

South-Estonia

A guide for culture lovers



Foundation
South-Estonian Tourism

Estonia
Positively surprising





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A guide for culture lovers

We invite you on a tour of cultural sights! If you wish to see Estonia in its authentic state, then South-Estonia is just the place to visit.

Estonia has charmed many as a border state between the East and the West, where different eras and cultures intertwine and the modern and ancient coexist peacefully. There are plenty of cultural extremes and historical layering to be found in South-Estonia. Different eras and cultures have left their interesting marks to buildings and the nature, customs, language, memories, people's souls and day-to-day lives. No other region of Estonia offers such a diverse spectrum of cultures and dialects, which are further enhanced by the genuine, sincere local people. You can experience all of this in the four main cultural areas: Tartu County, the coast of Lake Peipus, the Seto region and Mulgimaa, each of which has its own quirks, surprises and values to offer.

And the best part – thanks to the relatively small size of South-Estonia you can visit several fascinating sights and experience so much even in just a couple of days.

South-Estonia awaits you!



The ancient university town and Hanseatic city of Tartu

Begin your journey around South-Estonia by familiarising yourself with one of the oldest towns in the Baltics – **Tartu**, and the county surrounding it! The ancient **Hanseatic** city of Tartu which was first mentioned in 1030, is a **university and science centre**. The Old Town of Tartu is crowned by an Early Classicist **Town Hall**, the **University of Tartu**, one of Northern Europe's oldest universities (founded in 1632) and **St John's Church**, one of the most unique sacral buildings in northern Europe from the Middle Ages, known for its terracotta sculptures. The whole city centre of Tartu is a national heritage site that includes almost 400 various cultural monuments.

Worth visiting are the numerous museums of Tartu and the **Anthony's Guild** with its multiple studios and workshops located in the **St. John's cultural quarter**, where craft traditions of the hanseatic town are maintained in high regard.

Through the ages, an important cultural magnet of Tartu has been the oldest theatre in Estonia, **Vanemuine**, with its **concert hall**, providing drama, music and ballet performances. Annually more than 4000 various **cultural events** – film, dance, music, theatre and other performances, suitable to all tastes, take place in Tartu. And through Tartu flows one of the most beautiful rivers in Estonia – the Emajõgi, where small charming riverboats and the Hanseatic Barge sail in summer.

During **Hanseatic Days**, Medieval Tartu is revived in the streets and squares. **Singing and dance parties** in summer invite you to the song festival grounds and in December you can enjoy Tartu as a **Christmas Town**. Here you can meet the **Tartu Spirit**, a mythical creature, the presence of which can be felt in the picturesque boroughs, in the cosy small cafés and in the university – virtually everywhere.



Science Centre AHHA



St. Anthony's Guild



The Old Town of Tartu



Ice Age Centre



Tartu Toy Museum



Tartu Observatory

Be sure to visit!

The fountain "Kissing Students" in front of the town hall is symbolic to Tartu as a youthful and romantic town.

The main building of the **University of Tartu**, completed in 1809, is a gem of the Neo-Classical building style, the most beautiful room of which is the Assembly Hall representing the Classicist beauty and simplicity.

In the **Estonian National Museum** the cultures of both the Estonian and other Finno-Ugric people are researched and preserved.

The **AHHA Science Centre** makes science interesting and offers fascinating activities for visitors of all ages.

The **Ice Age Centre** in Tartu County is a unique nature study and visiting centre that combines popular scientific approach to the ice age with entertainment.

In **Hellenurme** you can find a 132-year-old **watermill** which was built by the Middendorff family who owned the mansion there. On the four floors of the still operating watermill you can see, touch, feel and taste how and what is made of grains.

We recommend!

In the **Tartu Toy Museum** you can admire the toys of different eras and nations and take part in games and craft workshops. In the nearby **Theatre House** you can enjoy plays and see puppets from all over the world.

The most fascinating of the churches in Tartu County are the **Nõo church**, which has remained in its original state from the 15th century; the tall-towered **Kambja church** and the spectacular **Võnnu church**.

