

A Mid-Summer Natural History Tour of Western Estonia and the Islands

<https://www.kudutravel.com/tours/estonia-walking-tour>

15 – 23 June 2020

The long days of mid-summer are ideal for walks on the forest paths, meadows and sand dunes of the Baltic coast, discovering natural habitats and numerous species of wildflowers and birds.

Accompanied by a naturalist guide, we visit town and country, including the historic cities of Tallinn, Parnu and Haapsalu and explore the islands off the Western Coast with their delightful landscapes, boutique hotels and wonderful vistas.

The country emerged from centuries of foreign domination in 1991 with its national identity intact or as an Estonian historian put it in an opening to his book, 'Estonia exists'. One of the last pagan countries to convert to Christianity, Estonia was literally on the warpath of a variety of Imperial and Regal powers from Russia to Sweden and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, once the largest state in Europe.

Itinerary

DAY 1

D included

After meeting at Tallinn airport in the afternoon, we have a 2-hour transfer to our small 3-star hotel (3 nights) located, perfectly for our purposes, in the countryside on the edge of the Matsalu Nature Park. This National Park on the west coast of Estonia covers a shallow bay and its surrounding coastal areas with various types of meadow and pastureland. It is one of the most important nesting and stopover site for waterfowl in Europe. More than 20 orchid species have been recorded here.

DAY 2

B, L, D included

We spend the day looking for birds and wildflowers in the area, mostly on foot, starting at the nearby Haeska observation tower overlooking the Matsalu Bay. From here, we head west along the shore discovering specialised habitats such as coastal, flooded and wooded meadows and alvars (dry grassland) towards the inevitably windy Cape Puise. We are a few days away from the summer solstice and at this northerly latitude (59°N) the sun will set around 10.30 pm.

DAY 3

B, L, D included

We board the comfortable ferry for our crossing (1 hr 15 mins) from Rohukula to the island of Hiiumaa. Following country roads, we circumnavigate the island, considered by Estonian botanists one of the richest localities in the country, and stop to walk and botanise in the forest and on the coast. The remarkable Kopu Lighthouse was built at the request of the Hanseatic League on the highest hill of the island (68 m) and has been in continuous use since its completion in 1531. We return to the mainland and our hotel in the evening.

DAY 4

B, L, D included

Haapsalu is a charming historic seaside town, developed around its 13th century Episcopal Castle and Cathedral. In 1825, a sea mud resort was established here and throughout the 19th century the town received many noble Russian visitors, including members of the Imperial family. We orientate ourselves on a circular walk through the town and along the sea front Grand Promenade, noting the well-preserved wooden imitation lace 19th century Kursaal (spa entertainment hall); the Tchaikovsky Bench commemorating the composer's visit and the old port, now serving as a yacht club. After lunch in an excellent café, we drive to the port at Virtsu to cross to Saaremaa (30 mins). We drive for 2 hours to the historic Loona Manor complex, which includes our 3-star hotel for 2 nights, as well as the visitors' centre of the Vilsandi National Park.

DAY 5

B, L, D included

The Vilsandi National Park is one of the oldest nature reserves in the Baltics and was set up to protect the fauna, flora, geology and cultural heritage of an area covering the coastal sea, more than 100 islands and islets and the western part of Saaremaa. Within the park, we walk in the oak woodland and on the dunes of the Tagamoisa peninsula and later in the Viidumae Nature Reserve, both rewarding places for observing wildflowers. In the afternoon, we explore the Sorve peninsula, where bitter fighting took place during WW2 between the Germans and Russians. The Tehumardi Memorial commemorates the victims killed in the deadliest battle.

DAY 6

B, L, D included

Kuressaare, Saaremaa's capital, is situated on the south coast on the Gulf of Riga. We start our tour of this small historic city at the moated mediaeval castle and walk through streets lined with well-preserved buildings of varying architectural styles. We drive east to reach the mainland, using the ferry, by mid-afternoon. En route to Parnu, we stop to walk the boardwalk trail in Tuhu mire. Our boutique hotel is situated in the city's historic centre.

