



Estonia  
Positively surprising.

# South Estonia

## Culturally Yours

A guide for  
culture lovers



Lõuna-Eesti Turism






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#### Nearest Airports:

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# Welcome to South Estonia!

**South Estonians offer a special invitation to a cultural tour!  
If you're looking for genuine Estonia, South Estonia is just the place you should visit.**

Estonia has attracted many people as a border country between east and west, as a meeting place of different eras and cultures – where one can find side by side the modern and the genuinely ancient. Cultural borderlines and historical layers can be found in Southern Estonia in abundance, different ages and cultures have left their fascinating traces in the buildings and landscapes, traditions, language, memory, the souls and the daily lives of the people. And in no other region in Estonia is there such a huge diversity of cultures and dialects, with special impressions left by the local genuine and sincere people. You can experience it in the four major cultural regions: in Tartu County, in the Coast of Lake Peipsi, in the Seto region and in Mulgimaa – each of them fascinating, surprising and enriching in their own way.

And what's especially good – thanks to the relatively small size of South Estonia, even a couple of days of travel can accommodate an incredible amount of thrills, different sights and a variety of contrasting cultural experiences.

**South Estonia is already waiting for you!**





## The ancient university town and Hanseatic city of Tartu

In becoming acquainted with South Estonia, one could start with Tartu, one of the oldest cities of the Baltics and its surrounding county! The ancient Hanseatic city of Tartu is a university and science center and also the South-Estonian cultural centre. The Old Town of Tartu is crowned by a classicist Town Hall, 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. Tartu city as a whole is a national heritage site that includes almost 400 different cultural monuments.

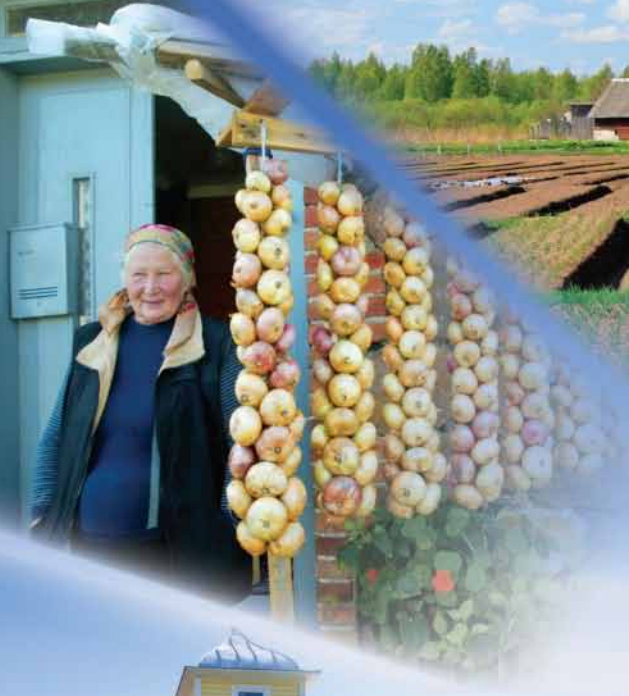
Worth visiting are the numerous museums of Tartu and the Anthony's Guild with its multiple studios and workshops located in the St. John's cultural quarter. Through the ages, an important cultural magnet of Tartu has been the oldest theater of Estonia, Vanemuine together with its concert hall, providing drama, music and ballet performances.

During any year, more than 4000 different cultural events – film, dance, music, theater and other performances, catering to all tastes, take place in Tartu.

Through Tartu flows one of the most beautiful rivers in Estonia – Emajõgi; during the summer season cute river steam boats and the Hanseatic Barge sail along the river.

During Hanseatic Days, medieval Tartu is revived in the streets and squares; singing and dance parties invite you to the song festival grounds; 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 boroughs of unique milieu, in the cozy small cafes and in the university – virtually everywhere.