Take part in an **intelligent pub tour** with a group of friends; cook your own meal in the **Restaurant Vilde**; or renew your sense of taste at a blindfolded dinner.

The **Old Observatory of the University of Tartu**, which was built in the beginning of the 19th century, belongs to the UNESCO world heritage list as a part of the Struve Geodetic Arc. **Tartu Observatory** is located in **Tõravere**.

In the **Treasury of the Tartu University** you can view exhibits that are important to the University for their story, uniqueness, age, innovation or cultural background.

Peipsimaa and Old Believers

From Tartu you can head to the shores of **Lake Peipus (Peipsi)** to experience a unique combination of the culture of Estonian peasants, German landlords and Russian Old Believers.

The people known as the **Russian Old Believers (staroverõ)** arrived in Estonia as religious refugees as early as the end of the 17th century; they have resisted the reforms of the Russian Orthodox Church and managed to maintain their religious practices unchanged for over 300 years. Today the Old Believers can be considered an ethnographic group of people with their own history, religious doctrine, cultural traditions and dialect.

Fishing has been one of the main means of providing for the families in the coastal villages of Peipus and many traditional **fishing methods** are still used. Another main activity of the old believers is **vegetable farming**, especially onions and cucumbers.

Peipsimaa (the land of Lake Peipus) is known for its **'street villages'**, which are a row of village buildings and street **markets** lining a single main road which can stretch for several kilometres. You can buy fresh fish and fruits and vegetables from the markets. In winter people use special vehicles to travel along the ice of Lake Peipus, which are called the **'karakatitsa'**.

The embodiment of the Baltic German culture are the spectacular parks and unique manor complexes. For example the **Alatskivi Castle**, a Neo-Gothic building from the 19th century. It houses a room of wax figurines, the museum of an Estonian composer and conductor E. Tubin, and a restaurant.



Samovars



Peipsimaa Visitor Centre



Alatskivi Castle



Old-Believers Museum in Kolkja



Market Season

Be sure to visit!

The **Old Believers' museums** in Kolkja, Varnja, Mustvee and the **Samovar Museum** in Kasepää parish welcome you and offer you a chance to explore their kitchens and living rooms, wardrobes and dish cabinets.

In the **Peipsimaa Visitor Centre** in Kolkja you can buy unique souvenirs and try your hand at stump or seal printing or at the art of gilding. To learn more about Lake Peipus, its habitat and fish types, visit the „**Living Room of Lake Peipus**“.

We recommend!

The **market season** in the Peipus areas begins in May and lasts till September. Don't miss the chance to try local foods and buy onions and fish from Lake Peipus.

Visit the kilometres long **'street villages'** on the routes Kasepää-Raja-Tiheda-Kükita and Kolkja-Kasepää-Varnja. A unique network of tourism service providers called the **Sibulatee** (Onion Route) begins from the right bank of the River Emajõgi and stretches from Tartu to the town of Kallaste.

Notable sights in the Peipus area are the restored bell tower of the **Raja Old Believers' prayer house**; the **Old Believers' prayer house in Varnja**, which has the richest iconostasis in Estonia, and **Mustvee town**, where there are 5 churches with different confessions of faith.

The **sandstone cliff in Kallaste**, which extends 9 metres from the waterline of Lake Peipus in its highest point, offers a magnificent view. A small Old Believers' cemetery is located on the edge of the cliff.



Setos – a unique ethnic community on the Russian borders

Heading south from the areas surrounding Lake Peipus you will find a unique cultural area – the **Setomaa**, where you will meet a special group of people, the Setos, who were originally inhabitants of **Southeastern Estonia and Northwestern Russia**. As the Seto region has historically been **located on the border areas**, its culture has been influenced by both the east and the west, which are embodied in the language, customs, food and traditional clothing of the Setos. Of the nearly 13000 Setos currently living in Estonia, approximately 4000 are residents on the **territories which have belonged to their people for centuries**.

In the spirit of the Russian Orthodox religion, virtually every household has an icon corner and almost every village has a small chapel – **tsässon**. Seto chapels can be visited during village or church holidays, when the Setos gather to pay respect to their ancestors. The morning worship is followed by a procession around the church, people visit the graves of their loved ones and have a meal; some of the food is often left to the souls of the deceased.

