 175 km^2







6. The swamps, damp forests and wetland meadows are home to many rare and endangered species at the European level. There are some species, however, that you are very likely to spot them. Here you see the beaver Castor fiber. Photo: Aivar Ruukel

The "fifth season"

The "fifth season" in Soomaa is the spring flooding period, when the rivers in the park flood an enormous territory, with the water level rising by as much as 5 m. This establishes one of the largest "flood lakes" in the Baltic States. The lake has no shores or edges, and there are few places where one can find dry land to step on. For centuries people have lived with this natural phenomenon, and that is why it is known as the "fifth season," as opposed to a natural disaster. We cannot describe the floods, just go and see them for yourself – by boat, of course.









- 1. A flooded tourist hut near Meiekose
- 2. This is a look at the inflow of "flood tourists"
- 3. Wetlands flooded by the Raudna River
- 4. A flooded road leading to Karuskose is a place where boating is easier than in the forest 5. A flooded farm near Karuskose today ...



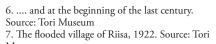






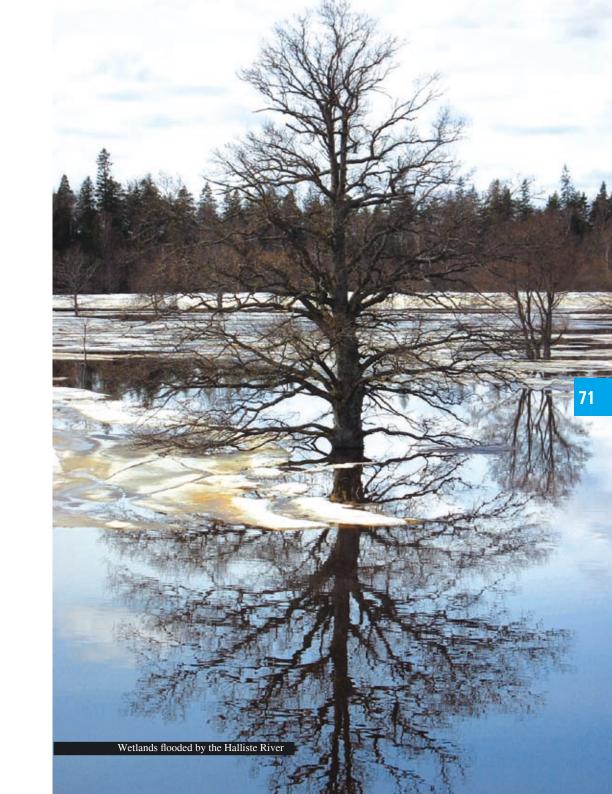






- 8. Flooded meadows near Riisa, 1922. Source: Tori
- 9. Flooded territories, 1928. Source: Tori Museum 10. People have used boats with single oars in the area of Soomaa for centuries. This photograph was taken in 1939. Source: Tori Museum 11. The maximum floodplain in the Soomaa National Park. Source: Andres Tonisson





INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

Trails in the Soomaa National Park are well appointed and marked, with information stands and viewing and bird watching towers. There are wooden pathways across the swamps and

wetlands, with mulch used for crossings elsewhere. All of the trails are free of charge and open at any time except during the winter and during the "fifth season."

The Riisa swamp trail (Riisa rabarada)

This is an outstanding circular trail (4.5 km) with wooden pathways that lead you through the Riisa swamp (Riisa raba). The pathways and the two-story wooden **viewing tower** offer a look at swamp lakes and swampy forests. If you start your visit to the park from the North, then this trail is a dandy beginning.

2 The Meiekose hiking trail (Meiekose matkarada)

This trail is 3 to 5 km long, leading along an old road along the left bank of the Tōramaa River (Tōramaa jōgi). There are interactive elements for children, which help them to perceive events in nature in a better way. The trail is surrounded by damp forests and wetland meadows which are underwater during flooding season. Traces of inhabitation since the Stone Age have been found around the village of Tōramaa.

3 The Ignatsi hiking trail (Ignatsi matkarada)

This trail runs along a former narrow-gauge rail line and through a forest. The rail line was used during the middle part of the last century to transport timber materials. Next you will pass the Suistna swamp (Suistna raba), where there is a **viewing tower** for an outstanding moss swamp landscape with tiny lakes. The trail is 4.5 km long in each direction.

4 The Lemmjõe hiking trail (Lemmjõe matkarada)

This trail focused on the place where the Lemmjõgi and Raudna rivers flow together. Here you will learn about wetland meadows and old, excessively damp forests – among the largest ones in all of Estonia. Open landscapes dominate at the start of the trail. One thing that you will see along the way on this circular 4.9 km trail is the **noble oak tree of Lemmjõe**. When weather conditions are damp, please remember to bring along waterproof footwear.







5 The Kuuraniidu educational trail (Kuuraniidu õpperada)

This 1.7-km circular trail offers a look at various forest biotopes, residents therein, and basic principles of managing the forest. There are wooden pathways and a small **viewing tower** for your convenience.

6 The Oksa trail

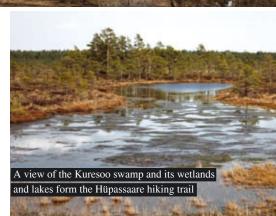
Once a 5-storey metal construction served as a viewing tower at the wetlands of the Lemmjõgi river. In the vicinity, an impressive **chimney** standing alone marks the place of the former **Oksa pub** (Oksa kõrts). A 0.8km long **wooden trail** offers a walk in the surroundings.

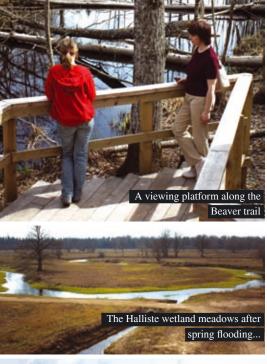




7 The Hüpassaare hiking trail (Hüpassaare matkarada)

This trail leads through the north-eastern section of the largest swamp in the Soomaa National Park – the **Kuresoo swamp**, where you can see landscapes of swamp lakes and wetlands. The trail starts at the **birthplace** of the Estonian composer, organist and folklore collector **Mart Saar** (1882-1963). Sheep graze in the surrounding meadows. The circular trail is 4.2 km long.





8 The Beaver trail (Koprarada)

This 2 km circular trail starts at the **Soomaa National Park Visitor Centre** (opened in 2000) in the village of Töramaa. It leads along the **Mardu stream** (Mardu oja), with countless trees which have fallen because of beaver activities. The scene appears to be quite chaotic. The visitors centre will provide you with information. You can watch a video and tour an **exhibition** devoted to the national park.

The Tõramaa trail (Tõramaa matkarada)

This 2 km trail (each direction) leads you to the **Halliste wetland meadows**. On the right bank of the Halliste River is a two-story wooden **viewing tower**. From there, you will get an all-encompassing view of the restored Halliste wetland meadows (they were cleared of brush). During the spring flooding season, the tower offers a good look at the surroundings even though it itself is in the water.



... and a view of flooded wetlands from the tower

10 The Läti tower (Läti torn)

Alongside the Jõsuu-Kõpu road, near the village of Läti, there is a car park with a **bird watching tower** from which you can look at the wetland meadows of the Halliste River and the nearby village. During flooding, all of the territory that can be seen from this tower (apart from roads) may be underwater. This is a good place to watch birds. "Läti," by the way, means "Latvia."

11 The Pauna trail (Pauna rada)

This cultural and historical trail (~2 km) in the Tipu village offers a look at several interesting objects – the **old school** (1931), the Halliste River, a **sauna**, and the **Pauna homestead**, where one of the leaders of the Estonian national resistance movement, **Villem Reiman** (1861-1917) was born.

12 The Õõrdi trail (Öördi rada)

This 1.2 km trail leads along a swampy forest on to the **Õrdi swamp** (Õrdi raba) and **Lake Õrdi** (Õrdi järv) which is alongside it. There is a leisure area here, as well as a beach for swimmers.



WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

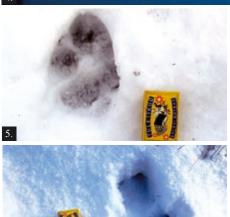


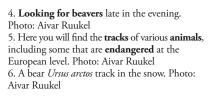
- Hike the Soomaa swamps while wearing special swamp shoes. Photo: Aivar Ruukel
 Blueberries, blackberries, bilberries and cloudberries there are lots of them here, so pick some for yourself!
 Photo: Aivar Ruukel
- 3. The results of **mushroom hunting**. Photo: Aivar Ruukel













- 7. Kicksleds can be used to traverse frozen rivers. Photo: Aivar Ruukel
- 8., 9. **Snowshoes** are best when crossing the swamp during the winter. **Cross-country skis** will do equally well Photo: Aivar Ruukel







10. The ancients were the first to know how to make **dugouts**, and now you can try your hand at it, too. Photo: Aivar Ruukel

Additional information

www.edel.ee

Information about passenger train services in Estonia



www.keskkonnaamet.ee/soom-eng

The Soomaa National Park



www.soomaa.com

Tourism opportunities at the Soomaa National Park



The National Park Visitors Centre at Tõramaa

Tőramaa, **2** +372 4357164, soomaa.teabepunkt@rmk.ee



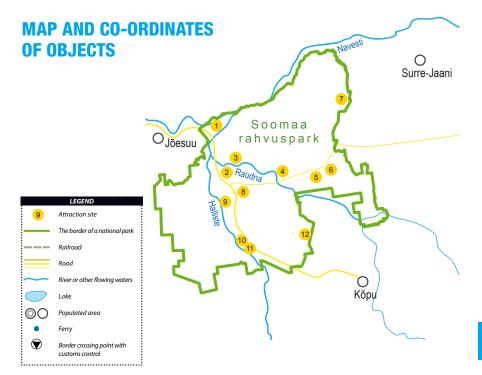
USEFUL ADVICE

During the "fifth season" by boat:

- The "fifth season" usually begins in early April and continues for two weeks or so. Weather conditions have everything to do with the flooding. Visit www.soomaa.com or the park's Facebook site to monitor the status of the floods;
- During the floods, vast territories are flooded (forests, meadows, populated areas), and that means a lack of traditional guideposts, which means that you will find it hard to know where exactly you are. We recommend that you bring a local guide with you;
- The "shore" of the flood lake may be several kilometres away;
- Absolutely bring a GPS system and a mobile phone in which you have recorded the number of rescue services:
- Before leaving, tell people onshore where you're planning to travel the start and finish, as well as the approximate time when you expect to have completed the journey;
- There can be strong crosswinds during flooding season, and some of the water may be frozen something which can cause "non-standard" situations:
- If there is heavy, wet snow on the water, it is all but impossible to boat through it;
- Bring a dry change of clothing in sealed bags, as well as food and a warm beverage;
- If you don't bring a guide, then you're responsible for your own safety.

At other times:

- The national park has no **shops** or **dining facilities**. The closest shops can be found in the villages of Kõpu, Jõesuu and Tori have the closest shops;
- Make reservations in a timely way for **tourism facilities** (nearby the park) where meals are served;
- Tourism services (including the rental of equipment) must be **reserved** well in advance:
- You can put up a tent and light a campfire only in locations specifically meant for that purpose.



| Object | Width | Length |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 1 The Riisa swamp trail | N 58°29,32' | E 24°58,90' |
| 2 The Meiekose hiking trail (northern end) | N 58°27,28' | E 24°59,56' |
| 3 The Ignatsi hiking traila | N 58°27,18' | E 25°02,20' |
| 4 The Lemmjõe hiking trail | N 58°26,50' | E 25°06,64' |
| 5 The Kuuraniidu educational trail (viewing platform) | N 58°27,09' | E 25°09,85' |
| 6 The Oksa viewing tower and trail | N 58°27,85' | E 25°12,00' |
| 7 The Hüpassaare hiking trail (Mart Saar Museum) | N 58°31,65' | E 25°16,27' |
| 8 Visitors Service Centre at the beginning of the Beaver trail | N 58°25,85' | E 25°01,83' |
| 9 The Tóramaa hiking trail (viewing tower) | N 58°25,32' | E 24°59,83' |
| 10 The Läti tower | N 58°21,96' | E 25°03,71' |
| 11 The Pauna trail (along the Halliste River) | N 58°21,49' | E 25°04,20' |
| 12) The Órdi trail (by Lake Órdi) | N 58°22,71' | E 25°10,68' |



Karula is an interesting dry land "island" in Southern Estonia. It is located in the centre of a huge forest and is little populated. If your goal is to visit places which are not full of tourists and others, then you will find it hard to visit a more appropriate environmental and cultural environment.

CONTENTS

The Karula National Park

- 82 Getting there
- 83 Why was the national park established?
- 85 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 90 What else can you do?
- 90 Useful advice
- 91 Map and co-ordinates of objects



GETTING THERE

The Karula National Park is in the Karula highlands (Karula kõrgustik) in Southern Estonia, between the towns of Valga and Võru. There are small populated areas and single family farms in the park.

The largest nearby populated area (outside the Northwestern border of the park) is Lüllemäe. There are bus services between Lüllemäe and Valga, but you can only visit the park with your own transportation.

By foot

The park has three well-appointed trails to learn about nature, as well as one route which crosses the entire park (36 km).



By bike

The hillocks and curvy roads of the Karula highlands will not allow you to be bored while you travel, but please remember that the park has gravelled or earthen roads alone. Low population density, the small territory of the park and the absence of other motor vehicles mean that travel conditions here are relatively safe.



The only lake large enough for small boating trips is Lake Ähijärv.



All of the destinations listed here are accessible by car and tourist bus, but the natural aspects of the place mean that "normal tourists" will feel uncomfortable and environmentally unfriendly if the car is the main form of transport. You should leave your car at the visitors centre and tour the park on a bicycle.

Distances among various cities and populated areas (km)

| | The village of Ähijärv | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Tallinn | 264 | |
| Pärnu | 167 | |
| Rīga | 195 km (via the A3 road in Latvia) | |

A brief evaluation of the park

| Natural diversity | *** |
|--|------|
| Bird watching | ** |
| Environmental tourism products | ** |
| Infrastructure for nature and active tourism | *** |
| Diversity in cultural and historical objects | **** |
| Cultural tourism products | ** |



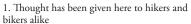
Our recommendation on travelling the park:



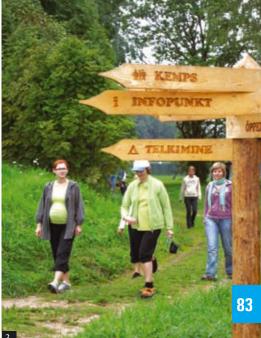








- 2. Signs pointing to various trails
- 3. A hike along the shores of Lake Ähijärv



WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?



1. In and near the park are buildings from previous ages – **churches**, former **estates**, etc. Here you see the new (up front) and old (in the back) Church of St Mary

2. The Karula National Park is home to 38

lakes and small wetlands









3. **Forests** cover ~70% of the park's territory. This is one of the largest forests in Southern Estonia

- 4. From hillocks and viewing towers, you will see a **landscape** that is based on long-lasting interaction between humans and the environment. Here you see the view from the Tower Hill (Tornimägi) viewing tower 5. The **Sibula granary**, which has been restored, is one of the oldest buildings in the park. It was built in the mid-19th century
- 6. The **cultural landscape** of the park is made up of small single family farms or villages with wooden buildings and small country roads





INTERESTING TOURISM OBJECTS AND ROUTES

1 Lüllemäe (Lüllemäe)

Lüllemäe is alongside the park, but it is a good destination. Of importance are two churches which are alongside one another. The **ruins of the Church of St Mary**, which dates back to the 15th century, stand witness to World War II, when the church was destroyed. The **new church** was built in 1997. A **monument** in the western part of the village is dedicated to those who fell during Estonia's liberation battles in 1919 and 1920.





2 Rebasemõisa (Rebasemõisa)

This is a small populated are in the northwestern part of the park. The Rebase Estate used to be here. Only the remnants of the old **granary** are still there, but alongside it is an interesting testament to history – an ancient rock which was once used for threshing purposes (Peksukivi).

3 Tower Hill (Tornimägi)

This is the highest point in the Karula highlands (137 m above sea level), and it is ~60 m tall. The **viewing tower** on the hill offers a very broad view. On the platform are panoramic images to show the most important objects in the area – populated areas, castle hills, church towers, etc. There are **leisure facilities** nearby, as is the start to the **Rebase landscape trail**.





4 The Rebase landscape trail (Rebäse maastikurada)

This is a marked circular route that is around 7 km long and leads through different biotopes – forests, wetlands and meadows, passing along the steep hillocks which are in the area. There are information stands and directions at the sides of the trail. The Rebase landscape trail is for those who are not afraid of a longer hike through a very natural and scantly populated region.

5 The Mäekonnu viewing tower (Mäekonnu vaatetorn)

This is one of two viewing towers in the national park, and it is approximately 1.5 km to the North of Lake Ähijärv. The tower is successfully "hidden" in a stand of pine trees so that it does not "damage" the surrounding environmental and cultural landscape which can be seen from the viewing platform. There are well-appointed leisure facilities at the car park.





6 Lake Ähijärv

The largest lake in the Karula National Park is 2.8 km long and up to 1 km wide. On the north-eastern shore of the lake is the park's **visitors centre**. The lake is 5.5 m deep, and it is full of fish and legends. The 3.5 km **Ähijärv trail** (Ähijärve teerada) is meant for those who want to study the lake and its surroundings up close. The start to the trail is at the visitors centre, which has leisure facilities and an attractive playground for children. The trail leads along the lake's shore, where there are small wetlands and forest roads which have been used during past centuries.



The visitors centre offers useful information and features an **exhibition** about the history of the Karula highlands, the residents of local lakes, and the cultural and historical traditions of the region. Groups of visitors can view an informational presentation in the centre's seminar hall.









8 The Pärajärve forest trail (Pärajärve metsarada)

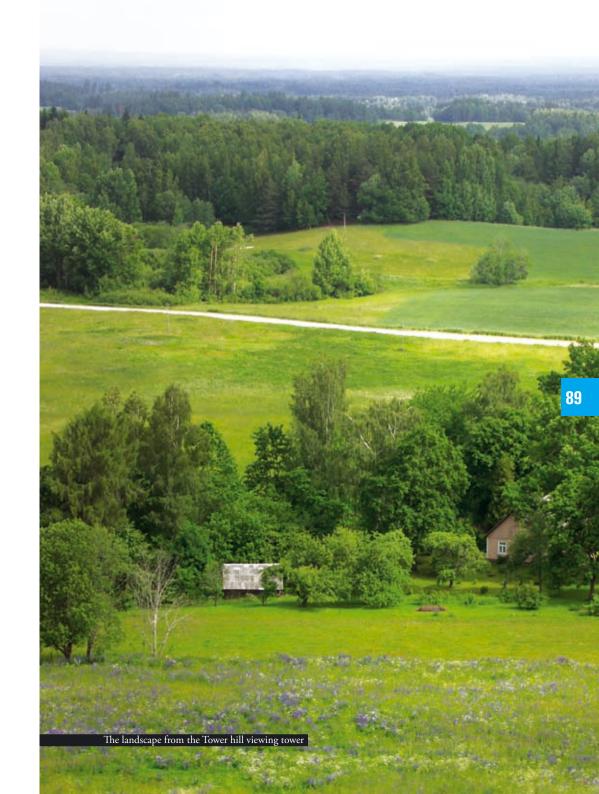
The 4 km marked circular trail leads through the forest and allows people to learn not just about plants and animals, but also about forestry traditions. The start to the trail is found in the small village of Pärajärve, which can be easily seen from a nearby hillock. There are leisure facilities and picnic grounds at the car park.





9 Kolski and Koobasaare (Koobasaare)

These are two small populated areas in the southwestern reaches of the national park. **Kolski** used to have five farms, but only one remains. Residents of Kolski were deported to Siberia during World War II, as were other people in the Baltic States. Livestock in the region graze in the local meadows, keeping them from becoming forests. This helps to maintain the historical landscape of the region. Three km to the Southwest is the village of **Koobasaare**. The name means "island of caves," and it recalls the Great Northern War, when people hid in caves which they dug themselves. Rural landscapes that are truly atypical of the 21st century can be found in Koobasaare and nearby **Apja**.



y

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?







USEFUL ADVICE

- It's **best to visit the park** in the spring and the autumn (when leaves are turning colour), as well as during the summer;
- The park has no **shops** or **dining facilities**. The nearest store is in Lüllemäe;
- There are only a few **tourist accommodations** in and around the park, so make reservations in a timely way!
- You may put up **tents** and light **campfires** only in locations which are meant for that.

Additional information

www.karula.ee

The local government of Karula

The total government of Natura

www.keskkonnaamet.ee/karula-eng The Karula National Park 💻 🗮

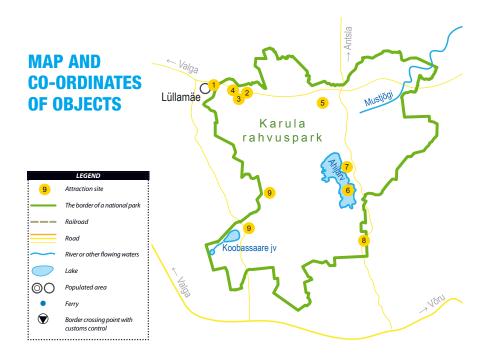
www.rmk.e

Estonian State Forests =

www.visitestonia.com

An Estonian tourism portal (10 languages)

The National Park Visitors Centre at Ähijärv Ähijärv, ☎ +372 7828350, ☎ +372 5251552



| Object | Width | Length |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 Lüllemäe (the old church) | N 57°45,05' | E 26°22,47' |
| 2 Rebasemeiza | N 57°44,70' | E 26°25,07' |
| 3 Tower Hill (the viewing tower) | N 57°44,59' | E 26°24,54' |
| 4 The Rebase landscape trail (start at the viewing tower) | N 57°44,59' | E 26°24,54' |
| 5 The Mäekonnu viewing tower | N 57°43,97' | E 26°29,33' |
| 6 Lake Ähijärv | N 57°42,47' | E 26°30,24' |
| 7 The Karula National Park Visitors Centre | N 57°42,74' | E 24°24,47' |
| 8 The Pärajärve forest trail (starting point) | N 57°41,10' | E 26°31,39' |
| <mark>9</mark> Kolski Kobasāre | N 57°42,38' N 57°41,22' | E 26°27,32' E 26°24,87' |



BALTIC NATIONAL PARKS

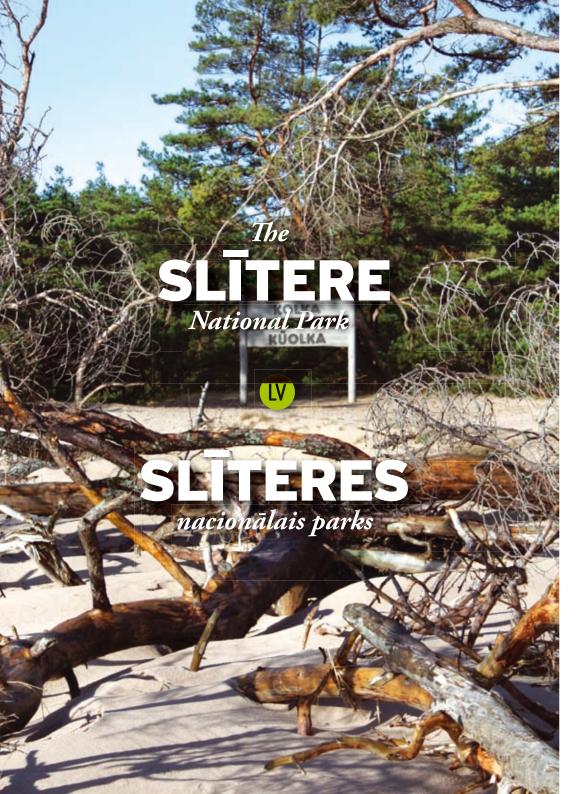
Latvia

Slīteres, Ķemeru, Gaujas, Rāznas national parks

CONTENTS

The Slitere National Park 94
The Kemeri National Park 114
The Gauja National Park 132
The Rāzna National Park 150





Known as the "geological open-air museum" of the Baltic Sea, the Stūtere National Park offers yews, ivies, a diversity of flora and fauna, the legendary Blue Hills of Štūtere and the cultural heritage of the Liv people. These are the main reasons why the Stūtere National Park was established. It must also be noted that for nearly half a century, the park, along with the entire Latvian coast, was a closed Soviet military zone.

CONTENTS

The Slītere National Park

- 96 Getting there
- 97 Why was the national park established? 100 The Liv people
- 102 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 108 What else can you do?
- 110 Useful advice
- 112 Map and co-ordinates of destinations



GETTING THERE

Kurzeme, around 50 km from Ventspils. It is on Talsi by: the coast of the Baltic Sea and the Bay of Rīga.

The Slītere National Park is in Northern You can reach the national park from Rīga and



There are several fine nature trails in the park, some of which are currently being restored. There are also hiking routes. The seashore is particularly appropriate for hikers. All along the coast, there are lovely and sandy beaches.



Spend at least two or three days to tour the park on a bike. It will be particularly interesting to ride down the old roads of Liv villages in the park.



By boat

You can get into a seagoing boat on the shoreline. When the weather is right, you can take a trip around the island on which the Kolka lighthouse is located. A guide will have to accompany you, and you will not be allowed to disembark on the island.



Since the Kolka-Mazirbe road was paved, access to the park has become even better. You should not drive your car through the Liv villages, though, because that would not be a friendly thing in this authentic natural and cultural environment.



By bus

Distances among various towns and populated areas

| | The Šlītere lighthouse |
|-----------|------------------------|
| Rīga | 165 |
| Talsi | 50 |
| Ventspils | 70 |
| Dundaga | 15 |

A brief evaluation of the park

| Natural diversity | **** |
|--|------|
| Bird watching | **** |
| Environmental tourism product | **** |
| Infrastructure for nature and active tourism | **** |
| (Is being restored) | |
| Diversity in cultural and historical objects | **** |
| Cultural tourism products | **** |
| | |

There are passenger bus services between Kolka and Mazirbe, but infrequently. Find out the schedule before you set out for the park.

Our recommendation on travel in the park:









Bikers on the Jūrmala-Kolka road



The bus station at the Liv People's Centre in Mazirbe



The Ventspils-Kolka road was paved beginning in 2009, and the paved road between the two towns was completed in 2011



Behind the sign are the famous "pine forests of Slītere," which feature stands of heather, as well

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?









- 1. The landscape of dunes and swampy lowlands **between them** is the largest natural system of its type in all of Europe
- 2. The **microclimate** of the Kurzeme Peninsula (warmer, gentler) allows relics of the Atlantic Era such as the **common yew** (*Taxus baccata*, seen in the photo) and the **Baltic ivy** *Hederal helix* to flourish here
- 3. The **diversity of biotopes** in the park is truly impressive. You'll find all of the dune biotopes of Latvia along the shore. Here you see dunes near Košrags
 4. There are seldom touched **broadleaf forests** at the
- foot of the Blue Hills of Šlītere
- 5. The ditches of the Blue Hills of Šlītere feature sandstone cliffs which are the oldest known cliffs from the Devonian Era in Latvia





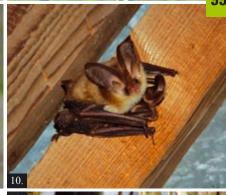


6. The shoreline of Northern Kurzeme is the only place where the **non-tangible heritage** of the Liv people has been preserved. Here you see a Liv youth group, *Nurmorkestôr* 7. Cape Kolka is crossed by a bird migration route that is of global importance (the White Sea – Baltic Sea route), and more than 60,000 birds may cross the territory in one hour's time! Photo: Andris Klepers

















12. The Liv environment of old fishing villages is of outstanding cultural and historical value in the park. Here you see the landscape of Sikrags
13. In the comparatively small territory you will find churches from various denominations, as well as other cultural monuments such as lighthouses or their ruins. Here you see the Kolka lighthouse. Photo: Peo Jonsson

The Liv people²

History tells us that the Liv people populated a vast territory during the 12th century – the **Daugava**, **Metsepole**, **Gauja** and **Turaida** regions. The Liv ethnos has lived the longest along the **western coastline of Kurzeme**, **from Kolka to Oviši**. A critical turning point in the preservation of Liv identity occurred in the mid-20th century, when **fishing in the Baltic Sea was prohibited**. This destroyed the traditional way of life of the Liv people – fishing in the sea. Because of this, masses of coastal residents moved to other locations in search of work.

