

visit  
estonia

# It's about time

A travel guide to Estonia



# Estonia at a glance



**Location:**  
on the Gulf of Finland

**Official name:**  
Republic of Estonia

**Population:**  
1.3 million

**Area:**  
45,336 square km

**Capital:**  
Tallinn

**Currency:**  
EUR

**Member of:**  
EU and Schengen

[Visit Estonia](#) ↗

[Travel here & around](#) ↗

## Estonia

Estonia is a nation built by centuries of change and layers of outside influence. It's where Baltic meets Nordic, Europe meets the East, and the past and future collide on a single city street.

The cool, crisp Nordic climate gives us natural, high-quality raw ingredients. Local chefs combine generations-old traditions with up-to-the-minute innovations while letting the four seasons shape their menus.

Sustainable tourism is a timeless tradition in Estonia, not a trend. Join us by pressing pause on the rat race and travel silently off-grid and off-season. Nature is only a heartbeat away, so you can get lost in the wilderness — and then find yourself back in civilization in the blink of an eye.

Estonia is one of Europe's least densely populated countries. Here, you will have the space you want and the freedom you need to travel at your own pace.

Visit Estonia. Don't you think it's about time?

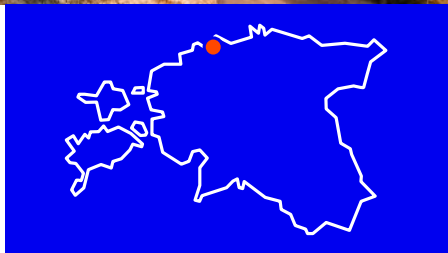






# Tallinn

Estonia's laidback capital city is a perfect holiday destination for those wanting to combine modern comforts, medieval charm, and coastal vibes.



In the morning, you can wander the streets of Old Town and marvel at buildings dating back to the Middle Ages. Then, in the afternoon, you can check out an avant-garde art exhibition in what used to be an old submarine factory.

Old and new mix in every part of the city. Thanks to Tallinn's compact footprint, the walkable city center is one of the city's most attractive features. Lively neighborhoods such as Kalamaja, Noblessner, and the Rotermann Quarter offer diverse dining and entertainment options only steps away from Old Town.



[Estonian cuisine](#) ↗



Experience rural life at the Estonian Open Air Museum, dive into maritime history at the Seaplane Harbour Museum, and stroll through the enchanting rooms of Kadriorg Palace. Feel the never-ending pulse of progress in Telliskivi's Creative City. A 30-minute ferry ride will take you to Aegna, an island with idyllic beaches, ancient pine trees, and massive boulders.

Don't let Tallinn's size fool you, though. It may be tempting to think you can cross it off your list in a few hours, but you'll have only just scratched the surface. The vibrant cultural scene, excellent fine dining, and fascinating history will make you want to stay for at least a day or two — or more!

### Did you know... ?

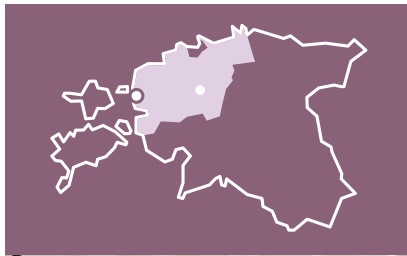
Sauna culture is believed to have begun about 4,000 years ago, and the oldest public sauna in Tallinn was opened in 1310 on Nunne Street.





# Harju, Lääne and Rapla Counties

Tallinn has its share of green space to explore, but if you long for solitude, head out of town. Hiking is the best way to explore the uncrowded beaches and quiet forests of North Estonia.



East of Tallinn, spend a few hours at the [Viinistu Art Museum](#), an excellent museum housed in an old fish processing plant, and hunt for skipping stones along the rocky coast.

Further inland, you can hike through lush forests and ancient bogs. [Sportland Kõrvemaa Hike and Ski Centre](#) has everything you need for an active holiday — skis, kicksleds, electric fat bikes, and more.



West of Tallinn, the Baltic Coastal Trail runs by the [Arvo Pärt Centre](#) in Laulasmaa, where you can learn how Estonian nature inspired one of the world's greatest living composers.

Haapsalu is further south down the coast. This tranquil town is known for its seaside setting and [Coastal Swedish heritage](#). Don't miss the [13th-century castle](#) and recently renovated museum. Haapsalu has been a favorite of spa lovers ever since the first mud spa opened in 1825.