The Setos have a notable peculiar type of singing – **leelo** – which is included in the UNESCO intangible heritage list. To sing the Seto archaic **folk song** a foresinger and a choir are required. The most famous foresingers have been able to sing as many as 20 000 verses in a row, and are given the title of “The Mother of the Seto Song”. Taking part in one of the **Seto festivities** is sure to be an exciting experience: it could be a *kirmask*, the Seto Kingdom Days, Seto Leelo days or the Easter festivities.



Piusa Clay House



Seto Farm Museum



Seto brooch



Setomaa Tourist Farmstead



Seto Museum in Saatsse

Be sure to visit!

The **Seto Museum in Saatsse** – the first museum for introducing the Seto culture, which also has the most extensive collection of old exhibits. The main focus is on introduction of the culture of Seto men.

In the **Seto Farm Museum** in Värskla you can learn about the Seto farm architecture in the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, see old tools and interesting handicrafts. Visit the restaurant **Tsäimaja** (teahouse) in Värskla to taste local delicacies which have been awarded with the “Authentic Estonian Taste” title.

The **Obinitsa Museum** introduces the day-to-day living and traditions of Seto families in the Obinitsa area between 1920-1940. The most authentic Seto interior can be found in the **Taarka Tarõ Kõögikõnõ** café in the Obinitsa Seto Community Centre.

The **Seto Studio Gallery** in Obinitsa provides an opportunity to learn about various Seto arts.

We recommend!

One of the most unique kingdoms in the world is sure to be the **Seto Kingdom**. Each year on the first Saturday of August the most important event of the Seto Kingdom takes place – a new Seto king, or *ülemsootska*, the deputy of the fertility god Peko – is elected to reign for the following year. Sootska masters for various art areas are also elected – *leelo* singing, crafts, cooking, playing musical instruments, dancing and more. The grand event takes place in a different location each year – in 2013 it will be held in Luhamaa.

To get the best overview of the Seto way of living, travel along the **Seto Külavüü** (Belt of Villages) – the fascinating journey begins in Võõpsu and ends in Luhamaa, passing through various Seto villages.

The **Setomaa Farmstead** at Meremäe is a pleasant location for having a meal and a coffee break. The Farmstead has a special area for children where they can have fun skating, on swings or playing in a sandbox.

In the **Piusa Clay House** visitors can observe traditional Seto pottery and unique art and craft objects being made. The artwork can be purchased or ordered for delivery.

Mulgimaa and Viljandi – the capital of Estonian heritage

In the central and southern parts of Estonia you are in the historical **Mulgimaa**, the inhabitants of which are called the *Mulgid*. They used to be **wealthy and powerful farmers** thanks to the fertile soils in the area, and the increase of flax growing in the 19th century. Their wealth was even equal to that of the landowners' and this was one of the reasons why this area was hit the worst during the mass deportations in the Soviet era. It was a miracle the local dialect was not completely wiped out.

In modern times there are only a couple of thousand people who can still **speak the Mulgi dialect**, but the self awareness of the area is rapidly growing. The **president** of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, considers Mulgimaa his home and he often wears a traditional **Mulgi coat** at official events to honour his roots. The Mulgid have contributed to the **Estonian cuisine** with their *mulgi kapsad* (sauerkraut), *mulgi korp* (traditional bun) and *mulgi puder* (porridge).

According to the most widespread interpretation, the so-called **Suur-Mulgimaa** (Great-Mulgimaa) covers the entire historic Viljandimaa (Viljandi Area), the cultural centre of which is the city of **Viljandi**, which is more than 700 years old and one of the most beautiful cities in Estonia. It captivates with its serenity, greenery and architecture. For years, one of the symbols of Viljandi has been a **suspension bridge** which leads up to the historic castle hills. The magnificent view to the lake in the valley below from the **ruins of the Viljandi Castle** has even been compared to Switzerland. The quiet streets of the city are spiced up by a particular cultural atmosphere and also by big red concrete **strawberries**.