## Peipsiveer and the old believers

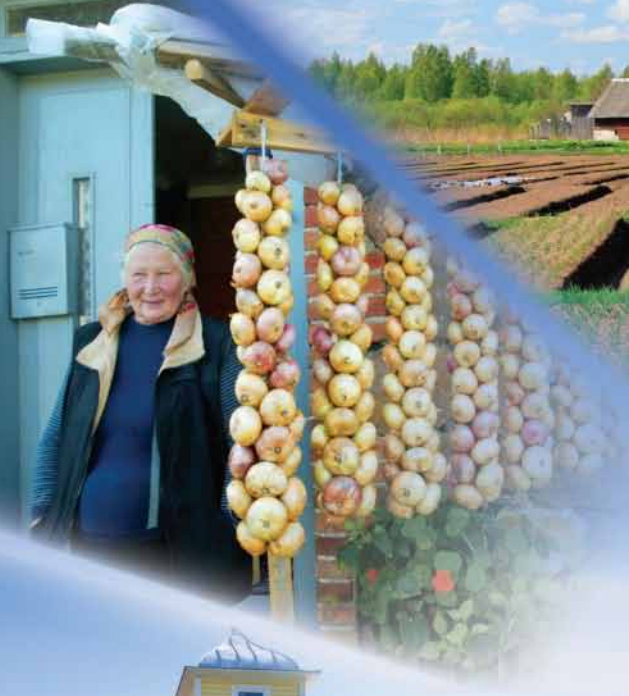
Moving from Tartu to the shores of the fifth largest lake in Europe, Lake Peipsi, you will have a rare opportunity to meet a specific cultural community. The Onion Road linking a variety of tourist attractions and sights offers an overview of a unique culture of Peipsiveere where intertwined are the cultures of the Estonian peasants, German landlords and the Russian Old Believers.

The people known as the Russian Old Believers (*staroverõ*) arrived in Estonia as early as the end of the 17th century as religious refugees; they have resisted the reforms of the Russian Orthodox Church and managed to maintain their religious practices unchanged over 350 years. Currently, on the banks of Lake Peipsi there are nine congregations of Old Believers, but Estonia has a total of about 15 000 Old Believers.

The Old Believers' main activities are fishing, farming, onion and cucumber growing. According to the ancient Russian tradition, their villages have just one street, and so, on the coast of Peipsi, around one main road, have formed unique mile long row villages – from one village the road passes smoothly through the next.

In the Old Believers' communities, many deem shaving, smoking and drinking coffee as a sin. A special experience can be derived from participation in the Old Believers worship with a live candle fire, peculiar liturgy, monodic hymns and the chime of the bells. Do not miss the opportunity to try local eating places and to buy the local fish and onions to go!!





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Lake Peipsi's Old Believers' Payer House



Peipsimaa Visitor Centre



Alatskivi Castle



Lake  
Peipsi

Piirissaar



Old-Believers Museum in Kolkja



Old-Believers Church in Piirissaare

## Be sure to visit!

The **Alatskivi Castle**, built in the 19th century Neo-Gothic style based on the design elements of the Royal Balmoral Castle in Scotland. Starting in spring 2011, accommodation services shall be offered.

The museums of Old Believers in **Kolkja** and **Varnja** will greet you warmly, allowing you to gaze into the kitchen and the living room, to peek into the closets and into the cupboards.

At the **Peipsimaa Visitor Centre in Kolkja**, you can buy unique local souvenirs and/or try your own hand at stump or seal printing or at the art of gilding.

## We recommend!

In Peipsiveere region is the remarkable **Raja Payer House of Old Believers** and the Old Believers' chapel featuring the most elaborate iconostasis in Estonia.

For getting acquainted with Old Believers' culture, we recommend a visit to the old **Kükita Old Believers' chapel** and the **Old Believer's Museum in Mustvee**.

**Nina hay bale houses** in Nina Village by Lake Peipsi present a good indication of how to build close to nature and to live in harmony with nature. In addition, this is the starting point of the Peipsi bird watching trips by kayaks.

**The Kallaste sand stone outcrop** with a maximum height of nine meters above the waterfront of Peipsi offers wonderful views of the lake. On the outcrop is located a small and cute cemetery of Old Believers.





## Setos – a unique ethnic community on the Russian border

From the areas around Lake Peipsi towards the south is located a unique cultural area Setomaa, where you will meet a little ethnic cluster – the Setos historically inhabiting the areas of South-East Estonia and North-West Russia. Due to the historical borderline position of Setomaa, in the unique culture of the Setos there are influences of both East and West – there are fascinating signs of both in the Seto language, customs, foods and folk costumes. In Estonia live currently almost 13 000 Setos, of whom about 4,000 live in their indigenous areas.

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

Particular attention should be given to the peculiar type of Seto singing – *leelo* – which is included in the UNESCO intangible heritage list. Seto archaic folk song requires a foresinger and the chorus, the most famous foresingers have been able to sing as many as 20 000 verses in a row, and received the title of “The Mother of Seto Song”. It is well worth the time to participate in some Seto holiday – kirmask, the Seto Kingdom Days, Seto Leelo days and the Easter festivities.