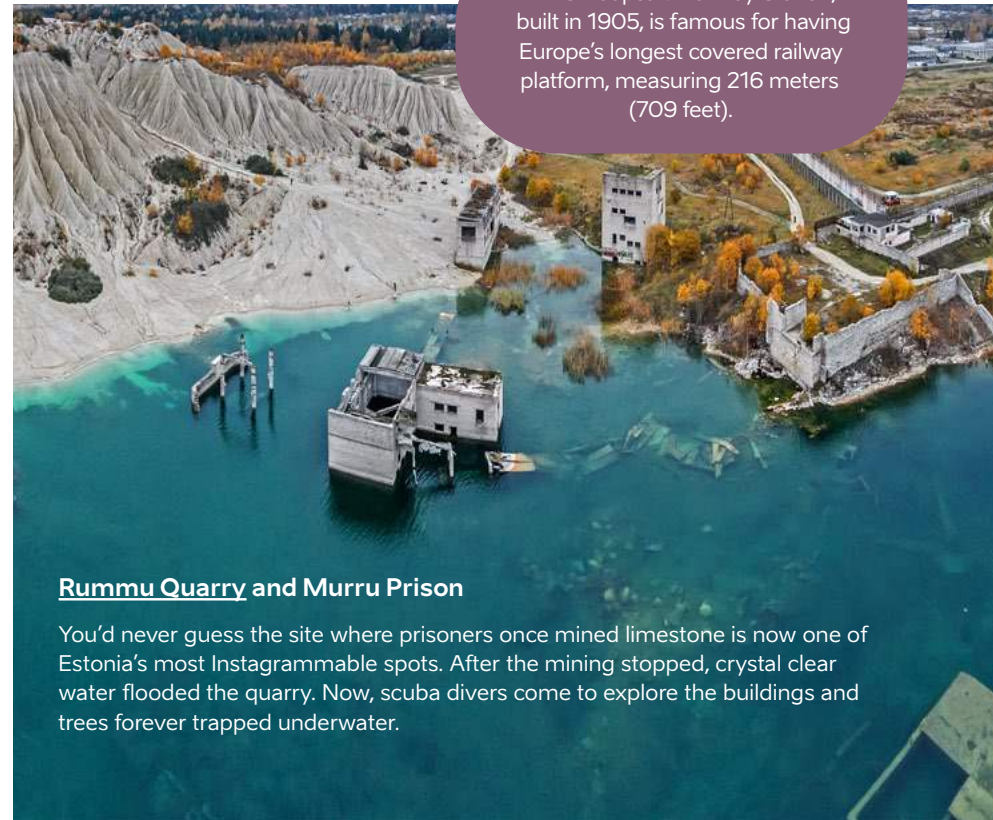


[Estonian Nature Tourism Organization](#) ↗

Haapsalu's serene vibe is matched only by the sandy beaches and hiking trails on Naissaar and [Prangli Islands](#) off Estonia's northwest coast. About 170 people call Prangli home, so it's easy to find an empty stretch of sand for sunbathing in the summer. Naissaar was once a military base, but now the entire island is a nature conservation area — bring a bucket if you come at the end of summer, as its forests are filled with blueberries, lingonberries, and wild mushrooms.

## Did you know... ?

The Haapsalu Railway Station, built in 1905, is famous for having Europe's longest covered railway platform, measuring 216 meters (709 feet).



## [Rummu Quarry and Murru Prison](#)

You'd never guess the site where prisoners once mined limestone is now one of Estonia's most Instagrammable spots. After the mining stopped, crystal clear water flooded the quarry. Now, scuba divers come to explore the buildings and trees forever trapped underwater.





## Viru County

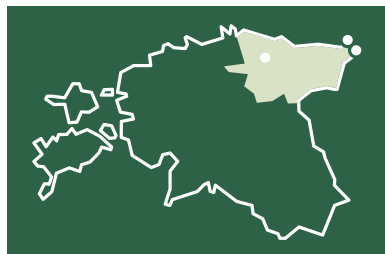
This region has always been at the crossroads of East and West, and no town better represents this than Narva, Estonia's third-largest city.

Its castle has stood for centuries, though other parts of the city have not been so lucky. The red-roofed Old Town, once very much like Tallinn's, was destroyed during World War II. A VR tour at the recently renovated historic Town Hall gives visitors an idea of what the city was once like.