The **Viljandi Folk Music Festival** is a world class event for all **folk music** lovers. During four days you can enjoy round-the-clock concerts which attract performers and visitors from all over the world. The festival is so popular that during the event the population of Viljandi doubles.



St John's Church



Bonifatius Guild's shop



Kondase Centre



Heimtal Manor Complex



Tõrva Spell Festival



Olustvere Manor

Be sure to visit!

In the **Kondas Centre of Naive Art** the paintings of the schoolmaster Paul Kondas (1900-1985) are exhibited. In addition to the permanent exhibition, the centre also displays temporary professional, naive and outsider art exhibitions and holds workshops.

Old hanseatic traditions are kept alive in the **Bonifatius Guild** where beautiful items are created by craftsmen.

The best way to experience everything Viljandi has to offer is to take a guided tour. In **summer guided walks** start from the Vabaduse square at 13.00 every day.

The highlight of the **Heimtali Manor House Complex** is the **distillery** with its four corner towers. The **local museum** has been set up by the textile artist Prof. Anu Raud. In the museum you can find classroom furniture which is a hundred years old and a large collection of handicraft samples.

It is said that the caves located near the ruins of the ancient **Helme Order Castle** used to lead all the way to Viljandi. The pure spring that flows through the valley by the ruins is called a **'sacrificial' spring**. To this day local girls use the water for washing their face as the water is said to make your skin silky smooth.

The highlight of the annual **Suure-Jaani Classical Music Festival** taking place around Midsummer's Day is the Sunrise Concert in the Kuresoo bog.

We recommend!

The **Old Water Tower** is one of the best known sights in Viljandi.

The **Tõrva Loits** (Ritual Recitation) is an annual music event (in August) with authentic Estonian musicians, synergy of wild nature and the man, mystical rites with tar and flames. The concert will end with a special charm or chant for the event, which for the Estonian faith and mind has been a shield from harm since times immemorial.

The **Halliste church** is special by its black ceiling and an altarpiece by Jüri Arrak, which depicts Christ walking in Estonia.

The **Olustvere Manor** is one of the best preserved manor complexes in Estonia. In its buildings you can find a collection of mounted birds, wooden horses and antique furniture. It has a handicraft and wool room, a smithery and a distillery.

Sauna culture

Through the times Estonians have **appreciated a good sauna**. However, the South-Estonians take this activity to a whole new level. The Finnish and Estonian sauna, cave sauna and sweat lodge, bathing barrel, barrel and floating sauna, and many more interesting types of sauna will all **recreate your mind and body**.

A type of sauna which is held in very high regard by South-Estonians is the **smoke sauna**, which is becoming increasingly rare in other areas. The smoke sauna (which has no chimney) is one of the oldest types of sauna known in the Baltic Sea region. The smoke sauna tradition is connected to a rich spiritual heritage beginning from traditional medicine and meat smoking and ending with special knowledge and skills, rules and regulations. Going to the smoke sauna has been a **ritual** which required a certain amount of commitment and provided many health benefits and relaxation. The hot steam in a smoke sauna is milder than in a Finnish sauna, but it is very good for cleansing the air and fighting microbes. As the saying in South-Estonia goes: the smoke sauna is both a doctor and a pharmacist for rural people. Every true smoke sauna has its own **'sauna spirit'** and a sauna-goer with bad thoughts might get a fright and sooty traces, which do not wear off for days.

We recommend!

The **Saunamaa** (sauna land) in **Võru County** offers a tempting chance to experience different types of saunas – the cave sauna, Finnish sauna, sweat lodge and the Estonian sauna. Enjoy the charms of different saunas, learn about their history and feel their steam!

During the first week of August there are **smoke sauna days** in Haanjamaa. Visitors get a chance to heat up a sauna themselves and of course – to enjoy the sauna!

In the **Männiku Forest Cottage** you can heat up and try out a real smoke sauna, knit a rug on a stocking frame and to spend your night in a traditional farmer's suite.

In a picturesque location in Valga County the **Sokka Holiday Resort** offers an opportunity to have an active and high quality rest and a good sauna. You will be able to relax in a genuine smoke sauna with a large fieldstone steam heater, in a hot tub sauna, in a raft sauna or in a Finnish sauna. Later you can cool off in a bath barrel.

