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estonia



# HAAPSALU & LÄÄNECOUNTY

Discover special experiences in Estonia's oldest resort area!



# Where to first?

## 6 FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HAAPSALU AND LÄÄNE COUNTY:

- 1. Meremuda ja tervis**  
Lääne County is renowned for its curative medicinal mud, which has been used for centuries for healing.
- 2. Stunning nature**  
Lääne County is home to both an enchanting sea and a forest rich in species, which is visited by migratory birds every year.
- 3. Inspiration for celebrities**  
Tchaikovsky, Roerich, Wikland and Russian emperors are just some of the many who have visited Lääne County or included it in their work.
- 4. Ice roads**  
When the sea freezes over, you can drive your car from Haapsalu to Noarootsi Peninsula.
- 5. Always something going on**  
Every year, hundreds of different events take place in Lääne County, attracting visitors.
- 6. Royal study area**  
Sviby and Hullo coastal meadows with their surrounding waters and islets have been designated as a study area by the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (Hullo and Sviby Bay RSBP area).



# Find your favourite Lääne County experience!

## Fun facts:

1. The world's largest collection of circular crosses — more than 300 in total — can be found in the graveyard at St. Olaf's Church on Vormsi island.
2. At just 13.6 x 7.1 metres, Nõva Church is one of the smallest churches in Estonia.
3. The sands on Nõva Beach are said to sing — when you step on them, the friction between the grains produces a sound similar to that of a violin.
4. The altar paintings in Lääne-Nigula Church (The Last Supper and The Resurrection) are copies of paintings of the same name by Leonardo da Vinci.
5. Osmussaar is the perfect destination for hikers. Explore natural sites, military sites, the old chapel and more on foot.
6. Matsalu National Park is Estonia's oldest and largest national park and a Ramsar Site of International Importance.



1.



2.



3.



4.



6.



5.



## Feel the touch of Haapsalu's history!

Haapsalu was granted city rights in 1279, becoming one of the nine medieval cities of Estonia. Haapsalu is Estonia's oldest resort, famous for its therapeutic mud.

Its sophisticated style makes it feel like a slice of another era. The city features latticework architecture in the Old Town, a beautiful beach promenade, cosy cafés, warm seawater, famous therapeutic mud and a magnificent bishop's castle, which has inspired a world-famous children's book illustrator.

The first mud bath in Haapsalu opened its doors in 1825 and since then, the city has attracted holidaymakers from all over the world. Among the most legendary visitors were members of the families of the tsar and the emperor of Russia.

The world-famous composer Pyotr Tchaikovsky spent the summer of 1867 in Haapsalu, and having heard the Estonian folk song "Kallis Mari" ("Dear Mary"), he later used the melody in his famous Symphony No. 6, the opening notes of which are carved on his memorial bench on Haapsalu Promenade.

Artist Nikolai Roerich (1880-1910) was also inspired by this seaside town. The history of the resort can be explored in Haapsalu Town Hall Museum.





# Events that make waves

## Captivate your senses with events in Haapsalu and Lääne County!

Cultural events in Lääne County offer something for all tastes all year round. Cultural events in Lääne County offer something for all tastes all year round. Are you interested in the horror and fantasy film festival, the blues festival, the Italian wine festival, vintage weekend, American cars or the White Nights Festival for music lovers?

In winter, you can enjoy the Epiphany Fair or put your skills to the test in the Noarrootsi Sauna Rally. And that's not all — make sure to keep an eye on what is happening!

*See events in Lääne County at [midateha.visithaapsalu.com](http://midateha.visithaapsalu.com)*

## Discover the taste of Lääne County!

As customary in a seaside area, the people of Lääne County have always eaten a lot of fish, but they have also engaged in vegetable and livestock farming.

The use of local ingredients is becoming increasingly popular in cafés and restaurants, and food made from them can be enjoyed in Haapsalu and other high quality eateries in the region.

The White Guide and Michelin are no strangers to Lääne County! Several restaurants in Lääne County have received quality labels and earned a place in prestigious lists. Taste award-winning dishes and give your verdict!



Lääne County offers special experiences to suit everyone's taste

# Feed your soul with art!

## Fall in love with a wonderland straight out of an Astrid Lindgren book!

Ilon Wikland is best known as the illustrator of books by Astrid Lindgren. A gallery dedicated to the work of Wikland was opened in Haapsalu in 2006. Ilon's World of Wonders, a centre dedicated to the artist, opened three years later.

The gallery features original works by the artist. In addition, the three-storey centre

has an exhibition room, Karlsson's room, Ilon's kitchen and a playroom that hosts different themed days with hands-on activities. In summer, the Wonderland courtyard is also open, featuring Mattias' house and a workshop where visitors can make lots of exciting crafts.