The contrast between old and new can also be seen in the region's industrial heritage. Kreenholm Factory was once the largest textile plant in Europe; now, you're more likely to hear pounding drumbeats than clacking sewing machines, as the complex hosts concerts and cultural events throughout the year.

Even old mining areas have been given new life. The Estonian Mining Museum offers visitors a chance to peek underground, while nearby Aidu Quarry hosts a brand-new watersports center.

Narva Castle isn't the only important fortress in Viru County — a 13th-century castle looms large over the city of Rakvere. Children especially love medieval games in the castle yard during the summer and the waterpark at the nearby spa hotel.



### Lahemaa and Alutaguse National Parks

This industrial region is sandwiched between two natural gems: Lahemaa National Park, an hour east of Tallinn, and Alutaguse National Park, on the northern shore of Lake Peipsi. In Lahemaa, hiking trails wind through tiny fishing villages and stretch over vast bogs. Alutaguse is wilder, as its dense forests are home to about 500 bears, making it one of the best places in Estonia to see these majestic mammals.

### Elegant manors

Estonia's time under German and Swedish rule left the country with hundreds of manor houses. Some have been renovated; others lie in ruins. Three spectacular examples can be found within the borders of Lahemaa National Park: Palmse Manor, Sagadi Manor, and Vihula Manor, now a luxurious Green Key-certified spa hotel.

### Did you know... ?

Narva-Jõesuu's 8-kilometer sandy beach is one of the longest in Estonia. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the town was a popular holiday destination among the nobility of St. Petersburg.

[Guide to hiking in Estonia](#) ↗





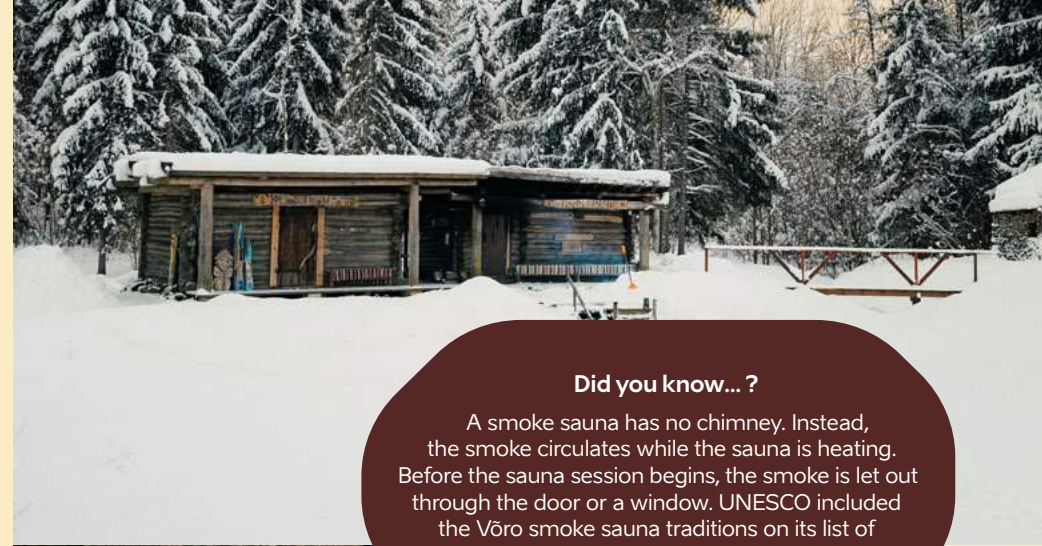
# South Estonia

Tallinn is Estonia's capital, but locals say Tartu is the country's heart and soul.

Estonia's second-largest city oozes small-town charm, with neighborhoods filled with street art, wooden buildings, and lively cafes. Tartu owes much of its cultural cachet to the University of Tartu, founded in 1632.



Tartu is the gateway to South Estonia, where you can immerse yourself in unique regional cultures and visit the country's most stunning natural attractions, like the Taevaskoda sandstone outcrops or the rolling hills of Karula National Park. This region is where you'll find the tallest point in the Baltics, Suur Munamägi (Big Egg Hill, if you must translate) at 318 meters (1043 feet) above sea level.



### Did you know... ?

A smoke sauna has no chimney. Instead, the smoke circulates while the sauna is heating. Before the sauna session begins, the smoke is let out through the door or a window. UNESCO included the Võro smoke sauna traditions on its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2014.