In 1991, the coastline between Kolka and Oviši was declared to be a protected cultural and historical territory known as the *Liv Shore*. Today, as socioeconomic conditions have changed, there are no more illusions about the possibility that the Livs might return to their historical living area. The process of globalisation has also "helped." And yet this is a place where the lives of Livs remain in place in a wide variety of manifestations – **linguistic borrowings**, the **dialect**, **place names**, the **characteristics of people**, as well as tangible things such as **buildings** which make this territory different from all others.

The profession of **fisherman** seems to be something which differentiated Livs from Latvians. In 1998, a group of folklore specialists reported that "when discussions with local residents involve Livs and their lives on this coastline, then it becomes clear that the Livs were fishermen and the fishermen were Livs. Locals say that the Livs did not want to do anything other than to go fishing in the sea." The extent to which the Liv people identified themselves with this activity is seen in the name they call themselves with this activity is seen in the name they call themselves with this activity is seen in the name they call themselves with this activity aream "fisherman." Latvians were called mönniez (farmers). Today we do not know the extent to which "Liv nature" remains in the heart of each local resident, but we do know that fishing skills continue to course through the veins of men who live on the coastline.

The **Liv language** has always been limited. It has never been taught at school, and most Livs learned the language in their families. Today the use of the language has become even narrower. People can speak it in the context of folklore traditions and scholarly research, but there are hardly any people left who speak the Liv language on an everyday basis. At the same time, however, increasing numbers of people are interested in learning it.

² Text by Dženeta Marinska from Slītere

Historical processes have led the Liv people to become completely integrated into the Latvian community, but their culture, as part of the environment of the *Liv Shore*, has ensured the unique nature of this place. Almost everyone here will say that his or her ancestors were Livs.





Recipe for Courlandian Carrot Buns³

Carrot buns, which are known in Latvian as sklandrauši, žograuši or dižrauši, are often baked for larger or smaller festivals. There is a lot of work involved, with many ingredients. The dough is made of rye flour and water, perhaps with some added butter. The dough must be firm. It is cut into pieces and rolled out, and then round pieces are cut out. The sides are bent upward. The dough dries out during the baking. The filling is made of mashed potatoes, to which butter or eggs can be added. On top of the potatoes there are grated carrots mixed with cream and sugar. When the buns come out of the oven, cream, sugar and cinnamon are added to them to make them juicy.

Demonstrations and tastings of carrot buns are available to groups of tourists, families or groups of friends at the Ūši homestead. Contact Dženeta Marinska on \$\mathbb{C}\$ +371 29475692 to arrange for a visit. More information can be found at \$www.kolka.info.

³ The recipe comes from Elza Rozenfelde (b. 1919), who lives at the Silnieki homestead in the Talsi District (Dumpe, 2009).

Preparation of carrot buns at Ūši



INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

The names of the villages are give also in Liv language

1 Kolka (Kūolka)

Cape Kolka (known as Domesnes in the past) was first mentioned in writing on a Rune stone in Sweden in 1040, but the name of Kolka as a populated area (with the same name) appeared in 1387. It is thought that the word Kolka came from the Finnish kolkka or the Estonian kolgas; kolk. In all cases, the word refers to a "corner." Kolka was the only Liv fishing village in which intensive economic activities continued after the establishment of the Soviet Union's border regime. Fish processing was part of the mix. The number of people in Kolka, unlike in the other Liv villages of the area, increased during the mid-20th century. Kolka was closed to civilians during the Soviet occupation, and there were only a few "official" beaches in the area. The Liv centre "Kūolka" is in Kolka, and it features a collection of Liv ethnographic objects from the 19th and 20th centuries. The foundations of the Kolka Evangelical Lutheran Church were laid by the former owner of the Dundaga Estate, Karl Ludwig Ferdinand von der Osten-Zacken, while the work was managed by building mater Oto Zīverts in 1885. The modern altar painting by Helēna Heinrihsone is worth a peek, because it unique among all churches in Latvia. Ūši is one of

the oldest farms in Kolka, and the largest campsite in the area is found there. Owner Dženeta Marinska offers families and tour groups a chance to learn about the preparation of a traditional food from Northern Kurzeme – the carrot bun that is known as a *sklandrausis*.



2 Cape Kolka

One of the most popular tourist destinations in Kurzeme is Cape Kolka – the most distinct cape along the shoreline of Latvia. Here you will see the confluence of the Baltic Sea (the Noble Sea) and the Bay of Rīga (the Small Sea). During storms, the crashing waves can be as much as 7 m high. The cape continues underwater to the Kolka lighthouse. The monument "Taken by the Sea" which is on Cape Kolka was produced by the sculptor Girts Burvis. There is also the wreck of a wooden ship (thought to be from the 19th century), along with a rock known as "the heart of Europe" (the 19th-century Latvian activist Krišjānis Valdemārs considered the place to be the centre of Europe). There are information stands dedicated to Valdemärs, and you can also visit the former Soviet Coast Guard base (🔊) which is still used by the Latvian Border Guard today. During the bird migration season, Cape Kolka is of Northern European importance as a place where travelling birds gather together and rest. This is a magnet for bird watchers. Cape Kolka has a visitors centre and a small cafeteria during the summer. Pine trees which have collapsed because of the sea and can be found on the beach are interesting. The sea around Cape Kolka is the largest boat cemetery in the Baltic Sea. This is a dangerous place for swimmers because of shifting currents and drifting sand. At the tip of Cape Kolka you will find the ruins of the old lighthouse. This is the southern

tower, which was built in the 18th century (the northern tower was washed away in the latter half of the 19th century). The **Kolka lighthouse** that is out in the sea was built on an artificial island which was created between 1872 and 1875. When the island settled, the current 21 metre **tower** was installed in 1883 (it was manufactured in St Petersburg). The lighthouse became operational on July 1, 1884. Today the island is home to the **lighthouse supervisor**, and there are several **ancillary buildings** along with an impressive **fog bell** that was once used when visibility was limited. A fire erupted on the island in 2011, but the lighthouse was not damaged.



3 The Cape Kolka Pine Trail

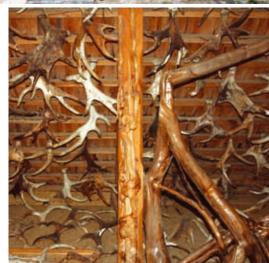
This circular trail leads through coastline biotopes and very old pine trees among the sand dunes. Human activities led to frequent cutting down of trees along the coastline, and fires often affected them, as well. This led to shifting sand which buried trees and local farms alike. The trail is 1.2 km long and will take around half an hour to complete. The area of the coastline between the trail and Cape Kolka is a great place to look for birds. The trail is currently being renovated, and the plan is to reopen it to visitors in 2013.





4 Vaide (Vaid)

This is an ancient Liv fishing village which was first mentioned in writing in the 1580s. The most interesting thing here is the **Purvziedi house** (which was built in the 1930s as a new farm for a farmer and fisherman). Inside is a **collection of horns** (more than 550 horns from moose and deer) which has been assembled by the Liv resident Edgars Hausmanis. The **hedge** is typical of Liv farms. Along the way, you can stop at the **Vaide Pond**, where there is a place to relax. There is also an information stand there. On the northern shore of the Vaide Pond is the **Vaide cemetery**, which was establish in 1928. Interesting wooden crosses can be seen there.





5 Saunags (Sänag)

This Liv fishing village was first cited in writing in 1310. Prior to World War II, local residents mostly engaged in fishing and wood processing. Only six farms in Saunags are currently populated year-round. **Vecvalki**, which will attract attention as you pass through Saunags, is the farm of a fisherman and farmer, and it includes the residential house from 1926 and a variety of farm buildings from the first half of the 20th century.







6 Pitrags (Pitrõg)

Pitrags was first cited in documents as a populated area in 1582. During the 1820s, there were 11 farms there. A century later, there were 12 old farms and 38 fishing farms in Pitrags. During the 19th and 20th century, Pitrags was known to be an important centre for the building of ships and boats, and that substantially enhanced the socioeconomic development of the entire coastline. There are lots of sunken boats and ships in the water off the coast of Pitrags, and the wrecks can sometimes be seen after strong winds wash them ashore. Today Pitrags mostly comes to life during the summer when holiday makers arrive in the village. The Pitrags Baptist Church was built in 1902 and restored in 1925 and 1926. To the North-west of the church (toward the sea) is the Kurgati homestead of a fisherman and farmer. It was built in the 1930s and brought a new building element into the Liv shore - a split roof end.



Košrags is one of the newest Liv fishing villages, originating in the late 17th century. Around the turn of the 19th century, Košrags was a popular place for guest workers from Saaremaa Island. It is said that smugglers of alcohol and eels also came to the region from the island. Like Sīkrags, Košrags is a monument to urban construction, but its buildings (unlike those in Sīkrags) remain in very good condition. This is one of the most "open" villages in the national park. Farms have signs with their names and some historical facts. You'll see several residential buildings which were built in the early 20th century as new farms (Väldamō, Virgo) or small rooms (Filmani, Silkalni) and their farm buildings (Norpiedagi). One of the oldest large farms is the oldest one in the village (first recorded in 1680) – Anduli. The farm has a house (c. 1909), a threshing barn (1905), a granary (mid-19th century), and a smokehouse made of a boat cut in two. Under part of the threshing barn is the so-called Black plague cemetery. During the mid-19th century, **Žoki** was home to the first school where Liv children were taught to read. Several buildings from the turn of the 19th century have survived at Tilmači.



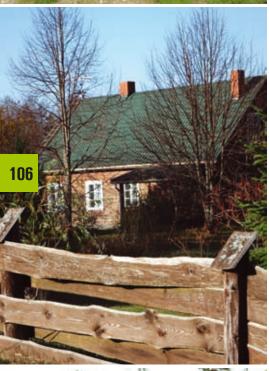
Mazirbe was first mentioned in documents in 1387. During the first period of Latvian independence, it was an important place for industry, trade and transport. During the Soviet era, the building of the former maritime school in Mazirbe was taken over by the Soviet Army, and along the Ventspils-Kolka road, a Border Control facility was installed. After individual fishing was banned in the Baltic Sea, many residents of Mazirbe lost their source of income and moved to Kolka. One of the oldest buildings in the village is the Mazirbe Lutheran Church (1766). On November 18, 1923, the Liv flag was consecrated at the church. Nearby you will find the **Old grave mound** – a cemetery used during the Middle Ages and again in the early 20th century. The so-called Werewolf's grave is there. To the North-east of the church, between it and the Pakalni homestead, there are two **black plague rocks** which have sunk partly into the ground. The larger of the two stones used to have an inscription about how the Livs were conquered by Swedish King Charles II and by the black plague (the inscription has faded away). The smaller stone leans against the larger one, and it used to be at the Pakalni homestead. The faded text speaks of armies which pillaged Kurzeme, as well as of famine and the plague. The third rock, the Great black plague rock, is behind the Mazirbe manse. The text can still be read a bit, and it is a message for future generations about the local clergyman (he died of the plague) and the establishment of a pastorate in Sīkrags. It also stands as a monument to six clergymen from the broader surroundings. All three stones refer to the epidemic of the plague which occurred in 1710, and all of the texts date back to the period between 1711 and 1734. All of the aforementioned objects can be found to



the South of the Kolka-Ventspils road. To the North of the road is the 'central section' of Mazirbe. Here you will find the **Liv People's Centre**, which was opened on August 6, 1939, and is home to the popular annual Liv Festival, as well as to other events. Inside the building is an exhibition of photographs about Liv culture from the early 20^{th} century. You should also look for the **boat cemetery** that is in the dunes of Mazirbe. It was established in the 1950s and 1960s, when individual fishing was banned because of the Soviet border regime.









9 The former Ventspils-Stende narrow-gauge railroad

In 1916 and 1917, the German military built a network of narrow-gauge railroad lines (a track width of 600 mm), and the line running from Ventspils to Mazirbe and Stende (138 kg) crossed the territory of the national park between Kikans and Mazirbe and then on to Jaunmuiža. The rail line was used for military purposes and for the transport of timber materials to Germany. After World War II and until the early 1960s, when the line was shut down, the line was used to transport passengers and goods. Today a bike route runs along the old tracks between Mazirbe and Sīkrags. It runs through a forest which is surrounded by dunes and valleys.

10 Sīkrags (Sīkrõg)

One of the oldest Liv villages along the coastline was first mentioned in documents in 1387. During the 17th century, one of the most important small ports in Northern Kurzeme was found in Sīkrags. Large fields of grain surrounded the village. There were several threshing barns for the threshing and drying of grain. Sīkrags was the site of active fishing operations during the first half of the 20th century. This was one of the few locations along the coast where fishing in the sea was permitted during the Soviet era, as well. Today there are only 10 or so permanent residents in Sīkrags. The most important farms and buildings in historical terms include Ziedlejas (late 19th century), where a school was housed in 1932; Sproģi - a set of buildings erected by a fisherman and farmer in the early 20th century; Anbanki, which is the best-maintained farm of a sea captain in all of the Liv fishing villages (the residential building dates back to the late 19th century); Pentes un Dzilnas, with a house (1923) and a smokehouse and a threshing barn form the early 20th century; Kelki (19302), where the Liv pedagogue and cultural activist Pēteris Dambergs (1909-1987) was born; Kilāsidāmi – the oldest house in the village (1892), almost completely destroyed; and Vīnamegi, a farm from the 1920s and 1930s with a house and other buildings. The Irbe Narrows are opposite Sīkrags (and the other aforementioned villages). This is a small segment of the bird migration route and opens into the Bay of Rīga. For that reason, the narrows are an important route for transport and trade.

11 The Pēterezers nature trail

One of the most beautiful nature trails in Northern Kurzeme, this one will give you a good look at the local landscape of dunes and valleys. The dunes are covered with dry pine forests, while the valleys are dominated by grasslands and transitional swamps. One of the widest valleys has Large Lake Pēterzers and Small Lake Pēterzers. Part of the trail leads along the tracks of the former Ventspils-Stende narrow-gauge railroad. The trail is 3.5 km long, and you will need an hour-and-a-half to two hours to hike it. The trail is currently being renovated and is to be reopened to the public in 2013.

12 A viewing tower

The tower is at the side of the Dundaga-Mazirbe road, in the upper part of the Blue Hills of Slītere. The tower offers a great view all the way to the Baltic Sea, which is 5.5 km away as the crow flies. There are parking facilities and information stands at the foot of the tower.

13 Šlītere

A small populated area in the south-western part of the national park, this is home to one of the most popular tourist destinations in the area – the **Šlītere lighthouse**. which is the second oldest lighthouse in Latvia (1849-1850), the tallest lighthouse in the country (82 m above sea level, including the 32-metre tower), and the one lighthouse in Latvia which is further inland (5 km from the sea). The light was switched off in 1999, and today the lighthouse is an excellent viewing tower and exhibition facility (an exhibition about Latvian lighthouses can be seen there at this time). During clear weather, the lighthouse offers a great view of the Irbe Narrows and Cape Serve (on Saaremaa Island) with the Serve lighthouse. You will also see the Blue Hills of Slitere and the Undžava **forests** which are at the foot of the hills. To the south, you will see the **Dundaga hillock**. The **Šlītere Nature Trail** starts at the lighthouse. The circular trail can only be hiked in the company of a guide, because it is in a nature reserve which was established in 1921 as a monument to the environment of Šlītere. Steep stairs lead down the Blue Hills of Slitere, which are cliffs from the ancient shore of the Baltic Ice Sea (more than 20 km long). Here you will see foothill and broadleaf forests, an area of underground waterways, and a grassy and limy swamp, all of which are protected biotopes. Old land reclamation ditches and rotted stumps of fir trees are also here, and these are important for the diversity of species. The stumps are of trees which fell during a massive storm in 1969. The trail is 1.2 km long, and you will need an hour or hour-and-ahalf to hike it. The trail is currently being restored, and it is to be reopened to the public in 2013. 500 m to the Southeast of the lighthouse is the **Šlītere Semi-estate**, where the Kurzeme regional administration of the Environmental Protection Board is housed today. Legendary yews and ivies can be seen here.









14) The steep shore and nature trail of Evaži

This nature trail passed along the steep shore of \bar{E} važi, which is one of the few steep shores along the Bay of R \bar{i} ga, is up to 15 m high, and has a viewing platform which offers one of the most beautiful views of the Bay of R \bar{i} ga and the coastline forests. A staircase that was repaired after a damaging storm in 2005 allows you to climb down to the unusual beach with a narrow sandy area which disappears under the waves of the sea during a storm. The 300-m trail (600 m there and back) will take around 20 minutes to hike.



WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?





- 1. **Fishing** for European flounder *Platichthys flesus* is a popular activity along the shore of the Baltic Sea
- 2. **Divers** will love Cape Kolka because it is one of the largest ship cemeteries in the Baltic Sea









8. Annual environmental information events allow every to look at the "tracks" of animals in nature

- 9. Children can take part in creative workshops
- 10. Cape Kolka is an outstanding place to look for birds. Photo: Asnāte Ziemele

Additional information

www.celotajs.lv

Tourism routes in the Slītere National Park





www.livones.lv

A portal about Liv culture and the Liv language





www.nba.fi/liivilaiset/Latvia/ALatvia.html

The culture of Liv people





The Slītere National Park





The Kurzeme regional administration of the **Environmental Protection Board**

"Šlīteres mežniecība," Dundaga Administrative District, **a** +371 63286000,

kurzeme@daba.gov.lv, www.daba.gov.lv

The Dundaga Administrative District TIC

Dundaga, Pils iela "Dundagas pils", **a** +371 63232293, 29444395, tic@dundaga.lv, www.ziemelkurzeme.lv



The Talsi Administrative District TIC

Talsi, Lielā iela 19/21, 2 +371 63224165, 26469057 talsutic@apollo.lv, www.talsitourism.lv



The Cape Kolka Visitors Centre

Kolka, Kolka Parish, Dundaga Administrative Districts, **2** +371 29149105

kolkacape@inbox.lv, www.kolkasrags.lv





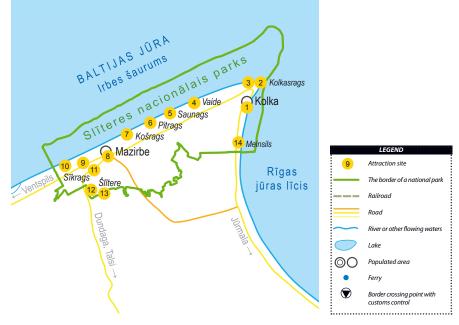


USEFUL ADVICE

- You'll need at least **three days** to tour the Slītere National Park properly;
- You are free to hike, observe plants, animals and landscapes, hunt for berries or mushrooms, swim (except in swamp lakes and Cape Kolka, where safety is an issue), sunbathe, ride a bike, ride in a boat (on the sea), and use motorised vehicles on roads everywhere except for the nature reserve in the park;
- Nature reserves in the park (the Šlītere Reserve, the Zviedru Forest Reserve, the Bažu Swamp Reserve) are closed to visitors and have no tourist trails or other objects;
- During the summer, **meals** are only available at a cafeteria at Cape Kolka. The closest dining facilities during the rest of the year are found in Dundaga;
- There are few **accommodations** in the park, so make reservations in a timely way;
- You will mostly have to rely on yourself when travelling through the park;

- Motor vehicles are allowed only on general use roads, and that does not apply to dunes, the beach and the forest; park your car in places specified for that purpose;
- You may put up a tent and light a campfire only in those places which are meant for that purpose – never in the dunes or on the beach;
- If you are bringing a four-legged friend with you, the animal must be on a leash and wear a muzzle whenever in the national park;
- You may fish in the Kikans and Pitrags rivers, Lake Pēterezers and the Vaide Pond, but only with a permit from the Environmental Protection Board;
- You may **fish** for European flounder and other fish in the sea only in accordance with rules which say that you must have a fishing permit and that you may keep no more than five turbots (no smaller than 30 cm in length) and 5 kg of European flounder.





MAP AND CO-ORDINATES OF DESTINATIONS

| | | • |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Object | Width | Length |
| 1 Kolka (Ũši, tastings of carrot buns) | N 57°44,91' | E 22°35,71' |
| 2 Cape Kolka | N 57°45,53' | E 22°36,28' |
| 3 Cape Kolka Pine Trail (car park) | N 57°45,38' | E 22°35,47' |
| 4 Vaide (horn collection at Purvziedi) | N 57°43,62' | E 22°27,63' |
| 5 Saunags (central part of the village) | N 57°43,08' | E 22°25,89' |
| 6 Pitrags (Baptist church) | N 57°42,22' | E 22°23,26' |
| 7 Košrags (central part of the village) | N 57°41,77' | E 22°21,62' |
| 8 Mazirbe (the Great plague rock) | N 57°40,26' | E 22°20,18' |
| 9 The former Ventspils-Stende narrow-gauge rail line (a bike route starting at the former Mazirbe station) | N 57°40,65' | E 22°18,81' |
| 10 Sikrags (central part of the village, car park) | N 57°39,64' | E 22°13,58' |
| 11) Pēterezers Nature Trail (car park) | N 57°39,25' | E 22°16,24' |
| 12 Viewing tower | N 57°37,45' | E 22°16,63' |
| 13) Šlītere (Šlītere lighthouse, start of nature trail) | N 57°37,70' | E 22°17,35' |
| 14) Steep shore and nature trail of Ēvaži (car park) | N 57°40,66' | E 22°34,08' |





The most important environmental aspect of the Kemeri National Park is its diverse number of wetland areas – swamps, shallow seashore lakes, black alder swamp and their residents. This is one of the largest regions in Northern Europe in terms of sulphur springs. During a relatively brief period at the park, you will be able to see many birds that are endangered at the European level. Historical health resort traditions in Kemeri are an important element of Latvia's culture and history.

CONTENTS

The Kemeri National Park

- 116 Getting there
- 117 Why was the national park established?120 Twists and turns in the development of the Kemeri historical health resort
- 121 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 128 What else can you do?
- 30 Useful advice
- 131 Map and co-ordinates of destinations



the Latvian capital city. The Bay of Rīga is to its North, and the Great Kemeri Heath is in its

The Kemeri National Park is ~40 km from southern part. You can get from Rīga to Kemeri







Several nature trails in the park are being restored at this time, and the plan is to reopen them in 2012. The seashore with its sandy beaches will be appropriate for longer or shorter hikes.



You will need at least two days to tour the park on a bike. The shoreline part of the national park is best for biking, because there are paved pedestrian and bike routes there. If you like to enjoy nature on your own, we can recommend many forest routes in the park. The Rīga-Ventspils (A10) road, however, is inappropriate for biking (it is very narrow, its quality is poor, and it is heavily travelled).



You can take shorter or longer journeys by boat along the shore. Be careful of fishing nets, and take weather conditions into account.



All of the major tourism destinations in the park are accessible by car and tourist bus.



There are regular passenger bus services through the shoreline villages (the P128 road) and along the Rīga-Ventspils (A10) road.

Distances among various towns (km)

| | Ķemeri |
|---------|--------|
| Rīga | 42 |
| Tukums | 25 |
| Jelgava | 57 |

A brief evaluation of the park

| J | J | 1 | |
|---------------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Natural diversity | | | **** |
| Bird watching | | | *** |
| Environmental tourism | n products | | *** |
| Infrastructure for nature | e and active | tourism | n (Is being restored) |
| Diversity in cultural an | ad historica | l object. | **** |
| Cultural tourism prodi | ıcts | | *** |









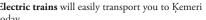
The Kemeri rail station in the late 19th century4

postcards from the private collection of Andis Liepa

4 Here and elsewhere we have made use of historical photographs and



Electric trains will easily transport you to Kemeri today





A warm beverage will be great after **cross country** skiing around Kemeri



Environmental tourists in the meadows of

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?



1. The shallow and overgrown seashore lakes (lagoons from the former Littorine Sea) are important for birds and many types of plants. Here you see Lake Kanieris 2. The Great Kemeri Heath is one of the largest moss swamps in Latvia, and it is of pan-Baltic importance in terms of wetlands





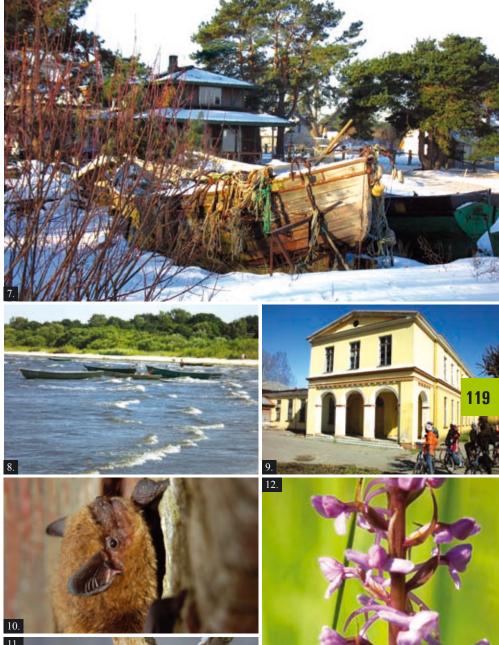
- 3. The **black alder swamp** around the Vēršupīte River are covered by light green wild garlic *Allium ursinum*. This is a protected plant, and you may not pick it
- 4. **Sulphurous water** which flows freely around Kemeri comes from **streams** which are unique at the European level. Here you see a **sulphurous stream** in the Raganu Swamp
- 5. The **wetland meadows** around the curvy Slampe River are home to many species of plants and animals, as well as for domestic animals which have been returned to the wild. Here you see the *Konik Polski* species of horse
- 6. Contrary to popular opinion, areas affected by beaver flooding are not dead. There are many species here, and many of these are uncommon at the European level



- 7. Only in Lapmežciems you will find historical facilities for the storage of boats
- 8. The shallow seashore waters of the Bay of Rīga and the surrounding **dunes** are protected biotopes with typical plants and animals
- 9. The **Kemeri swimming institution** which was once "fed" by the mud and sulphurous water of surrounding swamps is now empty. The **cultural values** of Kemeri have much potential, but it is not put to adequate use at this time
- 10. Nine of the 16 species of **bats** known in Latvia can be found in the national park. This is a photograph of the pygmy bat *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*. Photo by Viesturs Vintulis
- 11. **Dead trees** are the reason why you can find all kinds of **woodpeckers** in the park. Here you see the white-backed woodpecker. Photo by Andris Klepers
- 12. The **fragrant orchid** *Gymnadenia conopsea* can be found in the meadows around Lake Kanieris. Like other types of orchids in Latvia, it is a protected plant









Twists and turns in the development of the Kemeri historical health resort

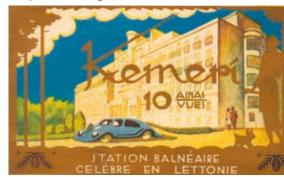
Kemeri (Kemmer) was first cited in written sources in 1561. During the latter half of the 18th century and the early 19th century, the sulphurous springs and swamp mud treatments made Kemeri well known in the region of Kurzeme, and people from the highest ranks of society came to receive treatment there. Local forest rangers greeted the guests, and the first mud baths were offered at that time. The development of swimming areas in Jūrmala and Kemeri halted for a bit during the War of 1812. Two decades later, from 1833 until 1835, the governor general of the Baltic provinces, Graf K.M. Pahlen tested out the benefits of Kemeri, and he was so entranced by them that he petitioned Tsar Nicholas I to offer support for the further development of the historical health resort. The request was granted, and in 1836 the tsar granted 700 ha of state-owned land plus 100,000 roubles for the construction of a treatment facility and for the paving of the road from Kemeri to the Sloka-Tukums highway. Two years later, in 1838, the first state swimming institution was opened up, and that is seen as the year when the historical health resort was founded. The fame of the historical health resort spread quickly throughout the Russian Empire, and the facilities became more and more popular. The Kemeri landscape park was established over the course of time and became an important part of the historical health resort. During the mid 19th century and later, steamships and the railroad line between Rīga and Tukums, which was opened in 1877, facilitated the development of the historical health resort. In 1912, a direct rail line between Kemeri and Moscow was established. Shortly before World War I, the facility was treating 8,300 people a year.