## Be inspired like famous masters!

Lääne County has been a favourite place for many creative people to relax and find inspiration. Art exhibitions can be admired in the Haapsalu City Gallery, Epp Maria Gallery and Haapsalu Art School Gallery.

The newly renovated and reopened Evald Okas Museum showcases the work of the famous Estonian artist and his family. The summer programme also includes exhibitions by other artists.

The museum dedicated to the work of Ants Laikmaa, one of the most prolific painters in Estonian art history, is located in the Village of Kadarpiku in Lääne-Nigula, where, in addition to various exhibitions, visitors can see his studio and work and living quarters.

## Fun fact!

In Haapsalu Town Hall, you can see the world's oldest preserved monument to Friedrich Schiller.

## Pull the exquisite Haapsalu shawl through a ring!

The tradition of knitting lacy shawls and scarves in Haapsalu dates back to the second half of the 19th century. They became highly sought-after luxury items thanks to wealthy tourists. The affluent crowd required suitable attire, so the normal wool used for knitting was replaced with a much finer thread.

The skills required to make the shawls have been passed on from generation to generation. Haapsalu scarves can be admired and bought at Haapsalu Lace Centre.





# Take advantage of the restorative powers of the sea!

## Sail, surf and experience Lääne County at sea!

You can rent row boats on Haapsalu Promenade and go on a sea kayaking trip. The Bay of Haapsalu warms up quickly, making Paralepa Beach a favourite among families with children.

For those arriving by yacht, the harbours of Veskiviigi, Grand Holm Marina and Westmer in Haapsalu offer safe moorings. The harbours of Dirham (Noarootsi), Sviby (Vormsi) and Rohuküla also receive visiting yachts.

The northern part of Lääne County features both Nõva Beach with its singing sands and Roosta, a favourite spot for surfers, offering excellent conditions for surfing or learning to surf. Naturally, Roosta has its own surf bar and seaside buzz.



## Treat yourself to a relaxing spa day!

The therapeutic qualities of Haapsalu's mud are thought to have been discovered by a military doctor called Carl Abraham Hunnius, who led the opening of a treatment centre of international renown in the town as early as 1825.

Celebrity patients – from members of the Russian imperial family to wealthy citizens of Western Europe – were treated here for rheumatism and other joint complaints. Nowadays, healing mud treatments can be enjoyed in spas in Haapsalu.



Relaxing treatments that boost health and wellbeing

### Fun fact!

In the summer of 2010, 51 people took mud baths at the same time on the Promenade.

## Immerse yourself with history!

### Learn the (hi)story of Coastal Swedes!

The Swedes have inhabited the coastal areas and various islands of north-west Estonia for more than 1,000 years.

Due to their isolated settlements, various privileges and language barrier, the Estonian Swedes, or Coastal Swedes, remained a rather closed community, where a distinctive language and culture developed. During the upheaval of World War II, the majority were forced to abandon their homes and flee to Sweden.

You can still see bilingual place names when you walk around Noarrootsi and Vormsi. To learn more about the culture and history of the Coastal Swedes, head to Rannarootsi Museum in Haapsalu and the Farm Museum on the island of Vormsi.



The 5th Estonian-Swedish Song and Dance Festival "Farther and Closer"



## Take cool photos of yourself at the historic railway station!

Haapsalu Railway Station, which was built in the early 1900s, is famous for the fact that at the time of construction, its 216-metre platform was the longest of its kind in Northern Europe.

The station was erected for the benefit of the Russian imperial household, as is reflected in the imperial pavilion and the length of the platform, which equalled the length of the emperor's train.

As one can no longer take a train to Haapsalu, visitors can explore it at their leisure and take some wonderful photos. The station building is a popular filming location for many filmmakers. The station is also home to the Railway and Communications Museum.

However, there is still one train line active in Haapsalu — in the summer, the station is the starting point of Old Town tours with sightseeing train Peetrike.



Peetrike on its way to show the sights



Historic railway station straight out of 19th century novels





# H is for HORROR!

Have a hair-raising experience in the Nordic capital of horror!

Haapsalu is a capital of horror and fantasy films, as every year the resort town brings film lovers from near and far to experience thrills and chills. The Haapsalu Horror and Fantasy Film Festival (HÖFF) takes place every spring.

Haapsalu is also home to Estonia's most famous ghost — the mysterious figure of the White Lady, who appears on full moons in August in the form of a white woman on the round window of the of baptistery of Haapsalu Cathedral.

Legend has it that one of the church men had the woman brought into the castle

dressed in boy's clothing. However, the deception was uncovered and the young maiden — who had transgressed the law of the monastery stating that no woman should ever set foot inside it — was walled up within the chapel. It is said that the same young woman appears at the window of the chapel as the White Lady. Thousands of people are drawn to Haapsalu on the night of the August full moon to see if they can catch a glimpse of the spectre at the window. It is a time of festivities for the town, which plays host to concerts, shows, exhibitions and all manner of parties dedicated to the legend.