DAY 7

B, L, D included

Parnu is the favourite seaside resort of Estonia. thanks to its long white sand beach and sunny climate. Our walk through the city centre covers the remains of this mediaeval city's fortifications, Parnu's oldest church, the Gothic St. Nicholas, the modern state-of-the-art concert hall on the riverbank, the 18th century Town Hall and the Neoclassical Mud Spa near the beach. A 2-hour drive takes us to Tallinn and by late afternoon we are settled into our 5-star hotel, a stylish conversion of a mediaeval building in the historic centre. We walk through the cobbled lanes to the splendid Town Hall square and our dinner in an atmospheric restaurant.

DAY 8

B, L, D included

From the ramparts of Toompea, the upper town inhabited by the German nobility after Tallinn joined the Hanseatic League in 1284, there are fine views across to the islands in the Gulf of Finland. We visit the Toomkirik, whose Lutheran simplicity contrasts with the nearby Russian Orthodox Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, then walk down through the mediaeval defences into the lower town. We see the Gothic Town Hall, Art Nouveau buildings and the 16th century House of the Blackheads, the former headquarters of the professional association of ship owners, merchants and foreigners, en route to lunch. In the afternoon, we turn our attention to the outstanding collection of mediaeval art displayed in

the atmospheric setting of the 13th-15th century St. Nicholas Church.

DAY 9

B included

The morning is free for individual wanderings, perhaps visiting the comprehensive Estonian History Museum in the Great Guild Hall, investigating the many linen, wool and amber shops or people watching from a traditional café on the Town Hall Square. A midday transfer to the airport concludes your holiday.

Activity Level

Relaxed

5 walking days, mostly covering short distances and some optional longer walks. Waterproof walking boots with good ankle support are recommended. The paths are rough and stony.

Temperatures

In midsummer, average high temperatures range between 18°C and 21°C and average low temperatures between 11°C and 13°C.

Accommodation

- 3 nights in a small 3-star hotel located in the countryside on the edge of the Matsalu Nature Park
- 2 nights on Saaremaa island, in a 3-star hotel in the historic Loona Manor complex
- 1 night in Parnu, in a 4-star boutique hotel in the historic centre
- 2 night in Tallinn, in a 5-star hotel, a stylish conversion of a mediaeval building in the historic centre

Trip Price, per person sharing

£2,488.25 until 14th September 2019

£2,622.75 until 14th March 2020

<https://www.kudutravel.com/faq#discounts>

£2,555.50 until 14th December 2019

£2,690 after 14th March 2020

£380 single room supplement

£400 deposit per person

Please note that the single room supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. We endeavour to obtain double rooms for single occupancy, whenever possible.

Price Includes

- Accommodation for 8 nights, on a twin shared basis
- Meals with wine and beer at dinners and restaurant lunches, as listed in the daily notation
- Land and sea transportation as described, except during free periods
- Entrance and sightseeing fees except during free periods
- Services of an expert local naturalist guide and your Kudu Travel tour leader
- Gratuities for restaurant and hotel staff (appreciation for your tour guides is at your discretion)

Price does not Include

- Flights to and from Tallinn
- Trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- Immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements
- Passport, visa and health documentation

- Personal expenses (laundry, alcohol besides wine and beer with group lunches and dinners, free time activities, etc.)
- Transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Estonian departure tax, if any

VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED

On Kudu trips, you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

Visa and Health Requirements

Visitors from the EU, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and USA currently require a valid passport, but not a visa, for entry to Estonia. If you are a national of any other country, please check visa regulations with your nearest Embassies of Estonia.

At present, there are no specific and compulsory health requirements for entry to Estonia. Residents of countries in the EU can claim free (emergency) medical treatment in Estonia by presenting their European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), which is issued in the UK by the Department of Health. You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/healthcare-abroad/healthcare-when-travelling-abroad/>) and the FCO (<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>).

Insurance

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details, please see the brochure, or ask our office.

Size of Party

This trip will run with a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 14 guests.