Piusa Clay House



Seto Farm Museum

● PÕLVA  
PÕLVA COUNTY

VÕRU  
COUNTY



Obinitsa Seto Muuseumitarõ



Setomaa Turismitalo



Saatse Seto Museum



## Be sure to visit!

**Saatse Seto Museum** – the first museum built specifically for the demonstration of Seto culture, also having the richest collection of old exhibits, where the main focus lies on introduction of the culture of Seto men.

In the **Seto Farm Museum** in Värskas you can become familiar with the Seto farm architecture, old tools, crafts, and rich handicrafts from Värskas from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. In Värskas you can also try the delicacies of the local restaurant **Tsäimaja**, which has been recognized with the award of "Genuine Estonian Taste".

**Obinitsa Seto Muuseumitarõ** presents the family life and customs of Obinitsa region in the years 1920-1940.

Seto **Studio Gallery "Hal'las kunn"** in Obinitsa offers the opportunity to learn about a variety of Seto arts.

## We recommend!

In **Setomaa Turismitalo** there is a nice opportunity for refreshments and coffee breaks, for children there is a children's corner with a skating rink, swings, a sandbox and toys.

The ruins of the **Vana-Vastseliina Episcopal Castle** from the year 1342 are an admirable and beautiful symbol of one of the most powerful and most beautiful border castles in Estonia and Latvia.

Welcome to what is very likely, the most unique kingdom in the world – the **Seto Kingdom!** On Saturday of the first week of each August takes place the most important event of the Seto Kingdom, a new Seto king, or the deputy of the fertility god Peko – *ülembootska* – is elected to reign for the following year. Also are elected sootska masters for various art areas – leelo singing, crafts, cooking, playing musical instruments, dancing and more. The venue of the grand event changes every year – in 2011 it will take place in Obinitsa.

In the **Piusa Clay House**, in the presence of visitors, both traditional Seto pottery and unique art and craft objects are made. The artwork can be purchased or ordered for delivery.

The best overview of Seto life can be acquired when moving along **Seto Külavüü** – the fascinating journey begins in Võõpsu and ends in Luhamaa, passing through various Seto villages.





## Viljandi in Mulgimaa – the capital of the Estonian traditional culture

While traveling in the central and the southern part of Estonia you are in historical Mulgimaa, the inhabitants of which are called the Mulks. Thanks to the local fertile lands and to the rise of flax growing in the 19th century, the Mulks were historically wealthy and influential farmers, who in their riches were not competing with their neighbors, but with the landlords. It was also the reason why, during the Soviet mass deportations which devastated the local population the hardest, the local dialect was preserved only through a miracle.

Nowadays, there are only a few thousand speakers of Mulk, but the region's self-consciousness is rapidly recovering. The President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves considers Mulgimaa his home and honoring his roots, often wears the traditional Mulk cloak for formal ceremonies. The most notable contribution of the Mulks to the Estonian food culture is the Mulk sauerkraut, the Mulk bun and Mulk porridge.

According to the most widespread interpretation, the so-called Greater Mulgimaa covers the entire historic Viljandimaa (Viljandi Area), the cultural center of which is the more than seven hundred year old city of Viljandi - one of the most beautiful cities in Estonia, which captivates with its silence, greenery and architecture. One symbol of Viljandi has for years been an ancient suspension bridge leading to the castle hills. The breathtaking view on the lake opening from the ruins of the medieval Viljandi Order Castle has been the source of comparison of the area with Switzerland.