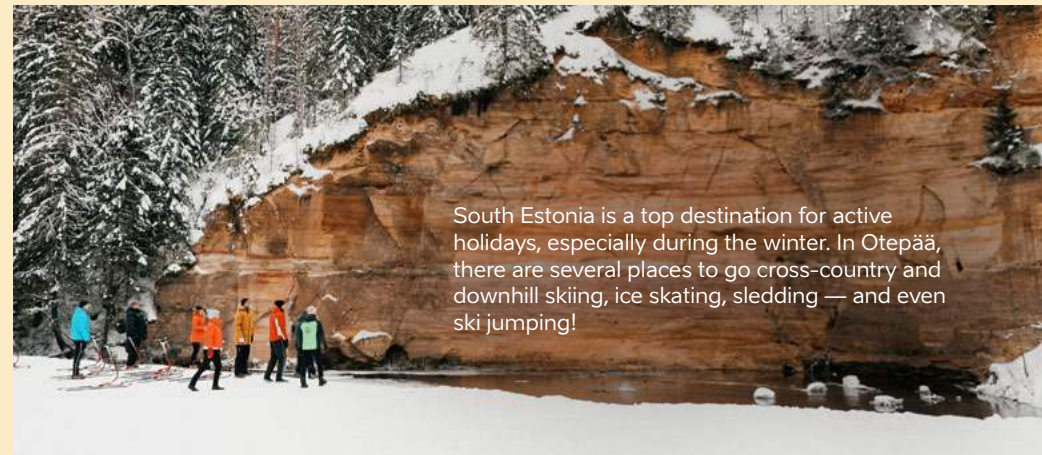
UNESCO heritage in Estonia ↗

### Old Believers and the Onion Road

Tucked up along the western coastline of Lake Peipsi runs a lonely road known as the Onion Route. The road is lined with communities of Estonia's Old Believers, descendants of religious exiles who left Russia in the 1600s.

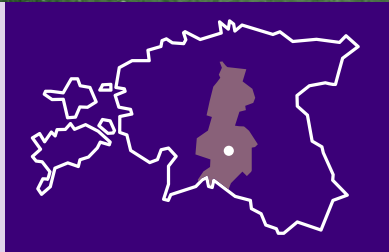
### Setomaa

The Seto people have called the southeastern corner of the country home for centuries. Setomaa may be off the average tourist's radar, but it's only a three-hour drive from Tallinn. Their polyphonic leelo singing style was added to UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009.



South Estonia is a top destination for active holidays, especially during the winter. In Otepää, there are several places to go cross-country and downhill skiing, ice skating, sledding — and even ski jumping!





Stroll through the streets and discover delightful cafes. Then follow the giant strawberries to the [Kondas Centre](#). This quirky little museum showcases outsider, or Naïve, art from Estonia and further afield.

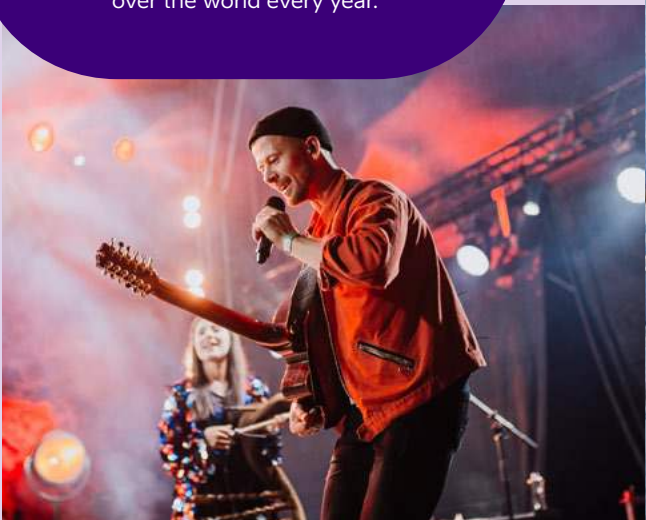
## Central Estonia

There are three ways to describe Viljandi and the surrounding villages of Central Estonia: quaint, quiet, and utterly charming.

Viljandi has inspired artists for centuries, and the ruins of a [medieval castle](#) stand as a testament to its rich history. The crumbling walls make for a romantic viewpoint as they overlook Viljandi Lake from high on a hillside.

### Did you know... ?

Viljandi hosts one of the biggest and most important folk music festivals in the Baltics. It attracts tens of thousands of visitors and dozens of performers from all over the world every year.



Viljandi isn't the only town with famous castle ruins; [Põltsamaa Castle](#) burned down during World War II. Põltsamaa Museum has been cleverly designed to fit in amongst the ruins and tell the story of the castle's former glory.