During the war, the front lines were not far from the historical health resort for several years, and the facilities were seriously damaged. Despite this, the historical health resort developed very rapidly after the war, and Kemeri became a popular leisure destination for the people of Rīga. Indeed, it was one of the most modern treatment facilities in all Europe. In 1924, anewswimming facility with mudbaths was installed in Kemeri, and it, too, was among the most modern on the Continent. In 1936, Latvian President Kārlis Ulmanis came to the location to open up one of the most outstanding buildings in independent Latvia – the Kemeri Hotel. During the Soviet era after World War I, the historical health resort expanded considerably, with nearly ten sanatoriums which

employed some 100 doctors. In 1971, Kemeri was declared to be a historical health resort of pan-Soviet importance. Between 1975 and 1985, the largest sanatorium in Kemeri was erected. First known as the Latvija, it was later renamed the Līva, and it had two 11-story buildings. Līva could accommodate as many as 1,200 patients at a time, and over the course of a year, it treated some 140,000 people. The sanatorium was closed down in the early 1990s because it was no longer profitable. Until 1994, there were five sanatoriums in Kemeri – Čaika, Daugava, Dzimtene, Kemeri and Līva, along with a polyclinic, Kemeri. This can be seen as the period when Kemeri began to lose its status as a major treatment historical health resort.



The Kemeri swimming area, 1930s



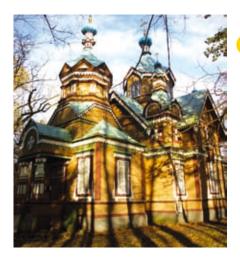
A postcard featuring the Kemeri Hotel



INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

1 The former Ķemeri swimming facility

During the 19th century, there was a building with wooden bathtubs here, and in 1924, it was replaced by a mud treatment facility in the style of Classicism. After World War II, the Kemeri polyclinic was installed in the building. Today the buildings are shut and can only be viewed from the outside. To the West of the buildings is a **monument** to the distinguished Russian doctor and physiologist **Ivan Pavlov**. The **Kemeri water tower**, which is to the North of the swimming facility, was built in 1929. It was once used to store fresh and mineral water. Prior to World War II, guests could clamber up to a viewing platform which was 42 metres above the ground to see the surrounding area.



3 The Ķemeri Hotel

This five-story building with a tower was built between 1933 and 1936 in the style of Neo-Classicism and after a design by the architect Eižens Laube. It was known as the "White Castle" or "White Ship," and it is seen as one of the most outstanding symbols of construction during the first period of Latvia's independence. Indeed, it became a symbol of the country. The interiors of the vestibule (to a certain extent), music salon, library and dining hall have been preserved, as have various works of art. Restoration of the hotel has continued for more than a decade, and the hotel can only be viewed from the outside. There is a **garden** to its West.





2 The Kemeri Park

The Kemeri Park is found on the banks of the Vēršupīte River. It was established as a landscape park in the mid-19th century. There are several interesting objects here. There is a **monument** to the founders and directors of the Kemeri historical health resort [(1861), the **Love Island pavilion and rotunda** (style of Classicism, 1928), the **Orthodox Church of St Peter and St Paul** (1893), which is the oldest church in Latvia and is typical of Northern Russian wooden architecture for churches, as well as monuments and a cemetery for those who fell during World War I. The church can be visited during worship services.







4 The sulphurous spring pavilion

This pavilion is in the south-eastern part of the park and was built at the turn of the 19th century. Alongside it, on the banks of the Vēršupīte River, you will find one of the most popular **sulphurous springs** in Latvia – the so-called "**Kirzaciņa**" or "Little Lizard." The water flows from the sculpture of a lizard which was installed in 1949. The water from the stream is good for internal and external use.

5 The Forest House

This building (1933) is one of the best examples of National Romanticist architecture in Latvia. It was initially known as the "Merry Mosquito" restaurant, with a large external terrace and an ornate fireplace hall with wood engravings. After World War II, the sanatorium "Forest House" was established in the building, and children from all over the Soviet Union came there to recover their health. In 1997, the administration of the Kemeri National Park moved into the house. The **Dumbrāju trail**, which is 500 metres long, starts alongside it.





6 The Green Dune

This is one of the most distinct dunes in the national park. An ancient earthen road is at its foot, and the road is good for **hiking** and cross-country skiing. To the East of the Green Dune is the **Raganu swamp**, which is an important place for sulphurous water. The 3.5-km Kemeri-Antinciems road crosses the swamp, and it offers an interesting landscape. To the West of the dune is the **Green swamp**, which is of medium size and was once used to extract peat moss.



The black alder swamp of Vēršupīte

The Vēršupīte black alder swamp feature excessively moist broadleaf forests, and this is among those biotopes in Latvia which feature the greatest diversity of species. The annual flooding of this area is made evident by the fat and split roots of many black alder trees in the region. The **Dumbrāju trail** (0.5 km), which starts alongside the Forest House, was developed so that the area can be toured. The most impressive views can be seen during the spring flooding season or after major rainfall, when the little river bursts out of its banks and floods a major territory. Another place where you can study the black alder swamps is the 3-km **Lake Sloka hiking trail**.





8 Lake Sloka (Slocene)

This is a medium-sized seashore lake that is 3 km long, 1.3 km wide and quite shallow (up to 1.1 m). The best view of Lake Sloka can be had from the **bird watching tower** on its south-western shore. This is the only floating pontoon object of its kind in Latvia. Alongside is the start to the **Lake Sloka hiking trail**, which is around 3 km long and features the **wetands of the Vēršupīte River**, which are regularly flooded. On the edge of the parking lot at Lake Sloka is an **information stand**, behind which you will find a **sulphurous stream**.



Jaunķemeri

The development of Jaunekemeri has everything to do with the Kemeri historical health resort. In 1912, an electric tram was installed between Kemeri and Jaunkemeri, and that made it easier for patients to get to the sea. Two major sanatoriums were built here during the Soviet era – the Jaunkemeri rehabilitation centre (1967) and the Yantamiy Bereg sanatorium (1972). Both remain open today. In 2009, the Jürmala historical health resort Historical Museum was opened at the latter of the facilities.

10 Bigauņciems

This is an ancient fishing village, and it, like other villages along the shore, was seriously damaged during World War I. For a long time after the war, some fishing families had to live in threshing barns and stables. Few of the buildings built in later years have been preserved, because today Bigaunciems, like the other villages along the shore, has become a place of summer homes owned by people from Rīga. Along the seashore, you will find Bigaunciems at the estuary of the Silinupe River, where you will see old boathouses. Along the right bank of the Silinupe and all the way to the P 128 road is the Kupskalni nature trail.



11 Lapmežciems

97 of the 104 houses in this village were destroyed during World War II, but Lapmežciems recovered quickly in the late 1930s, when one of Latvia's most important fishing co-operatives was established there. During the Soviet era, the co-operative was turned into a kolkhoz called "Selga," and its buildings can be seen at the estuary of the Silinupe River. Today Lapmežciems is a popular village for summer homes, leisure and swimming. An interesting monument to the history of fishing is the Lapmežciems pier, where fishermen used to build net huts to store their inventory. There was a settlement of fishermen and hunters in the area between Pīlādžu Street and the left bank of the Silinupe River during the 3rd and 2rd millennium BC, and a memorial stone has been installed in its memory. This is the oldest known populated area in the territory of the Kemeri National Park. Some of the discoveries from the site can be seen at the Lapmežciems Museum, where there is a regional exhibition featuring exhibits related to battles waged by Finnish troops in the area of Klapkalnciems.







12 Ragaciems

Ragaciems was not spared by World War I, but fishing traditions there were not destroyed. After world War II, fishermen from Ragaciems and surrounding villages became part of the "Selga" kolkhoz. Today the local **fish market** is one of the most popular places in the village. If your are walking along the seashore, you will find Ragaciems on the basis of **Cape Ragaciems**, which ends with shallow and rocky shallows which stretch for several hundreds of metres from the current shore. At the end of the cape is the **Ragaciems lighthouse**. Five **net huts** have been restored in the village. Along the six km of shoreline between Ragaciems and Klapkalnciems (the so-called **Slow Mile**), there used to be robbers who attacked travellers. Approximately 1.5 km ahead of Klapkalnciems (from

13 Kaņieris

This is a substantially overgrown and shallow seashore lake (a lagoon from the old Littorine Sea), and the water level in the lake was regulated mechanically several times during the 20th century. The lake features 14 islands of which nine are natural, and the others are manmade for the purposes of nesting water birds. Kanieris is one of Latvia's leading lakes for birds. An ornithological reserve was established here in 1964. The lake was listed as one of the most important bird locations in all of Europe in 1995, and in 1995, it was listed in relation to the Ramsar Convention. At Andersala on the south-eastern shore of the lake are boat rental facilities. A bird watching tower was built on the Riekstu peninsula in 2009. Good views of Kanieris can be had from the Lapmežciems-Antinciems road. The Kanieris castle hill trail is to be restored in 2012, and along it, the most interesting destinations are wetland forests, the Kanieris castle hill, and the old border between Vidzeme and Zemgale. The Starpinupīte valley, which links Kanieris to the bay of Rīga, is a good place for bird watching.

the Ragaciems direction), there is a **memorial stone dedicated to Finnish soldiers**, and it was opened on December 9, 1997. The rock was brought to Ragaciems from south-eastern Finland, where it was a part of anti-tank fortifications in 1940.









14 Smärde

This is an ancient populated area which was first recorded in writing in the 13^{th} century. Today it is a small village with a train station and store. At the centre of the village is a **monument** to the 38 soldiers who fell during World War I here (sculptor Kārlis Zāle, unveiled in 1936). On the north-eastern shore of **Lake Valgums** is the leisure centre "Valgums World," which was built in 1968 for the then chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers, Andrei Kosygin. It was a closed territory which was open only to high-ranking Soviet government representatives and their relatives. Today the location is open to the public, featuring active leisure opportunities, dining facilities and accommodations. The **meditation labyrinth** is nearby.



15 The Great Kemeri Heath

This is one of Latvia's largest moss swamps (6,192 ha), with very distinct lakes, lowlands and hillocks. The Great Kemeri Heath is of importance in maintaining the surrounding hydrological regime and microclimate. It is also a bird watching location of international importance, as well as one of the largest sources of sulphurous streams in the Baltic States. Along the Kalnciems-Kūdra road on the eastern edge of the swamp is an **information stand** which speaks to the management of the swamp. The once popular **pathway** is being restored, and it is to be opened in 2012.



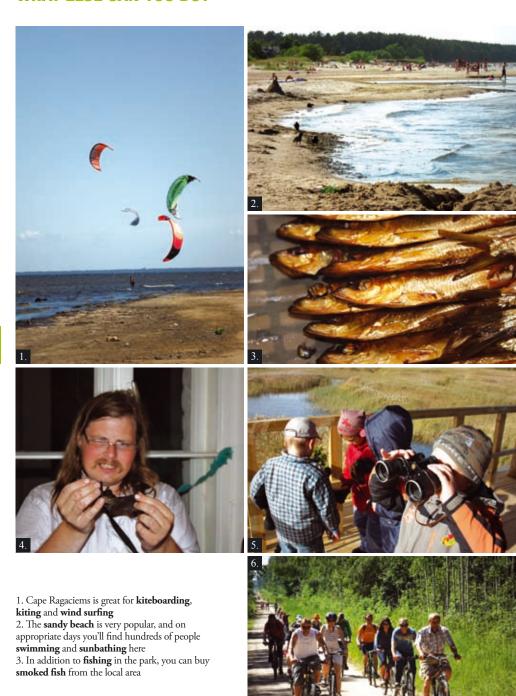


16 The Dunduri meadows

These meadows surround the curvy **Slampe River**, and species of plants and animals that are typical of wet meadows and rivers can be found here. Some of the animals are former tamed livestock adapted to life in the wild, and the animals can be seen from the **bird watching tower** that is nearby. The meadows are accessed via a narrow and forested corridor, the so-called **Throat of Melnragi**. A gravelled road passes along the corridor. The **Kurgāns** hillock at the end of the path offers a great view of the surrounding area.



WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?







- 4. Bat Nights are a fine annual tradition at the Kemeri National Park, and each year lots of people attend the events
 5. Bird Days attract professionals, as well as children who can help in building birdhouses
 6. Biological Diversity Day is one of a number of days at the park when bike trips are organised
 7. Thought is always given to the youngest park visitors when events are organised
 8. Kemeri Travellers Day allows professionals to talk about the wetlands and their inhabitants
 9. During the autumn, the massive local forests are rich with various mushrooms and berries, and you can pick them or just look at them
 10. Meadow Day is an event when professionals will inform you about various types of plants in the area
- the area
- 11. The area around Kemeri and its swamps offers fine **cross-country skiing** opportunities during cold and snowy winters









USEFUL ADVICE

- You will need at least two days to examine the Kemeri National Park thoroughly;
- Dining facilities and accommodations are mostly found in shoreline villages;
- Please remember that there are no accommodations or dining facilities in the village of Kemeri itself;
- Apart from nature reserves (the central and southern part of the Great Kemeri Heath and the Slocene Valley area in the south-western part of Lake Kanieris), the Kemeri National Park is open for hiking, skiing, plant watching, animal watching, landscape watching, berry picking, mushroom hunting, swimming (but not in the high swamp lakes and in full cognition of personal safety), sunbathing, biking and boating;
- You must rent a boat if you wish to boat on Lake Kanieris, and fishermen will need a li-
- Motor vehicles are allowed on all general use roads, but definitely not in the dunes or on the beach (except for those places where there are specific car parking facilities or other relevant infrastructures);
- You may put up a tent and light a campfire only at places which are specifically meant for that purpose and at campsites, but never in the dunes or
- Fishing is banned between April 1 and Mary 31 on the Slocene (Pulkaine) River between Lake Valgums and Lake Kanieris, as well as on the Vecslocene and Slocene rivers between Lake Sloka and the Lielupe River.

Additional information

www.celotajs.lv

Tourism routes in the Kemeri National Park

www.kemeri.lv

News about Kemeri

www.lapmezciems.lv

The Lapmežciems Administrative District

The Kemeri National Park Visitors Centre

Ķemeri, Meža māja, 2 +371 67146824, 67730078, pieriga@daba.gov.lv, www.daba.gov.lv

The Jūrmala Tourism Information Centre

Majori, Lienes iela 5, 2 +371 67147900, info@jurmala.lv, www.jurmala.lv

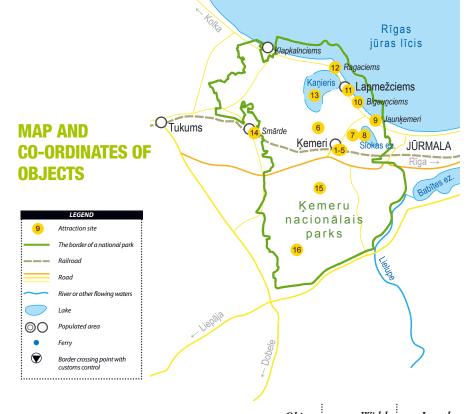
The Jūrmala Spa and Tourism Information

Majori, Jomas iela 50, \$\frac{1}{2}\$ +371 67764276, jurmalainfo@bkc.lv, www.jurmala-info.lv **--** 35 --

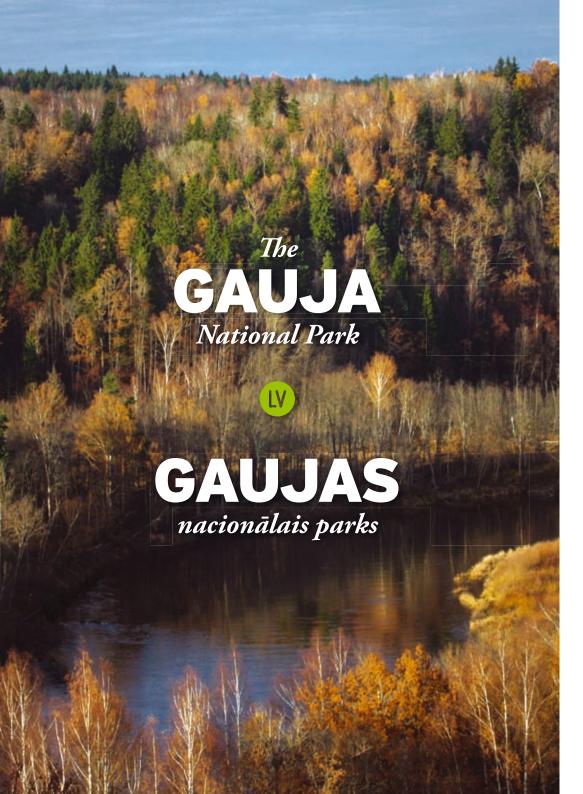
The Tukums Tourism Information Centre

Tukums, Talsu iela 5, 2 +371 63124451, tic@tukums.lv, www.visittukums.lv





| Object | Width | Length |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1 The former Ķemeri swimming facility | N 56°56,76' | E 23°29,99' |
| 2 The Ķemeri National Park (central section) | N 56°56,86' | E 23°30,15' |
| (3) The Ķemeri Hotel | N 56°56,94' | E 23°29,97' |
| 4 The sulphurous stream pavilion and the "Ķirzaciņa" stream | N 56°56,88' | E 23°30,14' |
| 5 The Forest House (Meža māja) | N 56°57,12' | E 23°30,76' |
| 6 The Green Dune (start of route at the end of Partizānu Street) | N 56°56,68' | E 23°28,44' |
| 7 The Vēršupīte wetlands (start of the Dumbrāji trail at the Forest House) | N 56°57,16' | E 23°30,69' |
| 8 Lake Sloka (start of the Lake Sloka trail at the bird watching tower) | N 56°57,44' | E 23°32,80' |
| 9 Jaunķemeri (the Yantarniy Bereg Hotel) | N 56°58,24' | E 23°34,47' |
| 10 Bigauņciems (Siliņupe estuary at the bay of Rīga) | N 56°59,50' | E 23°31,76' |
| 11) Lapmežciems (Lapmežciems Museum) | N 57°00,04' | E 23°30,74' |
| 12 Ragaciems (Ragaciems fish market) | N 57°01,44' | E 23°29,52' |
| (13) Kaṇieris (start of the trial to the Riekstu peninsula and the bird watching tower) | N 56°59,85' | E 23°28,56' |
| 14 Smārde (The "Valguma pasaule" leisure centre) | N 56°59,41' | E 23°18,91' |
| 15 The Great Ķemeri Heath (start of pathway, to be opened in 2012) | N 56°54,78' | E 23°27,63' |
| (16) The Dunduri meadows (Kargāns) | N 56°50,57' | E 23°23,93' |
| | | |



The ancient Gauja River valley with the tributaries of the Gauja River features one of the most outstanding terrains in the Baltic States. There you will see the most impressive Devonian era sandstone cliffs in the region. People have lived in this area for thousands of years, as is seen in many castle hills, medieval castles and estates. This is Latvia's largest and oldest national park.

CONTENTS

The Gauja National Park

- 134 Getting there
- 135 Why was the national park established?
- 139 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 146 What else can you do?
- 148 Useful advice
- 149 Map and co-ordinates of destinations



GETTING THERE

The Gauja National Park is in the historical region of Vidzeme, approximately one hour away from Rīga. The largest populated areas in the park

.....

are Sigulda, Augšlīgatne and Cēsis, and they can easily be reached from Rīga by







By foot

There are several well-appointed nature trails in the park. A hiking route that is approximately 20 km long runs along the Gauja from Sigulda to Līgatne.



By bike

The forest roads and pathways of the park are great for biking. One of the most interesting bike routes in Latvia runs along the banks of the Gauja River from Valmiera to Cēsis. Along the river's left bank, between Sigulda and Līgatne, there are more opportunities to gain experience with biking in nature. Hikers and bikers are welcome on the nature trails of Līgatne. Biking is not appropriate, however, for the A2 (Rīga-Veclaicene) and A3 (Inčukalns-Valka) roads, because they have heavy traffic and do not have proper conditions for bicyclists.



By boat

The Gauja is the most popular river in Latvia for water tourists of all ages. You can take rubber boats, rafts or canoes (the most comfortable option). The Gauja is navigable year round, except when it is frozen over. The Amata River, in turn, is the most popular river in Latvia during the springtime for lovers of extreme water sports. The Brasla River downriver from Straupe is also good for boating.



There is a dense network of roads in the national park. The most popular objects in the park are accessible by car or tourist bus.



There are regularly scheduled bus services along the aforementioned A2 and A3 roads.

Distances among cities and various towns (km)

| | Sigulda | Cēsis |
|----------|------------------|-------|
| Rīga | 54 | 90 |
| Valmiera | 62 (via Straupe) | 32 |

A brief evaluation of the par

| | | - | |
|-------------------------|------------------|---------|------|
| Natural diversity | | | **** |
| Bird watching | | | **** |
| Environmental touris | m products | | *** |
| Infrastructure for nati | ure and active | tourism | **** |
| Diversity in cultural i | and historical o | bjects | **** |
| Cultural tourism prod | ducts | | **** |
| | | | |

Our recommendation on travel in the park:









Boaters on the Gauja River



The diesel train is a comfortable form of travel which will allow you to reach the most interesting destinations in the national park



Cross-country skiing is good for you, and it is a friendly and fine way to learn about the national park during the winter

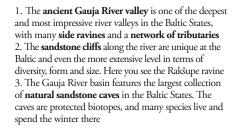


Bike tourists at the Launagiezis cliff

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?





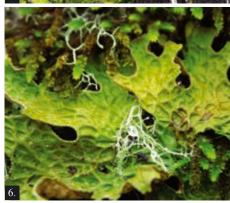


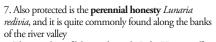


- 4. The **forests along the sides of the river valley** offer a **wealth of flora**, including oaks and other trees
- 5. **Forests** cover approximately one-half of the park's
- 6. **Lungwort** *Lobaria pulmonaria* is a protected lichen which testifies to the fact that the forest has existed for a very long time at this location







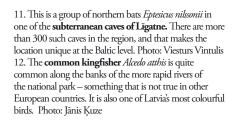


- 8. There are lots of lakes in the park. Lake Ungurs offers a look at uncommon and protected species of plants 9. There are places in the park where you might spot a wolf Canis lupus. Photo: Velga Vitola
- 10. The **old rivers** of the area are of great importance in preserving environmental diversity, and many invertebrates make their lives there





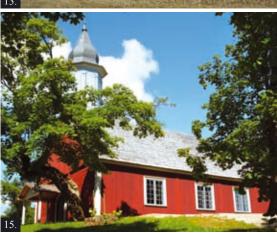






- 13. Nineteen **castle hills** have been found in the national park. Here you see the Satezele castle hill
- 14. There are six **medieval castles** or ruins thereof in the park. Here you see the ruins of the Sigulda castle 15. There are ten **churches** in the park, among which the **Turaida church** is one of the oldest wooden houses of worship in Latvia









16. Also of value in the park is the **cultural landscape** that is made up of **single family farms, old farms, new farms**, and **buildings** such as **livestock barns** and **threshing houses**. There are also **alleys** and other elements. Here you see the Āraiši windmill

17. Several outstanding **estates** are in the park as witnesses to the historical past. Here you see the Ungurmuiža castle 18. There are various **monuments of industrial heritage** in the park. This is the Ligatne paper factory



THE MOST INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

1 S

Sigulda

Start your visit to Sigulda at the ruins of the Sigulda Castle. Work on the castle was begun by the Order of the Brethren of the Sword in 1207, but in 1236 it was rebuilt for the needs of the Livonian Order. The castle suffered much damage during the wars of the latter half of the 16th and early part of the 17th century. It was burned down during the Northern War and was never restored. Today you can visit the south-western corps of the castle's convent building, as well as the tower of the main gate. Behind it is the internal forecastle with an open air stage from which you can get an impressive view of the ancient Gauja River valley. Reconstruction of the ruins is ongoing at this time. To the South is the New Castle of Sigulda, which was owned by a nobleman called Kropotkin and was built between 1878 and 1881. From 1923 until 1940, the castle was known as the Writers' Castle, while during the Soviet era, a sanatorium for cardiology patients was installed there. Since 2003, the castle has been home to the Sigulda Administrative District Council. Buildings that have survived include a wooden mansion (mid-19th century) in which the Kropotkin family lived, a granary (turn of the 18th century), the gardener's residence (19th century) and a stone wall (19th century). Less than 2 km to the South-east of the New Castle, you will find the Vējupīte ravine. Here you will find the Pētera cave, which is 3.6 m deep and 6.1 m high, as well as the deep Pūču ravine and the Krauklupīte River. Where the two river valleys come together, you will find the Satezele castle hill (90x75 m). During the early 13th century, an oaken castle built for the ruler of the Liv lands was there. Not far is the Krauklu ravine - a ravine on the left bank of the Vējupīte with sandstone walls that stand 11 m high, as well as the Krauklu cave, which is 5.2 m deep. Where the Vējupīte ravine and the ancient

Gauja River valley come together, there is the Paradizes (Gleznotāju) hill, which is a lovely location that has been drawn and photographed for centuries. There is an electric cart to get you to the hill. In Sigulda itself, there is a Ferris wheel (only open during the summer), along with an airborne tram, which is the only transport vehicle of its type in the Baltic States (installed in 1969). The cable which carries the tram is 1,060 m long, and without any supports, it links the banks of the ancient Gauja River valley between Sigulda and Krimulda at an average of 40 m above the Gauja. There are fantastic views from the pram. In the south-western part of Sigulda, you can hike to the mighty Beites cliff, which is split up by the deep ravine of a stream. On the western side of the ravine you will find a viewing area known as Keizarskats. It is 67 m above the Gauja with a good view of Krimulda and the Turaida Castle. A viewing area was installed here in 1862, when Tsar Alexander II of Russia visited the location. The wooden Keizarkresls (Emperor's seat) is on the western side of the ravine.