Let a tiny scare tickle your nerves

## Visit the grand Haapsalu Castle!

The castle is the heart of Haapsalu Old Town. Haapsalu Episcopal Castle, founded as the centre of the Bishopric of Ösel-Wiek, is one of the best preserved castles in Estonia. It was built in the 13th century and was in use until the end of the 17th century.

The main part of the castle housed living and administrative quarters and the main church, a grand cathedral. Today, the inner bailey is home to a museum, which introduces Haapsalu's older history and life in a medieval castle in both traditional and interactive forms. The outer baileys have

been turned into a park and an exciting themed playground for children has been set up in the large moat.

### Fun fact!

Haapsalu Castle served as an inspiration for Ronja's castle from the illustrations of Swedish author Astrid Lindgren's children's books as drawn by Ilon Wikland.

### Fun fact!

Sound in Haapsalu Cathedral enjoys a duration of 11 seconds, providing outstanding acoustics for concerts.



# Surround yourself with nature

## Say hello to the many faces of nature!

The coast of the northern part of Lääne County charms visitors with its beautiful beaches and pine forests rich in mushrooms and berries.

The southern part of Lääne County is home to Matsalu National Park, which is internationally renowned and one of Europe's largest bird sanctuaries. It also hosts a major annual nature film festival.

Marimetsa Bog, which is located a little further from the coast, attracts hikers and nature lovers. Several hiking trails, look-out towers and rest areas have been built to help you enjoy the nature of Lääne County.



The magical atmosphere of Lääne County's nature



## Follow thousands of migrating birds!

The west coast of Estonia is a migratory route for birds that nest in the Arctic. Hundreds of thousands of aquatic birds pass through the region in spring and autumn, many of which choose the area to nest in.

Cape Põõsaspea in the northern part of the Lääne County is also considered one of the best places in northern Europe for monitoring the migration of aquatic birds.



## Listen to the singing sands on beautiful beaches!

To the north of the county, in the Nõva and Noarootsi area, you will find sandy beaches stretching out for miles — the perfect place to settle in and soak up the summer sun, often completely undisturbed.

The beaches of Nõva are famous for their singing sands: when stepped on, the friction between the fine sand grains produces a sound similar to that of a violin.



## Travel along the ice roads!

During decent winters the shallow coastal waters freeze over to such an extent that visitors can enjoy a truly unique experience: driving on the ice. Haapsalu is connected to Noarootsi Peninsula and Rohuküla to the island of Vormsi by ice roads, which not only attract thrill-seeking visitors but also act as vital links for locals. For example, the icy link between Haapsalu and Noarootsi cuts almost 30 km from the normal route between the peninsula and the county capital, while for the residents of Vormsi the connection with the mainland gives them the freedom to travel independently of the ferry schedules.



A unique opportunity not only to walk but also to drive on water

# Lääne County as a gateway to the islands

## Discover Vormsi and its rich history!

Estonia's fourth biggest island Vormsi got its name from the Swedish Ormsö, meaning 'island of snakes'. Historically the island was home to Coastal Swedes, but under Soviet occupation it was a closed zone into which curious outsiders were not allowed. Its main historical and cultural monument is St. Olaf's Church, the cemetery adjacent to which has one of the world's biggest collections of limestone and sandstone circular crosses.

The protected area of Vormsi is diverse in species, boasts a variety of landscapes and is rich in heritage culture. Hullo and Sviby bays and Hari Strait along with their coastal meadows and islets are of international importance and are valuable study sites for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds of the United Kingdom. You can take a ferry from the mainland to Vormsi from Rohuküla harbour all year round.

## Hear the sound of a world-famous instrument!

Vormsi is the only island in Estonia that has its own national instrument called talharpa. The stringed instrument played with a bow has been part of Vormsi culture for as long as the Coastal Swedes have been active here. In 2024, the talharpa made waves in front of hundreds of millions of TV viewers when it was used by the musicians of Puuluup in the Eurovision Song Contest. In addition to playing the talharpa, Puuluup also performed a dance from Vormsi, named Veisson after a musician, on the big stage.





## Wave to migratory birds from Osmussaar!

Osmussaar (Odensholm) is an island of interest to birdwatchers, history and nature lovers, as well as holidaymakers. The island is also valued by divers, as Estonia's largest and oldest meteorite crater, Neugrund, is located northeast of Osmussaar, and there are many shipwrecks in the island's coastal waters. The tiny island is rich in both Coastal Swedish and military history. A landscape reserve was established on Osmussaare in order to preserve the island's geological sites, birds and history.



Wave to birds and spend time with sheep



# Discover Haapsalu and Lääne County

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-  Church
  -  Parking
  -  WC
  -  Swimming area
  -  Port





-  Birdwatching tower
-  Port
-  Swimming area





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