### Soomaa National Park

Viljandi is one of the towns used as a base to explore [Soomaa National Park](#). During the natural phenomenon known as the fifth season, the park's low-lying land floods and the waters rise. Local inhabitants of this region traditionally used haabjas, a type of canoe made out of a single tree trunk. As the flooding is so consistent, these ancient construction techniques have been passed on from generation to generation and are now part of [Estonia's UNESCO heritage](#).

[More about national parks](#) ↗



# Pärnu

Spas in winter and cycling in autumn, birdwatching in spring, and in summer, sunbathing — every season has its own special allure.

Pärnu has been a popular resort town since the 19th century, though the city's main attraction is the long, sandy beach. Thousands of visitors flock to Pärnu Beach every summer to swim in the sea, walk along the promenade, linger over cocktails at beachfront cafes, and party on into the night at clubs and festivals.



## Did you know... ?

A Kihnu Island woman may own as many as 20 skirts, known as *körts*. The pattern of stripes and the colors on the *kört* vary according to the woman's age and status.



## Kihnu Island

Kihnu is home to a close-knit community of about 700 people who have kept their culture alive for centuries. Their traditions are not remnants of the past but rather daily practices that set Kihnu Islanders proudly apart from mainland Estonians.



Located in West Estonia, Matsalu National Park is a birdwatching paradise. Millions of migratory birds visit or nest there annually. Climb a birdwatching tower and listen to the melodic songs of warblers coming from the reeds at the mouth of the Kasari River.







**Hiiumaa**, Estonia's second-largest island, is home to less than ten thousand people. This little green island is known for its seclusion, serenity, and silence. As befitting an island, almost everything you can do on Hiiumaa is related to the sea: fishing, boating, seal watching, surfing, and relaxing on the beach.



**Did you know... ?**

The Salme ship burials on Saaremaa predate the first recorded Viking raid by 50 to 100 years. They are proof that Scandinavian raiders plied the waters of the eastern Baltic decades before what has officially been called the start of the Viking Age.

# Islands

Time seems to move more slowly on Estonia's islands, where you can measure the days by the ebb and flow of the tides.



**Muhu Island** is a stopping point on the way to Saaremaa. But this idyllic island deserves an extended stay. What's there to do? Sample the famous bread. Admire traditional handicrafts. Or partake in the island's most popular activity, enjoyed by locals and visitors alike — sitting back and relaxing by the sea.

**Saaremaa**, Estonia's biggest island, is larger than the entire country of Luxembourg. Its capital, Kuressaare, has long been a bustling port in the region, as the imposing Kuressaare Episcopal Castle still bears witness today.

**Vilsandi National Park** on the west coast of Saaremaa was established to protect sensitive coastal and island habitats. Vilsandi is home to over 30 species of orchids, and in early spring, hundreds of thousands of white-cheeked barnacle geese and other seabirds fill the air with feathers.



**Ruhnu** is closer to mainland Latvia than it is to Estonia. Coastal Swedes once inhabited the island, but most escaped to Sweden in 1944. Now, about 60 people live on Ruhnu year-round. Its isolation means that nothing interrupts the silence here except the sound of the sea.





## Good to know

Keep this information in mind as you prepare for your trip to Estonia.

**Official language:**

Estonian, with English widely spoken

**Currency:**

Euro €

**Emergency number:**

112 (all emergencies)

**Time zone:**

GMT +2 in winter and GMT +3 in summer

**European Union membership:**

since 2004

**Country dialing code:**

00372 or +372

**Plug socket:**

Type F, with voltage of 230 V and frequency of 50 Hz

**Traveling with a pet:**

Your pet must have a passport and a chip. Must be healthy and vaccinated. Contact the Estonian Agriculture and Food Board for details.

**Tipping in Estonia:**

10% is the typical gratuity for exceptional service.

## Visas

Estonia is an EU member country and part of the Schengen area.

## Public holidays

Most shops and restaurants are open on public holidays — the 25th of December and 1st of January are the only days when most businesses are closed.

**1st of January:**

New Year's Day. Usually a very quiet day.

**24th of February:**

Independence Day. Celebrated with the military parade in the morning and festive family dinners in the evening.

**Good Friday and Easter Sunday:**

Commonly known as lihavõtted or munadepühad in Estonian. Celebrated by springtime (dairy-based) treats, eggs, and folk festivities.