Krimulda and its surroundings

The Krimulda Lutheran Church is one of the oldest houses of worship in Latvia. It was built in the early 13th century after the conquering of Kubesele, and since then it has been rebuilt many times. Alongside the church is a meditation labyrinth known as the Lily Flower. When the Liv leader Kaupo fell during the Battle of Vīlande, it is said, his ashes were interred at the church. People also believe that the grave of Kaupo is a small hillock next to the nearby Runtinupīte (Runtinš) stream, on the right bank of which is the Kubesele or Runtinala cave. It is 7 m deep and was dug by hand. On the left bank of the Runtinupīte is the Kubesele castle hill, and alongside the church is the start to the Kubesele nature trail. Take the trail to get to the Gauja and the Great (Runtina) rock which is there. Anchor blocks put up by rafters on the Gauja are also there. The Krimulda Medieval Castle (4 km to the East of the Krimulda church) was built in the latter half of the 13th century at a place where the right bank of the ancient Gauja River valley is split by the deep Vikmestes ravine. The castle was run by the Rīga Dome and the Council of Rīga Archbishops, and it was an impressive building with a wall that was 1.5 m thick around its internal yard. In 1601, the Swedish army blew up the Krimulda castle when it was retreating. Today the forested castle hill still has some **castle ruins**. Alongside is the **airborne tram** and the start to the Krimulda serpentine road. The nearby Krimulda Estate was first mentioned in writing in the 15th century. The **mansion** that is there now was built in the 19th century in the style of Neo-Classicism by the nobleman Lieven. After the mansion was taken over by the state in the 1920s, it was handed over to the Latvian Red Cross, which established a children's sanatorium there. The "Krimulda" rehabilitation hospital occupies the building today. Of the old estate buildings, there are still the stables, the livestock barn, the residences of servants and the estate manager, the so-called Swiss House, and a park. Thematic tours are available



at the estate. If you boat down the Gauja, you can see the **Velnalas cliffs**, which are approximately 15 m high. They are also visible from the left bank of the Gauja, where there is a rest area. At the centre of the cliffs is the **Krimuldas Velnala cave**, which is about 19 m deep and 4.7 m high. Head down the lower part of the right bank of the Gauja from the Velnalas cliffs toward Turaida, and you will see the **Piķenes cliff**, which displays large areas of sandstone. At the base of the cliff is the **Piķenes beaver** trail, which is ~1 km long. At the edge is the **Mazā Velna cliff** (5 m long) with its Gudrības stream, as well as the **Aunapieres cave**, which is almost as long. There are also small and ancient streams in the area.

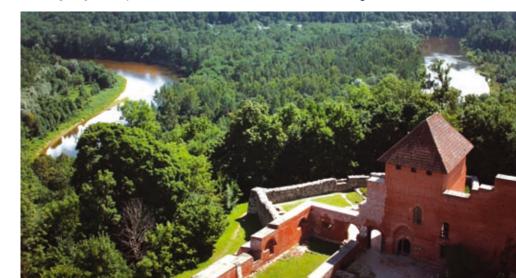


3 Turaida

On your way to Turaida, you simply must visit the **Gūtmaṇa cave**. It is the widest (12 m), highest (up to 10 m) and one of the mightiest caves in Latvia (a cave-type niche), and it is also important in terms of cultural and historical legends (the most popular relates to the Rose of Turaida). There are wall and ceiling engravings which have been left there by visitors for many centuries – the oldest date back to the late 17th century. The stream which flows out of the cave is said to have medicinal properties. The **Turaida Museum Reserve** has been established at the place where the right bank of the ancient Gauja River valley is split by several deep ravines of small streams. It features monuments of Baltic importance – ones which have a history dating back 1,000 years. Start at the Turaida Estate, which was first mentioned in documents in the 16th century and is an outstanding example of an estate in Vidzeme. 21 buildings have been preserved, and they were erected between the 18th and the early 20th century. You can tour the stables, wheelhouse, sauna, smithy, fish cellar, granary, overseer's residence, old residence of the nobleman, residence of servants. drying house, etc. If you walk in the direction of the Turaida Castle, you will find the Grave of the Rose of Turaida, which relates to the legend of Maija of Turaida, who sacrificed her life in the name of love. Alongside the grave is a major linden tree (in poor shape) which was supposedly planted on the young woman's grave. Further on is the Turaida Lutheran Church, which is the third church in the row and is one of the oldest wooden churches in Latvia (1750). It is a log structure with a Baroque tower. The altar and pulpit in the church date back to the mid-18th century. The altar painting "Golgotha" was painted in the late 17th or early 18th century. There is also an historical exhibition in the building. Folk Song Hill is home to the Folk Song Park, which was installed in and after 1985 in honour of the 150th anniversary of the birth of the father of Latvian folk songs, Krišjānis Barons. Stone sculptures produced by Indulis Ranka can be found



in the park at this time. There are annual folklore events in the park. Before the construction of the **stone Turaida Castle** (in 1214), there was a wooden castle built by the Livs here. The Turaida Castle was owned by the bishop of Rīga. It survived until 1776, when it burned down. Extensive restoration began in 1953, restoring the upper floor of the **main tower**, the **granary** (an exhibition about the Sigulda Administrative District), the **semi-circular tower**, and the **southern corps** of the castle. A **museum exhibition** is housed in the castle today, and it speaks to historical events in the local region.



4 Līgatne

The history of Līgatne has everything to do with the **Līgatne paper factory**. During the late 19th and early 20th century, residences for workers were erected here, along with a school, a birthing facility, a hospital, a club, a guesthouse and other buildings which have been preserved to this very day. During the Soviet era, the Līgatne paper factory mostly produced school notebooks which were sent to all of the republics of the USSR. Today the factory collects scrap paper and produces wrapping paper with it. The Līgatne paper factory is the only functioning company of its kind in Latvia, and guided tours are available. The historical centre of the Līgatne paper factory is a cultural monument. On the bank of the Gauja River in the northern section of Līgatne, you will find the only **crossing point** which remains on the Gauja and, indeed, on any river in the Baltic States. Run by the current of the river, the crossing point is a transportation method of local importance. To the West of Līgatne are the **Līgatne** nature trails, which are home to deer, wild boars, bears, foxes and bobcats, all living under conditions that are as close as possible to natural ones (it is the best object of its kind in the Baltic States). The nature trails offer a dense network of hiking trails and a paved route for cars and bikes. During the winter it is a cross-country ski trail. A modern visitors centre awaits you. To the East of Līgatne is the Līgatne Rehabilitation Centre, and there you will find an object that is unique at the European





level – a former Soviet bunker which was meant to be the place where Latvia's top-ranking military and civilian personnel would live and work in the case of a nuclear war or chemical attack. The bunker was opened back up in 2003, and it has been preserved unchanged to this very day. Between Augšlīgatne and Līgatne, stop by at the Vienkoču Park, where you will find dugout canoes that are the work of Rihards Vidzickis, along with mock-ups of various buildings, the Sand House, and various thematic events.

5 The Amata River Valley

The Amata is one of the most rapid rivers in Latvia during the spring. Downstream from the Rīga-Veclaicene (A2) road it flows through a deep valley in which the average fall exceeds 3m/km or as much as 8-10 m/km. Water tourists usually make use of the river between **Melturi** and the **Zvārtes cliff** or the **Veclauču bridge**, which crosses the Līgatne-Kārļi road. This is no river for beginners. The Amata river valley

is impressive because of sandstone and dolomite cliffs. Best known among them is the Vizuļu cliff, where there are beautiful ice falls during the winter, the Ainavu cliff, the Kaubju cliff, the Dzilna cliff, the Zvārtes cliff, and the Lustūzis cliff. The Amata geological trail, which is marked with orange dots on tree trunks, runs along the right bank of the river from Melturi to the Veclaužu bridge.



6 Āraiši

The most popular object in Āraiši is the Āraiši lake castle, which is of European importance and is a reconstruction of the Lettigalian castle which stood there in the 9th and 10th century. This is the only place in the Baltic States where visitors can learn about the lives of local residents more than 1,000 years ago. Various thematic events are organised here. The lake castle is part of the Āraiši Museum Reserve, which also includes castle ruins, a Lutheran church, the so-called Swedish pine.

a windmill and the Drabešu Estate. Alongside the Āraiši manse is the Geidānmuiža Estate, where fans of Medieval life can get a first-hand look at people's lives during the Livonian era. During the winter there are activities related to long-handled weapons, trips in ornate sleds, skating on bone skates, and traditional winter games. During the summer, you can test various types of weapons and taste foods from the Livonian age.



7 Cēsis

The origins of Cēsis can be found on Riekstu hill (18 metres high) and its surroundings. There was a wooden Vendian castle here between the 11th and 13th century. Riekstu hill is in the central part of Pils park. Stone stairs lead to the ruins of the Cesis Castle, which was built in the early 13th century and rebuilt in the late 15th and early 16th century. The Cesis Castle was the residence of the masters of the Livonian Order and one of the strongest fortresses in what are now the Baltic States. It was last sacked during the Northern War. Informational tours are available, and you can climb the Western tower and visit the ancient prison of the castle. Your way will be lit by lanterns. There are also theatrical tours which allow you to test your talents at Medieval games. Also in the territory of the castle is the ancient jewellery smithy of Daumants Kalniņš. Alongside the castle is the New Cesis Castle (Pils Square 9), which

was built in 1777 by the nobleman Karl Eberhard von Sievers. The building features a Neo-gothic tower that is decorated with wooden arcades and aisles, and it is an example of the first estates in Latvia designed in the style of Eclecticism. The Cesis Museum of History and Art is housed in the castle, and in March 2012 it will open a modern exhibition, "Cesis: A Symbol of Latvian History." In an addition to the building will be the visitors centre of the castle, along with the Cesis Tourism Information Centre. You simply must scale the castle's tower! Opposite the New Cesis Castle are several buildings – the stables and wheelhouse of the Cesis Castle Estate (both from the first half of the 19th century), where you will find the Cesis Exhibition Building. You can also find the granary, the coachmen's house and the old brewery. On the opposite side of Lenču Street is the romantic Maija park, which was installed in the 1830s. Walk down Lielās Katrīnas, Mazās Katrīnas, Mazo Kalēju, Kalēju and Lielo Līvu

streets and Līvu Square to see wooden buildings from the turn of the 18th century. Outside the church in Torna Street is the sculpture "Passing Centuries," which is the work of Matiass Jansons. The sculpture is also known as the "Old Man of Time". It is said that if you rub his lantern, you can see the future. One of the most impressive buildings in Cēsis is St. John's Lutheran Church, which was built in the late 13th century as the dome of the Livonian Order. It is a Roman-style three-section basilica with elements of Gothic design and a 65 metre tower which was erected in 1853. The building has been rebuilt several times, most recently in the 20th century. Inside the church are the grave markers of masters and bishops of the Livonian Order. The **pulpit** was manufactured in 1748, the oak **altar** dates back to 1858, and the altar painting, "Crucified One," was painted in 1862. There are artistically valuable stained glass windows above the altar. The organ was produced by the E.F. Walker Company in 1907, and it is one of the best concert instruments in Latvia. A sun clock with the year 1744 is in the south-western corner of the church. It is worth climbing the viewing tower. At the foot of the church is Rose Square, the former Market Square (mid-13th century to 1927, restored in 2008). During the Middle Ages, a punishment pole and the city well were found here. Rīgas Street has been the main artery in the old city since its origins. Here you will find the most outstanding 18th and 19th century buildings of the city – the former City Hall, the Fābera House, and the Princešu House. At one end of the street is Liv Square, where, in the 13th century, there was a church, a cemetery and the Rīga gate in the city walls. Today the square is decorated with a lighted fountain at the place where the well known as Lejas Šķimbēgs was found in the 13th century. At the other end of the street is a reconstruction of the foundations of the Raunas gate in the city walls of the 14th and 15th centuries. A bit further along is Vienības Square with the Victory monument.

8 The Ērģeļu (Ērgļu) cliffs

Approximately 7 km to the North of the centre of Cēsis, the Ērģeļu cliffs are the most monolithic sandstone wall in the Baltic States. They are some 700 long, with 330 m passing along the Gauja River, and as much as 22 m high. A viewing area reveals a lovely landscape of the ancient Gauja River valley. It is said that the name of the cliffs, which translates to "Organ cliffs," is based on echoes reminiscent of the sound of an organ. The infrastructure around the cliffs is to be restored in 2012.

9 Ungurmuiža

The Ungurmuiža Estate is one of the most outstanding examples of Baroque wooden construction in Latvia in the 18th century. The mansion (1732) is the only wooden structure of its kind to have survived. On the second floor are unique and restored wall paintings produced by G.D. Hinsch between 1750 and 1756. Master craftsmen from Germany, Russia and Sweden built the estate, with a granary, livestock barn, brewery, schoolhouse and the teahouse which was built in 1753





and restored later. The estate suffered much damage during World War 1 and again during the Soviet era. The **Kūduma park** which is alongside the estate boasts mighty linden and oak trees, as well as the **chapel of the Baron Kampenhausen family**, which was built in 1760. Each year Ungurmuiža is home to a concert series called "Šubertiāde," during which there are performances of compositions by Franz Schubert, Robert Schubert and Fredric Chopin.

10 The Lielstraupe Castle

The Lielstraupe Castle is the only one in Latvia which joins together a Medieval castle and a church. Work on the castle began in 1263. The building suffered much damage during the 17th and 18th centuries, as well as during the 1905 Revolution. The buildings were restored in 1909 after a design by the architect Wilhelm Bockslaff. The Lielstraupe Church can be visited during worship services, and it contains several artistic monuments – the organ loft from the 17th century and the **pulpit paintings** from the 18th century. The **stained glass windows** in the church were produced by the artist Sigismunds Vidbergs, and they were installed in 1944 - "Golgotha" and "Christ's Birth." The church steeple features a clock made by the local clockmaker Aide, and on the wall of the church is a sun clock. In the park of the castle, you can look at the **bell tower** that was built of wood in 1744. Since 1963, the castle has been home to a drugs treatment hospital.





11 Sietiņiezis

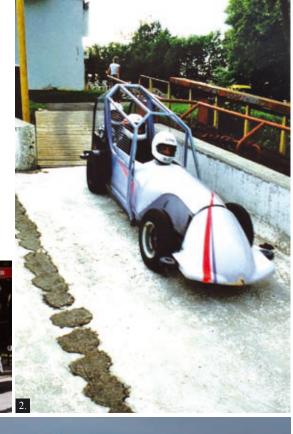
The Sietiņiezis cliffs are on the right bank of the Gauja River between Valmiera and Jāṇmuiža. A circular nature trail offers a good look at it. The cliffs are up to 15 m high and nearly 500 m long. The cliffs are interesting because of their diversity of form. It is said that the name of the cliffs, which translates to "Sieve cliffs," comes from bees which drilled little holes on the sandstone surface. Approximately 4 k to the South of Sietiņiezis you will find the Bregžu Chair-Maker Museum, where you will see an interesting exhibition of woven chairs, instruments, photographs and other objects related to chairmaking from the late 18th to the mid-20th century. Ceramics artist Īrisa Vainovska has her workshop in the museum.



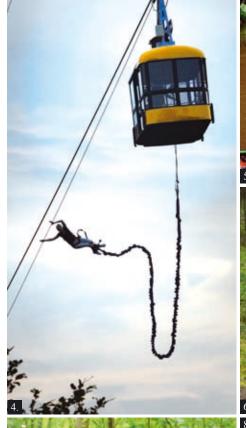
WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

- 1. The electric cart is an environmentally friendly way of touring Sigulda, Turaida and Līgatne
 2. There are exciting downhill races in wheeled carts at Sigulda and Rāmkalni during the summer, while the Sigulda Bobsled and Luge Track offers summer and winter sledding
 3. Take a hot air balloon to get a completely different view of the landscapes of the ancient Gauja River valley
 4. Bungee jumping is for the bravest of the brav
 5. You can go fishing on the Gauja, Lake Ungurs, Lake Raiskums and Lake Vaidava (with licenses). The small and rapid Amata, Brasla and Rauna rivers are appropriate for fly fishing





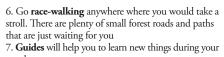




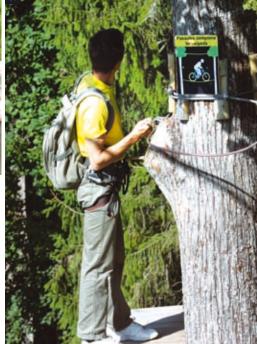








- 8. There are **obstacle courses** at various levels of difficulty in Sigulda, with ropes, platforms and other elements in the trees







- 9. **Skiers** and **snowboarders** are welcome on the steep hills of the ancient Gauja River valley and other river valleys in the are 10. **Horseback riding** and horse drawn cart rides
- 10. Horseback riding and horse drawn cart rides are available around the Turaida and Ligatne nature trails. During the winter there will be sled rides
- 11. There are a variety of **thematic events** along the Līgatne nature trails each year. Here you see Mushroom Day. Photo: Anda Andrušaite



148

USEFUL ADVICE

- Take at least **4 to 5 days** to visit the Gauja National Park:
- Tourist services are available in Sigulda, Līgatne, Cēsis and Valmiera (on the northern edge of the park);
- You can hike, watch plants, animals and landscapes and hunt for berries and mushrooms throughout the park, except for the nature reserves (the Sudas Swamp Reserve, the Nurmuižu Ravine Reserve, the Roču Forest Reserve and the Inciems Ancient Shore Reserve). You may swim in the Gauja, but only at assigned swimming areas, because elsewhere the current can be too strong, and there are also shifting sands. You may sunbathe, bike, and go on the waterways in rowboats or inflatable rafts;
- You can **boat** down the Gauja, Brasla and Amata, but only in boats which do not have internal combustion motors:
- Tents and campfires are only permitted in specific areas, campsites and yards of homes. There are special leisure and camping areas for water tourists on the banks of the Gauja, Amata and Brasla rivers;
- Avoid caves, particularly when bats are wintering there, because that will protect very fragile biotopes and species. Please do not damage the sandstone cliffs!

Additional information

www.celotajs.lv

Tourism routes in the Gauja National Park

— >k ===

www.gnp.lv

Tourism information about the Gauja National Park

— ><

The Vidzeme Regional Administration of the Environmental Protection Board

Sigulda, Baznīcas iela 3, 🎓 +371 67974006, vidzeme@daba.gov.lv, www.daba.gov.lv

The Sigulda Administrative District Tourism Information Centre

Sigulda, Raiņa iela 3, 2 +371 67971335, info@sigulda.lv, www.sigulda.lv



The Līgatne Tourism Information Centre

Līgatne, Spriņģu iela 2, **2** +371 64153169, info@visitligatne.lv, www.visitligatne.lv



The Cesis Tourism Information Centre

Cēsis, Pils laukums 9, **☎** +371 64121815, info@cesis.lv, www.turisms.cesis.lv



The visitors centre at the Gūtmaņa cave

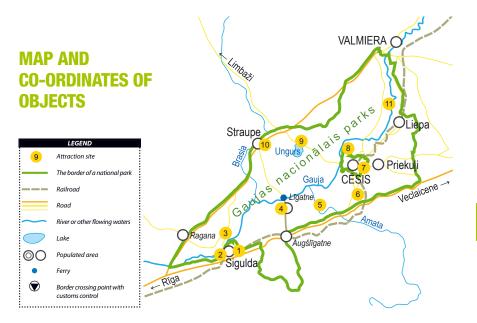
Sigulda, Turaidas iela 2 a, **2** +371 26657661, ac@gnp.lv, www.gnp.lv

The Līgatne Nature Trails Visitors Centre

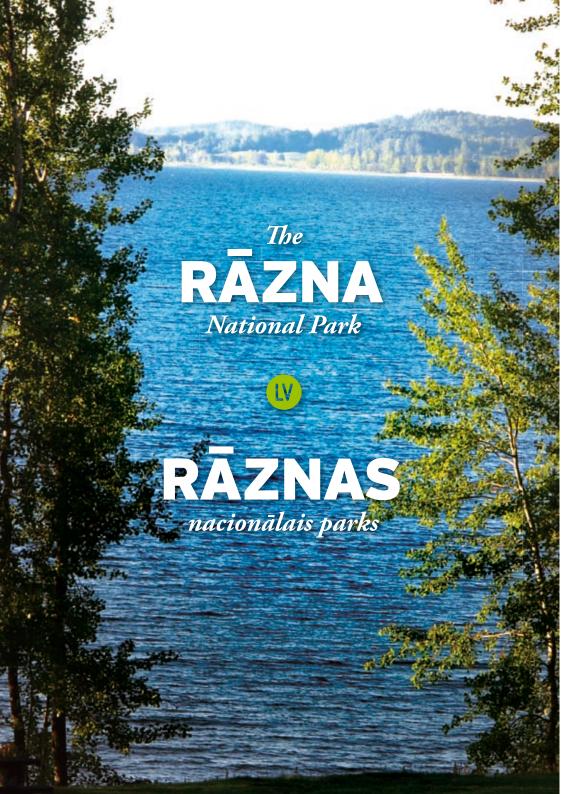
Ligatnes dabas takas, Ligatne Parish, 2 +371 64153313, +371 28328800, ac@gnp.lv, www.gnp.lv

The Zvārtes Cliff Visitors Centre

Amata Administrative District, Drabešu Parish, open early May to October 31, 2 +371 29335446, ac@gnp.lv, www.gnp.lv



| Object | Width | Length |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Sigulda (Sigulda castle ruins) | N 57°09,98' | E 24°51,00' |
| 2 Krimulda (Krimulda Lutheran Church) | N 57°09,80' | E 24°46,04' |
| 3 Turaida (Turaida Museum Reserve) | N 57°11,19' | E 24°50,85' |
| 4 Līgatne (Līgatne nature trails) | N 57°14,88' | E 25°00,88' |
| 5 Amatas ieleja (car park at Zvārte cliff) | N 57°14,75' | E 25°08,85' |
| 6 Āraiši (Āraiši lake castle) | N 57°14,98' | E 25°16,82' |
| 7 Cēsis (Cēsis Castle) | N 57°18,80' | E 25°16,23' |
| 8 Ērģeļu cliffs | N 57°21,62' | E 25°15,58' |
| 9 Ungurmuiža | N 57°21,77' | E 25°05,10' |
| 10 Lielstraupe castle | N 57°20,83' | E 24°56,87' |
| 11) Sietiņiezis | N 57°25,63' | E 25°23,19' |



Latgale is a special region of Latvia in terms of culture and history. It features the Lettigalian language, traditions, foods, beverages and faith. In this, Latgale differs from other regions in the country. Latgale is known as the "land of lakes," while Lake Rāzna is known as the "sea of Latgale." The Rāzna National Park is the fourth national park in Latvia and was established quite recently so as to protect these and other environmental, cultural and historical values.

CONTENTS

The Rāzna National Park

- 152 Getting there
- 153 Why was the national park established? 156 Latgale: An unusual region of Latvia
- 157 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 161 What else can you do?
- 162 Useful advice
- 163 Map and co-ordinates of destinations



GETTING THERE

The Rāzna National Park is in the historical region of Latgale (the "land of lakes"). You

can reach it from the largest towns in the region, Rēzekne and Krāslava, by

By foot

The park features several well-appointed nature trails.



By bike

It will take at least two or three days to tour the park by bike, but please remember that many of the roads in the area are gravelled. Your best choice will be the smallest forest and countryside roads which lead through authentic Lettigalian villages and small family farms. Only then will you feel the true colour if this location. There are several labelled bike routes in the park, as well.



By boat

You can take boat trips of various lengths on Lake Rāzna, utilising different kinds of boats for that purpose. Given the size of the lake, you must take your safety into account. Make sure that you look at weather forecasts before you set off. Many other lakes in the region are appropriate for short leisure trips or fishing.



All of the important tourist destinations in the park are accessible by car and tourist bus. It is more convenient to travel through the park in your own vehicle because of the many gravelled roads whether you want to or not. Park the car and go on radial hikes or ride your bike.



Regularly scheduled bus services run along the Rēzekne-Dagda-Krāslava (P 55) and Rēzekne-Malta-Daugavpils (A13) roads. The latter road does not cross the park's territory, but is very close to its boundaries.

Distances among cities and populated areas (km)

| | Lipuški |
|------------|------------------|
| Rīga | 260 (via Preiļi) |
| Jēkabpils | 120 (via Preiļi) |
| Rēzekne | 36 |
| Daugavpils | 89 (via Malta) |
| Krāslava | 73 |

A brief evaluation of the park

Natural diversity Bird watching Environmental tourism products Infrastructure for nature and active tourism *** Diversity in cultural and historical objects ***** Cultural tourism products



Our recommendation on travel in the park:













The **Latgale highlands** when dandelions are in bloom

Bike tourists at Lamaši

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?



- 1. There are small **wetlands** in the park. The Andrupene moss swamp has an information trail which allows you to look at the area up close
- 2. Along the shores of Lake Ežezers, you will find stands of oaks which are uncommon biotopes in
- 3. There are many different **plants** in the park. Here you see the Baltic orchid Dactylorhiza baltica 4. The **lesser eagle** Aquila pomarina is often seen in
- the park. Photo: Andris Klepers













- 5. The park is an appropriate habitat for many kinds of **bats**. Here you see the nocturne bat in a stand of oak trees. Photo: Viesturs Vinulis
- 6. Reintroduction of the red-bellied toad Bombina bombina has been successful at the park
- 7. **Horses** of various breeds can be found in Latgale, and they are used as an everyday form of transport or to help with farm work









- 8. This farm in Andrupene is one of the few places where tourists can enjoy traditional national foods from Latgale. This dish is known as "kļockas"
- 9. Various crucifixes at the side of the road are seen only in Latgale in Latvia. Also of interest are small Catholic churches and the prayer houses of the Old Believers 10. Typical decorative elements on buildings in Latgale, window jambs, are commonly seen
- 11. Old Believers have lived on the shores of Lake Rāzna and elsewhere for several centuries, and theirs is a very separate cultural environment









Latgale: An unusual region of Latvia

So what is Latgale, the Latvian "land of lakes"? This is one of the few territories in the Baltic States where an indigenous language other than the state language of Latvian is spoken. The Lettigalian language is alive. It is used on an everyday basis in families and in public life, and people are proud of their linguistic skills. Old traditions are very much respected in Latgale. Pottery is an excellent example, particularly in terms of a pottery school known as "Pūdnīku skūla," where black ceramic methods that are hundreds of years old are still used today. Staff there will be delighted to introduce you to the methods. Lettigalian foods include klockas, gulbišnīki, asuškas, krupniks, golupci, and pancks with cimuss. Šmakovka is a locally produced alcoholic beverage that is made of bread, grain, potatoes, etc. It is on the table in every village. It is a good thing that there are increasing numbers of places in Latgale where this culinary heritage is offered to guests. The identity of Latgale is also seen in its cultural environment. Only in Latgale do we find log buildings with richly decorated facades, characteristically painted window jambs, black smoke saunas, typical farms and layouts of residential areas, etc. Latgale is a place where not just many forms of culture, but also many types of religion encounter one another, and that is due to the multi-layered history of the region, which has been part of various states. Living alongside one another here are Catholics, Old Believers. the Orthodox, as well as Lutherans. There are Lettigalians, Latvians, Russians, Belarusians, Poles and other nationalities. A key element of the Lettigalian landscape are the many crucifixes that are found along the sides of roads and at road crossings. Latgale is a place where you will find a wealth of material, as well as non-tangible heritage - oral traditions, evening parties, outdoor balls and Lettigalian weddings where various local musical instruments are used. Household objects are used to make "noise" during these performances a bench made to squeak with a broom handle, wooden spoons, a wooden washboard, a cowbell, and a laundry roller. The musical values of Latgale are nurtured by many local folklore groups and musicians. This is Latgale - one of the most unusual ethnographic regions in the Baltic States.

- 1. Baking bread. Photo: Līga Kondrāte
- 2. Making ancient Lettigalian jewellery. Photo: Līga Kondrāte
- 3. A Lettigalian folklore group. Photo: Līga Kondrāte

INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

The Lūznava Estate

This estate dates back to the early 20th century. The mansion was built of brick and split fieldstones between 1905 and 1911 in the styles of Historicism and Art Nouveau. The estate was owned by Professor Stanislavs Kerbedzs from St Petersburg - the first Russian engineer to design new principles for bridge building. His wife, Yevgenia, was an art lover, and she brought various objects of art to the estate from Italy. During the summer, the estate was a popular place for artists to gather. Today the estate features a landscape park with several ponds. There is a statue of the Madonna, which was produced by an unknown Italian artist. During World War II, the statue was damaged and thrown into one of the ponds, but it was restored in 1991. A social centre is being established at the estate at this time, and it can be toured in the company of a guard.