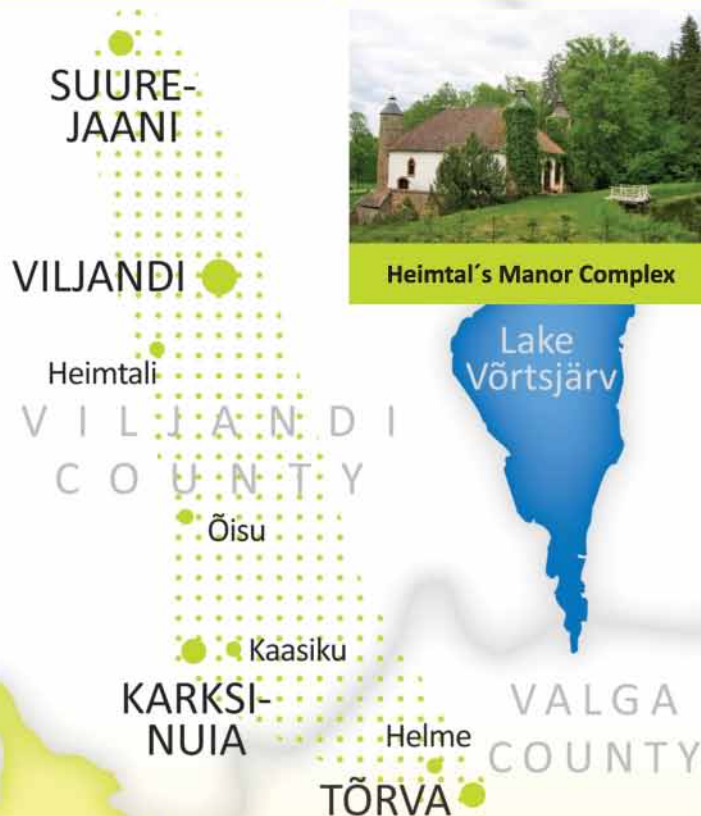
St John's Church



Bonifatius Guild



Heimtal's Manor Complex



Tõrva Loits (Tõrva Incantation)



Õisu manor

## Be sure to visit!

The best known landmarks of Viljandi are also the St. John's Church and the St. Paul's Church, Viljandi Museum, the Old Water Tower, Kondase Centre, The Town Hall, the stair hill and the beach on the lake. You can enjoy beautiful views on the city when sailing with a trawling sail boat on the lake.

In **Bonifatius Guild** are kept alive the old traditions of the Hanseatic League; from under the hands of masters come beautiful crafts.

The jewel of **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, and in addition to the 100 year old classroom furniture, a large collection of samples of the craft have been stored.

The tunnels of the caves located by the ruins of the ancient **Helme Order Castle** are said to lead all the way to the town of Viljandi, under the ruins in the valley is murmuring the sacrificial spring with its clean water. To this day local girls obtain their face washing water from the spring, as it is said that the water makes the skin soft and silky.

Each year around midsummer, the main event of the **Suure-Jaani classical music festival** is the concert held in Kuresoo bog at the time of sunrise.

The small town **Karksi-Nuia** captivates you with its beautiful scenery. On the ridge of the primeval valley stretch the ruins of Karksi castle and the church with a unique tilted tower.

## We recommend!

The music event **Tõrva Loits** (Tõrva Incantation) held annually in August, it brings to the audience Genuine Estonian musicians with primordial nature and human interaction, mysterious light and tar games. At the end of the concert a charm specifically created for event is chanted, which in the faith and the minds of Estonians have from ancient times had a protective effect.

In **Õisu manor smithy** one can, when booked in advance, listen to jolly tales of the Mulks about the life and customs and study the living quarters and the tools of the old blacksmith.

**Kaasiku Farm** is one of the most famous farms in Mulgimaa, where upon advance notice is open to guests a beautiful garden, a museum of old farm work tools and objects and a beautiful lace room for crafts lovers.





# The South Estonian gems For the body, mind and soul

## SMOKE SAUNA

Estonians have always been the people of the sauna, but a special relationship with sauna making is in South Estonia – there is still honored the otherwise very rare smoke sauna, the oldest known type of sauna in the Baltic Sea area. The tradition of smoke saunas is linked with rich spiritual heritage, starting from folk medicine and meat smoking and ending with special knowledge and skills, commands and prohibitions.

Going to a smoke sauna has been a ritual requiring a commitment, at the same time it is extremely pleasant and healthy – the smoke sauna vapor baths are milder than those in the Finnish sauna, while it cleans the air and successfully fights the microbes. As they say in South Estonia: a smoke sauna is the doctor and the pharmacist of rural people. Each proper smoke sauna has its own sauna spirit who can frighten a sauna-goer who exercises bad thoughts, and can leave sooty traces on him or her for several days.

The genuine smoke sauna experience offered in South-Estonian tourist farms is refreshment for the body and the soul and a stimulating change for people saturated with technical achievements of the modern era.

**We recommend!**

**Saunamaa in Võru County** offers an attractive opportunity to try out a cave sauna, a Finnish sauna, an Indian sauna and an Estonian sauna. Enjoy the delights of a variety of saunas, acquire knowledge of their history and assess their steam!

In the **Männiku forest farm**, in Viljandi County, you can heat and try out a genuine smoke sauna, weave a rug on looms and spend the night in a peasant-suite.