A European **Sauna Marathon** takes place in the Winter Capital Otepää. "Hot sauna in the hot Winter Capital Otepää". 15 saunas in the area are included in the marathon. The competitors get a chance to visit different saunas in the Otepää area, ranging from a Finnish sauna to smoke saunas, and go ice hole swimming.

Food culture

Dining is an essential part of every trip and also a pleasant way to experience local culture. The South-Estonian traditional cuisine is a blend of **German and Russian cuisine**; of course, it has also been affected by the coastal, forest and rural **way of life**. The most notable contribution to the Estonian food culture of the *Mulgid* are the favourites of many – the *Mulgi* sauerkraut and the *Mulgi* porridge. When visiting Setomaa, you should be sure to try the famous Seto *sõir*. During Christmas time the locals always have black pudding and meat, sauerkraut, and baked potatoes on the table, with a side of either lingonberry jam or pumpkin salad.

In South-Estonian **tourism farms** you will be able to taste home made grits porridge with fatty bacon sauce and pickles, delicious crusty raisin bread baked in the oven, caraway seed cheese to tickle your taste buds, and smoked meat. When taking a meal in South-Estonia, the joy of discovery is guaranteed! Here you can experience the pleasures of food and drink, starting from the authentic **peasant kitchen** all the way to the top European **gourmet cuisine**.

We recommend!

In the **Alatskivi Castle Restaurant** three different kinds of meals are offered according to the castle's history: Manor cuisine, Estonian cuisine and Scottish cuisine, which are rustic and made from local produce. The most talked about item on the menu is the Scottish surprise dessert.

The **Tsäimaja** in Värskä and the Obinitša **Taarka Tarõ Kõögikõsõs** offer local Seto foods.

The products of **Võru County small food producers** are sold under the **UMA MEKK** label.

Authentic **Mulgi foods** can be tasted in the **Mulgi Kõrts** in Abja-Paluoja and the **Musta Kõutsi Kõrts** in Tõrva. The **Kopra farm** gourmet dinner (pre-arranged) offers a pleasant dining experience for both those who appreciate the Mulgi cuisine and to others as well.

The **Rukkirestoran** (Rye Restaurant) in Sangaste and the **Tammuri Farm Restaurant** have been chosen in the 50 top restaurants in Estonia by an international jury.

The restaurant of the **Pühajärve SPA & Holiday Resort** in Valga County is the first restaurant officially recognised for serving organic food.

On the 6 floors of the **A. Le Coq Beer Museum** in Tartu 2000 items about beer and the history of the A Le Coq plant are displayed.

Püssirohukelder, located in the ditch of an ancient castle in Tartu, has been both an ammunition storage warehouse and a vegetable storage room, but today it is the home to a beer restaurant with the highest ceiling in the world.

In the **Põltsamaa Wine Cellar** you can try and buy local wines.

Manor culture

The South-Estonian manor culture incorporates **luxurious manor complexes, history spanning centuries** and a chance to feel it all with your very own hands. Since the 13th century more than a **thousand manors** have been built in Estonia. Although their grand times are over, even now you can still sense their royal luxury in South-Estonia, admire the **variety of architectural styles**, enter the world of legends and tales, or maybe even get a glimpse of a local ghost.

Some of the manor houses have been destroyed or lay in ruins, but many of them have been restored and turned into **luxury hotels** and have become popular tourist locations.

We recommend!

The Neo-Gothic **Alatskivi Castle** from the 19th century was designed with the Scottish Balmoral castle in mind. The Alatskivi Castle provides accommodation and a catering service in its noted restaurant.

One of the most prominent examples of Historicism in the entire Baltic region is the **Sangaste Castle** with its manor park, ponds, and rare tree species. The design of the castle was inspired by the famous Windsor Castle in England.

In **Olustvere**, north of Viljandi, is the best preserved **manor house complex** in Estonia, where visitors of all ages can find something interesting to do in its various houses and workshops.