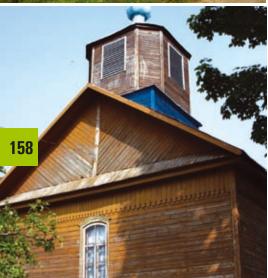
There are two points of interest in Zosna. The Roman Catholic Church of St Archangel Michael was built in 1800 and rebuilt in 1825. It is one of the smallest wooden churches in Latgale and the oldest house of worship in the national park. The renowned altar painting "Madonna With Child" can be found inside the church. Also worth a look are the gates, fence and bell tower of the church. Nearby is the mansion of the Zosna Estate, which is uncommon in design for Latgale in that the technique of half-timbering was used for it. The estate emerged in the late 19th century, and the mansion was built in 1870 in the style of Historicism and at the commission of the aristocratic Golytsin family. Some of the interior of the building has been preserved – doors, ceiling rosettes and tiles in the hallways. The coach house that was built in 1820 is the oldest building at the estate. Today the estate and its buildings can only be viewed from the outside. The Zosna Estate is surrounded by a small park.













3 Lake Rāzna

Lake Rāzna is the second largest lake in Latvia in terms of area, but in terms of its water capacity (405 million m³ of water, which represents approximately 1/5 of the water in all of Latvia's lakes) it is the largest. It is no accident that the lake is known as the "sea of Latgale." Its average depth is 7 m, and the greatest depth is 17 m. There are 10 picturesque islands on the lake, all of them along its western and southern sections, particularly in the two major bays - Zosnasgals and Dukstigals. On the eastern and south-eastern shores of the lake are leisure facilities and swimming areas. Sandy beaches can also be found on the northern and north-eastern shores of the lake. Lake Rāzna attracts tourists because of the clarity of its water. Bike around the lake to get a good look at it. The 2 km road between Folvarkova and Vilkagrogs along the Rēzekne-Dagda-Krāslava road is particularly picturesque.

4 The Lipuški Old Believer Prayer House

The community of Old Believers around Lipuški has been there for a long time and is the largest congregation in the Baltic States. There are ancient Old Believer cemeteries on the shores of Lake Rāzna. The Old Believer prayer house at Lipuški was built in 1893. It suffered many attacks by robbers, and so the icons in the building are copies. It might be added that until 1905, houses of worship had to be built in a way which made them no different from ordinary homes. No bells, no crosses, no cupolas. That is why the prayer house at Lipuški was built as a residential home. When the local government found out, there were plans to shut the place down, but the Old Believers put up an image of the tsarina alongside the icons, and that ensured the building's survival. The prayer house can only be viewed from the outside.

5 Mākoņkalns Hill

One of the most popular destinations in the historical region of Latgale, Mākonkalns Hill (also known as Padebešu Hill or Volkenbergas Hill) has a car park at its foot and wooden stairs to climb up to the top. From the flat surface of this major hillock (247 m above sea level, ~60 m above the local areas), you will get a wonderful view of Latgale and Lake Rāzna, which is some 2 km away. During the 13th century, the Livonian Order built the impregnable Volkenberga Castle at the top of Mākonkalns Hill – one of the first fortifications in Latvia. Fragments of the castle walls can still be seen at the location. Architect Pēteris Blūms has said that this was a special type of castle wall - the so-called shield wall. Legends say that after the death of the lord of the castle and his wife, their vast properties were divided up among three daughters - Roze, Lūcija and Marija. Each sister built a new castle on her land - Roze built Rēzekne, Lūcija built Ludza, and Marija build Vilaka. The memorial plaque at the foot of Mākonkalns Hill speaks to the fact that Latvian President Kārlis Ulmanis visited the site in 1938.

6 The Red Colt Hillocks

This is a farm ("Rudo kumeļu pauguri" in Latvian) which breeds 20 horses and other types of livestock. The owners have collected and restored eight horse-drawn carriages. The route "Along the Red Colt Hillocks" is about 2 km long, and you can ride it on horseback or in an ox-drawn cart. There are also trips of various lengths and durations in a cart – ones which can last up to five days. During the winter, the sled known as *Russkaya troika* is available for your enjoyment.

7 The Evalds Vasilevskis pottery workshop

This is the only pottery workshop in the national park, and master craftsman Evalds Vasilevskis, who runs it, was a founder of the "Pūdnīku skūla" pottery school, which is part of the Latvian Cultural Fund. He uses ancient methods to produce ceramics, using

the soot technique and a kiln dug into the ground. Apply in advance, and you will be able to visit the kiln, work with clay and purchase the artist's artworks. The kiln is at Akminīši along the side of the Rēzekne-Krāslava





8 Lielais Liepukalns Hill

This is the highest hill in the Rāznava hillocks of the Latgale highlands and the third highest hill in Latvia (189.3 m above sea level and 86 m above the surrounding territory). A viewing tower was installed at the top of the hill in 2011. The location is particularly lovely during sunsets.

9 The Bližņeva Old Believers Prayer House

One of the unique houses of worship in the national park, this one has a red brick bell tower and a set of residential buildings to establish an interesting cultural landscape complex. The house can be viewed from the outside.







Lake Ežezers

No other lake in Latvia has more islands, though the claim that there are 69 in all is an exaggeration, because some authors have taken sandbars which are covered with reeds and rushes to be islands. In truth the number of islands is about two times fewer. The largest number of islands can be found in the northeastern part of the lake. The largest, **Lielā Lāča Island** (45 ha) is in the western part thereof. It is said that there used to be a farm on the island. The **oak stands** which are on the islands and shores of the lake are known as **Piļori** and **Pahatnīka**, and they are part of a nature reserve. There is a short hiking trail with a place to rest in the Pilori stand.





11 The Museum of the Andrupene farm

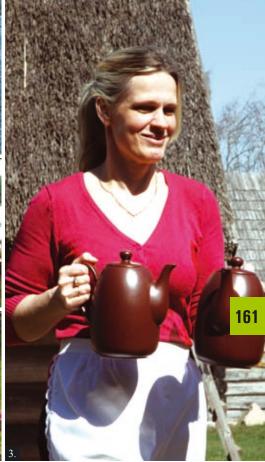
This museum features an authentic representation of a late 19th century Lettigalian farm with a house, granary, livestock barn, sauna, threshing barn and smithy. Some of the buildings were transported from the Libini village in the Andrupene Parish, while others were built anew. Theatrical performances of Lettigalian wedding and Summer Solstice traditions are presented, a market is held on St Michael's Day, and you can learn various crafts. If you contact the museum in advance, you will be able to taste local dishes such as klockas and pancaks with cimuss, Andrupene bread and cheese, as well as teas made from locally harvested grasses and he local alcoholic beverage known as šmakovks. To the North of the farm is the Andrupene swamp, which has a nature trail that is less than one km long.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?









- 1. Sandy and well-appointed **beaches** are found on the eastern shore of Lake Rāzna. Holiday makers can sunbathe, swim and enjoy the water here
- 2. The lakes of the park are popular among **fishermen**, including ice fishermen during the winter. On the shore of Lake Ežezers there are **places for leisure** where you can have a meal
- 3. If you visit the Andrupene Farm Museum, you must taste local **foods** and **beverages**
- 4. The **opening of the kiln** at Evalds Vasilevskis' workshop is a cultural and historical event which is worth seeing in person
- 5. Annual cultural events will demonstrate Lettigalian cultural traditions of all kinds. Here you see the **Mākoņkalns folklore group**. Photo: Irēna Broliša



USEFUL ADVICE

- You will need at least **two days** to tour the Rāzna National Park properly;
- During the summer, there is just one place in the park for a **meal**;
 - Rēzekne offers a wide variety of **services**;
- In the Razna National Park, you are allowed to hike, watch birds, animals and landscapes, pick berries, hunt for mushrooms, swim, sunbathe, bike and take rowboats out on the lakes;
- · Boats with combustible engines and water motorcycles are not allowed on Lake Rāzna, Lake Zosna, Lake Salājs, Lake Olovecas, Lake Biža and Lake Ežezers;
- Tents and campfires are only permitted in specific locations in the park.

Additional information

www.celotajs.lv

Tourist routes in the Rāzna National Park



www.dagda.lv

Tourism opportunities in the Dagda Administrative District



The Latgale Regional Administration of the **Environmental Protection Board**

Rēzekne, Zemnieku iela 16 a, 2 +371 64605860, 28323081 vai +371 29139677,

latgale@daba.gov.lv, www.daba.gov.lv



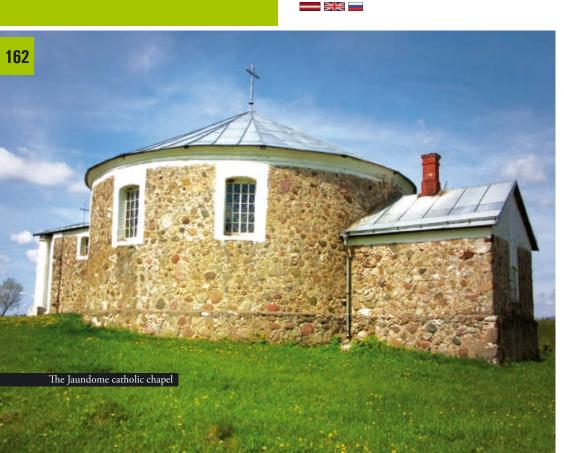
The Rēzekne and Rēzekene and Vilāni Administrative District Tourism Information Centre

Rēzekne, Atbrīvošanas Alley 98, Hotel "Latgale", Rm. 110, 2 +371 64605005, 26337449, 26332249, tic@rezekne.lv,

www.rezekne.lv un www.rezeknesnovads.lv









| Object | Width | Length |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1 The Lūznava Estate | N 56°21,46' | E 27°15,63' |
| 2 Zosna (the Roman Catholic Church of St Archangel Michael) | N 56°19,84' | E 27°20,37' |
| 3 Lake Rāzna (beach on the E shore of the lake by the P56 road) | N 56°18,58' | E 27°30,83' |
| 4 The Lipuški Old Believers Prayer House | N 56°17,46' | E 27°26,10' |
| 5 Mākoņkalns Hill (Padebešu, Volkenbergas Hill) | N 56°16,75' | E 27°24,91' |
| 6 The Red Colt Hillocks | N 56°16,85' | E 27°30,99' |
| 7 Evalds Vasilevskis' pottery workshop | N 56°17,52' | E 27°32,76' |
| 8 Lielais Liepukalns Hill | N 56°16,25' | E 27°39,26' |
| 9 The Bļižņeva Old Believers Prayer House | N 56°16,72' | E 27°42,64' |
| 10 Lake Ežezers (beach on the E shore of the lake) | N 56°10,89' | E 27°39,41' |
| 11) The Andrupene Farm Museum | N 56°11,42' | E 27°23,84' |
| | | |

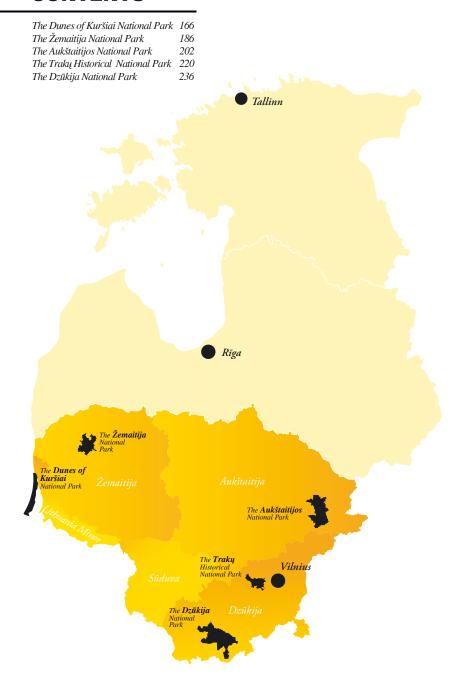


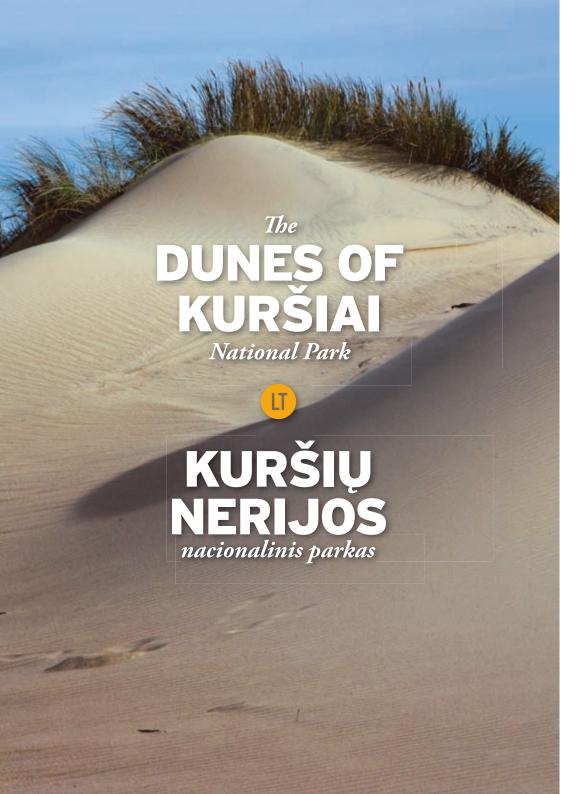
BALTIC NATIONAL PARKS

Lithuania

Dunes of Kuršiai, Žemaitija, Aukštaitijos, Trakų Historical, Dzūkija national parks

CONTENTS





With good reason, the Dunes of Kuršiai are known as the largest sand desert in the Baltic States. For centuries now, people have battled against sand in a way that has been desperate and quite impossible. Indeed, the sand has buried more than just a few homes and villages. The interaction between nature and humankind led to the establishment of the Kuršiai National Park so as to protect the territory. The Dunes of Kuršiai are also listed on the UNESCO list of world heritage.

CONTENTS

The Dunes of Kuršiai National Park

- 168 Getting there
- 169 Why was the national park established?
 - 172 The Coursenians residents of the Dunes of Kuršiai
- 174 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 180 What else can you do?
- 184 Useful advice
- 185 Map, co-ordinates for destinations



GETTING THERE

The Dunes of Kuršiai National Park is located in Western Lithuania on the Kuršiai Stripe (Kuršių nerija), with the Baltic Sea on one side and the Kuršiai Strait (Kuršių marios) on the other. The closest major town to the park is Klaipėda, which is Lithuania's third largest city and the country's leading port. Klaipėda can be reached via various forms of transportation:







By foot

There are several well-appointed nature trails in the park, with wooden pathways leading across the sandy areas. Hiking is one of the best ways to learn about the effects of the wind and the sand in this area. The beach along the Baltic Sea is sandy and freely available along its entire distance of ~50 km.



By bike

The Dunes of Kuršiai offer beautiful landscapes, and there is a paved bike route all the way from Nida to Kopgalis (~54 km). High-quality bike paths are also available along the promenades on the shore of the Kuršiai Strait.



By boat

You can travel along the Kuršiai Strait via boat or kayak, but keep in mind the strength and direction of the wind. The shores of the Kuršiai Strait (particularly on the eastern side) are full of swamps and reeds.



There is a paved road (No. 167) through the Dunes of Kuršiai at a length of 45 km. The Dunes of Kuršiai National Park is the only national park in the Baltic States where a road tax has to be paid before entering. The tax facility is between Smiltynė and Juodkrantė. Hikers and bikers can visit the park for free.



By bus

There are regular passenger bus services from Klaipėda and Nida.

Distances Among Cities and Populated Areas (km)

| | Kopgalis | Nida |
|---------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Vilnius | 315 | 360 |
| Kaunas | 224 | 269 |
| Rīga | 292 (via Šiauliai and Kretinga) | 337 (via Šiauliai and Kretinga) |

A brief evaluation of the park

| J · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · | |
|--|------|
| Natural diversity | **** |
| Bird watching | **** |
| Environmental tourism products | *** |
| Infrastructure for nature and active tourism | **** |
| Diversity in cultural and historical objects | **** |
| Cultural tourism products | **** |
| | |



Our recommendation on travel in the park:







To get to the park from Klaipėda, you will take a ferry across the Kuršiai Strait



The "gate" the park, where drivers must pay a road tax



Road No. 167 between Klaipėda and Nida



Bike route No. 10, "The Baltic Sea Circle," passes through the Dunes of Kuršiai

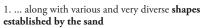
WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?











- 2. The battle with the sand can be seen in local culture and traditions. Mountain pines Pinus montana were planted here at one time with the purpose of shoring up the dunes
- 3. The sandy **seashore** on the western side of the Dunes of Kuršiai is around 50 km long, and it is of recreational importance as the longest **beach** in Lithuania
 4. The Kuršiai Strait is of great importance for nesting, feeding and relaxing **birds**. Here you see the **great**
- cormorant Phalacrocorax carbo





- 5. The Dunes of Kuršiai are crossed by one of
- The Dunes of Kursiai are crossed by one of the world's greatest avian migration route
 The buildings in the villages of the dunes are ornate with various wooden elements.
 This wooden building is in Nida
 Wooden buildings in Juodkrantė. Many of these buildings are cultural monuments









- 8. Until the 1950s, fishermen along the Kuršiai Strait used these kinds of old fashioned **boats**. One can still
- be seen at the Nida port

 9. The **Lithuanian Maritime Museum** and **dolphin house** are modern structures which are among the most popular tourism destinations in Lithuania and the Baltic States
- 10. The Coursenian cemetery at Preila evidence of very recent history



The Coursenians – residents of the Dunes of Kuršiai

The Coursenians¹ (in latvian – kursenieki) were successors to the Courlandians, and they became permanent residents of the Dunes of Kuršiai sometime between the 13th and the 15th centuries, according to historians. Territorial and political isolation was the reason why the Coursenians did not think of themselves as Latvians, and their language (which some specialists consider to be a dialect) was not seen as part of the Latvian language. Baltic German and Latvian linguists over the past three centuries have always been surprised at the fact that people could freely converse with Coursenians in Latvian. There is information to suggest that during the early 20th century, some 3,000 people still spoke the Coursenian language. The decline of the Coursenian language and culture occurred after World War II, when Eastern Prussia, which included the Dunes of Kuršiai, was split up between the USSR and Poland. Many Coursenians became refugees, some were deported to Germany, and others were repressed by the Soviet regime. Little time remains for those who wish to hear the Coursenian language, if only in fragments. On a few people remain alive who speak the language.

What were the Coursenians doing in the Godforsaken area of the Dunes of Kuršiai, where the ruling forces were the sea, the wind and the shifting dunes? For the most part, they went fishing, particularly in the Kuršiai Strait, where the water was calmer. The old Coursenian villages of Kopgalis, Smiltynė, Pervalka, Preila and Nida were built on the Kuršiai Strait, not along the side of the Baltic Sea. Coursenians believed that while fishing, they could only speak Coursenian, and if anyone spoke German, then the catch would not be a good one.

Because there were not always enough fish to eat, the Coursenians also engaged in the unique activity of **catching crows**. Latvian folklore researcher Ilmārs Mežs recorded this story from a person in Sventiniai:

"Poor fishermen often tried to capture crows. On open areas on the dunes, they had nets that were raised above the ground. Below them there were fish and a tame crow which was tied to the net. The fishermen hid, and when crows flying across the dunes saw fish and one crow already eating them, they alit to eat some fish, as well, and when there were sufficient numbers, a rope was pulled, and the net captured the crows. The fisherman collected the crows, bit

their heads off to kill them, and put them in a sack. Several crows could be caught at once this way – as many as 60 on one occasion. The crows were cooked fresh, though most were packed in salt for the winter, when they were the main source of meat. There are still people among the Coursenians who will be pleased to cook a tasty crow if only someone catches one for them."

Ilmārs Mežs also recorded the lyrics of a rare Coursenian song, thus preserving it for the present day. The song was about seafaring in a boat made by the singer's father, with sails made by his mother, and with the singer catching five fish of one kind and five of another.

The **shifting sand** in the area was an ongoing problem for the Coursenians. They considered the forests to be holy and untouchable, but others found that timber was a great commodity. Timber was mostly used to build ships, and that is why the forests around the Dunes of Kuršiai were cut down in great numbers in the 16th and 17th century. Fires and excessive grazing also helped to reduce the area of forestland. Then came the day when the wind caused the dunes to shift. They buried villages, homes, fields and the last areas of the forest. To this day there 14 villages under the mass of sand in this place. Not far from present-day Pervalka was the village of Karvaičiu. In 1797, all that was still above the sand was the steeple of the local church, but soon it was buried, as well. In order to deal with this human-made cataclysm, the government of Prussia approved funds to plant forests on the Dunes or Kuršiai in the first half of the 19th century. The mountain pine *Pinus montana* was chosen as the most appropriate tree for this process, because it has deep roots and a low and thick crown which successfully kept the sand from shifting too much. Because of this process and a few others, most of the Dunes of Kuršiai today are forested.



Crow catcher in the Dunes of Kuršiai. Photo from the book Die Kuršiche Nehrung. Eine Monographie in Bildern. 1930.



¹ Information here comes from an article by Pēteris Vanags, "Coursenians and their Language in Latvian Studies and Publications," as well as from this Internet sit: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:TKxqECl9Kn8J:vesture.eu/index.php/Kursenieki+kur%C5%A1i+v%C4%81rnu+kod%C4%93ji&cd=4&khl=lv&ct=clnk&gj=lv&source=www.google.lv.

² The Courlandians emerged in the 13th century as one of the most ancient Baltic peoples, and they populated the historical regions of Kurzeme and Žemaitija, as well as the area that is now the Lithuanian coastline.

INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

The Kuršiai Strait (Kuršių marios)

This freshwater strait is almost 100 km long and up to 36 km wide, and to the North (between the **Klaipėda port** and **Kopgalis**), it is linked to the **Baltic Sea**. The impressive **Kuršiai Strip** separates the strait from the sea, and the largest river in Lithuania, the **Nemuna River**, empties into the strait. The shores of the strait are largely full of reeds and swamps, which makes them difficult to access. Since ancient times, the strait has been very important as a source of fish. The strait and its lovely landscapes can be seen from local villages and from the top of the highest dunes. The strait is crossed by enryboat by anyone who is visiting the dunes from the side of Lithuania (on the Russian side, the strip is linked to the Kaliningrad Peninsula).

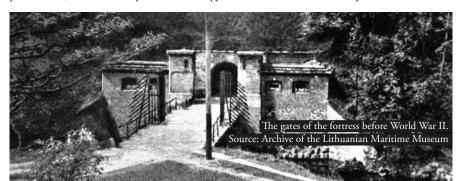


The village of **Kopgalis** is in the northern part of the Dunes of Kuršiai, opposite the Klaipėda port. There are tourism destinations that are of importance and popularity at the Lithuanian and Baltic level here. Kopgalis has forever been of military and strategic importance. In 1866, the Prussians began to build a mighty fortress here. It was blown up during World War II, but work on its restoration began in 1979, and now the building houses the only maritime mu**seum** in the Baltic States. The impressive **aquarium** at the museum features fish from the Baltic region and other seas and oceans in the world, with an exhibition along the sides of the tank. Visitors just love the graceful penguins at the site, as well as the seals when they are fed. The gunpowder cellars of the old fortress are now home to an exhibition about shipping in Lithuania, and on the bastions are a collection of ancient weapons. The dolphin house (1994), which is nearby, is well known for dolphin performances, as well as dolphin-related therapy.





The view of the port is just lovely from the dolphin house, from which you can head to the northern end of the dunes, where you will find a breakwater that is still popular among fishermen. The Klaipėda lighthouse, which was built in 1945 and reconstructed in 1953, is on the opposite shore and stands 44 m high. To the South of the Maritime Museum is the administration of the Dunes of Kuršiai National Park (Smiltynės gatve 11), along with the park's visitor centre. There you will find the small Nature Museum. 100 metres to the South of the museum is an ethnographic fisherman's farm with a house and ancillary buildings, as well as four original fishing boats, including a small one and a large sailboat. Three original ships that were used for fishing during the Soviet era are on enormous posts. A **shoreline promenade** which starts at the Maritime Museum and stretches for a distance of around 1 km will lead you to Smiltynė, where hikers and bikers can cross to Klaipeda by ferryboat. Drivers must take a second ferry, which departs from a place that is 2 km to the South of Smiltvnė.



3 Burnt areas

As you pass from Kopgalis to Juodkrantė, you will find the **Bear's Head Dune** (Meškos galvos kopa), and on the eastern side to your left, you will find a peculiar landscape of dry mountain pine *Pinus montana* stumps – one which will remind you of something of a fairytale. This is the result of the so-called forest fire of the century in the spring of 2006, when 235 ha of century-old pine trees were burned. There is a wooden pathway for tourists here.





4 Amber Bay (Gintaro jlanka)

On the eastern (left) side of the road when travelling from the direction of Klaipėda, shortly before Juodkrantė, you will find a small expansion of the Kuršiai Strait - the so-called Amber Bay. In 1855, when shipping routes were being deepened, the workers found beds of amber at this location. A company was established to extract the amber, and local residents were used as cheap labour. As the amount of extracted amber increased, barracks were built for workers, a boat repair workshop was established, and a shop selling diving apparel was opened. Amber was extracted only during the summer, and the work was done in three shifts. 2.250 tonnes of amber were extracted from the location between 1860 and 1890. At the bottom of the Amber Strait, between 1860 and 1881, people found unique amber jewellery from the Neolithic and Bronze Era. Most of these were in the collection of the University of Karliaučiaus, from where some were transported in 1944 to the Museum of Geology and Palaeontology at Gottingen University, while the rest were lost. It is possible that the items were destroyed during the late months of the war. Copies of the jewellery can be found at the Mizgiriu Amber Gallery and Museum in Nida.





Juodkrantė

This is an ancient Coursenian fishing village which was first mentioned in written sources in 1429. Before World War II, Juodkrantė was a popular spa at the European level, and it has not lost those traditions even today. This can be seen in the orderly environment and the lovely landscape - villages in the Dunes of Kuršiai are unique at the Baltic level because of their architecture. There are unique lowlevel wooden buildings which are small guesthouses. There are several interesting objects in Juodkrantė – a wonderful **promenade** along the shores of the Kuršiai Split which stretches through the entire village with an open-air exhibition of stone sculptures, "Land and Water" (1995), an exhibition of Lithuanian art, a Lutheran church (1885), a gallery created by the wind, and Witches' Hill.



6 Witches' Hill (Raganų kalnas)

Witches' Hill in Judokrantė is a large parabolic dune that is covered with coniferous trees. There is an outdoor exhibition of wooden sculptures which was established in 1979, and this is one of the most popular destinations in the national park. Along the sides of the trail which relates to the hill, you will see some 80 wooden sculptures which have been produced by Lithuanian sculptors over the course of the years. These show the diversity of Lithuanian mythology. It will take around one hour for you to hike the trail.



7 Gray Heron Hill (Garnių kalnas)

On the right side of the road from Juodkrantė to Nida, there is a carp park from which you can see the largest colony of gray herons Ardea cinerea and black cormorants in Lithuania (or, perhaps, all of Europe). There may be as many as 3,000 or so birds there. Don't forget your binoculars!



The Nagliu Nature Reserve (Naglių gamtos rezervatas)

Beyond Gray Heron Hill on the side of the Kuršiai Strip there is a range of open and sandy dunes which is approximately 9 km long and is one of the most unusual territories in the Baltic States. The nature reserve was set up to protect the territory, and this is also one of the places where sand buried ancient villages. Drivers and bikers must travel to the fourth car park in a row to see the largest sand desert in the Baltic States. A special set of wooden pathways has been established to preserve the landscape and the fragile flora of the region, as well as to avoid any further movement of sand. The pathway ends at the top of the dune, but there is then a "corridor" marked out with wooden posts. This is a very popular location of hikers, people seeking information, photographers and painters. From the top of the dunes you will see a fantastic view of the Kuršiai Strip, the Kuršiai Strait and the blue waters of the Baltic Sea. Please note that this is the only special trial between Kopgalis and Nida which is meant specifically for those who wish to tour the sand dunes. You are not allowed to walk or otherwise travel across the dunes anywhere else!