**1st of May:**

May Day. The night before (Walpurgis Night) is celebrated with parties and folk traditions.

**23rd of June:**

Victory Day celebrates a decisive battle in 1919 during the War of Independence.

**24th of June:**

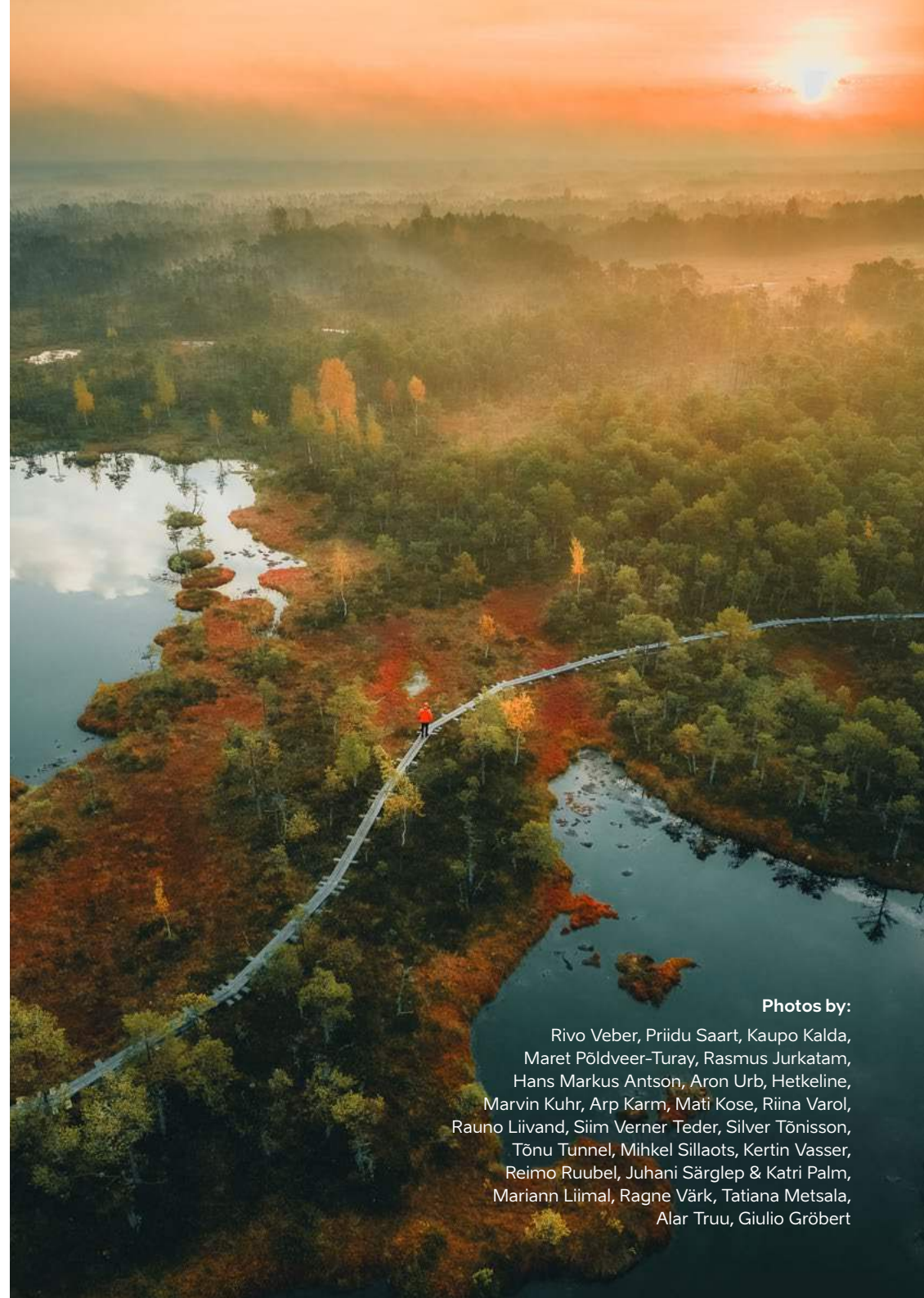
Midsummer Day, known as Jaanipäev. Celebrated with bonfires and festivities. One of the most important dates of the year for Estonians.

**20th of August:**

Day of Restoration of Independence. Celebrated with national festivities, events, and family gatherings.

**24th December – 26th of December:**

Christmas



**Photos by:**

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The Nature of Estonia ↗