The **Mooste Manor** has one of the best preserved outbuilding complexes in Estonia, the special pride of which are the numerous gate structures and an extremely beautiful clock tower, which is inspired by the architecture of medieval fortresses.

The **Sänna Cultural Manor** in Võru County is worth a visit - you will find many cultural and creative activities in its various studios, workshops, training sessions, performances, movie nights and parties. And the **Rogosi Manor**, which allegedly is haunted by a woman in a blue dress, who is said to have been a nun.

Taagepera Castle, located near the border with Latvia, is exceptional in terms of its location and romantic looks – from its walls begin the thick old-growth forests and woods filled with mysterious poetry. The free plan park surrounding the castle, which is currently functioning as a hotel, is one of the largest and richest in species in southern Estonia.

The **Põltsamaa Castle Complex** has many interesting museums, craft shops and a Wine Cellar. Over the summer many open-air events are held there.

To travel back into the medieval times, visit the ruins of the **Vana-Vastseliina Episcopal Castle** and the **Visitor Centre**, where you can learn about the history of the castle, medieval Estonia and try on a suit of armour or take part in handicraft workshops.

Blue, black and white – the story of the Estonian flag

Estonians are very proud of our beautiful **tricolour flag**. The most popular poetic story behind the colours says that the blue represents the deep blue of Estonian skies, the black is the soil of Estonian lands and the white is for hope and a bright future. The history of the Estonian flag dates back to 1870, when the first academic organization in Estonia was established – nowadays it is known as the **Estonian Students' Society**. According to the custom back then, signatory colours were elected for the Society – blue, black and white – and the flag (sewn in the handicraft workshop in the parish school at Põltsamaa) was introduced and inaugurated in the Otepää Church on June 4, 1884.

We recommend!

You can get a fascinating and thorough overview of the story behind the flag and of its establishment as a national and state flag in the **Museum of the Estonian Flag** in the rectory of the St. Mary's Church in Otepää. The most important exhibit there is an exact copy of the historic flag. The bas-reliefs representing the celebration of the flag are on the facade of the St. Mary's Church of Otepää.

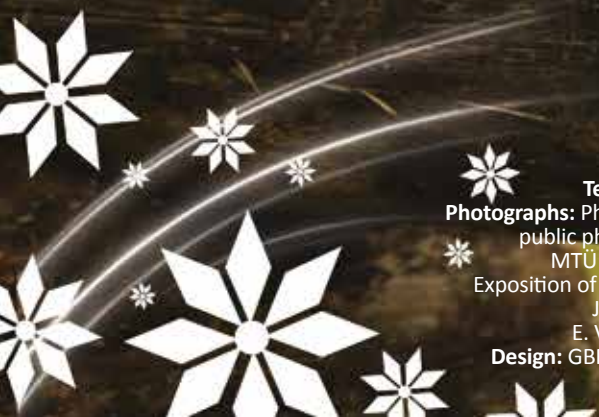
When already in the area, be sure to visit the town located on the Estonian-Latvian border. Estonians call it **Valga**, Latvians know it as **Valka**. The town used to be one undivided town during the Livonian state. However, after the Estonian and Latvian republic were created, it could not be decided which side should get the town. The border dispute was solved in 1920 by an English colonel Tallents, who divided the town in half with his sword, on a map – Estonians on one side, Latvians on the other.

In Valga you can find a **Patriotic Museum** which introduces the history of our border guards, police and military. The **Valga Museum** is located in what used to be a theatre building.

A unique cultural event is the **Valga International Military History Festival**. During two days it offers excitement and various activities for the entire family in different locations in Valga and the county. The highlights of the event are a military fair, introduction of law enforcement forces, the march through the town, and a WW II demonstration battle.

The Estonian **national epos "Kalevipoeg"** was written in Võru by the most famous citizen of Võru – Dr. Fr. R. Kreutzwald (1803-1882), who lived in Võru and worked there as a town doctor in 1833-1877. A **memorial museum** is located in the buildings, which used to belong to Kreutzwald. A grandiose **memorial** for the "Father of Song" has been placed in the historic town park by the Tamula Lake.

See you in South-Estonia!



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