9 The Pervalkos lighthouse (Pervalkos švyturys)

There is a short hiking trail from Pervalka to the shore of the Kuršiai Strait, and if you take that path toward the North, you will arrive at Cape Arkliu (Arklių ragas, also known as Žirgų ragas). Approximately 200 m away is a lighthouse on an artificial island which is 14 metres high. It was built around 1900 and covers a location where shipping routes from Klaipėda, Nida and Ventė (Cape Ventės) coincide. You will have a lovely view of the impressive dunes of the Naglių Nature Reserve from this location.





O Pervalka

This old Coursenian fishing village has been moved from place to place every since the early 19th century because of shifting sands, and it has been in its present location for approximately 100 years. People from the buried villages of **Naglių** and **Karvaičių** have move to Pervalka. This is the smallest village in the Dunes of Kuršiai, and it has wooden buildings that are 100 years old, as well as more modern structures. They both are mostly summer homes and guesthouses.





11 Preila

A former Coursenian fishing village on the shore of the Kuršiai Strait, Preila is approximately 5 km from Pervalka. Preila was originated in 1843, when the former residents of Naglių and Karvaičių moved here. The **Karvaičių Dune** (59 m) stands above a village that disappeared under the sand. Preila has one central street along which there are wooden buildings from the late 19th and early 20th century, as well as more recent structures used as summer homes and guesthouses. There are little saloons in Preila where you will enjoy local fish. You can also bike from Nida to Preila and Pervalka.



12 Nida

This is the largest populated area in the Dunes of Kuršiai (~1,100 residents according to 2001 census data), and it is an ancient Coursenian fishing village. Nida was first mentioned in writing in 1385. Until the late 19th century, most of the people of Nida were fishermen. During the late 19th and early 20th century, by contrast, Nida became a popular spa. Like other villages, Nida has moved from place to place several times because of the drifting dunes. You should spend a day or so in Nida, because there are many museums here the Neringa Museum of History, the Gallery of the Amber Museum, the Nida Art Museum, an ethnographic fishing farm and various monuments. During the tourist season, between 200,000 and 300,000 people visit Nida. Perhaps that is a good reason for you to visit the village in the spring or autumn. Some of the more interesting destinations are described below.



13 The Thomas Mann Cabin (Tomo Mano namelis)

Walk along the **promenade** of the Kuršiai Strait from the centre of Nida and toward Preila (to the North), and after 15 minutes or so, you will find a large dune – the **Uošvės Dune**. Atop it is a lovely two-floor wooden cabin with an outstanding view of the Kuršiai Strait. The distinguished German author and Nobel Prize winner **Thomas Mann** (1875-1955) spent three summers here (1930-1932), and while at the cabin, he worked on text such as the novel "Joseph and His Brothers."



14 The Nida Lutheran Church and graveyard

The red-brick Gothic church was consecrated in 1888. During the Soviet era, the Dunes of Kuršiai Museum of History was housed in the church, but now it is once again a proper church. The building contains an outstanding **pipe organ**, an **altar painting**, as well as **chandeliers** and **stained glass windows**. Alongside the church is a unique **ethnographic cemetery** dating back to the 19th and 20th century. It features very unusual wooden crosses which present images of plants, birds, hearts and horse heads. Many of the crosses have been restored. Graveyards with such crosses can also be found in Preila.









15 The Nidos lighthouse (Nidos švyturys)

While in Nida, you must certainly climb the **Dune of Urbo** (Urbo Kalnas), which is 52 m high and covered by trees. It is to the West of Nida, and the lighthouse which is there was blown up by the Germans in 1944, replaced a year later and restored in 1953. The lighthouse is 29.3 m high, and it is the most romantic seashore lighthouse in Lithuania. The light can be seen for a distance of 22 nautical miles. When it gets dark, walk over to the **Kuršiai Strait promenade**, from which you will have a great view of the lighthouse and its sparkling light.





16 The Dune of Parnidžio (Parnidžio kopa)

This is another part of the Dunes of Kuršiai where you can see the "desert landscape" of the region. The Dune of Parnidžio is 52 metres high. Start with the sun dial, which was installed in 1995 in honour of the fifth anniversary of the restoration of Lithuania's independence. From here you will see an unusual landscape stretching all the way to Lithuania's border with Russia. The shifting dunes which emerged when people cut down forests beginning in the 18th century are still here. There are particularly interesting views of the village of **Nida** and its **port**, particularly in the evening. On the side of the Kuršiai Strait is a marked environmental trail which leads along the sandy dunes (follow the markings). It will take around an hour to tour the area, but please remember that you are not allowed to step off of the trail and onto the dunes!







- The paved bike trail stretches through the Dunes of Kuršiai, and you must travel its entire length!
 During migration season there are lots of different birds here, so bring your binoculars and your bird guide.
- Here you see a migrating goldcrest *Regulus regulus*3. Such interesting **forms** in the sand!





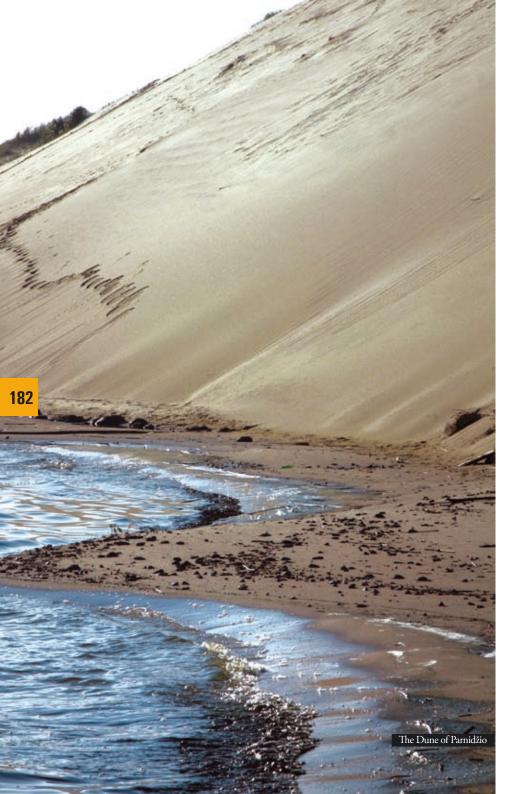








- 4. Paint!
- 5. Take pictures!
- 6. A **horse-drawn carriage** will carry you to the Lithuanian Maritime Museum and Dolphin House in style





- 7. Local fishermen will sell you fresh **fish** that have just been caught 8. **Fishing** is popular in the Kuršiai Strait and the Baltic Sea





- 9. You will also enjoy **dried** fish which some of the shoreline village restaurants will be happy to serve
- you
 10. Amber jewellery is popular among tourists as souvenirs of the shore of the Baltic Sea
 11. Each autumn huge hordes of mushroom hunters descend on the Dunes of Kuršiai



USEFUL ADVICE

- Plan to spend at least **two or three days** in the in the park; park:
- The **ferryboat** ride from Klaipėda to Kopgalis or Smiltynė lasts for 10 minutes or so. The "old" ferryboat transports hikers and bikers and is at the place where the Dane River flows into the Kuršiai Strait. The "new" or "second" ferryboat (Naujoji, Antroji) is for cars and buses, and it is at the end of Varnenų Street at the Kuršiai Strait;
- Make sure that you check out the schedule of ferryboat services before setting out. During the high season you may find yourself stuck in a long queue of cars, particularly in the morning and afternoon;
- It takes a bit less than an hour to **drive** or **take a bus** from Kopgalis to Nida;
- Drivers who enter the national park must pay a road tax (www.visitneringa.com/en/main/info/levy);
- The period between May and early June and between late August and September will be the **most appropriate time** to visit the park if your main purpose is to watch nature and learn about culture and history. Those are times when you can expect fewer tourists

- If you want to relax at the sea and sunbathe, the best time to visit the park is during the summer, particularly in July and August
- All necessary **services** for tourists are available in Nida and Klaipėda;
- Dining facilities, tourist accommodations and shops are found in the larger populated areas of the national park;
- Please make sure that you reserve accommo**dations** far in advance;
- You may have problems in finding parking **spots** during the tourist season, particularly mid-day in the Nida centre:
- Tourist buses are banned in the centre of Nida and must be left at the edge of the village:
 - Nearly all dining facilities will offer fish;
- Walking and other forms of transport on the sand dunes are strictly prohibited. There are special hiking trails in the Nagliu Nature Reserve and the Dune of Parnidžio, but you must stay on the trail at all times.



| Object | Width | Lenght |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 1 Kuršiai Strait (second ferry for vehicles) | N 55°41,32° | E 21°08,35' |
| 2 Kopgalis (Lithuanian Maritime Museum) | N 55°43,01' | E 21°06,07' |
| 3 Burnt area | N 55°38,53' | E 21°07,43° |
| 4 Amber Bay | N 55°33,10' | E 21°07,59' |
| 5 Jodkrantė (centre of town) | N 55°32,52' | E 21°07,29' |
| 6 Witches' Hill | N 55°32,16′ | E 21°07,05' |
| 7 Gray Heron Hill | N 55°31,33' | E 21°06,77' |
| 8 Naglių Nature Reserve (car park) | N 55°26,50' | E 21°06,77' |
| 9 Pervalka lighthouse | N 55°25,17' | E 21°06,89' |
| 10 Pervalka (centre of town) | N 55°24,89' | E 21°05,84' |
| 11) Preila (centre of town) | N 55°22,37' | E 21°03,86' |
| 12 Nida (centre of town) | N 55°18,21' | E 21°00,32' |
| 13 Thomas Mann cabin | N 55°18,80' | E 21°00,79' |
| 14 Nida Lutheran Church and cemetery | N 55°18,55' | E 21°00,41' |
| (15) Nida lighthouse | N 55°18,30' | E 20°59,72' |
| 16 Dune of Parnidžio (sun dial) | N 55°17,70' | E 20°59,43' |

Additional information

www.jovila.lt/en/news

Water tourism and tour boats in and around the Kuršiai Strait

__}<___

www.keltas.lt

Ferry boat schedules

www.klaipeda.lt

Tourist information about Klaipėda and its surroundings

www.neriia.lt

The Dunes of Kuršiai National Park

--

www.neringa.lt

Tourist services in Neringa, including populated areas in the Dunes of Kuršiai







www.visitneringa.lt

The homepage for tourism in Neringa

The Dunes of Kuršiai National Park Visitors Centre in Smiltynė

Smiltynės gatve 11, Smiltyne

2+ 370 46402256, info@nerija.lt

The Dunes of Kuršiai National Park Visitors Centre in Nida

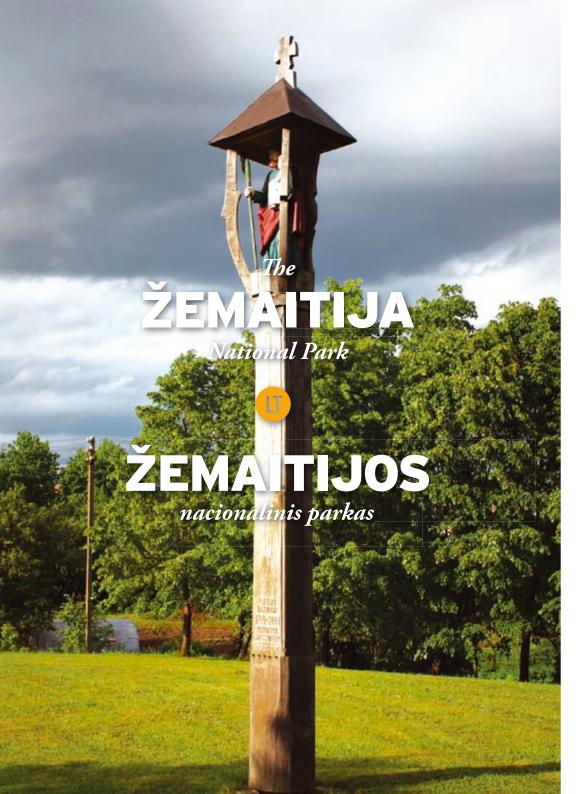
Naglių gatve 8, Nida

☎+ 370 46951256, infonida@nerija.lt

The Klaipėda TIC

Turgaus gatve 7, Klaipėda

2+ 370 46412186, tic@klaipedainfo.lt



This is an interesting part of the cultural and historical Žemaitija region. Here you will visit the lands of the ancient tribes of Courlandians and Žemaitians and learn about their heritage from pagan times to the present day. Travellers love Lake Plateliai and Žemaičių Kalvarija as important destinations for pilgrims. There is also a former and secret Soviet nuclear missile base here. These are at least three reasons why it is worth paying a visit to this park.

CONTENTS

The Žemaitija National Park

- 188 Getting there
- 189 Why was the national park established? 192 The historical region of Žemaitija
- 194 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 198 What else can you do?
- 200 Useful advice
- 201 Map, co-ordinates for destinations



Plungė and Telšiai. Both towns can be reached via public transport:



By foot

The park has several well-appointed trails focused on information about nature and history. More self-convinced hikers can hike around Lake Plateliai.



The terrain of the Žemaitija highlands makes biking far more interesting. There is a bike route around Lake Plateliai. On the western shore of the lake, the path runs along paved roads, while on the eastern shore, it mostly covers forest roads and gravel roads. Most of the small roads are appropriate for biking in terms of the intensity of traffic.



By boat

You can boat on Lake Plateliai. The shortest route will be to Pilies Island (Pilies sala), while a longer route is around the lake or one of its parts.



The park has a wide network of paved and gravel roads, and the most important tourist destinations are accessible by car or tourist bus.



Passenger bus services are available from the region's major cities to Plateliai and Žemaičių Kalvarija. The nearest railroad stations are outside the park in Telšiai and Plungė.

- 1. The Žemaitija National Park begins after this sign
- 2. The hillocks of the **Žemaitija highlands** make the surrounding landscape far more attractive
- 3. There are signs pointing to the most interesting tourism destinations in the park

| | Plateliai |
|----------|------------------|
| Vilnius | 306 |
| Kaunas | 212 |
| Klaipėda | 76 |
| Rīga | 215 (via Saldus) |

A brief evaluation of the park

| Natural diversity | **** |
|--|------|
| Bird watching | *** |
| Environmental tourism products | ** |
| Infrastructure for nature and active tourism | **** |
| Diversity in cultural and historical objects | **** |
| Cultural tourism products | **** |

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK



- 1. **Lake Plateliai** is at the centre of the park the largest and deepest lake in Žemaitija. Pĥoto: Vidmanto Bezaro
- 2. Major hillocks have offered people a place to live or hide from dangers since the Iron Age. Here you see the **Užpelkiu castle hill** (Užpelkiu piliakalnis)





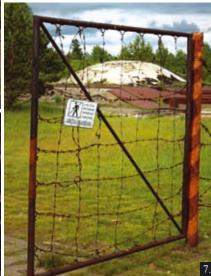












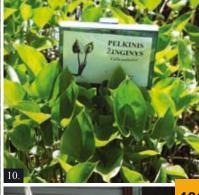
- 3. The terrain, lakes, forests and farmland of Žemaitija establish an attractive mosaic-like landscape
- 4. Single family farms, crosses, and small chapels which are typical in Žemaitija are a
- harmonic part of the natural landscape

 5. Žemaičių Kalvarija is a sacral facility that is of importance in Lithuania and beyond

 6. There is a unique museum of masks in Plateliai. The masks were once used for a ceremony to greet spring. In Lithuanian, it is known as užgavėnės











- 7. The **Soviet era** is an automatic part of history, and today that era is manifested in objects which offer information about the Iron Curtain
- 8. There are small **wetlands** and **mossy swamps** in the park
- 9. The **islands** of Lake Plateliai are home to **oak forests** which have hardly been touched by human hands
- 10. The **diversity** of landscapes and **biotopes** in the region is the reason for a wide diversity of **plants** and **animals**. Here you see the marsh calla *Calla palustris* along the **Šeirės Nature Trail**11. Lithuanians offer **traditional foods** at the saloons of Plateliai,
- including the dish known as zeppelins
- 12. The violet oil beetle *Meloe violaceus* is a protected **insect**

The historical region of **Žemaitija**

Žemaitija is one of five ethnographic districts in Lithuania, and local residents today are the successors of Žemaitians, Courlandians and Semigalians. That is why there are **elements of tradition** from all of the aforementioned ethnographic groups in Žemaitian culture. They have been combined with new elements that have been established in subsequent centuries. **Sacral traditions** related to the Catholic Church are particularly vivid here.



1. Celebrating the festival to await spring, užgavėnės, with participants wearing masks specifically for the festival. Photo: Aldona Kuprelytė





- A traditional game in Žemaitija is called "ripka". Photo: Rimantas Diržius
 Catholic pilerims walk the route of Chris
- 3. Čatholic pilgrims walk the route of Christ's suffering every year at Žemaičių Kalvarija. Photo: Sigitas Kazlauskas
- 4. Žemaitian girls. Photo: Aldona Kuprelytė



- 5. In Žemaitija, as elsewhere in Lithuania and the Baltic States, people celebrate the Summer Solstice. Photo from the archives of the Žemaitija National Park
- 6. The traditional Catholic cross is often seen on hillocks and at crossroads. Photo: Gintautas Margis







7. There are long-lasting craftsmanship traditions in Žemaitija. Here you see the wood processing master Antanas Vaškys. Photo: Aušra Brazdeikytė 8. National foods from Žemaitija. Photo from the archives of the Žemaitija National Park

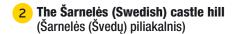




194

DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

(Mikytų pažintinis takas)



This is one of the most impressive castle hills in the national park, and there was a town at its foot in ancient times. Ancient items from the Courlandians have been found here by archaeologists. The forest is thick around here, and that makes it difficult to see the true scope of this important archaeological monument. During the summer, there is a mowed trail which leads to the castle hill. If you are near Žemaičių Kalvarija and have a bit of time, you can include this destination on your agenda.

Žemaičių Kalvarija

Cited in historical sources for the first time in 1253, this place was a settlement for Courlandians. Nineteen chapels were built here between 1637 and 1639 to remind people of the stations of the cross in Jerusalem. Ever since then, Žemaičių Kalvarija has been an important destination for pilgrims. Some of the chapels that are there now date back to the 17th and 18th century, while others were built in the 19th century. During the Soviet era, which was not all that long ago, pilgrims were persecuted and repressed in a merciless way. Today the town has 21 "stops" for pilgrims. The Žemaičių Kalvarija Catholic festival is held here each year (usually between July 2 and 12), and it brings together people from all over Europe. The impressive Catholic basilica is famous for a painting of the Virgin Mary, which was brought here from Rome in the 17th century. The painting is said to have miraculous properties. The web of streets in town is interesting in that it is based on the plan of the town between the 9th and the 13th century. Certainly visit the impressive **Žemaičių Kalvarija castle hill**, which stands alongside the small Varduva River.



The Mikytų information trail

This one-kilometre circular trail leads through the forest of the national park, and it offers a good look at the history of how the Žemaitijai highlands and the surrounding terrain were formed. The highest elevation along the trail is Mikytų Hill, which is an ancient pagan sacrificial hill. It offers a good view of the surroundings. Other interesting objects along the trail are a rock with a devil's footprint that is surrounded with legends, as well as the remnants of an old well laid out in stone.



Lake Plateliai (Platelių ežeras)

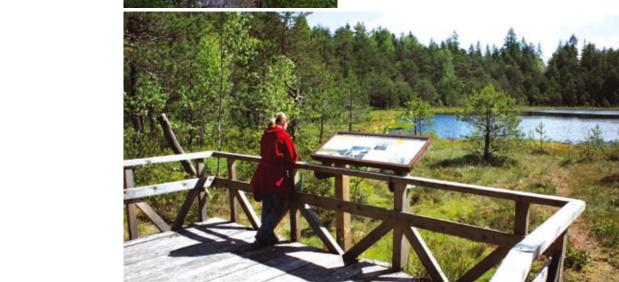
This lake dominates the landscape of the park. The lake is approximately 8.4 km long and up to 3.3 km wide. The eastern shore is mostly forested, the north-western shore is swampy, and on the western shore are farms and the lovely village of Plateliai, where there are the most beautiful views of the region. The infrastructure around the lake is well developed, with tourist accommodations, dining facilities (in Platelia), and leasing of inventory for water sports and recreation. Divers just love the lake because of its clear water. There are several islands, among which the most interesting is Pilies Island, where an estate could be found in the 15th and 16th century. It is thought that the initial settlers in the area of Plateliai lived on the island and had a pylon bridge to connect it to the land. It has to be added that the village of Plateliai was first cited in written documents in the 15th century, and at that time it was on Šventorkalnis Hill. A 24 km bike route runs around Lake Plateliai. That is an excellent opportunity to learn about the park while supporting the environment of the park and the health of the traveller.





5 The Šeirės Nature Trail (Šeirės gamtos takas)

This four km circular and market nature trail begins and ends at the north-western part of the village of Plateliai. It leads through various biotopes, including forests, swamps and the shore of the lake, thus revealing various landscapes and species of plants, birds and animals therein. This is the most interesting and beautiful nature trail in the Žemantija National







6 The National Park Visitors Centre

The visitors centre is in the centre of Plateliai, which is the second largest village in the national park. The centre offers information, applications for organised tours, informational materials, and a small **exhibition** about the park's most important natural values.



7 The Platelių church (Platelių bažnyčia)

Visitors will certainly notice this impressive wooden building which is an outstanding example of wooden architecture. The Platelių church is one of the oldest wooden churches in Lithuania. In its present view, the church dates back to 1744 and its bell tower to 1899. To the south of the church, there is the **Platelių estate park**.





8 The Platelių Estate (Platelių dvaras)

To the south of Plateliai is the **park of the Plateliu Estate**, which was first recorded in documents in the 16th century. At the centre of the park is an **oak tree** known as the Witch's Oak, and it has a circumference of 7.2 metres. In and around the park are the **ancillary buildings** of the estate. The restored **stables** now house a museum with 250 unique masks made my local masters. This is the largest collection of masks in the Baltic States. Three oaken **dugouts** have been found in Lake Plateliai. One, which was manufactured in the 16th century, is housed at the Lithuanian Maritime Museum, but another (15th century) is in the **cellar of the grain warehouse** at the Plateliu Estate (Didžioji gatve 22), because it is currently being restored. The third boat is also exhibited at the museum.



The watermill is at the side of the road in the village of Babrungas. It was installed in 1816, and today it is the workshop and art gallery of Leonardas Černiauskas. The museum features the master's paintings and objects of wood. There is also a collection of ancient items found in the nearby surroundings.





10 The former Soviet nuclear missile base

One of the most unusual historical objects in the park relates to countless legends and secrets, and people who were involved with it are still rather unwilling to talk about it. We know that some 10,000 soldiers from various Soviet republics were involved in the construction of the base between 1960 and 1962, and they did their work under complete secrecy. Underground passages were built so that short people could move along them. There were four underground shafts for R-12 $\ensuremath{\mathrm{U}}$ medium-range ballistic missiles with nuclear warehouses. Alongside were facilities for service personnel, a power generator, a communications centre, etc. Until 2010, the base was open to visitors in the company of a local guide, but now it is being reconstructed, and in 2012 the Cold War Museum will be opened there. The base is deep in the forest to the East of Lake Platelia.



11 The Plokštinės Information Trail (Plokštinės pažintinis takas)

Once you have looked at the nuclear missile base, you can hike the 3.2 km Plokštinės Nature Trail, which starts nearby. The trail passes through various types of forests. You will see cages for bats made by local residents, various plants and birds, as well as the **Pilelio stream** (Pilelio šaltinis), which is a protected environmental monument.





WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?











- 1. There are well-appointed facilities around Lake Plateliai **swimming beaches**, as well as places for **picnics and tents**. Photo: Saulius Sidabras 2. There are **restaurants** in Plateliai
- 3. Lake Platelia is popular among **divers**. You can learn to dive here, and you can rent the necessary equipment
 4. Forests, the shores of bodies of water and small wetlands are excellent
- Forests, the shores of bodies of water and small wetlands are excellen for bird watching. Here you see a bird watching tower in the village of Virkšai
- 5. Knowledgeable **guides** are available to take you through the park. Photo: Aušra Brazdeikytė



USEFUL ADVICE

- Take at least **two full days** to tour the Žemaitija National Park thoroughly;
- If your main goal in visiting the park is to watch nature and to learn about the local culture and history, then the **best time** to visit the park will be between May and September;
- If, however, you want to **relax on the waterside** or in the forest, or if you want to go **sunbathing**, then June to August will be the best period for you;
- Major **tourist services** are available in the region, and the closest ones are in Plunge;
- Tourism accommodations are mostly found along the shores of Lake Plateliai and other local lakes:
- Make sure that you **reserve accommodations** well in advance, particularly during the high season of tourism:
- You are not allowed to travel through nature reserves, and there are posted signs to let you know which ones are restricted;
- Lithuanian national dishes such as "zeppelins" can be had in Plateliai.

Additional information

http://zemaiciukalvarija.lt/

The sacred Žemaičių Kalvarija



www.zemaitijosnp.lt

The Žemaitija National Park

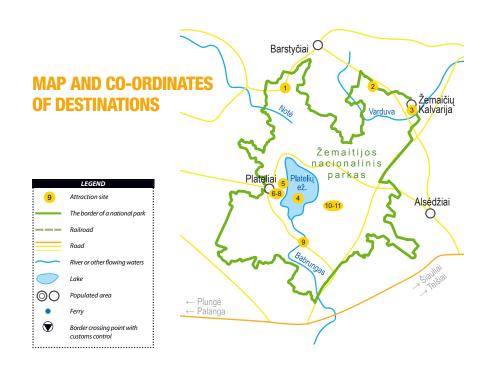




The Žemaitija National Park Visitors Centre in Plateliai

Didžioji gatve 8, Plateliai, **2** +370 44849337, info@zemaitijosnp.lt





| Object | Width | Length |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1 The Mikytų information trail (start of the trail) | N 56°07,65° | E 21°49,52' |
| 2 The Šarnelės (Swedish) castle hill | N 56°07,86' | E 21°57,27' |
| 3 Žemaičių Kalvarija (Catholic basilica) | N 56°06,60' | E 22°00,63° |
| 4 Lake Plateliai (Pilies Island) | N 56°02,61' | E 21°50,79' |
| 5 The Šeirės Nature Trail (Lake Piktežeris) | N 56°03,58' | E 21°50,10° |
| 6 The National Park Visitors Centre | N 56°02,54' | E 21°48,91' |
| 7 The Plateliai Church | N 56°02,43' | E 21°48,95' |
| 8 The park of the Plateliai Estate | N 56°02,32' | E 21°49,00' |
| 9 The Babrungėnu watermill | N 55°59,95' | E 21°51,79' |
| 10 The former Soviet nuclear missile base | N 56°01,89' | E 21°54,37' |
| 11) The Plokštinės Information Trail (the Pilelio stream) | N 56°02,24' | E 21°54,26' |



This is the first national park in Lithuania, and it was established to protect the "land of lakes" – Aukštaitija. There are countless lakes, along with boaters, the Palūšė church, the beekeeping museum in Stripeikiai, the Giunčių castle hill, the Ladakalnis (which is the symbol of the park), and a windmill. All of these are the most well known objects in the park.

CONTENTS

The Aukštaitijos National Park

- 204 Getting there
- **205** Why was the national park established? 208 Who are the Aukštaitians?
- 210 Interesting tourism destinations and routes 215 Boating on the lakes of the national park
- 215 What else can you do?
- 217 Useful advice
- 219 Map, co-ordinates for destinations



GETTING THERE

The Aukštaitijos National Park is in Eastern Lithuania - the historical region of Aukštaitija. The largest populated area near the

park is on its border - Ignalina. The park can easily be accessed with the following transport resources:







By foot

There are several trails and one hiking route which crosses the entire territory of the park for hikers.



By bike

A beautiful landscape, roads that are paved or lonesome earthen roads in the forest, well-appointed leisure facilities, and ethnographic villages - all of that is great for bicyclists. You can travel through the park via radial or circular trips.