In a picturesque location in Valga County, **Sokka Recreation Center** offers an opportunity to have an active and high quality rest with a 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.







## INTERESTING TASTE EXPERIENCE

Food is an essential part of every trip and also the delightful opportunity to partake of the 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 peasant way of life. The most notable contribution to the Estonian food culture of the Mulks, are the favorites of many, the Mulk sauerkraut and the Mulk porridge. When visiting Setomaa, you should be sure to try the famous Seto sõir. During Christmas time on the table of the locals are always blood sausages and meat, sauerkraut, and baked potatoes, 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 a pickle, delicious crusty raisin bread baked in the home oven, caraway seed cheese 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 **Kolkja onion fish** restaurant are served dishes of Russian Orthodox Old Believers prepared by recipes inherited from generation to generation. In restaurant **Tsäimaja** located in Värskä you can also try the local Seto delicacies, which have been recognized with the award of **"Genuine Estonian Taste"**. The taste sensations of the small food producers of Võrumaa can be found in the retail stores under the **trade mark UMA MEKK**.

You can try **genuine Mulk food** in **Mulgi Kõrts** in Abja-Paluoja and in **Musta Kõutsi** tavern in Tõrva. A Gourmet dinner in **Kopra Farm** (by reservation) offers the pleasures for the lover of the Mulk kitchen, as well as for others.

**Sangaste Rye Restaurant** and **Tammuri Farm Restaurant** have been selected by an international jury among the 50 best Estonian restaurants and are definitely worth a visit. The restaurant of **Pühajärve Spa & Recreation Centre** in Valga County has received recognition based on the organic farming law as the only restaurant serving organic food in Estonia.

On the five floors of the **Brewery Museum of A Le Coq Tartu Brewery** have been exposed 300 exhibits on the history of both beer and the A. le Coq factory. The restaurant **Püssirohukelder** located in the ditch of an ancient castle has been both an ammunition storage warehouse, as well as vegetable storage room, but today it is a home to a beer restaurant with the highest ceiling in the world.





## Medieval history, royal luxury and ghosts – Estonian manor culture

Starting from the 13th century, manors began to emerge in the Estonian territory and although their grand times are over, even now you can still enjoy the flavor of the South Estonian royal luxury, gaze at the variety of architectural styles, enter the world of the legends, or even meet with some local ghosts.

### We recommend!



One of the most prominent examples of the historicist style in the entire Baltic region is **Sangaste castle** with its manor park with 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 most perfectly preserved manor house complex in Estonia, which today is a theme park for the whole family.

**Mooste manor** however is one of the most preserved in its entirety complex of outbuildings, the special pride of which are the numerous gate structures and an extremely beautiful clock tower, which is inspired by the medieval fortress architecture.

In Võru County worth visiting is the **Sänna Cultural Manor** supporting cultural and creative activities with its various studios, workshops, training sessions, performances, movie nights and parties. Also, **Rogosi mansion** is worth a visit, 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 there forward begin thick virgin forests and woods full of mysterious poetry. The free plan park surrounding the castle, currently functioning as a hotel, is one of the largest and richest in species in southern Estonia.





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

Estonians are proud of their beautiful tricolor. According to the most common poetic description, the blue symbolizes the azure blue of the Estonian skies, the black symbolises the home soil surface, and the white – hope and the bright future. The history of the Estonian flag dates back to the year 1870 when the first academic organization in Estonia was established, today's Estonian Student Society. According to the custom then, signatory colors were elected for the Society – blue, black and white – and the flag was introduced and inaugurated in Otepää Church on June 4, 1884.

## We recommend!

You can get an exciting and comprehensive overview of the origin of the flag and of its formation to national and state flag in the **Museum of the Estonian Flag** in the rectory of the St. Mary's Church in Otepää.

The most attractive display of the exhibit is the exact replica of the dedicated historical flag. The bas-reliefs representing the celebration of the flag are located on the facade of St. Mary's Church of Otepää.

If you haven't already been there, you should visit the town on the Estonian-Latvian border, which Estonians call **Valga** and Latvians call **Valka**. The city of once single Livonia, could not be divided between the newly emerged republics of Estonia and Latvia – the border dispute was resolved in 1920 by an Englishman, Colonel Tallents, who on the map divided the city in half with his sword – the Estonians to one side and the Latvians to the other side. In Valga, most interesting is the **Patriotic Museum** introducing the border guard, police and military history. Also don't forget to visit the **Valga Museum** located in the former theater building.







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