204

By boat

This is a true paradise for boaters! There are 126 lakes in the park! Most are linked with waterways,

and so you can plan excellent water tourism routes which will require one or even several days.



Each of the interesting destinations in the park can be reached by car or tourist bus. Most of the earthen and gravelled roads which pass through the massive forests of the park are easily traversed by car during the summer.



By bus

There are bus services between Ignalina, Kirdeikiai and Tauragnai, but bus services among the less populated areas of the park are very rare.

Distances among cities and populated areas (km)

| | Palūšė |
|---------|----------------------------|
| Vilnius | 113 |
| Kaunas | 156 |
| Rīga | 250 (via Biržai and Utena) |

A brief evaluation of the park

| Natural diversity | **** |
|--|------|
| Bird watching | ** |
| Environmental tourism products | ** |
| Infrastructure for nature and active tourism | *** |
| Diversity in cultural and historical objects | **** |
| Cultural tourism products | **** |



Our recommendation on travel in the park:









A boat and a bike - inventory for active tourists



Behind the sign of the Aukštaitijos National Park is a building with an ethnographic appearance



The best way to visit **ethnographic villages** is on foot or a bike. Here you see the village of Salos



A typical landscape of the lakes of Aukštaitija. Here you see Lake Ūkojas in the western part of the park

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?



1. The bodies of water in the park are an important place for **water birds**. Here you see the nest of a great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus*









- Forests and lakes take up most of the park. The landscape is particularly distinguished because of the terrain of the Aukštaitija highlands, from which you will see lovely views
- 3. Wood carvings by master craftsmen in Lithuania are at the side of roads and in single family farms not just in Aukštaitija, but throughout Lithuania, and this is an inviolable component of the country's landscape 4. The Palūšė church (Palūšės bažnyčia), which is made
- 4. The **Palūšė church** (Palūšės bažnyčia), which is made of wood, is an outstanding monument to sacral wooden buildings (the photo was taken during the building's restoration)









- 5. There are **crosses** everywhe
- 6. Beekeeping traditions have become a tourism product. Here you see the Stripeikiai Beekeeping History Museum
- 7. Lithuania's **culinary heritage** is popularised, albeit in a modern way
- 8. Seldom will you find such old and authentic farm buildings. This one is in the village of **Kretuoniu**
- 9. There are several **ethnographic villages** in the park with interesting buildings and street plans. Here you see the village of **Kretuoniu**, which has just one street (**Kretuoniu** gatvinis kaimas)



10. There are six water mills in the park. Here you see the **Ginučių water mill** (**Ginučių vandens malūnas**) 11. The **Ginučių water mill** in 1961. Source: Archive of the Aukštaitijos National Park





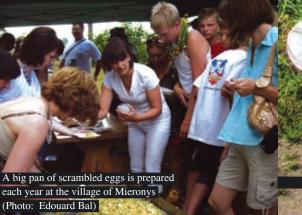
Who are the Aukštaitians? 5

The Aukštaitians and Aukštaitija as such were first mentioned in an agreement struck by the Lithuanian nobleman Gediminas in 1322 with the Crusaders. The people of Aukštaitija at that time engaged in farming and cattle breeding. The centre of Aukštatija was in the Vilnius-Ašmena highlands to the East of the Šventoji River. The soil in this area, which was well forested, full of hillocks, and rich with lakes, was not fertile, which is why this region has never had too many residents and has always been backward in economic terms. Perhaps that is why Aukštatija is the precise area of Lithuania in which ancient forms of culture have been preserved to this very day - forest-related jobs, as well as ancient ways of processing livestock (slaughtering pigs on a bench, short-term salting of meat, drying of salted meat in the sun, preparation of food in a bread kiln, archaic rituals such as burying bread and salt in the first row ploughed in the spring, swinging on swings between Shrovetide and Whitsuntide to ensure a good flax harvest, spanking of livestock with boughs of pussy willows or fir branches on the first day of grazing, and the carrying of a symbolic key around herds of livestock so as to protect them.

Land reforms were conducted at Lithuania's aristocratic estates in 1557, and the land of rulers was redistributed. Local farmers began to live in **villages with just one street**. Such villages have best been preserved specifically in the region of Aukštaitija. Until the early 20^{th} century, community traditions were preserved there – joint tending to herds of livestock, as well as common saunas for everyone. Farms in these villages tended to be small, because tradition held that the farm of parents was divided up by all of their sons.

The **folk costumes** of the Aukštaitians are the oldest in Lithuania. Women's costumes tend to be light in colour (white aprons, while shirts), with striped or checked skirts (red, green, yellow, violet) and checked or striped woollen vests. Married women wore white caps (*aube, nomats*) or scarves. Men wore white shirts, dark pants, gray coats made of homespun textiles and boots. Breakfast in Aukštaitija usually involved pancakes with sauce and buckwheat porridge. Beet or cabbage soup was common for lunch, along with meat sandwiches and sauerkraut. In the evening, Aukštaitians ate soup made of milk and buckwheat.

People in eastern Aukštaitija tend to be shorter than their compatriots further to the West. Their hair tends to be darker (dark brown or chestnut coloured), and their eyes have light colours.





⁵ This information was prepared by Edmundas Vilkas on the basis of various sources of information



INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

1 Lake Tauragnas

This lake is around 9.5 km long and up to one km wide, and it dates back to the sub-glacial period. It is the deepest lake in Lithuania and the second deepest lake in the Baltic States (a depth of 60.5 or 62.5 metres, depending on the source which you consult). The **Taurapilio castle hill** (Taurapilio piliakalnis) rises above the southern shore of the lake. There are stories about a pagan priest who lived here, a sunken church, and an age when the castle hill was surrounded by water. The castle hill offers an all-encompassing view of Lake Tauragnas.





2 Stripeikiai

This is a small village in the north-western part of the park, accessed by small countryside and forest roads (tourist buses can travel down them). The village is home to Lithuania's best known **beekeeping history museum** (Senovinės bitinkystės muziejus), where you can study various types of hives, beekeeping tools and wooden sculptures. Local beekeepers will be happy to sell their products to you. On August 15 each year, Stripikiai is home to a celebration commemorating the end of the beekeeping season.

3 The Ginučių water mill (Ginučių vandens malūnas)

Of the six water mills in the park, the one at Ginučių has been fully restored and is open to the public with stories about its history and its mechanisms (the original equipment has been preserved). The mill was built in the 19th century and remained open until 1968. It was used to grind flour, as well as to produce electricity for nearby farms. People in cars and on bikes cannot help but stop at the water mill. The same is true for boaters, who will encounter a dam at the location. During the tourist season, there are dining facilities nearby.

4 The Ginučių castle hill (Ginučių piliakalnis)

This is one of the largest castle hills in Aukštaitija. After massive reconstruction, it was reopened in 2011 at a new level of quality in terms of its landscape and infrastructure. Previously, the dense forest (which has been thinned now) kept people from perceiving the impressive object. Two nearby lakes can be seen very well from the castle hill. Atop it is a **memorial stone** which commemorates a visit to the location by Lithuania's first president, Antanas Smetona, in 1934, in honour of his 60th birthday. It is said that the castle hill was populated during the first millennium BC. It is also believed that the **Linkemnas castle**, which is described in chronicles, was located here during the 14th and 15th centuries. A newly established **trail** links the castle hill to another popular destination **Ladakalnis**.



The aforementioned trail (from the North) links the Ginučių castle hill to Ladakalnis. It is also accessible from the West, where there is a car park, along with stairs (thought has been given to people with special needs). The hill reveals one of the most beautiful landscapes in the national park, with several lakes and the hillocks of the Aukštaitija highlands (this has been particularly true since the area was cleaned up). It is said

that six lakes are visible from Ladakalnis, though the number of lakes which are actually visible may differ between periods of vegetation and periods when trees are bare. Take a map with you and count up the lakes that you can see. It is said that this was a cult hill for pagans long ago – a place where sacrifices were made to the goddess Lada, who was credited with creating the world.









6 Salos II

This is a small populated area with a few single family farms on a peninsula (the word "salos" means "island" in Lithuanian). The village is located between several lakes, and Salos II is one of the six ethnographic villages that are found in the Aukštaitijos National Park. The village will be of interest to those visitors who seek out very peripheral locations with old buildings made of logs. There is a land route from Salos II to Ladakalnis and the Ginučių castle hill (see above).



7 Vaišnoriškė

The fabulous village of Vaišnoriškė is located deep in the forest and on the banks of the picturesque **Būka River**. This is one of the most beautiful ethnographic villages in the national park. Its origins date back to 1756, when a saloon was built at the side of the historical road. The first single family farm, according to documents was established in 1830. Buildings that are seen in the village today were mostly built in the early 20^{th} century. People remember the village for its supply of linden honey, because beekeeping and the gathering of other goodies from the forest have long since been a major activity for local residents. There are five farms in the village. The Būka River is shallow and with clear water, and it is perfect for boating. You can start your boat trip from Vaišnoriškė.



8 Strazdai

If your purpose in visiting the national park is to take photographs of all of the ethnographic villages therein, then you will surely have to visit Strazdai (which means "thrush" in Lithuania). This is a tiny little village on the northern shore of **Lake Balušas**. The village was first listed in documents in 1783, and its name is based on the surname of a local forest ranger.



9 Šuminai

This is a lovely ethnographic village on the northern shore of **Lake Baluošas**, and not far from the two aforementioned villages. The landscape here is gorgeous, with interesting and beautiful log buildings that have roofs of reeds or shingles and are decorated with various elements. The village dates back to 1784 and is named for a family that used to live there. An ancient **granary** must be seen as the most interesting building in the village.



Palūšė is home to the **national park's administrative headquarters** (which offers a small **exhibition**), as well as a **tourism information centre**, a **campsite**, a recently restored **boating facility** and one of the most frequently visited destinations in the park – the **Palūšė church** (Palūšės bažnyčia). The church was built in 1757. From the grounds of the church, you can see beautiful views of **Lake Lūšiai**, particularly during the sunset, when the church takes on a magnificent colour. The old **Palūšė oak tree** which is alongside the fence of the church is thought to be 350 to 400 years old.







11 The Botany trail

Although the Aukštaitijos Natioal Park is seen as a territory that is rich with flora, this trail offers the only real chance to learn about the wealth of plants in the area. Information stands alongside the trail help to provide information. The 3.5 km circular trail begins on the eastern shore of **Lake Lūšiai** at **Palūšė**. The path leads along the shore of the lake, featuring forested dunes, small stream valleys and some swampland. Markings on tree trunks will help you to avoid getting lost.



12 A bird watching tower

A small area of wetlands has been restored near the village of Reškutėnai, and a **bird watching tower** has been erected at its edge. If you are lucky, then during the spring you will spot or hear rare and protected species such as the great snipe *Gallinago media*, the spotted crake *Porzuna porzuna*, the black-necked grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, the corn crake *Crex crex* and others. The village is particularly pretty when dandelions and apple trees bloom. The viewing tower also offers a survey of places where people settled during the Iron Age. Alongside the swampy meadow there was once the bay of a lake, and lake castles similar to the Āraiši lake castle in Latvia were erected there.





<mark>13</mark>) The one-street village of Kretuonių

On the southern shore of **Lake Kretuonas**, which is completely overgrown, you will find the village of Kretuonių. This is a place which seems to be stuck in the past. The single street which passes through the village has farms on both sides which were built at the turn of the 19th century or, in some cases, a bit earlier – in the middle part of the century. There are both homes and ancillary buildings, and the village resembles an open air ethnographic museum. True, some of the buildings are not in particularly good shape, but this is nevertheless one of the most unusual ethnographic villages in the national park. We recommend that you walk down the entire length of the street. This village, like the other ethnographic villages in the park, is an official object of cultural heritage.





Boating on the lakes of the national park

The Aukštaitijos National Park offers one or multi-day boat trips on more than 10 of its lakes. This will not be a circular route, but if you think carefully, you can ensure that the place where you disembark is just four or five kilometres from your starting point.

Our recommendation: Lake Baluošas, access to Lake Baluošykštis via a small canal, the small and swift Skregžda River, the mill pond of Ginučių also known as Sravinaitis, a small canal to Lake Almaja, the small and nice Srovė River, Lake Asėka, the Asėka canal, Lake Linkmenas, Lake Asalnykštis, Lake Asalnai, the small Dringė River (you'll be boating upstream in this case), the swampy Lake Dringykštis, and Lake Dringis. The route is 23 km long.

From Lake Linkmenas, you can also boat down a short canal to Lake Alksnaitis, continuing via the short Novena canal to Lake Ūkojas and Lake Pakasas.

This route is navigable at various times of the year, including the summer. The canals and streams which link the lakes are all navigable, and you will hardly ever see fallen trees there. The only obstacle is the dam of the Ginučių mill, but you can carry your boat around the dam on its right side. The clear water in the canals will allow you to see the underwater world very easily.



WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?



1. The beekeeping museum at Stripeikiai holds a beekeeping festival each August, and you can purchase honey and other beekeeping products there. Photo: Algirdas Panavas
2. Lovers of folklore can attend the summer festival which is held in the village of Meironys each year. Photo: Algirdas Panavas







- 3. On the shores of many of the lakes are **swimming locations**, as well as places for **leisure**, **picnics** and **tents**. You can also go **fishing** here 4. **Knowledgeable guides** will tell you all about the most interesting places in the national park. Here you see park employee Edmundas Vilkas talking about the mill at Ginučių
- 5. Fishing for the **European smelt** on Lake Lūšiai an unusual event which takes place each year in February. Photo: Algirdas Panavas







- 6. You can go **ice fishing** on the many lakes of the park each winter! Photo: Algirdas Panayas
- 7. Alongside the park is a restaurant where you can buy a traditional Lithuanian sweet called the **šakotis** Latvians call it the Lithuanian fir tree



USEFUL ADVICE

- You will need at least **two full days** to tour the Auštaitijos National Park properly. Boating will require at least one day;
- If your primary aim in visiting the national park is to observe nature, learn about culture and history, and engage in active tourism, the **most appropriate time** for a visit will be between May and September;
- Summer months will be best for water tourists, but the boating routes are equally good in the spring and during the autumn;
- The widest range of tourist **services** will be found at Ignalina, which is outside the park, but alongside it. Most services can also be found at Palūšė:
- Tourist accommodations are found throughout the park;
- If you want to **lease a boat**, make sure that you reserve one in a timely way;
- Lithuanian national foods can be found in and around Ignalina:
- When visiting the **ethnographic villages**, please remember that they are not classical tourism destinations or "open air museums." Instead, they are places where people actually live.

217

Additional information

www.anp.lt

The Aukštaitijos National Park

-- **

www.ezerukrastas.lt

Tourism opportunities in the lake district of Latvia and Lithuania

--

www.ignalina.lt

The Ignalina District local government

==

www.ignalinosautobusai.lt.

Bus services around Ignalina

www.paluse.lt

Tourism and other opportunities in and around Palūšė

=

www.parkai.lt

The Lithuanian Association of National Parks and Reserves

.....

--

www.x-diver.lt

Information about extreme water sports

-- ₹

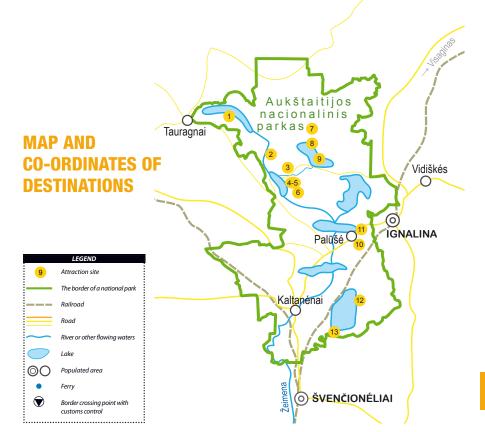
The national park's visitor centre at Palūšė

Palūšė, **☎** +370 38653135, info@anp.lt, www.anp.lt

Ignalinas TIC

Ignalina, Ateities gatve 23, 2 +370 38652597, tic@ignalina.lt, www.ignalina.lt





| Width | Length |
|-------------|--|
| N 55°26,88' | E 25°52,12' |
| N 55°24,50' | E 25°56,73' |
| N 55°23,11' | E 25°59,69' |
| N 55°22,40' | E 25°59,12' |
| N 55°21,97' | E 25°59,44' |
| N 55°21,42' | E 25°59,59' |
| N 55°25,55' | E 26°01,60' |
| N 55°24,67' | E 26°01,77' |
| N 55°23,95' | E 26°02,44' |
| N 55°19,68' | E 26°06,20' |
| N 55°19,90' | E 26°06,32' |
| N 55°15,74' | E 26°06,54' |
| N 55°13,60' | E 26°03,19' |
| | N 55°26,88° N 55°24,50° N 55°23,11° N 55°22,40° N 55°21,97° N 55°21,42° N 55°25,55° N 55°24,67° N 55°23,95° N 55°19,68° N 55°19,90° N 55°15,74° |



The Trakų Historical National Park is the only park in the Baltic States which emphasises the preservation and protection of the cultural and historical heritage of a specific territory. The park is located in an area in which the cultures and traditions of various nationalities have merged for hundreds of years. One of the most popular destinations in the park is the Trakų lake castle, which is known far beyond Lithuania's borders.

CONTENTS

The Trakų Historical National Park

- 222 Getting there
- 223 Why was the national park established? 226 Learning about the Karaimi
- 228 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 232 What else can you do?
- 234 Useful advice
- 235 Map, co-ordinates for destinations



GETTING THERE

The Trakų National Park is in southern Lithuania, in the historical district of Dzūkija. Train and bus services are available to get to the

two largest populated areas of the park - Trakai and Senieji Trakai



Hiking is the best way to visit the town of Trakai. The national park has one environmental information trail in the Varnikų nature preserve.



By bike

The area around Trakai and the national park itself can best be toured on bike, because the park is not particularly large. Bikers also will not have to think about where to park a car during the height of the tourism season.



By boat

There are five interlinked lakes near Trakai, from which very different views are available of Trakai and the Trakai Castle.



Best leave your car in a parking area in the park, or use it to transport for a boat or a bike. Surely you do not want to increase the crowdedness of the area!

Distances among various towns (km)

| | Trakai |
|-----------|--------|
| Vilnius | 28 |
| Panevėžys | 144 |
| Kaunas | 82 |
| Rīga | 300 |

A brief evaluation of the park

| Natural diversity | * |
|--|------|
| Bird watching | ** |
| Environmental tourism products | ** |
| Infrastructure for nature and active tourism | *** |
| Diversity in cultural and historical objects | **** |
| Cultural tourism products | **** |

Our recommendation on travel in the park:







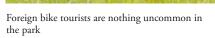


This bridge leads to the Traky lake castle, and hundreds or even thousands of people cross it every day



The electric train that you see here was built at the Rīga Wagon Building Factory, it is popular in Lithuania, and it can be used to get from Vilnius to the Trakų National Park







The only nature trail in the park has wooden pathways to lead across wetlands and the local swamp

223

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?



1. There are various monuments to **sacral** culture which are an important part of the local landscape









- 2. The Catholic Church of the Appearance of the Holy Virgin Mary
- 3. The **Užutrakio Estate** (Užurtrakio rūmai) is a vivid reminder of the historical past
- 4. The heritage of the **Karaimi** is manifested in buildings and various traditions







- 5. Lakes with many bays and islands cover much
- 5. Lakes with many bays and islands cover much of the park's territory
 6. The "heart" of the park is the historical centre of the town of Trakai, where you will find unusual and vividly painted wooden buildings
 7. One enjoyable Karaimi tradition is this bun, known as the kibinai. It comes with various fillings
 8. Castle hills remind us of the way of life of the area's earliest residents. Here you see Upurkalns hill



- 9. Among **biological** treasures are small **moss swamps**...
- 10. ... as well as **oak forests** in the Varnikų nature preserve
- 11. The **terrain of the Dzūkija highlands** is an important element in the park's **landscape**







Learning about the Karaimi

What was the origin of the Karaimi people in Trakai? The nobleman Vytautas the Great (1350-1430) engaged in battles against the Tatars in 1397 and 1398, and he was surprised at the battle skills of the Karaimi. Returning home from the Crimea, he brought along 400 families of Tatars and Karaimi. The men from these families served as Vytautas' personal guards and more. The Karaimi were given homes in a newly established village – Trakai. They were faithful servants of Lithuania's rulers, guarding their castles and working as doctors and interpreters during other military adventures. The government also demonstrated loyalty, and

in 1441 the Karaimi community was given the right of self-governance. Ever since the Middle Ages, the town of Trakai has, to a certain extent, been divided into two parts. The northern part of Trakai was populated by the Karaimi, while the southern part was populated mostly by Roman Catholics and the Orthodox. Each part of the town had its own administration. The wooden architecture of the ages has been preserved in both parts of the city. It mostly dates back to the 19th and 20th centuries, though a few buildings date back as far as the late 13th or 16th century. Most of the buildings are one-story, but very colourful in appearance.

How can you learn about the culture and history of the Karaimi? Start down the main street of the northern part of Trakai, **Karaimu gatve**. On both sides you will see Karaimi homes painted with various colours. These houses can be identified because they have three windows (one dedicated to God, one to the motherland, and the third to the nobleman Vytautas). The windows always open up to the street. You will also find an exhibition devoted to the Karaimi culture (the same is true at the Traku lake castle), and an old house of worship for the Karaimi can be visited, as well, though it is not always open to visitors. The Karaimi own many local restaurants, and the stuffed buns known as kibinai will always be on the menu. They can be filled with mutton, pork, cottage cheese or cabbage, always with spices. Kibinai must be eaten fresh out of the oven, and only at Karaite restaurants.

When you visit Trakai, you will not find it easy to differentiate between Karaimi and others. You probably will not have a chance to visit a typical Karaimi building, either. The Karaimi speak their own language, but the ones in Trakai are far more likely to speak Lithuanian, Russian or Polish. You may get the sense that the Karaimi hide themselves to a certain extent. A school for Karaimi has been opened in Trakai, where some 60 Karaimi live at this time. It is thought that the total Karaimi population of Lithuania is approximately four times larger than that.

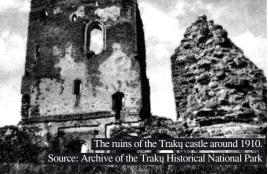








- 1. A dancing Karaimi woman, 1939, by Bari Egiz. Source: Archive of the Trakų Historical National park 2. The Karaimi community around 1920. Source: Archive of the Trakų Historical National Park 3. Karaimi gardens on the shore of Lake Galvė, with the ruins of the Trakų lake castle in the background.
- Source: Archive of the Trakų lake castle in the background. Source: Archive of the Trakų Historical National Park
- 4. Karaimu gatve in 1932. Source: Archive of the Trakų Historical National Park





INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

1 The Trakų lake castle (Trakų salos pilis)

The Traky lake castle is the only castle in Eastern Europe to be built on a small lake island. It is thought that construction of the castle was begun in the late 14th century by the nobleman Kestutis, son of Gediminas, and completed in the early 15th century by Kestutis' son, Vytautas the Great. Other sources say that construction and renovations on the church continued throughout the 1430s. During a battle in 1410, the joint military force of Poland and Lithuania, led by King Jogaila, beat the forces of the German Order, and the lake castle lost its military and strategic importance. It became home to the rulers of Lithuania. Today the Trakų lake castle is one of the most frequently visited tourism destinations in Lithuania. It is home to a history museum which focuses on the history of Trakai. There are two bridges which lead to the castle.

2 The Užutrakio Estate (Užutrakio rūmai)

Work on the estate began in the 16th century, but it took on its present appearance between 1897 and 1902, when it was owned by a local nobleman and his wife. After 1940, the estate was nationalised, as were many other estates. Its destiny is similar to that of many estates in the Baltic States. It first housed a sanatorium, then a camp for Pioneers, and then a tourism company owned by the state. In 1995, the administrators of the national park took over the estate. The Neo-Renaissance castle can be seen very well from Lake Galvė (form the side of the Trakų lake castle). The Užutrakio Estate is a popular venue for various cultural and artistic events. Major reconstruction of the estate and its lovely park of ponds and viewing areas (first installed by the French biologist E.F. André) occurred in 2011. It is easy to get from Trakai to the estate on a bike.











3 Karaimų Street (Karaimų gatve)

This is the central and most beautiful street in Trakai, leading through the northern part of the Trakai peninsula. It was once known as the "Small Town." On both sides of the street you will see little wooden houses painted in a rainbow of colours. Please remember that the houses of Karaimi typically have three windows facing the street. On the western side of Karaimų Street you will find one of the few surviving worship houses of the Karaimi – a one-story wooden building with a bluish roof. At Karaimų Street 22 you will find an ethnographic exhibition (Karaimų etnografine paroda).

The ruins of the Peninsula castle (Pusiasalio pilies liekanos) and the Dominican cloister (Dominikonų vienuolynas)

The origins of the Peninsula castle date back to the 14th century, when it was one of the largest defensive castles of its kind. After the occupation of Trakai and Vilnius in 1382, the castle was taken over by the Kestutis dynasty of rulers. During the war between the Polish-Lithuanian Empire and Russia in 1655, the castle was sacked. The building, which covered 4 hectares of land at its height, is mostly gone today, with only parts of the **defensive ramparts** and **towers** still surviving. Alongside the eastern wall of the castle is a forested

and impressive **castle hill** (there is a wooden staircase leading up the hill). It is Upurkalns hill, and before the stone castle was built, a wooden one was there. In 1779, Dominican monks cleared the area of the ruined castle to build a church. In 1822 and 1833, a **Dominican cloister** and a **chapel** were installed there. In 1990, the **administrators of the Traky Historical Museum** took over the building, and an exhibition focused on **sacral art** was installed in the chapel in 2005. Major reconstruction of the buildings occurred in 2011.



5 The old post office

This beautiful building at **Karaimų Street 5** was recently repainted, but it was built in 1810 by Dominican monks. The police worked in the building for 23 years

after 1864, but a postal service and telegraph facility were installed there in 1887. Today the building is home to the **headquarters of the national park**.

6 The Column of St John

The Column of St John can be seen from the old post office. It is thought that it was erected in the 17^{th} century and initially served as a place for people from the nearby market square to post notices. Later the column was named after St John, patron saint of fishermen, because fishing was a daily routine for many people in and around Trakai.





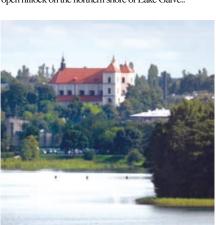
7 The Catholic Church of the Appearance of the Holy Virgin Mary

This church is located at Sodų Street (gatve) 8. It dates back to 1409 and is one of the oldest churches in Estonia. Vytautas the Great was the ruler who established a church for Trakai. The church is known to this very day because of a painting of the Mother of God of Trakai, which was supposedly produced in 1123 in Constantinople and presented to Vytautas in 1390 by the emperor of Byzantium, Manuel II Palaiologos. This is just a myth, however. The historian Albertas Vijūkas-Kojalavičius has written that during a restoration of the

painting in 1645, it was determined that it was painted in the late 15th or early 16th century. The painting of the Mother of God of Trakai, however, was the first painting in Lithuania to be consecrated by the pope (in 1718). Many Roman Catholics, Orthodox people, pagans and Tatars have claimed over the centuries that the painting has produced miracles. A copy is found in the Aglona Basilica in Latvia, and it, too, is seen as a holy object. The best view of the church, the Trakų lake castle and Trakai is from an open hillock on the northern shore of Lake Galvė..

8 The Orthodox Cathedral of the Birth of the Holy Mother of God

Orthodoxy arrived in Trakai during the rule of Gediminas (1316-1341), but of the eight Orthodox churches which were built, all were gone by the late 18th century. In 1863, the Orthodox congregation built a new church, which is located at Vytauto Street 32.



9 The Varnikų information trail

There is a truly interesting environmental information trail in the **Varnikų forest** (miškas). It passes through a variety of biotopes – coniferous and oak forests, a swampy forest, a moss swamp with pools, and small swamp lakes with two viewing platforms. There are wooden pathways across wetlands and the swamp. This is a popular hiking area. The circular trail is well marked. You'll need about an hour-anda-half to hike it.





10 Senieji Trakai

The history of Trakai begins in Senieji Trakai, which is 4 km to the South-east from the centre of Trakai. It is believed that Senieji Trakai was established by the nobleman Gediminas (c. 1275-1341) in the first half of the 14th century. A stone castle was built here during the latter half of the same century, but only the earthen ramparts have survived to this day. Between 1345 and 1382, the castle was home to Gediminas' son, Kestutis. His son, Vytautas the Great, was born in Senieji Trakai and became one of the greatest rulers of Medieval Lithuania. The castle and its rulers played an important role in the Crusades and other battles. In 1391, the castle was sacked by the German Order, and it lost its strategic importance. In 1405, Benedictine monks built a church at the location. In the late 18th century, they added a new and larger cloister. In 1889, one swing of the building was rebuilt for the purposes of a church.



WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?







- 1. At Lake Galvė and other larger lakes, you can rent boats...
- ... or water bikes
 ... or uan travel on Lake Galvé by yacht...
 ... or a little tourist ferry



- 5. Make sure that you stop off at a Karaimi restaurant to enjoy the local traditional **delicacy kibinai** 6. Various **arts and culture events** are held each year at the mansion of the Užutrakio Estate 7. Various **torture devices** can be checked out at the Trakų lake castle 8. Guides will lead you through the lake castle and provide you with lots of **information**









USEFUL ADVICE

- You will need at least a day and a half to properly visit the Traku Historical National Park – one day for the town, half a day for the surrounding area;
- All necessary tourism services are avai-
- The best time to visit Trakai is during the week, when there are fewer tourists. You can also plan to visit Trakai in the spring or autumn for the same reason;
- During the height of the tourist season and the middle of the day, you may have problems with **parking your car** in Trakai. Most parking lots charge a fee;
- Please reserve accommodations in Trakai in a very timely way, particularly during the tourism season;
- Traditional Karaimi foods can be enjoyed at many dining facilities in Trakai;
- Before planning to visit museums or other public facilities, make sure that you know when they are open.

Additional information

www.karaim.eu Lithuania's Karaimi

www.musupaveldas.lt

Lithuania's cultural heritage



www.seniejitrakai.lt

The Traky Historical National Park



www.trakaimuziejus.lt

The Traku lake castle and museum



www.trakai-visit.lt

Tourism opportunities in the Trakai region

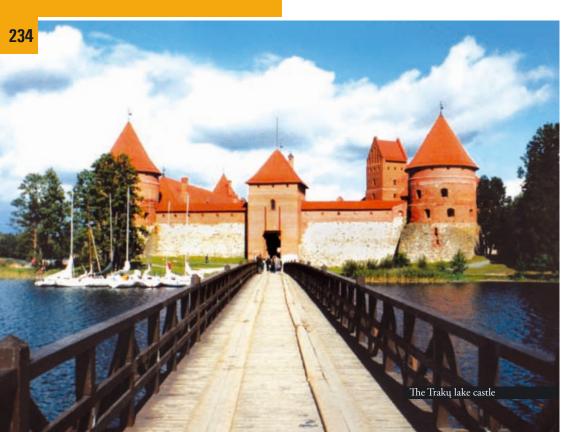


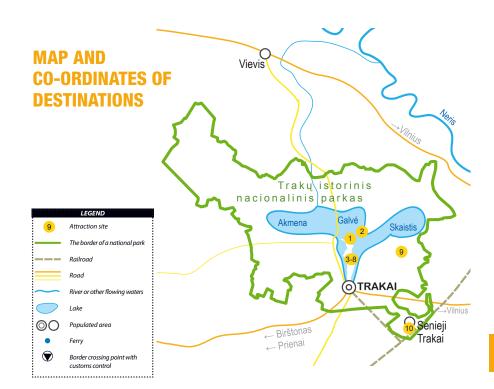


Traķu TIC, Traķi

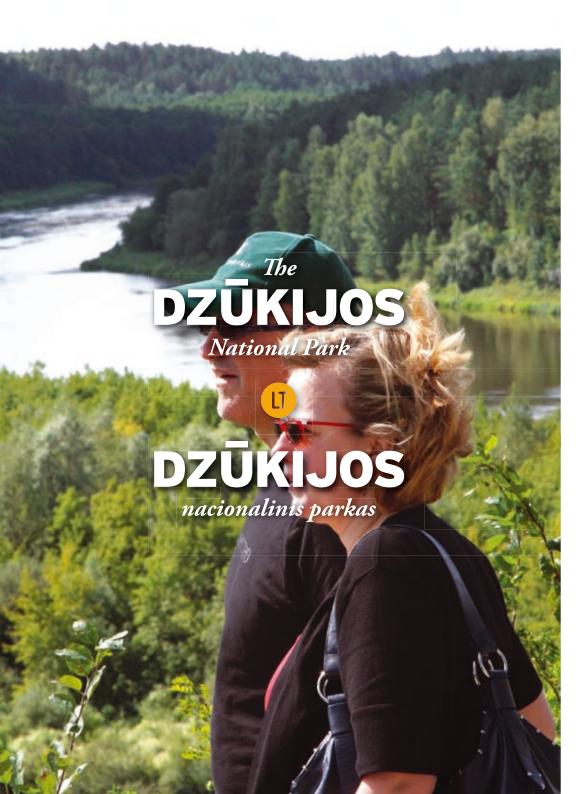
Vytauto gatve 69, 2 +370 52851138,

+370 52851934, trakaiTIC@is.lt, www.trakai.lt





| Objekts | Width | Length |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1 The Trakų lake castle | N 54°39,13' | E 24°56,00' |
| 2 The Užutrakio Estate | N 54°39,54' | E 24°56,58' |
| 3 Karaimų Street | N 54°38,90' | E 24°55,94' |
| 4 Ruins of the Peninsula castle and the Dominican cloister | N 54°38,74' | E 24°56,16' |
| 5 The old post office | N 54°38,71' | E 24°56,14' |
| 6 The column of St John | N 54°38,69' | N 54°38,69' |
| 7 The Catholic Church of the Appearance of the Holy Virgin Mary | N 54°38,56' | E 24°56,06' |
| 8 The Orthodox Cathedral of the Birth of the Holy Mother of God | N 54°38,45' | E 24°55,98' |
| 9 The Varnikų information trail | N 54°38,85' | E 24°57,88' |
| 10 Senieji Trakai (cloister and church) | N 54°36,33' | E 24°59,02' |



Dzūkija is Lithuania's most heavily forested region, and since time eternal, people there have lived in harmony with nature. Untouched forests, clean rivers, crystal clear streams, major swamps, ethnographic villages, beekeepers, mushrooms and berries – those are the "keywords" for the Dzūkijos National Park.

CONTENTS

The Dzūkijos National Park

- 238 Getting there
- 239 Why was the national park established? 242 Dzūkija Then and Now
- 244 Interesting tourism destinations and routes
- 248 What else can you do?
- 249 Useful advice
- 250 Map, co-ordinates for destinations



GETTING THERE

The Dzūkijos National Park is in southern Lithuania. It is located in the southern part of the historical region of Dzūkija, and this is Lithuania's most heavily forested region. The villages of Marcinkonys and Zervynos are in the eastern part of the park and can be reached by , but the largest populated area in the region, Merkinė, is accessible



Although the park has only one hiking route, the vast areas of forest and the ethnographic villages are a great place for shorter or longer hikes, as well.



There are several circular bike routes in the national park. Biking is certainly one of the best ways to visit the park, because local roads are not heavily travelled, and if you're in a car, you may not be able to enjoy the fresh "mushroom" air of the region. On the other hand, lots of the roads are earthen or gravelled. Some of the roads which pass through coniferous forests may be sandy.



By boat

If the symbol of the Aukštaitija National Park is lakes, then the symbols here are three rivers – the $\bar{\mathrm{U}}\mathrm{la}$, the Merkys and the Nemunas rivers. All three rivers are navigable when they are not frozen over. If you want to avoid crowds, it will be best to boat down the Ūla River on weekdays in early June or late August. There is an appropriate infrastructure for tourists on the banks of the rivers - places to relax, have a meal,



and put up a tent.

All of the destinations in this guide are accessible by car our tourist bus. There are car parking facilities alongside the most popular destinations, and there are also information stands. True, this is a park where it's best to park your car and set off in a different way.



There are public bus services among some of the larger towns in the region - Druskininkai, Merkinė, Alytus, Varėna and Vilnius. Some of the bus routes cross the national park. There are also bus services (twice a day) between Varena and Marcinkonys.

Distances among various towns (km)

| | Merkinė |
|-----------|---------|
| Vilnius | 104 |
| Panevėžys | 238 |
| Kaunas | 98 |
| Rīga | 392 |

A brief evaluation of the park Natural diversity ++++ Bird watching Environmental tourism products *** Infrastructure for nature and active tourism **** Diversity in cultural and historical objects ****

Cultural tourism products



Our recommendation on travel in the park:











The famous **mushroom forests** of Dzūkija begin here



Bike tourists near Marcinkonys



Rivers in the Dzūkijos National Park are navigable during the summer by boaters of all ages

WHY WAS THE NATIONAL PARK ESTABLISHED?









- 1. Since time eternal, the forest has been the main sourco of survival and profit for the people of Dzūkija. Here you see a **basket** meant for collecting **chanterelles**2. The park is crossed by several **rivers** with lovely banks and distinct river valleys. Here you see the Ula
- River Valley
- 3. The mighty Nemunas River Valley offers a look at cultural and historical monuments from various ages, and this is a unified and outstanding landscape of the environment and culture
- 4. **Streams** alongside the rivers offer clear and cold water. Here you see the **Skroblaus streams** (versmės).





5. Alongside the park is the largest moss swamp in Lithuania, the Čepkelių swamp (raistas) 6. Alongside the river valleys are mighty castle hills and sacred hills. Here you see the Liškiava sacred hill 7. There are several ethnographic villages in the park – this is Musteika







- 8. **Churches** stand witness to sacral tradition. Here you see a church in Liškiava 9. The **little-visited environment** and the
- **responsive people** who still use **ancient farming techniques** are a true and seldom seen treasure!









12. This "certificate" applies to the historical foods which are served at the Dzūkijos National Park



Dzūkija Then and Now

Dzūkija is one of Lithuania's five historical regions. Since time eternal, the southern part of the region has been Lithuania's **most heavily forested one**. This has had a most direct effect on the things which local residents do, as well as on their lifestyle and culture.

Poor soil and other problems with agriculture have led the people of Dzūkija to live and work in the forest both in a direct and an indirect sense. Logically, they have always **hunted for**

mushrooms and berries, done forest work, and engaged in beekeeping. Selling mushrooms and berries was the only way to get some cash money, and during the Middle Ages, taxes were also paid with mushrooms, berries, firewood, honey and wax. The only crop to do well in the sandy soil was buckwheat, along with the occasional potato, and so one of the traditional foods in the region has been the Dzūkija bun, which is baked of roughly ground buckwheat flour. Sweetness was added to the bun with the help of locally harvested honey.

Mushroom hunting was an everyday activity during the summer and autumn, but the locals were a bit snooty. They mostly ate **boletes**, while chanterelles and other "shoddier" mushrooms were usually sold.

The people of Dzūkija had their own **dialect**, though today only very elderly people speak it. In ancient times, people from Dzūkija and Žemaitija could not understand one another, though today there are still a few guides in the Dzūkijos National Park who will lead tours in the local dialect if requested to do so.

During the Soviet era, when collective farms were being established left and right, the one near Marcinkonys lasted for just a few years, because it was not possible to engage in farming in the traditional sense there. The kolkhoz was shut down, and trees were planted on the emptied land. True, very valuable and old coniferous stands of trees were harvested, too.

Mushrooms remain an important source of income for many local residents. You will learn about the local residents and the traditions of their historical region by hiking through the forests, visiting the ethnographic villages, contacting local beekeepers, and visiting the Dzūkija Ethnographic Museum in Marcinkonys. That's the only way to learn about these things...

1. A woman from Dzūkija. Photo:Lina Černiauskienė 2. Grinding **buckwheat** with an ancient milling stone. Photo: Lina Černiauskienė 3. A local **folklore ensemble**. Photo: Lina Černiauskienė











INTERESTING TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND ROUTES

1 Merkinė

Merkinė is one of the oldest populated places in Lithuania. During the 14th century, it was at the crossroads of major transport and trade routes. The dominant factor back then and now has been the impressive Merkinės castle hill (piliakalnis), with its impressive and steep valleys and protective moats. The hill rises above the confluence of the Merkys and Nemunas rivers. During the 14th and 15th century, Crusaders attacked the castle on the hill several times (the castle is now gone). Pluck up your strength and head to the top of the hill to see one of the most beautiful landscapes in all Lithuania. Merkinė is the largest town in the Dzūkijos National Park (pop. ~1.500).



2 Liškiava

Another ancient populated area on the Left Bank of the Nemunas River is Liškiava. You can access it from the direction of Druskininkai or Merkinė, with bridges across the Nemunas in both cases. Liškiava is home to an impressive serious of historical monuments. Best known as the Liškiava church and cloister (bažnyčia, vienuolynas). In 1697, Liškiava was taken over by a Dominican cloister. Dominican monks arrived two years later, and between 1704 and 1720 they built the stone church that is still there in place of a former wooden church. Between 1699 and 1741, a Dominican cloister was built alongside the church. During Soviet times, the cloister housed a school, a

leisure facility and a sewing workshop. The complex is being restored at this time. The church is open to visitors, and it is known for its seven Rococo altars). The cloister also welcomes visitors. There are "secular" services here — a guesthouse, a hall for conferences and seminars, tours, etc. From the yard of the cloister, there is a broad view of the Nemunas River Valley. To the South-west of the church are two hillocks split apart by the Nemuna River Valley — the Liškiava sacred hill (alkakalnis) and the Liškiava castle hill (piliakalnis). There is a path between the two of them. At the foot of the hills is a ferry boat stop, and during the summer there are ferry boat services between Liškiava and

Druskininkai. The **castle ruins** that are atop the castle hill date back to the late 14^{th} century, when Vytautas the Great built a castle there (only a fragment of the tower remains). The castle lost its strategic importance after a major battle. The castle hill and sacred hill offer fine views of the Nemunas River Valley and the Liškiava church. Students of ancient history certainly must find the **cult rock** with the hoof print of a cow.

3 The Ūla and Merkys rivers

The Ūla is one of the most beautiful and, logically enough, most popular rivers in Lithuania for water tourists. Its main attractions include a lovely landscape with steep banks atop which there are impressive sand cliffs similar to those that are seen along the Irbe River in Latvia. Start your boating trip at Mančiagirė or Zervynos and continue down the Ūla to the Merkys and then on to Merkinė and Nemunas. The Ūla is not a broad river, but after the village of Zervynos there are no fallen trees or other obstacles which would force you to get out and carry the boat around an obstacle. The rapid flow of water, the sharp curves, the clear water and the underwater

world that can be seen – all of these will ensure truly nice feelings for you. Alongside the Ūla are to interesting places – the Ūla cliff (Ūlos atodanga) and a powerful stream known as the Eye of Ūla (Ūlos akis). The Merkys is a far broader river, with a visible flow of water and a couple of nice rapid, as well. Though few people live on the banks of the Merkys, there are places where you can spend the night. Travelling down the Ūla and Merkys from Zervynos to Merkinė will take a day and a half or two days if you're in no great hurry.





4 Zervynos

Fans of cultural tourism must visit Zervynos as soon as they get to the park. The small village is on the Right Bank of the Ula River, and archaeologists believe that people have lived here since the Stone Age. Zervynos is in a large forest. If you're driving, the only safe route is from the direction of Mančagire. Zervynos begins with two gravelled country roads which cross one another, and there is a wooden crucifix at the centre of the crossing. Turn right to see 100year-old wooden buildings and farms which still have their old-time design. Zervynos will truly remind you of the 18th and 19th century. It is no accident that it has been one of the most thoroughly studied ethno**graphic villages** in southern Lithuania. Further along you will reach the Ula River and the bridge. This is a fine place to start a boat trip.







6 The Dzūkija Ethnographic Museum

If you don't visit this museum, you will not learn about the history and culture of Dzūkija. The museum is in Marcinkone, not far from the railroad station. Hire a local guide who can provide you with all kinds of interesting facts about the traditions of local residents and their relationship to the forest. The museum features a home with everyday objects, as well as a threshing barn which will surprise you not just because of its size, but also because of its many interesting exhibits. These include a basket for mushrooms which could hold 110 kilograms of chanterelles. There are the remnants of a 750-year-old dugout, instruments used by beekeepers and local craftspeople, etc. Each year various events related to local culture and history take place at the threshing barn. You can buy local souvenirs and honey. If you want to tour the area around Marcinkone, hike the 13-km Zackagirio nature trail (gamtinis takas).



5 Lynežeris

It is hard to imagine that there are any other populated places in Europe which can be accessed only along an unpopulated and sandy road that is surrounded by forest and along which you can only occasionally see someone who is hunting for mushrooms or berries. Lynežeris, like Zervynos, is a monument to cultural heritage because it is one of a few ethnographic villages in the park. Linežeris has houses and a village plan which date back to the turn of the 19th century. Here, as elsewhere in Dzūkija, the main activities have been forestry work and the collection of goodies from the forest. Minor amounts of agricultural work have also been done here. When you travel through the ethnographic villages of the park, you may well wonder what people do there today and how they can possibly live in such a remote place. It must be admitted that most people who live here only do so during the summer, but despite this fact, the ethnographic villages are very tidy and



7 The Marcynkonis railroad station

This station was built in the early 1860s along the St Petersburg-Warsaw line. The tracks continue in the direction of Belarus, but Marcinkone is the last train station to which passengers can get from Vilnius (three times a day). Freight trains do not travel any further, either. The **station** is an outstanding example of wooden architecture and train station management. There used to be a **narrow-gauge railroad** from the train station to the **Čepkelių swamp**, and it was used to transport timber materials. An old forest road runs along the former tracks, and there are plans to put up an information stand about narrow-gauge railroads.

8 The Čepkelių swamp (Čepkelių raistas)

This is the largest moss swamp in Lithuania, and the Čepkelių nature reserve (gmatinis rezervatas) has been established to protect it. The swamp stretches from the south-eastern part of the national park all the way to Belarus. You can access the edge of the swamp from Marcinkone along a sandy forest road (-9 km there and back) on foot or bike (or via a small tourist bus with no more than 20 seats). There is a 1.5 km nature trail in the forested dunes and swamp, complete with a viewing tower which offers a fine view of the western part of the swamp. Before visiting the swamp, you must register at the Dzūkijos National Park visitors' centre (Šilagėlių gatve 11), which is behind the railroad crossing. There you will find a small exhibition dedicated to the park and the reserve.

9 Margionys

This is a small and lovely place in the vast **Skroblus Stream Valley**. On the eastern side of the village is an object that is unique in Lithuania – a combined **granary and threshing house** where locals staged theatrical performances beginning in 1929. The **Skroblus streams** (versmés) are nearby (there are signposts to show the way to both objects). The streams are in a deep valley between hillocks. The stream has been flooded by a beaver dam, it has to be said. To the South of the village is an old **gravel quarry**, which is one of the few places in the Baltic States where we can find **flint cliffs** left behind by the Ice Age.

10 Musteika

Musteika dates back to the 18th century. You can get there from Marcinkone via a gravelled road which leads along the **fishing ponds** of the former **kolkhoz**. Leave your car at the start of the village and walk through it to enjoy the aroma and charm of the old buildings. There is a "living" **museum of beekeeping** in the village, with hives of bees and a beekeeper who just loves his job. If you like, he will show you how flint, metal and tinder were used in the olden days to produce fire.









WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

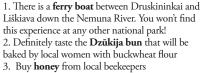












- 4. During the summer and autumn, the forests of Dzūkija are full of berries and mushrooms. You can pick your own mushrooms or just inspect them
- 5. Students of history can hike down the abandoned narrow-gauge and broad-gauge railroad lines
- 6. Make sure that you take part in some of the cultural events in Dzūkija. Here you see the Dzūkija ensemble. Photo: Archive of Lina Černiauskienė



USEFUL ADVICE

- Spend at least two full days to tour the Dzūkijos National Park in full (not counting boat
- Boating down the **Ūla River** will take a day and a half or so, while a trip down the Merkys River will take one day;
- The **Ūla** is the only river in the Baltic States for which you require a license if you wish to boat down it. You can get the license at visitor centres in Merkine and Marcinkone:
- If your main focus is to observe mature and learn about local culture and history, your best **bet** is to visit between May and September;
- If you want to pick mushrooms in the forests, visit the area in late August and September;
 - Merkinė offers all necessary tourist services;
- Tourist accommodations are concentrated on the banks of the larger rivers in the area - the Ūla, the Merkys and the Nemunas;
- You won't find **dining facilities** in the park apart from a few local farms, but you have to contact them in advance if you want to be fed;
- We recommend a guide to show you the birds, plants and animals in the park. Various thematic excursions are available;
- · National foods are available at the Marcinkonys Ethnographic Museum (arrange for this in advance).

Additional information

info.druskininkai.lt

Druskininkai and its surrounding area, boating on the Nemunas River



www.dukijosbaidares.lt

"Dzūkijos baidarės" – leasing of kayaks



www.dzukijosparkas.lt

The Dzūkijos National Park

www.liskiava.lt

The Liškiava church and cloister

www.litrail.lt

Passenger train schedules for Lithuania

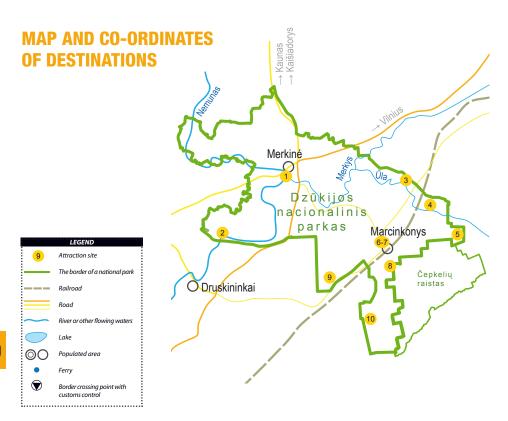
The Merkinė Tourist Information Centre

Merkinė, Vilniaus gatve 2, 2 +370 31057245, merkine@dzukijosparkas.lt

The National Park Visitors Centre at Marcinkonys Marcinkonys, Šilagėlių gatve 11, 2 +370 31044466, info@dzukijosparkas.lt







| Objekts | Width | Length |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1 Merkinė (castle hill) | N 54°09,50° | E 24°11,01' |
| (<mark>2</mark>) Liškiava | N 54°04,83' | E 24°03,41' |
| (3) Ŭla (Ūla cliff) | N 54°08,61' | E 24°26,46' |
| 4 Zervynos | N 54°06,74' | E 24°29,91' |
| 5 Lynežeris | N 54°03,72' | E 24°34,28' |
| 6 The Dzūkija Ethnographic Museum | N 54°03,26' | E 24°24,47' |
| 7 The Marcinkonys train station | N 54°03,15' | E 24°24,47' |
| 8 The Čepkelių swamp (trail, viewing tower) | N 54°01,27' | E 24°25,73' |
| 9 Margionis | N 53°59,89' | E 24°25,73' |
| 10 Musteika | N 53°57,31' | E 24°21,93' |

A ROUTE TO VISIT THE NATIONAL PARKS OF THE BALTIC STATES

Here is our recommendation on how to tour the national parks of the Baltic States. For more information, see www.tours.countryholidays.lv

Day 1 Gauja National Park

Route: Rīga-Sigulda-Līgatne

Locations and activities: Sigulda, Turaida Museum Reserve, Līgatne

Accommodations: In Ligatne

Day 2 Gauja National Park

Route: Līgatne-Āraiši-Cēsis

Locations and activities: Canoeing on the Gauja between Cēsis and Līgatne, Āraiši, Cēsis

Accommodations: In Cesis

Day ³ Soomaa National Park

Route: Cēsis-Valmiera-Valka-Viljandi-Kópu-Riisa-Pärnu Locations and activities: Nature trails, hiking routes, hikes with swamp shoes, etc.

Accommodations: In Pärnu

Day 4 Vilsandi National Park

Route: Pärnu-Virtsu-Muhu-Kuressaare-Kohelkonna-Loona Locations and activities: Kuressaare Castle, Loona Estate, hiking on the Harilaid Peninsula

Accommodations: At the Loona Estate

Day 5 Vilsandi National Park

Route: Loona-Kuressaare

Locations and activities: Hiking or boating to Vilsandi, the Vilsandi Island

Accommodations: In Kuressaare

Day 6 Matsalu National Park

Route: Kuressaare-Virtsu-Matsalu-Puise Locations and activities: Bird watching from towers and on the Bay of Matsalu, estates in the park

Accommodations: In Haapsalu

Day 7 Tallinn

Route: Haapsalu-Tallinn

Locations and activities: Old Town of Tallinn Accommodations: In Tallinn

Day 8 Lahemaa National Park

Route: Tallinn-Kolga-Leesi-Hara-Loksa-Pärispea-Käsmu-Palmse-Vihula

Locations and activities: Noble rocks, nature trails, estates, the Käsmu Peninsula

Accommodations: In Vihula



Route: Vihula-Rakvere-Tartu

Locations and activities: Rakvere castle ruins, Old Town

Accommodations: In Tartu



Route: Tartu-Võru-Haanja-Alūksne

Locations and activities: Suur Munamägi hill, Alūksne Accommodations: In Alūksne



Route: Alūksne-Litene-Balvi-Rēzekne

Locations and activities: Litene, churches in Rezekne Accommodations: In Rezekne

Day 12 Rāzna National Park

Route: Rēzekne-Mākoņkalns-Andrupene-Daugavpils Locations and activities: Lake Rāzna, Lettigalian potters, Mākoņkalns Hill, the Lettigalian culinary heritage Accommodations: In Daugavpils

Day¹³ Aukštaitija National Park

Route: Daugavpils-Zarasai-Ignalina-Palūše-Ginučiai-Stripeikiai-Ignalina

Locations and activities: Churches, ethnographic villages, castle hills, beekeeping museum, etc.

Accommodations: In Ignalina



Route: Ignalina-Moletai-Vilnius Locations and activities: Old Town of Vilnius Accommodations: In Vilnius

Day¹⁵ Trakai National Historical Park

Route: Vilnius-Trakai

Locations and activities: Trakai Lake Castle, Old Town of

Accommodations: In Trakai

Day¹⁶ Dzūkija National Park

Route: Trakai-Merkinė-Marcinkonys-Druskininkai Locations and activities: Ethnographic villages, Ethnographic Museum

Accommodations: In Druskininkai



Route: Druskininkai-Kaunas

Locations and activities: Old Town of Kaunas Accommodations: In Kauna

Day¹⁸ Dunes of Kuršiai National Park

Route: Kaunas-Klaipėda-Nida

Locations and activities: Maritime Museum, Dolphin House, former fishing villages, nature trails, Nida Accommodations: In Nida



Route: Nida-Liepāja

Locations and activities: Palanga, Liepāja, Karosta Accommodations: In Liepāja

Day 20 Ventspils

Route: Liepāja-Ventspils

Locations and activities: Old Town of Ventspils, etc. **Accommodations:** In Ventspils

Day 21 Slītere National Park

Route: Ventspils-Kolka-Ģipka

Locations and activities: Liv villages, Šlitere lighthouse, Cape Kolka, nature trails, observation of birds and animals Accommodations: Gipka

Day²² Ķemeri National Park

Route: Ģipka-Ragaciems-Ķemeri-Rīga

Locations and activities: Bird watching towers, nature trails, historical Kemeri historical health resort

Accommodations: In Rīga



Locations and activities: Old Town of Rīga Accommodations: In Rīga

